

Essays & Reviews: Introduction

We are excited to introduce “Essays & Reviews,” a new section of *Historical Studies in the Natural Sciences*, which launches with this collection of essays focused on the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic. Traditionally, *HSNS* has run “Review Essays” that use one or more books on a topic in the history of science to make their own, original arguments. “Essays & Reviews” retains this important function while expanding outward to new authors and audiences. As many fields reconsider the gatekeeping function of academic journals in general and review sections in particular, we see this new section as an experiment with openness. To this end, we seek to develop pieces that stretch the meaning of “review” in content and form, taking up objects other than academic books and breaking down barriers between sub-fields and even disciplines. Such experimentation is an opportunity to restock the toolkits of historians of science using adjacent fields from literary studies to science education. It also responds to urgent calls for political and ethical engagement. The aim is to cultivate a space for historical writing that might repair scholarly communities, reimagine shared assumptions, or speak directly to matters of public concern.

These experimental and ethical commitments are on full display in our first issue. It is commonplace to note that crises reveal unexamined, often toxic aspects of the status quo. In what follows, we have asked scholars from various disciplinary backgrounds to train this insight on scientific practice. Each author has chosen a specific object, crystallized by the pandemic, in order to

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explore dimensions of science and medicine that often go unnoticed. They represent objects and concepts that dominated public discourse through the summer of 2020: the curve, the mask, the ventilator, the promised vaccine. Or they are the unspoken element uncovered by historical expertise: the virus image as a symbol, lessons from the tradition of Black public health, the power of organized labor in healthcare.

Each essay is, in its own way, a call to action, insisting that the tragic present is also an opportunity to reimagine or even activate aspects of the past. Taken together, they propose a history of science that is more *engaged*—an insistence that builds on important work and that we hope to help realize in this section going forward. If “Essays & Reviews” can promote new voices and perspectives to reinvigorate our shared field, then it will contribute to a necessary reappraisal of the promises and pitfalls of science and medicine in 2020 and beyond.