

Creating a Crisis, Constructing an Administrative Object

The Origins of the Special Leukemia Virus Program, 1944-1964

BY Robin Wolfe Scheffler

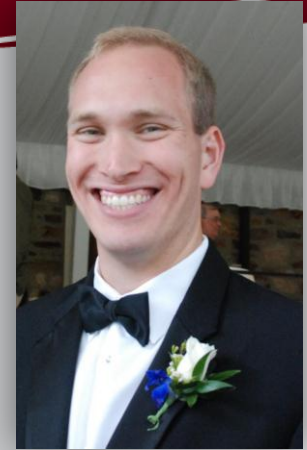
Doctoral Candidate - Yale University's Program in the History of Science and Medicine

ABSTRACT

After the end of the Second World War, cancer virus research experienced a remarkable revival, culminating in the foundation in 1964 of the National Cancer Institute's Special Leukemia Virus Program (SLVP), an ambitious and lavishly funded program of directed biomedical research to accelerate the development of a leukemia vaccine. This immense project came into being despite the fact that no virus causing leukemia in humans was known to exist, nor did the program discover one. I place the creation of the SLVP in the context of the critical cultural and organizational precedents offered by the polio vaccination and chemotherapy for childhood leukemia. The revival of cancer virus studies was a function of the success advocates and administrators achieved in associating cancer viruses with these campaigns against childhood suffering, redefining the central problem of cancer virus studies as an organizational question not *if* but *when* a human cancer virus would be found and a vaccine provided. To address the newfound urgency expected of cancer research, the SLVP's architects turned to Cold War research and development methods in an effort to engineer speed into the process of biomedical research and discovery, in the process inaugurating an influential alternative to the system of peer review for the organization of biomedical research and innovation.

BIOGRAPHY

Robin Wolfe Scheffler is a Doctoral Candidate at the Program in the History of Science and Medicine at Yale University. His dissertation focuses on the co-construction of cancer viruses and biomedical institutions in the United States.



EVENT DETAILS

DATE:

October 17, 2012

TIME:

4:00pm–5:30pm

LOCATION:

Richardson Room
Stevens Institute of Technology

ATTENDANCE:

Free and Open to the Public