

K20.1059
Disease and Civilization
SCI, 4 CR
MW 12:30-1:45
Professor Gene Cittadino
Fall 2009

This course explores the cultural, social, scientific, and political dimensions of epidemic disease through an examination of selected episodes from plagues in antiquity to AIDS, Ebola, avian flu, and bioterrorism in our time. We will approach the problem of understanding the role of disease in human history from two different, but interrelated, perspectives: an ecological perspective, making use of a combination of environmental, biological, and cultural factors to help explain the origin and spread of epidemics, and a cultural/social history perspective, emphasizing the interaction of cultural values, religious beliefs, scientific knowledge, medical practice, economics, and politics in shaping perceptions of the nature, causes, cures, and significance of various diseases. Readings will range from Thucydides and the Hippocratic writings to Boccaccio, Defoe, Orwell, and such current works as Hays, *The Burdens of Disease*, Wills, *Yellow Fever*, *Black Goddess*, and Preston, *The Cobra Event*.