

**Centre for the Social History of Health and Healthcare (CSHHH)  
Seminar Series**



**‘Crossroads of American Sovereignty: Technogenic Suffering and  
Media Spectacle in the Nuclear Pacific’**

**Mary X Mitchell  
Purdue University**

**Thursday, 6 December 2018  
1.00 pm LH218  
Lord Hope Building**

**Lunch will be provided.**

**All welcome!**

**For more information, please contact Dr Laura Kelly ([L.e.kelly@strath.ac.uk](mailto:L.e.kelly@strath.ac.uk))**

**Mary X Mitchell**

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**Abstract**

“Crossroads of American Sovereignty: Technogenic Suffering and Media Spectacle in the Nuclear Pacific”

This paper uses the media spectacle of the United States’ first offshore nuclear weapons test, “Operation Crossroads”, to explore what nuclear weapons and their effects meant for competing visions of American sovereignty and offshore power in post-World War II Oceania. The suffering body has stood at the center of historical and anthropological work on nuclear politics. This paper contributes to these literatures by examining how actors grappled the intersection between sovereignty and nuclear harm at the very beginning of the atomic age in 1946. It argues that US military officials attempted to reframe the destructive effects of technologies abroad on others peripheral to the US polity—Indigenous persons and test animals—as the new price of technological and scientific modernity. Advancing science and technology, US officials argued, supported the United States’ moral claim to an expanded presence in ancestral lands and waters in Oceania. Some US citizens resisted this narrative, however, as the operation opened new controversy over the value of life and the meanings of suffering in American democracy.