A CONTAGIOUS CAUSE:
THE SEARCH FOR CANCER VIRUSES AND THE GROWTH OF BIOMEDICINE IN THE UNITED STATES

Throughout the twentieth century, successive generations of medical, scientific and organizational advances confronted, and were confounded by, the challenge of cancer. Few theories of cancer embodied this cycle of hope and frustration better than the idea that cancer might be caused by an infectious agent, particularly a virus. Following cancer viruses through the twentieth century allows us to understand the political ground upon which biology and medicine merged together to form biomedicine in America, as well as the impact that this new political infrastructure had on the capacity of biologists to reimage the nature of life in molecular terms. In considering this path, I also offer some more general points as to how historians of science and medicine should think about the relationship between experimental and political systems and the relevance that this relationship has for our understanding of “failed” scientific endeavors.

MONDAY
APRIL 16TH, 2017
3:30 - 5:00 PM
BUILDING 50, 51A