

# INEQUALITIES UNMASKED

What Pandemics Reveal about American Society from the Spanish Flu to COVID-19

A Lecture by

**KEITH WAILOO**

Wednesday, February 16, 2022, at 12 p.m.  
Mayer Auditorium, Health Sciences Campus  
University of Southern California

## KNOW BEFORE YOU GO

Keith Wailoo is a historian who has written about history and health policy, the politics of race and health, and more.

**“The responses of society to illness reveal underlying ideological and moral commitments and lay bare a world in which often unarticulated principles are at work.”**—Keith Wailoo in “Whose Pain Matters? Reflections on Race, Social Justice, and COVID-19’s Revealed Inequalities,” at the NYU School of Public Health, November 2020

**“To my mind, every avenue for containing contagion has been culturally contentious and politically fraught. . .”**—Keith Wailoo, in the panel “History and Historians in Response to COVID-19,” American Historical Association, December 2020

## KEITH WAILOO

Keith Wailoo is Henry Putnam University Professor of History and Public Affairs at Princeton University, where he previously served as Vice Dean of the School of Public and International Affairs and Chair of the Department of History. The current president of the American Association for the History of Medicine, his research straddles history and health policy, touching on drugs and drug policy; the politics of race and health; the interplay of identity, ethnicity, gender, and medicine; and controversies in genetics and society.

He is the author of *Pushing Cool: Big Tobacco, Racial Marketing, and the Untold Story of the Menthol Cigarette* (2021), *Pain: A Political History* (2015), and *How Cancer Crossed the Color Line* (2011), among other books.

## PANDEMICS CHANGE SOCIETIES

In an interview with NPR's *All Things Considered*, Keith Wailoo gave some examples of how pandemics have changed societies throughout history:

- American society learned from tuberculosis outbreaks that spitting in public is not hygienic
- Cholera epidemics in the nineteenth-century United States led to the creation of government institutions entrusted with guiding the public through health calamities
- In the fourteenth century, the Black Death killed so many people that it undermined the feudal system and laid the basis for new economic systems

**“The real danger is that one part of the population—the population that’s privileged—declares an end to the pandemic before it actually ends for people who are not as privileged.”**—Keith Wailoo, “How Do Pandemics Change Societies? A Historian Weighs In,” NPR’s *All Things Considered*, March 11, 2021

## VOCABULARY CORNER

**bioethics**—the multidisciplinary study of, and response to, moral and ethical questions relating to the health-related sciences, including biology, medicine, and technologies

**health disparities**—preventable differences in the burden of disease, injury, violence, or opportunities to achieve optimal health that are experienced by different social groups

**health care disparities**—differences between social groups in health insurance coverage, access to and use of health care, and quality of care

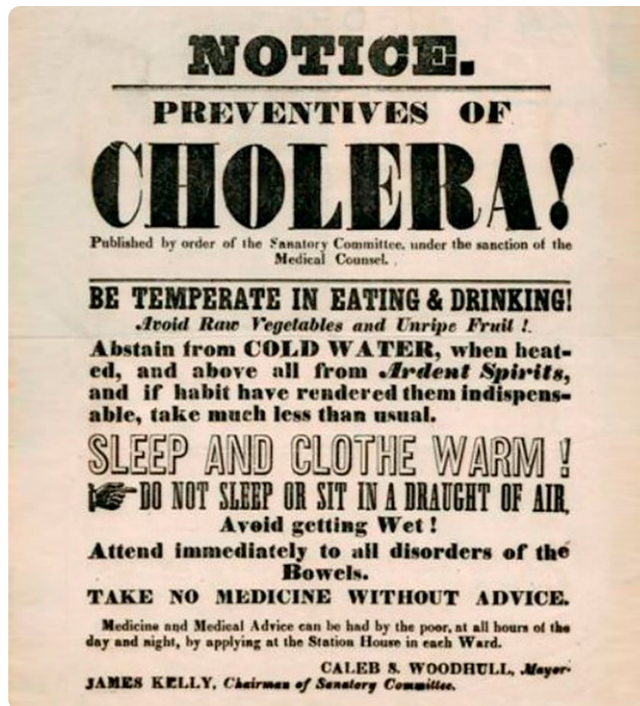
**health equity**—when every individual has the opportunity to attain their highest level of health through the elimination of disparities

**public health**—promotes and protects the health of people and the communities where they live, work, and play, focusing on prevention of illness and injury and promotion of wellness; public health involves things like research, education, vaccination, regulations that promote safe and healthy environments, and more

Sources: CDC, Kaiser Family Foundation, Berman Institute of Bioethics at Johns Hopkins, APHA, Merriam-Webster

## FOR FURTHER REFLECTION

- What did you learn about the COVID-19 pandemic from thinking about it in a historical context?
- What bioethical issues are raised in formulating responses to the COVID-19 pandemic?
- What do governmental and individual responses to the COVID-19 pandemic reveal about U.S. society? What values or logics underlie the various responses?



1849 Cholera prevention poster by the Sanatory Committee, under the sanction of the Medical Counsel, in New York City

Source: New York Historical Society



4/13/22: A Lecture by Michele Bratcher Goodwin

## IF YOU LIKED THIS EVENT, YOU MIGHT WANT TO CHECK OUT:

- **4/13/22** at Visions and Voices: Dying While Black: Race, Maternity, and the Reproductive Health Care System: A Lecture by Michele Bratcher Goodwin [bit.ly/VVDyingWhileBlack](https://bit.ly/VVDyingWhileBlack)
- Other Talks by Dr. Wailoo [keithwailoo.com](https://keithwailoo.com)
- BIPOC voices in public health and health equity on Twitter [@uche\\_blackstock](https://twitter.com/uche_blackstock), [@RheaBoydMD](https://twitter.com/RheaBoydMD), [@choo\\_ek](https://twitter.com/choo_ek)

## DISCOVER MORE AT THE USC LIBRARIES

HUGH McHARG of the USC Libraries selected the following resources to help you learn more about this event. Electronic resources are accessible through the search bar on the USC Libraries homepage at [libraries.usc.edu](http://libraries.usc.edu) but may require the user to log in using their USC credentials.

### BOOKS

- Maureen R. Benjamins and Fernando De Maio, *Unequal Cities: Structural Racism and the Death Gap in America's Largest Cities* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Univ. Press, 2021).
- Richard D. DeShazo, *The Racial Divide in American Medicine: Black Physicians and the Struggle for Justice in Health Care* (Jackson: Univ. Press of Mississippi, 2018).
- Patricia J. Fanning, *Influenza and Inequality: One Town's Tragic Response to the Great Epidemic of 1918* (Amherst: Univ. of Massachusetts Press, 2010).
- John M. Hoberman, *Black and Blue: The Origins and Consequences of Medical Racism* (Berkeley: Univ. of California Press, 2012).

### DATABASES

- [Centers for Disease Control and Prevention Journals](#)
- [Gale Health and Wellness Resource Center](#)
- [Global Health](#)
- [ProQuest Public Health Database](#)

### JOURNALS

- [Bulletin of the History of Medicine](#)
- [Journal of Racial and Ethnic Health Disparities](#)
- [Research in the Sociology of Health Care](#)
- [Social Science & Medicine](#)

### OTHER RESOURCES

- [COVID-19 Teaching Resources and Materials for Historical Research](#), compiled by the American Association for the History of Medicine

