

## [Injecting Racist Hysteria: How Media Coverage of the 2009 H1N1 \(Swine Flu\) Virus Raises Questions about Border Security, NAFTA, and Mexican Representation in U.S. Culture](#)

### Presenter

- Vincent Pham, Senior, English *Mary Gates Scholar, UW Honors Program Scholar*

### Mentor

- Maria Elena Garcia, *Comparative History of Ideas*

### Session

- [Session 2A: Outbreak! Reimagining Death and Life, Disease and Health](#)
- 171 MGH
- 3:30 PM to 5:00 PM

In 2009, the World Health Organization declared swine flu to be the first global flu pandemic in 40 years as a result of the outbreak of cases in Mexico. Although the mortality rate of the disease was lower than predicted, the narrative constructed around the disease offers important takeaways regarding how an outbreak is perceived and what groups become associated as disease carriers. Incorporating knowledge of Mexican-American relations, past and present, in the analysis of the media coverage broadens the understanding regarding the roles that racism and xenophobia play in responses to swine flu. However, the U.S. media's blaming of Mexico, especially when connecting to issues of immigration and borders, draw attention away from American culpability in the H1N1 experience. Using my digital medium as a holding space and synthesis for different thought provoking articles, imagery, and videos about this subject will allow the audience to understand the systematic conditions that influence the spread of diseases like H1N1. For example, by unpacking the capitalist economic imperatives of NAFTA (North American Free Trade Agreement), a policy signed off by Canada, the US, and Mexico to create the world's largest free trade area, I examine how its neoliberal policies encouraged transnational corporations to open up industrial pig factories and its impacts on the environment, human health, labor practices, animal welfare, and immigration. I argue that these factors are symptoms of a "NAFTA Flu", which shaped unequal disease development conditions and unequal access to treatment in Mexico, a perspective that anti-Mexican media ignore. Therefore, critiquing the U.S. media framings of the outbreak undermines the stigmatization and blaming of the specific populations in traditional outbreak narratives.