Teaching the Black Death during COVID-19

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Project Goals:

- Develop a unit (5-6 classes) appropriate for different education levels, including secondary school in NYS and undergraduate courses on medieval history, the history of medicine, or the history of pandemics.
- Create an educational framework flexible enough for a flipped hybrid, synchronous or asynchronous classroom.
- Foment student engagement with the past through historical comparisons between pandemics.
- Enhance critical thinking through activities and lectures inviting students to compare and contrast the effects and implications - social, environmental, economic - of outbreaks of disease.
Unit Components

- Secondary School Instructor Syllabus
- Secondary School Student Syllabus
- Undergraduate Instructor Syllabus
- Undergraduate Student Syllabus
- Activity Sheets
  - Activity One: Mapping How Pandemics Spread
  - Activity Two: Images of the “Other” in the Middle Ages
  - Activity Three: Landlords and Laborers- the Economics of Pandemics
1. Create and upload a short (~15 minutes) pre-recorded lecture giving an overview of the spread of the Black Death: how does it spread? What are the symptoms? How many people did it kill? 
   a. NB: The introduction to Horrox, Part One: Narrative Accounts, is a good place to start.

2. Distribute the following readings to the students to read, annotate and consider before the class session:
      i. NB: de Musis, though an incredible source, can be long-winded. Feel free to excerpt.
   b. “Mapping the novel Coronavirus Pandemic”, last updated September 11, 2020

3. Upload the following readings to the course website; students will pick one to read, digest and bring to class discussion:
In Class Tasks:

1. Lead the following activity [~20 minutes]:
   a. Compare and contrast [this map](#) of the spread of the Black Death to [this graphic](#) depicting the spread of coronavirus. Why did they spread the way they did? What has changed?

   **NB:** The first map, which is static, focuses only on the date of the pathogen’s arrival, not numbers of infections. The second graphic, however, is animated, and demonstrates both the dates at which governments noted the first infection within the country [the date at which the country becomes highlighted in yellow] and numbers of infections within the given country [represented by red circles]. Why would these two representations of a pandemic differ, and how do these differences alter our understanding of the data?

2. Lead and Moderate Class Discussion [~20 minutes]
   a. How and why did medieval Europeans’ increased connectivity to societies outside their own, including Asia, Africa, and the Middle East, increase their susceptibility to disease outbreaks? How has the increasing interconnectedness of our globe increased or decreased our susceptibility to disease?
   b. **NB:** for an expanded unit or full class, for example on Disease and Western Civilization, these questions could be expanded to include the role of disease in the Columbian Exchange and the colonization of the Americas.
Class Components

- **Asynchronous (Before Class) Components**
  - Lecture (~15 minutes)
    - Provides context to course readings
  - Readings (primary and secondary)
    - Primary sources via Rosemary Horrox, *The Black Death* (Manchester, 1994)
    - Secondary readings generally open access, appropriate for different levels

- **Synchronous (In Class) Components**
  - Activity (~20 minutes)
  - Class Discussion (~20 minutes)
    - Discussion Questions Provided
Class Themes:

1. Confrontation between Human and Nature
2. Confrontation between Knowable and Unknowable
3. Confrontation between “Insider” and “Other”
4. Confrontation between Tradition and Transformation
5. Confrontation between Powerful and Powerless
Activity: Landlords and Laborers

- **Goal:** To teach students about the economic consequences of pandemics through hands-on, experiential learning.
- **Students** are assigned roles, landlords or laborers, and must negotiate for the price of labor in order for both to survive.
- **Round One (Norfolk)** Ratio of Landlords to Laborers: 1:5

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Players</th>
<th>Coins</th>
<th>Laborers Required</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>5 Landlords</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 King</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 Barons</td>
<td>20 each</td>
<td>6 each</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 Knights</td>
<td>10 each</td>
<td>4 each</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25 Laborers</td>
<td>Each require 4 coins to survive</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Activity: Landlords and Laborers

- Round Two (Norfolk and Suffolk) Ratio of Landlords to Laborers: 1:2
- Students will answer the following questions:
  - If you are a landlord:
    1. How much did you pay your laborers?
    2. Do you have any money left over?
    3. Did the amount of money change? Why?
  - If you are a laborer:
    1. How much were you paid for your work?
    2. Do you consider this amount fair?
  - For everyone:
    1. Who is in the stronger bargaining position right now, after the Black Death?
- Ultimately, students will discuss the experience of the two rounds in light of the Statute of Laborers and information on the economic consequences of Covid-19.
Possible Next Steps

- Write and Record Lectures
- Further develop activity sheets
- Expand Reading List to be more global in scale
- Expand Syllabus to be a full semester length class
Thank You

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