

THE WAGNER FREE INSTITUTE OF SCIENCE

Fall 2020: ARCHITECTURE AND URBANISM SERIES

Public Health and the City

Professor Michael J. Lewis

Dates: 6 Tuesdays, October 6 to November 17, 2020 (no class on Election Day)

Time: The class meets from 6:30 to 7:45 PM

The course will be held online. A Zoom link will be sent to registered students.

To register for the course, you must sign up through EventBrite. To sign up, click on the link on the course schedule webpage. If you need assistance, please call 215-763-6529 x14.

Course Description

The current pandemic reminds us that disease and the fear of disease have always shaped cities. Since cities began ten thousand years ago, they have constantly struggled with the need for clean water, fresh air, and the removal of sewage. But that struggle became much more urgent with the Industrial Revolution, which made cities more populous and denser than ever before – producing catastrophic epidemics and desperate countermeasures. Philadelphia, Paris, and London each owe their familiar urban form in large measure to devastating epidemics of yellow fever, cholera, and typhus. This course looks at how doctors, architects, and city planners responded to disease, and how their responses changed along with changing medical knowledge. Because of its importance in the history of medicine and of public philanthropy, Philadelphia, gives us a unique resource in studying these issues at first hand. The ultimate goal of the course is to deepen our understanding of cities and public health.

There will be one architectural tour—a field trip to the Philadelphia Water Works, with appropriate social distancing. One short research paper is optional for students who wish to deepen their knowledge.

Course Schedule – lectures begin at 6:30 PM

1. Tuesday, October 6, 2020 - Health and City

An overview of the history of urban form, and the history of disease control. We look at diseases in the ancient world, down to the Black Death of the fourteenth century and its return three centuries later.

2. Tuesday, October 13, 2020 - Yellow Fever in a Greene Country Towne: Public Health and Philadelphia

The Yellow Fever epidemic of 1793 marks the beginning of organized public health measures in the United States, and leads to the building of the Fairmount Water Works.

3. Tuesday, October 20, 2020 - Blue Death in the City of Lights: Paris, Cholera and Baron Haussmann

One in 25 Parisians died in the cholera epidemic of 1832, which helped bring about the modernization of the city under Baron Haussmann, who was told to “aerate, unify, and embellish” Paris, producing the wide boulevards, parks and open public squares that are its loveliest features. It also marked the first serious questioning of the miasma theory of disease.

4. Tuesday, October 27, 2020 – London and the Great Stink of 1858

In 1858 a prolonged drought and a month of 90+ degree days reduced the Thames River in London to a slow ebb of steamy human waste, an event celebrated as the Great Stink. It led London to revise its way of controlling sewage and inadvertently produced one of the city’s finest features, the Thames Embankment.

NO CLASS – Tuesday, November 3, 2020 – Election Day

5. Tuesday, November 10, 2020 - Hospitals, Asylums and Disease

The history of hospitals is a history of our changing understanding of disease and health. We look at changing ideas about contagion and hygiene, and how they affected the design of hospitals and also hospital practice. Special attention will be paid to Philadelphia's leadership in American medicine and education.

6. Tuesday, November 17, 2020 - From "Sick Building Syndrome" to Coronavirus

The story of today's coronavirus pandemic is not over but it has already directed attention back to the significance of healthy air, especially in a world that has only been using mechanical air conditioning for less than a century. The course concludes with a look at the controversial relationship between ventilation and contagion, and addressing such diseases as tuberculosis and legionella (Legionnaire's Disease), Philadelphia's unhappy contribution to the history of epidemiology.

Suggested Readings

Readings for this course will be provided with registration.

About the Professor

Dr. Michael J. Lewis is the Faison-Pierson Stoddard Professor of Art at Williams College in Massachusetts. His research focuses on 19th and 20th century art, architecture and urban history. He is the author of *Frank Furness: Architecture and the Violent Mind*. His forthcoming book, *Philadelphia Builds*, a collection of his essays on Philadelphia architecture, will be published by Paul Dry Books in 2021..He is the architecture critic of the *Wall Street Journal*. He has taught courses for the Wagner since 2009.

Contact information for the Wagner Free Institute of Science

Office hours: Monday – Friday, from 9 to 5 PM Main telephone: 215-763-6529

Wagner staff will coordinate course registration and questions about online participation. For more information, please contact:

Susan Glassman, Director – 215-763-6529 x14 or susang@wagnerfreeinstitute.org

Coryn Wolk, Communications & Program Coordinator – 215-763-6529 x24 or corynw@wagnerfreeinstitute.org
