

STS.005: Disease and Society in America  
Second Paper Assignment

The Roles of Medicine

Due at start of Lecture: 3 November 2005

The year is 1777. Harvard College is in turmoil. The University of Pennsylvania and King's College have both opened medical schools, the first two in the British Colonies. Wanting to regain its status as the colonies' premier educational institution, Harvard appoints a committee of prominent physicians to develop plans for its own medical school. Their report is nearly complete when two things go wrong. First, when war broke out in 1775, Cambridge became the headquarters of the Continental Army. Although the British retreated from Boston in 1776, things have not yet returned to normal. Second, an anonymous broadside was published in 1777. The mysterious authors, who signed the piece "M&M," argued that medicine was a waste of money. The citizens of Massachusetts spent more and more of their hard earned money on physicians, surgeons, midwives, apothecaries, herbalists, bone-setters, preachers, and so forth, but had nothing to show for it. Life expectancy was low, around 35 years. Infant mortality was high, with 20% of children dying before their first birthday. Diseases thrived, with people suffering from fevers, fluxes, aches, smallpox, colic, measles, and diphtheria. "M&M" had clear advice for the President and Fellows of Harvard: don't waste your money on a medical school.

The committee's physicians are outraged. Several had trained in England and had mastered all that clinical science could offer. Many had worked for decades, tending to the sick in Boston. All had large numbers of grateful and appreciative patients. Clearly "M&M" did not understand the role of medicine. They decide to fund an analysis of the complex roles of healers in colonial America. They have many questions. What kinds of healers exist? In what ways do they help their patients? How else do they contribute to society and public health? What is their source of expertise and authority? Wanting to do this discreetly, they look for a college student who will do all the work but allow them to take credit for it. One Tuesday they knock on your door and make their proposal:

Write a 2000-word (6-8 page) essay that describes the roles of healers in colonial society. They have a series of specific requests:

First, describe the range of healers working in colonial America.

Second, provide detailed studies of Martha Ballard and two other healers. For

each, describe the nature of their training, their practice, and their roles in their society. In what different ways did they help their patients?

Third, integrate this material into a concise summary that defends the role of healers in colonial society. Is there more to medicine than data about life expectancy and infant mortality?

As you formulate your answers, follow these guidelines:

- You can write from the perspective of 1777, 1807, or 2005; just make sure your chronological position is clear and consistent.
- The three healers: One of your detailed studies **MUST BE** of Martha Ballard. The other two can be your choice from the range of individual or groups of healers discussed so far. The readings have provided information about many individual healers, including John Josselyn, William Buchan, Cotton Mather, Zabdiel Boylston, William Douglas, Benjamin Rush, Daniel Cony, and several others. They have also provided more general information about groups of healers, such as Indian doctors, Indian jugglers, Republican and Federalist physicians in Philadelphia, etc. Pick cases that are described in sufficient detail to support your analysis, and that are interesting to you.
- You must make clear arguments, defended with correct, relevant, and specific evidence.
- Your essays must be well organized and clearly written.
- You should not need to do any outside research. There is abundant material in the readings and the lectures.
- You must use material from at least three readings, from any of the weeks.
- You do not need to make the case for a medical school. The Committee will steal your ideas and make that case themselves.
- You **MUST** cite all sources (course readings, lectures, other readings if any) correctly, this includes both the source and the specific page number. If you have any questions, see the information at the MIT Writing Center website (<http://web.mit.edu/writing/>). You can pick your own style (e.g. CMS, parenthetical citations, etc.) -- just be accurate, consistent, complete.
- Please put your name on a title page, but not on any pages of the body of the paper, so that we may grade the papers blind.

Many different approaches can be taken to this assignment. You could emphasize a single role as most important. You could emphasize the broad range of roles. You will be graded on the basis of how well you present a clear, insightful, and well-documented discussion of the role of healers.