Course Topic: The Politics of Illness

How is illness related to representation, power, and identity?

This course explores illness and health in relation to race, gender, and disability through a focus on health activism and cultural representations of illness. We will draw on documentary and experimental film, first-person essays, television, memoir, and poetry to investigate the ways sick people represent themselves against dominant cultural understandings of illness. Course content will address how some bodies are represented as inherently ill or pathological and ask whose pain and injury is viewed as politically important. To do so, we will also evaluate the ways illness has served as a potential site for political organizing in case studies ranging from the Black Panther Party’s health activism to disability justice movements. This course will also explore key debates in the field of disability studies about the relations between disability politics, pain, and illness. Students will have the opportunity to conduct a creative, academic, or activist project around their specific interests in illness and health.