

Religion, Health, and the Body in Law and Order Teaching Module

Philippa Koch
Missouri State University
September 2020

Background and Application

This is a unit designed for a course called “Body and Health in American Religions.” It could be used in a variety of courses, including a survey of American religion and an elective on sexuality, healing, and family life. It could also be used in a course to cover the topics of religion and colonialism.

Teaching Module Goals:

1. To place the body at the center of our study of religion.
2. To recognize the role of governments and religious authorities in defining what is religion, what is medicine, and what kind of behavior is morally acceptable.
3. To practice and develop the work of historical interpretation on contested and difficult subjects, including witchcraft, crime, slavery, government-imposed quarantines, and new and controversial religious and medical practices.
4. To relate past dynamics of religion, law, and the body to contemporary issues.

Assigned Readings

1. Possession

Samuel Willard, “A Brief Account of a Strange and Unusual Providence of God Befallen to Elizabeth Knapp of Groton (1672),” in *Remarkable Providences*, ed. Demos (Northeastern, 1991), 422-436.

John Demos, “A Diabolical Distemper,” in *Entertaining Satan: Witchcraft and the Culture of Early New England* (Oxford, 1982), 116-131.

2. Sexuality and Death

Cotton Mather, *Warnings from the Dead* (1693), 68-76.

Kathleen M. Brown, “Murderous Uncleanness: The Body of the Female Infanticide in Puritan New England,” in *A Centre of Wonders*, ed. Lindman & Tartar (Cornell, 2001), 77-94.

3. Obeah in the Caribbean

Bryan Edwards, *The History Civil and Commercial, of the British Colonies in the West Indies* (Philadelphia, 1806), pp. 296-308.

Diana Paton, “Obeah Acts: Producing and Policing the Boundaries of Religion in the Caribbean,” *Small Axe* 28 (2009): 1-18.

4. Hawaiians and Leprosy

The True Story of Kaluaikoolau, as Told by his Wife Piilani, trans. by Frances Frazier (University of Hawaii Press, 2001), (selections) 6-21, 33-44.

Franco Salmoiraghi, “Honokahua,” *Manoa* 19 (2007), 24-35.

The National Park Service webpage for Kalaupapa:

<http://www.nps.gov/kala/learn/index.htm> Consider: How are the patients, families, and missionaries represented and remembered? How is the current site controlled? Who gets to visit?

5. Beginnings of Christian Science

Rennie B. Schoepflin, "Mary Baker Eddy: Patient, Healer, Teacher," in *Christian Science on Trial: Religious Healing in America* (Johns Hopkins UP, 2002), 15-32.

Mary Baker Eddy, "Chapter VI: Science, Theology, Medicine," *Science and Health with a Key to the Scriptures* (1875) (selections).

"May Call It Manslaughter Physicians May Ask The Investigation Of The Baird Case. The Case," *Kansas City Times*, March 31, 1895. P. 11.

"Churches And Church Men Two Systems Of Healing Discussed By A Christian Scientist." *Kansas City Times*, April 7, 1895. P. 20

"An Open Letter To Dr. King A Christian Scientist Cites a Case of Interest to an Ingenuie," *Kansas City Times*, April 7, 1895. P. 4

Study Questions

1. What stake did early American communities have in interpreting women's actions the way they did? What role does the female body play in defining larger social norms?
2. What did you think of applying psychoanalytic categories and interpretations to stories of possession in the distant past?
3. How were medicine and religion interrelated in the Caribbean? How were they both defined by the law code? What can we know about Obeah?
4. How did Piilani understand her responsibility to her family and their bodies during their sickness? What was the Provisional Government's view of quarantine? What role did religion play in this story? How do Hawaiians view bones?
5. How did Christian Science compare to the prevailing medical world at the time it emerged? How did Eddy explain the origins of sickness in *Science and Health*? What did she think humans could do about it?
6. In what ways do you see political authorities policing, curtailing, challenging, and/or defining religious and bodily practices today?