

Continuity and Contingency: The Medical-Historical World according to Charles E. Rosenberg

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FEW American historians of medicine and health care are as well known as Charles E. Rosenberg. Since his first book, *The Cholera Years*, appeared in 1962, the conceptual frameworks Charles (as everyone calls him) developed and refined in his many publications have formed the historiographic backbone of our field. His interests in history have been so catholic, and his personal support of individuals so wide-ranging, that several generations of scholars have been shaped by his influence. Yet perhaps because his influence has been so pervasive, his impact on the history of medicine remains largely unarticulated and unexamined.

This roundtable represents a first effort to articulate and examine that influence. The articles gathered here were first presented at a conference held 18–19 June 2004, at Harvard University, where Charles currently holds the position of Ernest E. Monrad Professor in the Social Sciences in the Department of the History of Science. Unlike the conventional festschrift, the conference did not mark Charles's retirement, but rather represented a celebration of his continued productivity as a thinker and as a mentor. Co-sponsored by the Harvard History of Science Department and the

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Francis A. Countway Library, the conference brought together former students and colleagues from the University of Pennsylvania (where Charles taught from 1963 to 2000) with current students and colleagues at Harvard and others in our field. In addition to the support from his Harvard department and the Countway Library, other institutions and individuals closely associated with Charles's career also supported the conference, among them Cambridge University Press, Richard and Mary Dunn, the Wood Institute of the College of Physicians of Philadelphia, Harvard Medical School's History of Medicine Working Group, the Johns Hopkins University Press, the Library Company of Philadelphia, and Keith Wailoo of Rutgers University.

Organized by a group of former students, the "Charlesfest," as it was nicknamed, drew over fifty scholars, some from as far away as England and New Zealand. The diversity of the papers reflected the many facets of Charles's intellectual interests. Charles has written on many topics, including public health, psychiatry, hospitals, nursing, advice books, medical practice, and the doctor-patient relationship. Likewise, his fifty (and counting) doctoral students represent a variety of institutions and subject areas. While the majority worked with Charles at the University of Pennsylvania, his first student Edward Beardsley completed his Ph.D. in 1966 while Charles was at the University of Wisconsin, while two others (Barbara Brookes and Lindsey Granshaw) did their doctorates at Bryn Mawr. At the University of Pennsylvania, Charles drew students from many different departments. While most came from the History and Sociology of Science department, a substantial minority (among them Janet Tighe, Leila Zenderland, and Carole Haber) took their degrees in Penn's American Civilization program, and a few (among them Nancy Tomes) did theirs in the History department. Charles played a significant role in the training of M.D./Ph.D. (Jeff Brosco and Chris Feudtner) and of nurse historians (Patricia D'Antonio, Julie Fairman, and Karen Wilkerson). Since moving to Harvard in 2000, Charles has already acquired a new group of graduate students, among them Jeremy Greene. Finally, many scholars who were never formally students of Charles have been deeply influenced by his work and his personal support (Susan Reverby, for example). Thus the number of scholars who consider themselves "descended" from Charles's work goes far beyond the circle of people who were formally his students.

Likewise, Charles's students, formal and informal, have worked in a wide range of subject matter. While most have focused on some aspect of American medicine, significant numbers has worked on agriculture and/or animal science (Hal Barron, Drew Faust, Deborah Fitzgerald, and Susan Jones), psychology (John O'Donnell, Hans Pols, and Leila Zenderland), and non-Western subjects (Warwick Anderson, Marta Hanson, Maneesha Lal, and Lynette Schumaker). While most have worked on the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, a few, most prominently Mary Fissell, have focused on earlier periods. Finally, having taken their Ph.Ds over a span of over forty years, the careers of Rosenberg students illustrate the changing orientation of history as a discipline, from the "new social history" to the new cultural history. Because Charles is not done training students yet, the changes experienced by his intellectual heirs will only keep compounding.

Thus, the "Charlesfest" brought together a diverse and lively group spanning several generations of historical work. Although the papers presented ranged widely, the state of the field in the history of medicine commanded the most attention. The discussion of Charles's influence was shaped in part by two recent commentaries on Rosenberg's work: Roger Cooter's "'Framing' the End of the Social History of Medicine,"¹ and an essay by Nancy Tomes and Jeremy Greene, "Is There a Rosenberg School?"² written for the conference, which is included in this special issue.

In selecting papers to include in this roundtable, we have chosen pieces that directly engaged the strengths and weaknesses of Charles's approach. They address some common themes, among them the limitations of "the frame," problems of irony and political engagement, the clinical relevance of medical history, the challenge of writing twentieth-century history, and the difficulties of exporting American concepts into non-American settings.

1. Roger Cooter, "'Framing' the End of the Social History of Medicine," in *Locating Medical History: The Stories and Their Meanings*, ed. F. Huisman and J.H. Warner (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins Press, 2004), 309–37.

2. Nancy Tomes and Jeremy Greene, "Is There a Rosenberg School?" *The Journal of the History of Medicine and Allied Sciences*, 63, no. 2 (forthcoming).