HEALTH ACTIVISM  
Brandeis University, Spring 2018

Instructor: Wangui Muigai, Ph.D.  
Email: wmuigai@brandeis.edu

Class Meeting Time: Wednesday 2:00-4:50pm  
Office: Rabb 109

Location: Shiffman Hum. Ctr 122  
Office Hours: Wed 10am-12pm

COURSE DESCRIPTION
This course examines the history of health activism in the U.S. over the past 125 years, from late 19th century debates over compulsory vaccination to contemporary public health campaigns around gang violence and incarceration. Medicine is a healing profession with a long history of social activism. Enduring questions of why people get sick and who is responsible for the public's health have spurred social and political debates that in turn have fundamentally reshaped the delivery, practice, regulation, and teaching of medicine. Through a series of historical case studies, we will examine the sites (neighborhoods, jobs, schools, laboratories, the doctor's office) and strategies that different stakeholders (patients, practitioners, lay people, politicians) have employed to advocate for change. We will pay particular attention to social, political, and historical contexts, and the role of race, gender, class, and disability in structuring health reform campaigns. Themes to be explored include: the politics of diagnosis, medical ethics, community health, and institutional gatekeeping.

EXPERIENTIAL LEARNING
Health Activism is an Experiential Learning course, meaning you will be co-creators of the learning process through in-class activities, opportunities to lead class discussion, and interacting with visiting scholars. The course is structured around a series of historical and contemporary case-studies, a format that enables you to develop your skills analyzing real world problems, reflect on what you are learning, and make connections between your academic, social, and professional goals. You will be encouraged to think deeply about how your experiences interacting with healthcare systems connect to course materials. Through readings and assessments, you will develop analytic skills that bring your newly developed historical understanding to bear on the analysis of ongoing issues in health, health care, and health policy. A major component of the class involves researching a health issue of your choice and developing your expertise on the topic through preparing a research proposal, conducting a critical literature review, writing an Op-Ed, and presenting your research, recommendations, and overall reflections to the class through final presentations.

LEARNING GOALS
- Articulate major trends, patterns, and strategies in the history of health activism
- Contextualize medical activism within broader social, political, and cultural changes in U.S. history
- Apply a historically informed perspective to current debates in health and health care
• Strengthen critical reading, analytic, and communication skills, with both academic scholars and non-academic audiences

REQUIRED BOOKS
• Claudia Clark, Radium Girls: Women and Industrial Health Reform, 1910-1935 (North Carolina, 1997)
• Laurence Ralph, Renegade Dreams: Living Through Injury in Gangland Chicago (University of Chicago Press, 2014)

ASSIGNMENTS & GRADING
Active Class Participation (25%): This a discussion-based course, meaning regular attendance and active participation is expected. Success in this four-credit course is based on the expectation that students will spend a minimum of 9 hours of study time per week in preparation for class (readings, papers, research, etc.).

Your constructive contribution to discussions depends on completing the assigned readings beforehand and coming to class prepared to share insights and questions. As this class meets only once a week, expect a significant amount of reading – some weeks we will read an entire book. Please come to class with the reading material in hand.

Discussion Leading (15%): Each of you will have an opportunity to lead a seminar. You will be responsible for preparing a 2-3 page response to the week’s readings that includes three questions for discussion. To receive full credit, your response should evaluate the arguments posed in the readings, address points of tension and confusion, and expand our understanding of course themes by drawing connections to other class readings and discussions. Your response must be emailed to me the day before class, by Tuesday 5pm.

Research Proposal and Annotated Bibliography (10%): due January 31. A major component of the course involves researching a health topic, and becoming an expert on the issue over the course of the semester. For this assignment, you will write a 300-word overview of your chosen topic and an annotated bibliography of 3-4 key sources you have identified. Your topic should not be something we cover in class as a case study. Rather it should reflect something you want to explore out of academic interest, curiosity, or personal commitment. Some broadly framed topics include, but are not limited to:

Indigenous American health
Occupational Health
Lead poisoning
Tobacco/ Anti-smoking
Clinical trials
LGBTQI health
Agent Orange
Prisoners’ health

Homelessness
Women’s health movement
Intellectual/Physical disabilities
Veteran’s health
Health philanthropy
Genetic testing/screening
Mental illnesses
Harm reduction/Substance abuse
Critical Book/Film Review (15%): due February 28. Your midterm assignment will be to write a 5-page review of a key secondary book or media project (e.g. documentary film) that relates to your health issue. The source can come from your annotated bibliography, and you may use questions from the course readings and discussion as a guide. The review should contextualize the work, assess how the author(s) has accomplished their tasks, and explain what insights you gain from the work. It should be a critique of the work, not merely a descriptive summary.

Op-Ed (15%): due March 28. To further develop your position on your chosen health issue, you will write a 750-800-word Op-Ed that introduces your research topic and frames your expertise to a broad audience. Your Op-Ed will advance a concise argument for a specific solution, bringing in and citing empirically-supported materials to convince readers of the validity and utility of your argument. Papers will be graded on the ability to logically articulate an argument, the quality of evidence, appropriateness of conclusion, and clarity of writing.

Final Presentation (20%): During Finals Period you will give a 7-minute presentation on your health issue that incorporates some form of visual aid (e.g. PowerPoint, infographics, social media, etc.) giving us a way of contextualizing them, and outlining at least two competing interpretations. Your presentations should cover the major stakes, stakeholders, and questions relevant to your topic, and offer your suggestions regarding potential solutions. You will submit the notes/written text of the presentation.

GRADE BREAKDOWN
- Class Attendance & Participation – 25%
- Discussion Paper and Questions – 15%
- Project Proposal with Annotated Bibliography – 10%
- Critical Book/Film Review – 15%
- Op-Ed – 15%
- Final Presentation – 20%

ACADEMIC INTEGRITY: You are expected to be honest in all of your academic work. Please consult Brandeis University Rights and Responsibilities for all policies and procedures related to academic integrity. Students may be required to submit work to TurnItIn.com software to verify originality. Allegations of alleged academic dishonesty will be forwarded to the Director of Academic Integrity. Sanctions for academic dishonesty can include failing grades and/or suspension from the university. Citation and research assistance can be found at LTS - Library guides.

LATE PAPERS: Late assignments are marked down 1/3 letter grade per day. Extensions, without any penalties, will be granted only for extremely compelling reasons (medical or family emergency). I will only consider requests for extensions if you reach out to me BEFORE the paper’s due date.

DISABILITY POLICY: If you are a student with a documented disability on record at Brandeis University and wish to have a reasonable accommodation made for you in this class, please contact me as soon as possible.
UNIT I: ORGANIZING MEDICINE

January 10         Introduction

January 17        Reforming Medical Education
• Brown and Zavestoski, “Social Movements in Health: An Introduction” Sociology of Health & Illness 26:679-694
• Naomi Rogers, “Caution: The AMA May be Dangerous to your Health: The Student Health Organizations (SHO) and American Medicine, 1965-1970,” Radical History Review (2001) 80:5-34.

UNIT II: HISTORICAL CASE STUDIES

As we read and discuss the following case studies, some questions to guide you through the reading: What have been the stated and unstated motivations, tactics, and goals (access, justice, empowerment, elimination, prevention, cure, inclusion etc.) of health campaigns? Who are the key stakeholders? How have activists addressed questions of identity, stigma, and knowledge production? What is the line between preventative measures and excessive surveillance? How do health concerns get framed as legal and political arguments? How do specific biomedical interventions (chemotherapy, mastectomy, abortion, experimental drugs, sterilization) become legitimate solutions? What role does media play in constructing disease/disability and in raising awareness?

January 24     The Anti-Vaccination Movement

January 31    Occupational Health in the Progressive Era
• Claudia Clark, Radium Girls: Women and Industrial Health Reform, 1910-1935 (North Carolina, 1997).

February 7  Public Health during Jim Crow
February 14 The “War” on Cancer

February 21 NO CLASS (Winter Break)

February 28 Community Health

March 7 Abortion

March 14 Reproductive Justice
• Alexandra Minna Stern, Nicole L. Novak, Natalie Lira, Kate O’Connor, Siobán Harlow, and Sharon Kardia, “California’s Sterilization Survivors: An Estimate and Call for Redress,” American Journal of Public Health 107 (1): 50-54

Review associated website The Eugenic Rubicon: California’s Sterilization Stories
March 21  Activism in the Academy
SPECIAL GUEST: “Escaping Melodrama: How to Think about the U.S. Public Health Service Studies in Tuskegee and Guatemala,” Professor Susan Reverby, Marion Butler McLean Professor Emerita in the History of Ideas; Professor Emerita of Women’s and Gender Studies, Wellesley College.


March 28  The AIDS Crisis

April 4  NO CLASS (Spring Break)

April 11  Environmental Justice

April 18  Gun Violence

April 25  NO CLASS (Brandeis Friday)

FINAL PRESENTATIONS – to be scheduled during Final Exams period