



# **A CULTURAL HISTORY OF POLIO**

**JOANNA BOURKE**

● **LECTURE 2 OF 6**



# **A Cultural History of Polio**

**Joanna Bourke**

**Professor of History, Birkbeck,  
University of London &  
Professor of Rhetoric, Gresham College  
(@bourke\_joanna)**

**The Great Cat Massacre  
of July 1916, New York**

**(72,000 cats killed)**



**72,000 CATS KILLED  
IN PARALYSIS FEAR**



**The Great Cat Massacre  
of July 1916, New York**

**(72,000 cats killed)**

**Fear of infantile paralysis  
or poliomyelitis**



# A Cultural History of Polio

Joanna Bourke

Professor of History, Birkbeck,  
University of London &  
Professor of Rhetoric, Gresham College  
(@bourke\_joanna)

**“The Crippler”**

**1916 Epidemic:**

**more than 27,000 Americans  
were infected.**

**One third resided in New York.**

**80% under age five years.**

**¼ died.**





# **A Cultural History of Polio**

**Joanna Bourke**

**Professor of History, Birkbeck,  
University of London &  
Professor of Rhetoric, Gresham College  
(@bourke\_joanna)**

**The Great Cat Massacre  
of July 1916, New York**

**(72,000 cats killed)**



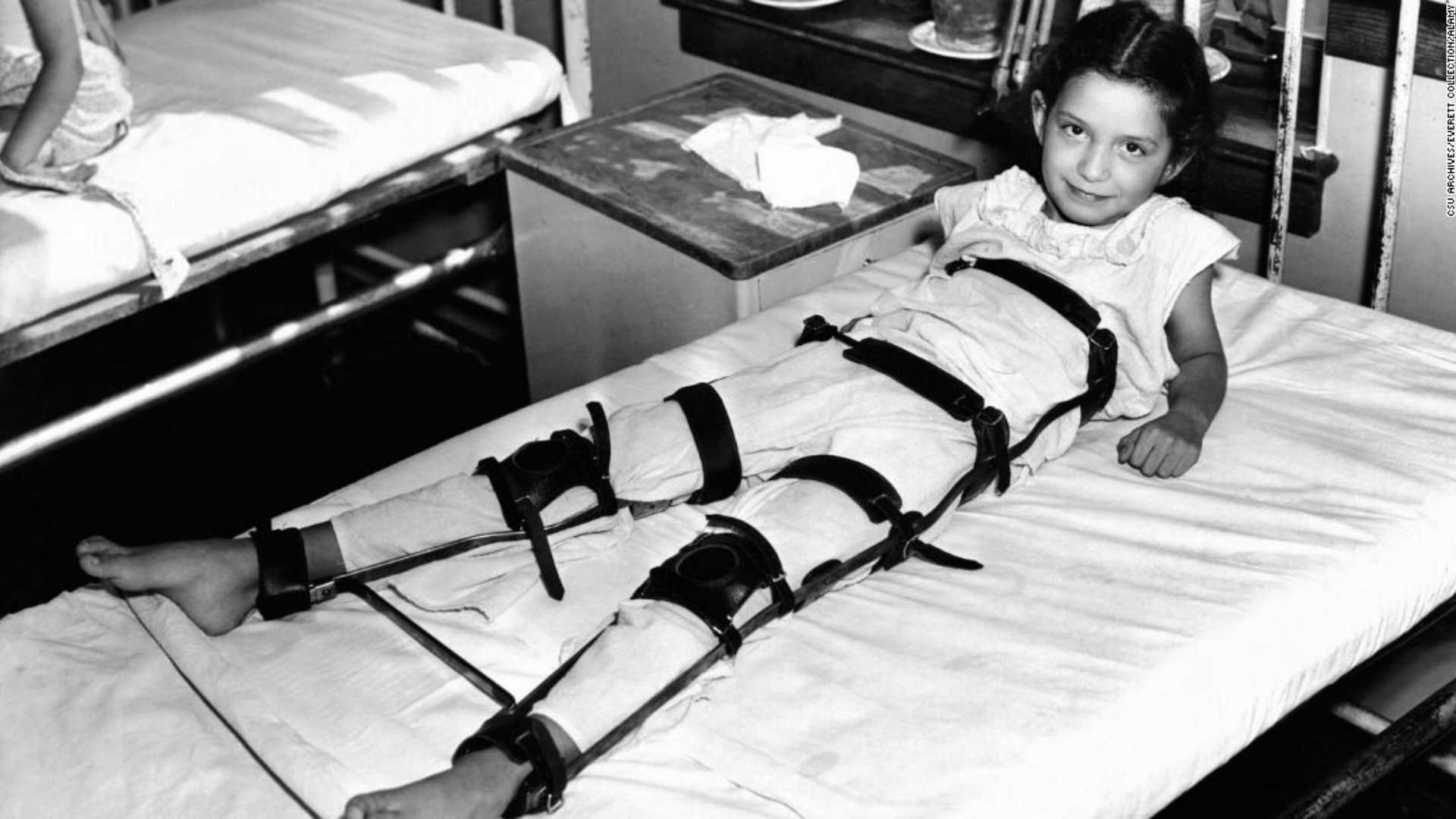
# **A Cultural History of Polio**

**Joanna Bourke**

**Professor of History, Birkbeck,  
University of London &  
Professor of Rhetoric, Gresham College  
(@bourke\_joanna)**

**‘Pirate Cats’:**

**Leader was Wang,  
a ‘tailless mauve cat  
from Formosa’**







# A Cultural History of Polio



**150+ movies referenced polio;  
most famous is Hitchcock's "Rear  
Window" (1954)**



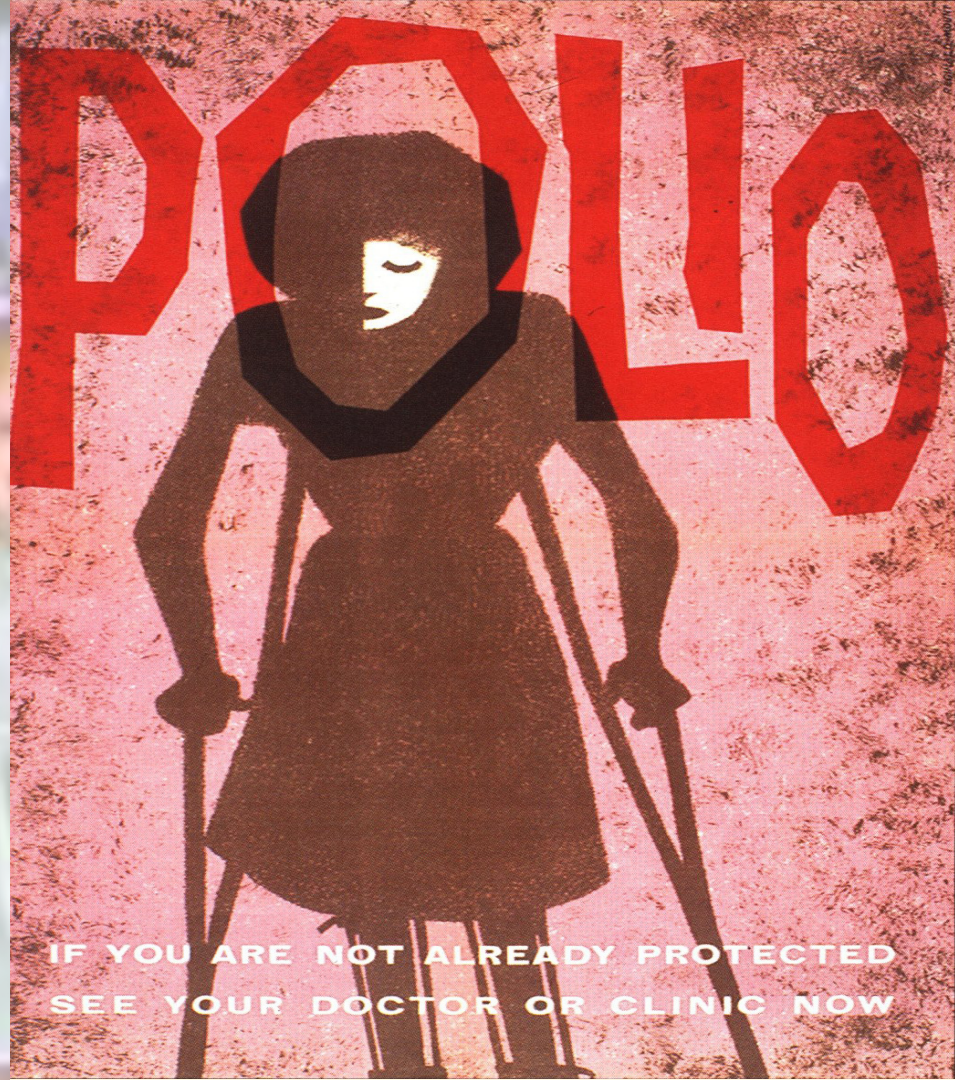




# A Cultural History of Polio

Joanna Bourke

Professor of History, Birkbeck,  
University of London &  
Professor of Rhetoric, Gresham College  
(@bourke\_joanna)





# A Cultural History of Polio

Joanna Bourke

Professor of History, Birkbeck,  
University of London &  
Professor of Rhetoric, Gresham College  
(@bourke\_joanna)



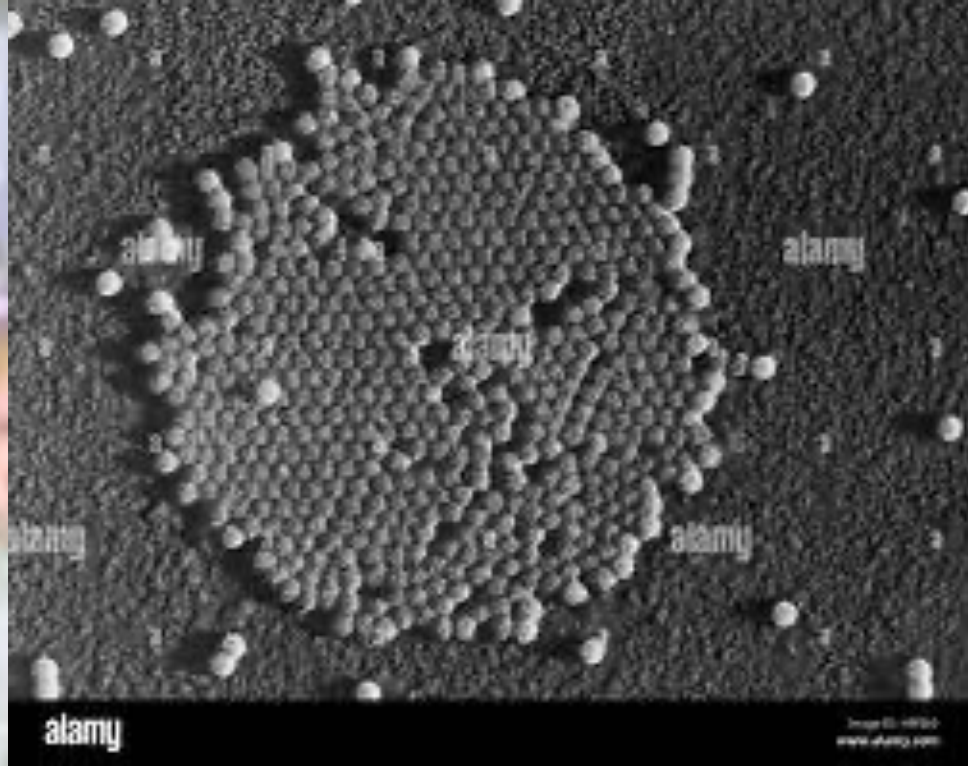
(From the Birmingham Age-Herald.)

KEEP HIM FROM YOUR CHILD.

# A Cultural History of Polio

Joanna Bourke

Professor of History, Birkbeck,  
University of London &  
Professor of Rhetoric, Gresham College  
(@bourke\_joanna)



The polio virus

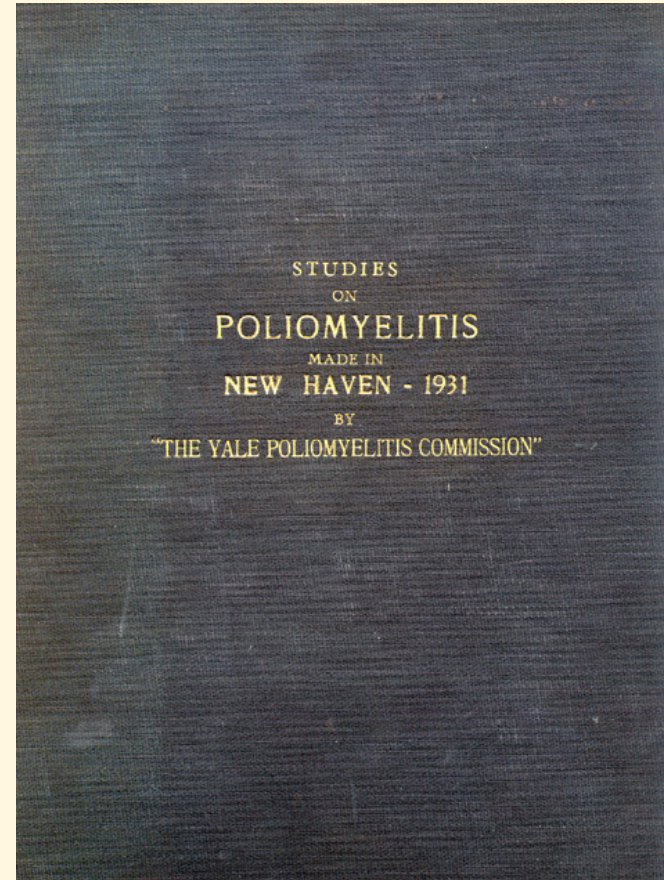


A young boy with a cast on his right arm, standing next to a girl in a green dress. The background is a blurred outdoor setting.

# A Cultural History of Polio

Joanna Bourke

Professor of History, Birkbeck,  
University of London &  
Professor of Rhetoric, Gresham College  
(@bourke\_joanna)



John Paul and James Trask

A young boy in a white shirt and dark shorts is walking with a cane. A woman in a light blue dress is walking beside him, holding the cane. The background is a blurred outdoor setting.

# **A Cultural History of Polio**

**Joanna Bourke**

**Professor of History, Birkbeck,  
University of London &  
Professor of Rhetoric, Gresham College  
(@bourke\_joanna)**

**Polio outbreaks were a  
direct outcome of the  
sanitization of homes and  
workplaces, making polio a  
classic example of a disease  
made worse by ‘progress’.**





# A Cultural History of Polio

Joanna Bourke

Professor of History, Birkbeck,  
University of London &  
Professor of Rhetoric, Gresham College  
(@bourke\_joanna)



# A Cultural History of Polio

Joanna Bourke

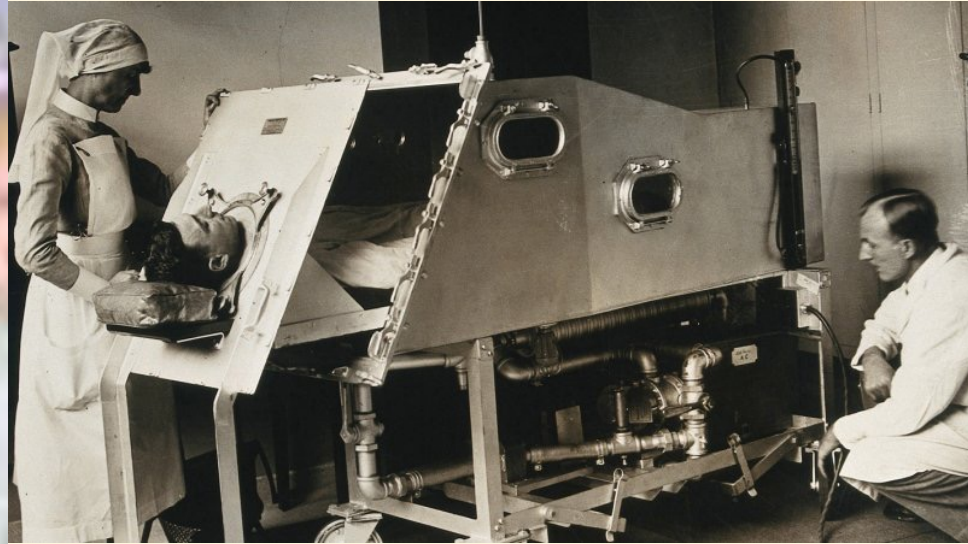
Professor of History, Birkbeck,  
University of London &  
Professor of Rhetoric, Gresham College  
(@bourke\_joanna)



# A Cultural History of Polio

Joanna Bourke

Professor of History, Birkbeck,  
University of London &  
Professor of Rhetoric, Gresham College  
(@bourke\_joanna)



**Drinker Tank Respirator**



# A Cultural History of Polio

Joanna Bourke

Professor of History, Birkbeck,  
University of London &  
Professor of Rhetoric, Gresham College  
(@bourke\_joanna)



**Sister Elizabeth Kenny:  
from “deformity” to “disability”**





JAMES MONTGOMERY FLAGG

ROSALIND RUSSELL · ALEXANDER KNOX

# SISTER KENNY

with DEAN JAGGER

PHILIP MERIVALE · BEULAH BONDI · CHARLES DINGLE

Produced and Directed by DUDLEY NICHOLS · Screen Play by Dudley Nichols, Alexander Knox and Mary McCarthy





# A Cultural History of Polio

Joanna Bourke

Professor of History, Birkbeck,  
University of London &  
Professor of Rhetoric, Gresham College  
(@bourke\_joanna)







# **A Cultural History of Polio**

**Joanna Bourke**

**Professor of History, Birkbeck,  
University of London &  
Professor of Rhetoric, Gresham College  
(@bourke\_joanna)**

**Jim Marugg:**

**“I am not polio!**

**I am bigger than this thing that  
has happened to me!”**



# **A Cultural History of Polio**

**Joanna Bourke**

**Professor of History, Birkbeck,  
University of London &  
Professor of Rhetoric, Gresham College  
(@bourke\_joanna)**

**“Tough love”,  
the “right mental attitude”,  
& “guts”**



*"Look! I can walk again"*



Join the  
**MARCH  
OF  
DIMES**



THE NATIONAL ORGANIZATION FOR INFANTILE PARALYSIS

# COURAGE



STYLING BY - CARMEL

AMERICA'S FIGHT AGAINST INFANTILE PARALYSIS

A young boy with a cast on his right arm, standing with a cane, being supported by a woman. The image is slightly blurred and serves as a background for the text on the left side of the slide.

# **A Cultural History of Polio**

**Joanna Bourke**

**Professor of History, Birkbeck,  
University of London &  
Professor of Rhetoric, Gresham College  
(@bourke\_joanna)**

**Suffering is the “furnace”  
that makes a person stronger**

# A Cultural History of Polio

Joanna Bourke

Professor of History, Birkbeck,  
University of London &  
Professor of Rhetoric, Gresham College  
(@bourke\_joanna)







# **A Cultural History of Polio**

**Joanna Bourke**

**Professor of History, Birkbeck,  
University of London &  
Professor of Rhetoric, Gresham College  
(@bourke\_joanna)**

**Artist Frida Kahlo (1913),  
actress Connie Boswell (1910s),  
actress Dinah Shore (1918),  
blues singer Brownie McGee (1919),  
folk singer Judy Collins (1950),  
rock singer Ian Dury (1949),  
folk singer Donovan (1949),  
rock guitarist Neil Young (1951),  
singer-songwriter Joni Mitchell (1951),  
the reggae group Israel Vibration (1950s),  
and so on**



# A Cultural History of Polio

Joanna Bourke

Professor of History, Birkbeck,  
University of London &  
Professor of Rhetoric, Gresham College  
(@bourke\_joanna)



# A Cultural History of Polio

Joanna Bourke

Professor of History, Birkbeck,  
University of London &  
Professor of Rhetoric, Gresham College  
(@bourke\_joanna)



Jonas Salk and Albert Sabin

A young boy in a white shirt and dark shorts is walking with a cane. A woman in a light blue dress is walking beside him, holding the cane. The background is a blurred outdoor setting.

# **A Cultural History of Polio**

**Joanna Bourke**

**Professor of History, Birkbeck,  
University of London &  
Professor of Rhetoric, Gresham College  
(@bourke\_joanna)**

**A medical drama that drew its oxygen from**

- 1) the structure of U.S. health care system,**
- 2) the early growth of virology as a discipline,**
- 3) the politics of the Depression, and**
- 4) the Cold War.**




# A Cultural History of Polio

Joanna Bourke

Professor of History, Birkbeck,  
University of London &  
Professor of Rhetoric, Gresham College  
(@bourke\_joanna)



Isabel Morgan



*Children's Hospital*  
**CLINIC**

# A Cultural History of Polio

Joanna Bourke

Professor of History, Birkbeck,  
University of London &  
Professor of Rhetoric, Gresham College  
(@bourke\_joanna)





# A Cultural History of Polio

Joanna Bourke

Professor of History, Birkbeck,  
University of London &  
Professor of Rhetoric, Gresham College  
(@bourke\_joanna)



A young boy in a white shirt and dark shorts is walking with a cane. A woman in a light blue dress is walking beside him, holding the cane. The background is a blurred outdoor setting.

# **A Cultural History of Polio**

**Joanna Bourke**

**Professor of History, Birkbeck,  
University of London &  
Professor of Rhetoric, Gresham College  
(@bourke\_joanna)**

**Vaccines worked:**

**by 1964, the incidence of polio  
was below 0.1 cases per 100,000**



# A Cultural History of Polio

Joanna Bourke

Professor of History, Birkbeck,  
University of London &  
Professor of Rhetoric, Gresham College  
(@bourke\_joanna)



**A SUMMER PLAGUE**  
Polio and its Survivors

**TONY GOULD**





# **A Cultural History of Polio**

**Joanna Bourke**

**Professor of History, Birkbeck,  
University of London &  
Professor of Rhetoric, Gresham College  
(@bourke\_joanna)**

**Pathographies  
(or illness narratives):**

**Too often they are “raced white”**

# A Cultural History of Polio

Joanna Bourke

Professor of History, Birkbeck,  
University of London &  
Professor of Rhetoric, Gresham College  
(@bourke\_joanna)



**Segregation: Tuskegee Infantile  
Paralysis Center**

A young boy with a cast on his right arm, standing with a girl. The boy is wearing a light-colored shirt and dark shorts, and the girl is wearing a light blue dress. They are both looking towards the right.

# **A Cultural History of Polio**

**Joanna Bourke**

**Professor of History, Birkbeck,  
University of London &  
Professor of Rhetoric, Gresham College  
(@bourke\_joanna)**

## **Able-ism**

**Experiments that did not get  
consent from participants**



A young boy in a white shirt and dark shorts is using a walker. A woman in a light blue dress is standing next to him, holding his hand. The background is a light blue wall.

# **A Cultural History of Polio**

**Joanna Bourke**

**Professor of History, Birkbeck,  
University of London &  
Professor of Rhetoric, Gresham College  
(@bourke\_joanna)**

## **Able-ism**

**Disability and Patients' Rights  
Movements**

A young boy in a white shirt and dark shorts is walking with a cane. A woman in a light blue dress is walking beside him, holding the cane. The background is a blurred outdoor setting.

# **A Cultural History of Polio**

**Joanna Bourke**

**Professor of History, Birkbeck,  
University of London &  
Professor of Rhetoric, Gresham College  
(@bourke\_joanna)**

**A virus alone does not create a  
'disability'.**

**Rather, scientific ideologies,  
public understandings, and  
social policy all interact with the  
virus to create a disease,  
which is then made into a  
'disability'.**



# **A CULTURAL HISTORY OF POLIO**

**JOANNA BOURKE**

● **LECTURE 2 OF 6**