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PROGRAM IN THE HISTORY OF MEDICINE SEMINAR SERIES

“Phylogenies of Hunger”

Dr. Dana Simmons, Assistant Professor of History, University of California Riverside



Abstract: How should we define hunger, and how does hunger define us? For many twentieth-century scientists, hunger was a tool and a model system for understanding what makes us human. This paper recounts two proximal histories of hunger science, which unfolded at the University of Pennsylvania Institute of Neurological Science in the 1960s and 1970s. One is a story of blowflies and Vincent Dethier, entomologist and specialist in insect behavior. Dethier understood his fly hunger as a complex of season, place, chemosensation and motor activity. The other is a story of white rats in the lab of Eliot Stellar, an experimental psychologist. Stellar studied rat hunger as a model system for a cognitive psychology of human motivation. Both scientists were interested in the boundless hunger behind hyperphagia, a condition in which experimental subjects ate until their excessive consumption killed them. Neuroscience offered them a framework in which to scale their research from flies to rats and humans.

Bio: Dana Simmons is Assistant Professor of History at UC Riverside, specializing in the history of science and technology. She has published on the history of hunger, nutrition, political economy, and the human sciences. Her recent book, *Vital Minimum: Need, Science and Politics in Modern France*, traces the history of the concept of the “vital minimum”—the living wage, a measure of physical and social needs. She is currently working on a project tracing the history of the Imposter Syndrome. She is also a faculty co-organizer of the UC Riverside Science Studies Group.

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12pm – 1pm

North Tower Conference, Room C

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