



PROJECT MUSE®

Nursing with a Message

Patricia D'Antonio

Published by Rutgers University Press

D'Antonio, P..

Nursing with a Message: Public Health Demonstration Projects in New York City.

New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2017.

Project MUSE., <https://muse.jhu.edu/>.



➔ For additional information about this book

<https://muse.jhu.edu/book/49597>

Acknowledgments

Nursing with a Message was never meant to be a book-length project. Its origins lay in a long-ago request that I present a paper on some aspect of the history of women's health at the 2010 Congress of the International Council on Women's Health Issues hosted by my School of Nursing in Philadelphia. I knew the Barbara Bates Center for the Study of the History of Nursing, my intellectual home for the past thirty years, held Susan Reverby's anthology of pamphlets written by public health nurses involved in an interesting maternal-child health project in the East Harlem section of New York City in the 1920s. I saw this as an opportunity to dive more deeply into these materials. Paper written, paper presented, and then paper put aside.

Until a short time later when my friend and colleague, Julie Fairman, and I visited the Rockefeller Archive Center, successfully persuading the Center to fund a third, but now international, conference on the history of nursing. While there, James Allen Smith—the Center's vice president, its director of Education and Research, and a staunch proponent of the importance of the history of nursing to the Foundation's own history—gave us a tour of its archives. Before me lay boxes upon boxes, row after row, of materials related to the Rockefeller-funded East Harlem Health Demonstration Project and, a short time later, the East Harlem Nursing and Health Demonstration Project whose nurses actually wrote my above referenced pamphlets. Now, I thought, I have access to the materials I needed to return to my paper and turn it into an article-length manuscript. A generous grant-in-aid from the Center allowed me to spend two weeks in Sleepy Hollow, New York, slowly realizing I now had a story that could not be contained by the conventions of a thirty-page manuscript. I thank Jim for believing this project was broader than just the history of nursing—that it was also about the history of public health. And I thank archivist Bethany Antos for constantly steering me in the direction of even more letters and documents.

While in Sleepy Hollow I came to understand the intense optimism that public health reformers of the immediate post-World War I era who believed that they could now put health—health promotion and disease prevention—into public healthcare. This drew me to the collection of the Milbank Memorial Fund that supported its own health demonstration project in what was then the Bellevue-Yorkville section of midtown Manhattan. This has not been a journey of archival hardship. Funding from Penn's own University Research Foundation

(URF) allowed several extended trips to Yale's magnificent Sterling Memorial Library. I admit that my most vivid memory of those visits will remain that of sitting in that appropriately named "cathedral of learning" and feeling the aftershocks of the earthquake that rumbled through the East Coast in 2011.

The URF and the H-15 grant for faculty members from the American Association for the History of Nursing allowed more trips to New York City than I can remember to explore the archives of all the other associations involved with the demonstration projects, particularly those of the Association for Improving the Conditions of the Poor that administered the demonstration projects for both the Rockefeller Foundation and the Milbank Memorial Fund. The staff at Columbia University's Rare Books and Manuscript Library never tired of my repeated requests. I am particularly grateful to Stephen Novak, the head of Archives and Special Collections at the Augustus C. Long Health Sciences Library at Columbia University's Medical Center. He brought to my attention records I would never have found on my own: those of the public health nurses' own Citizen's Protective Society, otherwise known as the Manhattanville project.

There are some very practical debts I need to repay. Most universities, like Penn, have efficient book or article retrieval systems that literally place such requests on your desk or desktop within days. But the staff at Penn Libraries outdid themselves when, three days after I requested that twenty years of the nondigitized journal *Public Health Nursing* be retrieved from storage, two young work-study students arrived at my office with suitcases full of all twenty old and dusty volumes. And as chair of a very large department during the entire life of this story, I would also like to thank my successive assistants, Kristen Nestor, Erica Hildenbrand, and, now, Jake Rutkowski for assiduously protecting the time I had set aside for research and for writing. My thanks also to Lisa Hilmi for her beautiful maps that locate the health clinics and demonstration projects in Manhattan.

I am especially grateful for the community of scholars who have surrounded this story and have helped me develop context, sharpen arguments, and, although I own any remaining errors, save me from some dreadful mistakes. Theodore Brown pushed hard and helped me improve the clarity of some fundamental tensions that ran through the East Harlem Nursing and Health Demonstration Project. Karen Flynn, as always, helped me talk and think through the intersections of race and gender in these demonstration projects, in the larger city, and in the discipline of nursing. David Rosner's, Gerry Oppenheimer's, Daniel Fox's, and James Colgrove's feedback after a seminar at Columbia's Mailman School of Public Health immeasurably strengthened the ending. I am also so thankful to those who have read earlier versions of

this story in its entirety: Susan Reverby, Jennifer Gunn, and Cynthia Connolly. Their extraordinarily generous critiques, insights, and advice have made this overall story so much stronger.

The Barbara Bates Center's faculty, staff, and students continuously provided support, collegiality, good council, and friendships. Julie Fairman, Cynthia Connolly, Barbra Mann Wall, Joan Lynaugh, and Jean Whelan have patiently (and sometimes painfully) heard—in formal and informal discussions—about this story since its inception. I owe a special debt to Cynthia Connolly for her strategic advice that constantly moved this story along. Finally, our doctoral students, Kathleen Nishida, Katharine Smith, Amanda Mahoney, and Briana Ralston, sat through a rather muddled presentation of what would become chapter 1. Their advice helped make it chapter 1 and, in return, I hope they learned that historical writing is not a linear process.

I have been very self-conscious during the life of this project that I have been standing on the shoulders of a giant in the history of public health nursing, the late Karen Buhler-Wilkerson. Karen, my dear friend and mentor, set the standard for rigorous scholarship and uproarious fun. I can only aspire to meet her high expectations. And I have always known of my good fortune to sit in a School of Nursing that values history and historical thinking. Both my former dean, Afaf Meleis, and my current dean, Antonia Villarruel, have been unwavering in their support of an intellectual climate that supports the ambitions of the Bates Center faculty and students.

As this story now closes, I thank Janet Golden and Rima Apple, the editors of Rutgers University Press's series on Critical Issues in Health and Medicine, for believing in the importance of this story from the beginning. I also thank Peter Mickulas, senior editor at the Press, for shepherding the story through to publication. As always, my husband, Joseph, and my son, Frank, deserve my eternal gratitude for their patience and pride in my work.

Portions of the following articles are used with the permission of the publishers: "Cultivating Constituencies: The Story of the East Harlem Nursing and Health Service, 1928–1941," *American Journal of Public Health* 103, no. 6 (2013): 988–996; and "Lessons Learned: Nursing and Health Demonstration Projects in New York City, 1920–1935," *Policy, Politics, and Nursing Practice* 14, no. 3–4 (2014): 133–141.

