

Johns Hopkins University Press Podcast

Arien Mack, Social Research

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Mary Alice Yeskey

Welcome to the Johns Hopkins University Press Podcast. I'm Mary Alice Yeskey with the JHU Press Journals Division. The latest issue of *Social Research* is a special issue: "In the Time of Plague: The History and Social Consequences of Lethal Epidemic Disease – COVID-19 Edition." This special issue is a revisiting of the journal's Fall 1988 issue of the same name, which was a response to the AIDS epidemic. The COVID-19 edition is made up of two books. Book one includes a response to the COVID-19 pandemic and book two is a re-print of the original 1988 issue. Joining us today is the journal editor, Dr. Arien Mack.

Thank you so much for joining us, Dr. Mack.

Arien Mack

Thank you for having me.

Mary Alice Yeskey

How did the idea to re-publish and reflect on the journal's 1988 AIDS response come about?

Arien Mack

Well, obviously it was not rocket science. As the pandemic became more and more real to everybody, and it was clear it was a pandemic, it brought me back to the very first conference that I did as editor of *Social Research* I think in 1987. The issue was published subsequently in 1988 and it was at the height of the hysteria around HIV/AIDS and some people who are old enough can remember the photographs of policemen arresting demonstrators. They were all garbed in gloves in order to protect themselves from what they considered a contagious person, and of course AIDS was not contagious by just touching somebody or being near them, and anyway that was a very bad moment in the history of plague, the AIDS moment, and it inspired me to do a conference, a large public conference, that became the 1988 issue on *Social Research* in time of the plague. Then, this spring, when it was clear that we were again in the midst of a wildly virulent virus, it seemed natural. It just seemed obvious to me that we should republish and update the early issue, the 1988 issue. And so we decided that we would simply republish all the papers from the 1988 issue and then write to some of the authors who were still available and still alive, some of them were not, and to add new authors who we considered to be experts on COVID and what COVID was offering us and what we were going to have to live with, and so that was the basis of the decision to publish a double issue, and to do it quickly because we moved this issue up in the order of to be published issues, forthcoming issues, in order to try to get it out as quickly as possible during the pandemic and unfortunately

it looks to all of us, I think, as if the pandemic is going to be with us through this spring which is a nightmare, but it makes this issue continuously relevant.

Mary Alice Yeskey

How would you say that *Social Research* as a journal is uniquely positioned to address the myriad of issues that we're facing now in COVID-19?

Arien Mack

Well, uniquely maybe not, but well positioned because this is a journal unlike most academic journals, which are disciplinary journals in political science journals, in economics journals, sociology. We are none of those. We are and have been through all the years that I've edited the journal, which are many many many, I started editing it in 1970 so it's unbelievable. At any rate, we are very much a journal of ideas and one in which we try as best we can to invite authors from very different specialties to address subjects that we think are current concern or just enduring concern, and all our issues are thematic which made it even easier for us to focus on COVID and plagues in general because that's what we do. We have themes and the theme of this issue was plague. So, in that sense we were well-positioned to address the new pandemic.

Mary Alice Yeskey

When you were putting together this issue, and I'm also going to ask specifically about if you have any comments about authors that wrote both for the 1988 issue and for this 2020 issue, when you were putting it together as an editor, was there anything that surprised you or challenged you?

Arien Mack

It's always a challenge. Every issue is a challenge, and the first challenge is the theme. But this theme we had so that was not a challenge, and then it's finding people, and I very much wanted to ask the people who had written for the original issue when HIV/AIDS was very much in our lives to write again about COVID and then we added other people, who Karen and I together came up with their names as people who are experts and who'd already been speaking out about various aspects of COVID-19.

Mary Alice Yeskey

Were there any sort of insights, or specific comments or call outs or revelations from the new material that struck you? Or something that you read that you, you know, kind of weren't expecting, or you thought that the author had really, you know, sort of was onto something?

Arien Mack

I think the thing that was most startling, but I don't know, since the newspapers made you aware of it, it was already in the public domain, but that is the serious differences between who

this disease was affecting compared to the HIV/AIDS virus. Because one of the things that allowed the general public to sort of isolate AIDS was that, oh well, that's the disease of gay men or drug users, it's not going to affect us so ultimately it was the other that was that was vulnerable to that disease. Whereas COVID-19, we're all vulnerable but the kind of most painful and depressing aspect of it is who is dying from it, poor people, people of color, are people who are underserved and therefore more vulnerable. Older people, and certainly that was a population not so much affected by HIV/AIDS, but also people with no money, no healthcare, no access to hospitals, so the poor and people of color, and that is a salient difference between the two diseases.

Mary Alice Yeskey

Exactly.

Arien Mack

I won't say that we discovered it or that I discovered it and added it in the issue because the newspapers were already pointing it out, but I think the case needs to be made loudly that once again the people who are threatened most are the people who are defenseless. I mean, look at what's happening in prisons. Prison population is completely engrossed and very little being done to prevent the spread of the disease in prison.

Mary Alice Yeskey

I completely agree, and I also think to me, especially after reading the pieces on COVID, the big difference to me having, you know, lived through the 1988 and the onset of HIV/AIDS, granted I was, you know, a teenager at the time, but I feel like where we're at now is our actions collectively as a society affect the outcome of this disease which was not quite the same with HIV and AIDS where it was, like, the choices of specific people versus the choices of an entire country, the choices of the entire world, and so I found so many of the pieces in the journal fascinating because they're talking about, kind of our collective moral, you know, need to as a society work to get this under control versus just condemning someone for the choices that they made or the unfortunate outcome of their disease status. Aside from the fact that the disparities in, you know, morbidity are terrifying and awful, everybody's affected by this, this is a global collective memory, and I found a lot of the pieces in the first book touching on that and sort of just how we're going to collectively remember this were just some really good food for thought. Was there anything else about the issue that you wanted our listeners to know or anything specific you wanted to point out?

Arien Mack

No, I just think we were lucky to get it out quickly and that it's very relevant and I hope people will read it because it does provide some insight into what we're confronting and who is confronting it the most and I think that's an important message. We did do a webinar, actually two webinars, on the issue before the issue came out and they were very well attended and

this week there's going to be people who were writing for the COVID part of the new issue of the journal. So, we did everything we could to try to get the word out about it. And, you know, clearly the subject, as you said, is universally of interest because we're all at risk.

Mary Alice Yeskey

Are the webinars that you put together prior to the issue, are those still available online?

Arien Mack

I'm sure they are.

Mary Alice Yeskey

We'll link those so our listeners can see those.

Arien Mack

That'd be great.

Mary Alice Yeskey

Absolutely. So, what is coming up for the next issue of *Social Research*? What's your next topic?

Arien Mack

It's not unrelated to the plague issue. It's on cultural trauma. It's guest edited by a colleague of mine who's an expert and leading figure in the field called collective memory and clearly COVID-19 is going to be, we think, in the future part of the collective memory of many societies and it is certainly a cultural trauma. So, the upcoming issue, the fall issue, is really about what constitutes, why do some things become a cultural trauma and remain in the culture's memory of the culture when others disappear, which what makes something a cultural memory? It's an interesting issue and I think many readers will find it interesting and it's clearly related to COVID, which we think will in times to come be a piece of our cultural memory and our history. So, it's in that sense interesting and we didn't plan it this way but fortunately, there is this link between the two issues.

Mary Alice Yeskey

Yeah, relevant whether you wanted it to be or not.

Arien Mack

Yeah.

Mary Alice Yeskey

Excellent. Well, thank you so much for your time, Dr. Mack. I am so looking forward to that issue and we will post links to the webinar so our listeners can see those and again, best of luck and stay safe and stay healthy.

[Arien Mack](#)

You too.