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BROOKLYN HISTORICAL SOCIETY OPENS NEW EXHIBITION, *TAKING CARE OF BROOKLYN: STORIES OF SICKNESS AND HEALTH*, WHICH CHALLENGES CONVENTIONAL THINKING ON THE HISTORY OF PUBLIC HEALTH IN THE BOROUGH

Exhibition examines injustices and assumptions as it delves deeply into the social history of healthcare in Brooklyn

[May 14, 2019] Brooklyn, NY— On Friday, May 31, 2019, Brooklyn Historical Society (BHS) will open *Taking Care of Brooklyn: Stories of Sickness and Health*, an exhibition exploring how centuries of Brooklynites have understood their own health and that of those around them. Through the experiences of everyday Brooklynites giving, receiving, and even being denied health care, *Taking Care of Brooklyn: Stories of Sickness and Health* reveals that sickness is about germs and biology, but also housing conditions, access to nutritional food and clean water, prevailing stereotypes, and much more.

The exhibition leads visitors on a journey through a plethora of health issues that have affected Brooklyn, from the devastating epidemics of its early history to the illnesses that shape our lives today. Starting with smallpox, which ravaged Lenape communities in the 17th century, and continuing through contemporary issues, from heart disease to mental health to birth equity, this exhibition brings to life the stories of the families, friends, nurses, physicians, institutions, and activists who have played an important role in promoting the health of Brooklynites throughout history.

The exhibition uses the personal stories of past Brooklynites to demonstrate how attitudes toward health have changed over time. The story of 17th-century Brooklyn visitor Jasper Danckaerts serves as an entry point into the role illness played in the displacement and genocide of the Lenape. A section on smallpox and vaccination shows that present-day vaccination wars have deep historical roots in Brooklyn. A bulletin board-style installation uses memorabilia to showcase how issues of public health became central demands of Brooklyn civil rights activists in the 1950s and 1960s. Another section tracing the origins of the 20th-century birth control movement in Brooklyn reveals that women's bodily autonomy has long been a fraught topic in the borough and beyond. Visitors will leave the exhibition with an expanded understanding of the changing meaning of "sickness" and "health" both in the past and in their lives today.

Taking Care of Brooklyn: Stories of Sickness and Health is a product of three years of thorough research by BHS historians and curators. BHS partnered with key organizations to tell the story of health in Brooklyn's past, present, and future, including the New York City Department of Health and Mental Hygiene, Long Island University's Public Health Program in the School of Health Professions, and the Center for the History and Ethics of Public Health at the Columbia University Mailman School of Public Health.

Taking Care of Brooklyn: Stories of Sickness and Health is presented by Brooklyn Historical Society in collaboration with Wellcome Trust, a global charitable foundation. *Taking Care of Brooklyn: Stories of Sickness and Health* is the final New York City exhibition of Wellcome's major international initiative, *Contagious Cities*, which explores the interplay of people and pathogens in urban contexts.

Brooklyn Historical Society will celebrate this exhibition with a public opening reception on Thursday, May 30 from 6:30pm to 8:30pm. Made possible with generous support from The Brooklyn Hospital Center and JP Morgan Chase & Co., [this event is free and open to the public](#).

In connection with the exhibition, Brooklyn Historical Society is offering an ongoing roster of public programs, educational outreach, and podcast episodes dedicated to the history of public health and epidemics in Brooklyn's past, present, and future:

- On Thursday, June 6, Iyeshima Harris, project director at East New York Farms!, Vegan Restaurateur Erick Castro, and Esther Crain, Deputy Editor of Health.com, will discuss the effects of food deserts during a program titled [Eatin' Good in the Hood: The Link Between Socioeconomics and Access to Nutritious Food](#).
- On Thursday, June 26 Jennifer Brier, University of Illinois at Chicago professor and author of *Infectious Ideas: US Political Response to the AIDS Crisis* and Steven Thrasher, journalist and professor at Northwestern University, will debunk historical myths about HIV/AIDS in America during a program titled [Getting the History of HIV/AIDS Right](#).
- Programs for school students will provide an opportunity for teachers to bring their classes for guided experiences in the exhibition.
- Brooklyn Historical Society's podcast, [Flatbush + Main](#) has already focused on this history in multiple episodes, and will continue to do so in the future. Currently available to listeners are [Episode 8: Brooklyn's Veterans](#), [Episode 25: Brooklyn's Pioneering Women Doctors](#) and [Episode 29: Cholera in Brooklyn](#).

Taking Care of Brooklyn: Stories of Sickness and Health is made possible through generous support from the National Endowment for the Humanities, the Office of the Brooklyn Borough President, Pfizer Foundation, Wellcome Trust, JP Morgan Chase & Co., and The Brooklyn Hospital Foundation. Related programs are also made possible by the New York State Council on the Arts with the support of Governor Andrew Cuomo and the New York State Legislature, and are supported, in part, by public funds from the New York City Department of Cultural Affairs in partnership with the New York City Council.

Taking Care of Brooklyn: Stories of Sickness and Health will be on display at Brooklyn Historical Society (128 Pierrepont Street, Brooklyn, NY), from May 31, 2019 until Spring 2022. BHS is open to the public Wednesday to Sunday from 12pm to 5pm. Suggested admission is \$10 for adults, \$6 for seniors and teachers, and free for members, veterans/military personnel, and students of all ages.

[About Brooklyn Historical Society](#)

Founded in 1863, Brooklyn Historical Society is a nationally recognized urban history center dedicated to preserving and encouraging the study of Brooklyn's extraordinary 400-year history. Located in Brooklyn Heights and housed in a magnificent landmark building designed by George Post and opened in 1881, today's BHS is a cultural hub for civic dialogue, thoughtful engagement and community outreach. In May 2017 BHS opened a second site in DUMBO's Brooklyn Bridge Park.