

Spring 2020

## The 'Spanish Flu': A True Global Pandemic

Erin H. Keener  
*Gettysburg College*

Follow this and additional works at: [https://cupola.gettysburg.edu/student\\_scholarship](https://cupola.gettysburg.edu/student_scholarship)



Part of the [History of Science, Technology, and Medicine Commons](#), and the [Public History Commons](#)

**Share feedback** about the accessibility of this item.

---

### Recommended Citation

Keener, Erin H., "The 'Spanish Flu': A True Global Pandemic" (2020). *Student Publications*. 814.  
[https://cupola.gettysburg.edu/student\\_scholarship/814](https://cupola.gettysburg.edu/student_scholarship/814)

This open access student research paper is brought to you by The Cupola: Scholarship at Gettysburg College. It has been accepted for inclusion by an authorized administrator of The Cupola. For more information, please contact [cupola@gettysburg.edu](mailto:cupola@gettysburg.edu).

---

# The 'Spanish Flu': A True Global Pandemic

## Abstract

This paper examines the portrayal of the 'Spanish Flu' in the press as it was emerging on the scene in 1918. Using contemporaneous newspaper articles, it shows the evolution from denial, to blame, and eventually to a call to action that developed as it spread around the country. This piece also provides some insight into the parallels between this pandemic and the current Covid 19 pandemic in regard to how both were handled, and what can be learned from when this devastating occurrence repeats itself.

## Keywords

Pandemic, Spanish Flu, Coronavirus, 1918, Newspaper Coverage

## Disciplines

History | History of Science, Technology, and Medicine | Public History

## Comments

Written for History 300: Historical Methods.

## Creative Commons License



This work is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 License](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/).

The 'Spanish Flu':  
A True Global Pandemic

Erin Keener

Dr. Michael Birkner

History 300: Historical Methods

April 30, 2020

*I affirm that I have upheld the highest principles of honesty and integrity and have not witnessed a violation of the Honor Code.*

The influenza pandemic of 1918 is notorious for bringing about, in mass force, one of the most defining and impactful aspects of the human experience: death and tragedy. While golden ages and victories continue to be felt by many of the preceding generations. In examining some of these tragedies simply by the numbers, it can be found that, by a new estimate, the Civil War claimed over 750,000 lives, the Holocaust systematically ended the lives of approximately 11 million Jews and members of other marginalized populations, with the Second World War murdering a total approaching 24 million soldiers and even more civilians.<sup>1</sup> According to *The Washington Post*, twentieth century wars have ruthlessly killed, at minimum, 108 million people and through this system of conflict, it can be estimated that all the wars combined in human history may have killed as many as 1 billion people.<sup>2</sup> These numbers are profound and often quite difficult to fully comprehend. The number of lives lost does not accurately pay tribute to the grief claimed as collateral, felt by parents mourning their children, spouses finding themselves alone, children being orphaned, and many friends who will also feel the loss. Yet, lurking in the shadows of all this war is one of the other most ruthless killers: disease, typified by the Influenza Pandemic of 1918. This pandemic shook the world, not only from claiming over 50 million lives prematurely, but also from its silence.<sup>3</sup> The initial lack of attention from the press played a significant role in this silence. The Pandemic of 1918 is often referred to as the ‘Spanish Flu’ for the sole reason that the Spanish press was the first, and for a long time only, press corps

---

<sup>1</sup> Guy Gugliotta, “New Estimate Raises Civil War Death Toll,” *The New York Times*, 2 April 2012, <https://www.nytimes.com/2012/04/03/science/civil-war-toll-up-by-20-percent-in-new-estimate.html>; “Auschwitz: How Death Camp Became Centre of Nazi Holocaust” *BBC News*, 23 January 2020; <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-50743973>; “World War 2 Statistics,” *Second World War History: The Great Global Conflict Day-by Day*, <https://www.secondworldwarhistory.com/world-war-2-statistics.php>

<sup>2</sup> Chris Hedges, “What Every Person Should Know About War,” *The New York Times*, 6 July 2003, <https://www.nytimes.com/2003/07/06/books/chapters/what-every-person-should-know-about-war.html>.

<sup>3</sup> Jessica A. Belser and Terrence M. Tumpey, “The 1918 Flu, 100 Years Later,” *Science* 359 (January 19, 2018): 255, <https://ezpro.cc.gettysburg.edu:2483/content/359/6373/255>.

to designate column space for reports on this deadly disease.<sup>4</sup> The United States press, on the other hand, took much longer to give the virus the attention it deserved. As a result of this shortcoming, serious repercussions ensued. Most notably, this lack of public awareness delayed processes to get preventative measures to be put in place, consequently making it much easier for the disease to spread. In order to gain a better understanding of the public perception of this deadly disaster, I have chosen to study coverage of the 1918 pandemic from three different newspapers: *The New York Times*, *The Washington Post*, and *The Chicago Tribune*. These Newspapers are based in New York, NY; Washington D.C.; and Chicago, Il, respectively, which are all cities with large population centers. In such places, close proximity of residents often facilitates the spread of information and the spread of disease, though in this case, the latter spread much more rapidly.

When taking a step back from the 1918 pandemic specifically and examining the institutions responsible for preserving the memory of such events, it must be noted that, within the world of historical research as a whole, one of the most prominent recent developments is the phenomenon of the ‘New Social History.’ This new way of conducting research controversially turned the world of historical academia on its head in the mid twentieth century. It was designed to remember the forgotten, tell the stories of those overshadowed by the great and powerful, and to give a broader context of the time in order to understand both the experiences of the common individual in an attempt provide insight into what life was really like.<sup>5</sup> In many ways, the Influenza Pandemic of 1918 has been treated as the lowly common person of early twentieth

---

<sup>4</sup> Evan Andrews, “Why was it Called the ‘Spanish Flu?’: the 1918 Influenza Pandemic did not, as Many People Believed, Originate in Spain,” *History*, last revised 27 March 2020, <https://www.history.com/news/why-was-it-called-the-spanish-flu>

<sup>5</sup> Shuo Wang , “The ‘New Social History’ in China: The Development of Women’s History,” *History Teacher* 39, no. 3 (May 2006): 315-317, <http://ezpro.cc.gettysburg.edu:2118/ehost/pdfviewer/pdfviewer?vid=2&sid=a8a45ae0-5810-410a-8411-6f5f84f8e5ce%40sessionmgr103>

century life-taking tragedies in the era before the New Social History; often out shadowed by the First World War. What is often overlooked is the degree to which these two monumental events were so tightly intertwined. On the great timeline of history, this influenza epidemic and the First World War are both significant enough to have their own, distinct entries. However, there was nonetheless a distinct and prominent overlap of these two events. For example, “By the War Department’s most conservative count, influenza sickened 26% of the Army—more than one million men—and killed almost 30,000 before they even got to France,” statistics which are quite significant, yet poorly represented.<sup>6</sup> Overall, this overlap pertains to the people each event affected, the time period they reigned, and their inherent codependence: the influenza pandemic greatly contributed to the death count of the First World War, and it is in large part because of the Great War that the disease was able to spread with the speed and reach that it did.

The intertwined nature of the disease and the war did not stop with its spread and the joint devastation that ensued. Despite the fact that flu outbreaks were first identified to be in the United States in March, 1918, with approximately 500 soldiers at Camp Funston in Fort Riley, Kansas becoming ill within a week of their first 100 cases, there was no mention of the presence of influenza within the country for quite a while. There was a small exception to this blanket statement as, on April 5, 1918, a public health report was published in the greater Fort Riley area. This report, however, merely “[informed] officials of 18 severe cases and three deaths in Haskell, Kansas.”<sup>7</sup> News of this new crisis would not be brought fully to public awareness until much later. When the greater American press finally began to publish reports on the disease, it was not to warn the public, but rather to spread propaganda against the German

---

<sup>6</sup> Carol R. Byerly, “The U.S. Military and the Influenza Pandemic of 1918-1919,” *Public Health Reports* 125 (2010): 82-91, <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC2862337/>.

<sup>7</sup> “1918 Pandemic Timeline,” *Center for Disease Control and Prevention*, last revised 20 March 2018, <https://www.cdc.gov/flu/pandemic-resources/1918-commemoration/pandemic-timeline-1918.htm>.

enemy. Such articles were widely released in the summer months of 1918 and were designed to emphasize the inferiority of the German army, citing how much the disease had weakened their forces. For example, On July 10, 1918, *The Washington Post* published an article titled, “Huns have Epidemics: One is Influenza; Other is Spirit of Disobedience,” which referenced the German prisoners’ accounts of “Flanders Fever,” and, when combined with the observation that “cases of [German] soldiers who refuse to obey orders are increasing to an alarming extent,” was designed to bolster patriotism and to spread a general perception that the young men fighting for the allies were both healthier and more noble in their cause.<sup>8</sup> Designed for a similar effect, approximately two weeks earlier *The New York Times* had published an article titled “Spanish Influenza is Raging in the German Army; [Grippe] and Typhus Also Prevalent Among Soldiers,” which classifies the disease as an epidemic and explains that it is “reported to be of the Spanish type, which recently broke out in Berlin and other German cities,” which proved to be quite misleading. It ignored the fact that by the time this article appeared in print, on June 27, 1918, the disease was undeniably not merely a solely ‘German problem.’<sup>9</sup> Additionally, they published the article, “Germans with Fever Drop in their Tracks,” which provides an excerpt from a German prisoner war’s letter which reads, “I feel so ill that I should like to report sick. Fever is rampant among us and already a whole lot of men are in the hospital. Every day more go in.”<sup>10</sup>

---

<sup>8</sup> Perry Robinson, “Huns have Epidemics: One is Influenza; Other is Spirit of Disobedience, *The Washington Post* (1877-1922), 10 July 1918, p. 3, <https://ezpro.cc.gettysburg.edu:2260/hnpwashingtonpost/docview/145667826/994F68BCF4874821PQ/27?accountid=2694>.

<sup>9</sup> “Spanish Influenza is Raging in the German Army; Grip and Typhus also Prevalent Among Soldiers,” *New York Times* (1877-1922), 27 June 1918, p. 1, [https://ezpro.cc.gettysburg.edu:2260/cv\\_1485734/docview/100217180/23D15D33D1BA4A45PQ/20?accountid=2694](https://ezpro.cc.gettysburg.edu:2260/cv_1485734/docview/100217180/23D15D33D1BA4A45PQ/20?accountid=2694).

<sup>10</sup> “Germans with Fever Drop in Their Tracks: New Disease Strikes Very Suddenly and Men are in the Hospital at Least Six Days,” *New York Times* (1877-1922), 9 July, 1918, p. 7, [https://ezpro.cc.gettysburg.edu:2260/cv\\_1485734/docview/100210683/23D15D33D1BA4A45PQ/29?accountid=2694](https://ezpro.cc.gettysburg.edu:2260/cv_1485734/docview/100210683/23D15D33D1BA4A45PQ/29?accountid=2694).

Many of these articles went beyond merely implying that the disease spreading through the German troops would directly lead to their swift defeat, and often explicitly stated it, with snappy headlines such as, “Epidemic Grips German Soldiers: Disease Hampers Foe in Preparing New Offensive”<sup>11</sup> In a world where acknowledgement of the disease was very limited, particularly when it concerned any potential direct threat to the United States, publications utilizing the disease for political leverage against the Germans appeared as early as January 1918.

The issue concerning how to present the pandemic to the public was a constant battle of truth and lies, ignorance and innovation, and tendencies to comfort or frighten. The statistics from city to city or day to day rarely lined up and, by virtue of the time period, much of modern-day medical knowledge remained uncharted territory. As a result, there was conflicting information making it difficult for the public to truly figure out if they were at risk or not. For example, on August 16, it was reported in *The New York Times* that despite the fact that the New York Board of Health had just confirmed they “took official notice that there is influenza, germinated in Europe, in [New York],” Dr. Cofer, a health officer of the Port of New York, declared that he did “not intend to establish a quarantine against influenza, Spanish or any other kind,” continuing to say that the whole ordeal was a “misnomer” and concluding with an overconfidence that foreshadows disaster as he declared, “There is not the slightest danger of an influenza breaking out in New York, and this port will not be quarantined against that disease.”<sup>12</sup>

---

<sup>11</sup> “Epidemic Grips German Soldiers: Disease Hampers Foe in Preparing New Offensive,” *The Washington Post* (1877-1922), 27 June 1918, p. 1, <https://ezpro.cc.gettysburg.edu:2260/hnpwashingtonpost/docview/145644468/994F68BCF4874821PQ/19?accountid=2694>

<sup>12</sup> “Health Head Calls Influenza Inquiry: Eleven New Cases Arrive on Another Ship, but Authorities are not Alarmed,” *New York Times* (1857-1922), 16 August 1918, p. 16, [https://ezpro.cc.gettysburg.edu:2260/cv\\_1485734/docview/100229116/23D15D33D1BA4A45PQ/51?accountid=2694](https://ezpro.cc.gettysburg.edu:2260/cv_1485734/docview/100229116/23D15D33D1BA4A45PQ/51?accountid=2694)



Yet, while maintaining ambiguity and a nonchalant air, the health officers did slightly change their tune, stating that they were “keeping a strict lookout on incoming steamships from Europe whose passengers or crews might have developed Spanish influenza.”<sup>13</sup> Meanwhile, the *Chicago Tribune* and the *Washington Post* did not publish any articles concerning the disease in the seven days including and following August 16. An even more typical example of this constant ebb and flow of information and policy can be seen in the *Chicago Tribune* on September 19 and 20. Just as the country was approaching the peak of the disease’s destruction, the *Chicago Tribune* published the article, “Grip Epidemic at Great Lakes Under Control: 1,000 Men Quarantined; Northwestern U. Camp Also Affected.”<sup>14</sup> The very next day, the same newspaper published: “Grip Shuts Off Jackie Liberty at Great Lakes: Naval Camp Under Strict Orders to Stamp Out Spanish Influenza.”<sup>15</sup> Reading through each of these articles, they are in fact quite similar. However, the title of the former, in particular, clearly demonstrates how easily minds can be manipulated by a misleadingly reassuring or frightening title. What is more, approximately one month after these were published, it was reported that Virginia state health officials “denied knowledge of the quarantine and also stated that they had not been notified of any epidemic,” making it therefore unsurprising how confused the average citizen would be if their health officials were presenting drastically different narratives.<sup>16</sup>

---

<sup>13</sup> “Epidemic Guard for Port: All Incoming Steamships Watched for Signs of Spanish Influenza,” *New York Times (1857-1922)*, 19 August 1918, p. 5, [https://ezpro.cc.gettysburg.edu:2260/cv\\_1485734/docview/100201964/23D15D33D1BA4A45PQ/55?accountid=2694](https://ezpro.cc.gettysburg.edu:2260/cv_1485734/docview/100201964/23D15D33D1BA4A45PQ/55?accountid=2694)

<sup>14</sup> “Grip Epidemic at Great Lakes Under Control: 1,000 Men Quarantined; Northwestern U. Camp Also Affected,” *Chicago Daily Tribune (1982-1922)*, 19 September 1918, p. 13, [https://ezpro.cc.gettysburg.edu:2260/cv\\_1485734/docview/174390336/57233A890F2B4525PQ/43?accountid=2694](https://ezpro.cc.gettysburg.edu:2260/cv_1485734/docview/174390336/57233A890F2B4525PQ/43?accountid=2694)

<sup>15</sup> “Grip Shuts Off Jackie Liberty at Great Lakes: Naval Camp Under Strict Orders to Stamp Out Spanish Influenza,” *Chicago Daily Tribune (1982-1922)*, 20 September 1918, p. 9, [https://ezpro.cc.gettysburg.edu:2260/cv\\_1485734/docview/174435554/57233A890F2B4525PQ/47?accountid=2694](https://ezpro.cc.gettysburg.edu:2260/cv_1485734/docview/174435554/57233A890F2B4525PQ/47?accountid=2694)

<sup>16</sup> “Denies Virginia Quarantine,” *The Washington Post (1877-1922)*, 17 September 1918, p. 3, <https://ezpro.cc.gettysburg.edu:2260/hnpwashingtonpost/docview/145664872/994F68BCF4874821PQ/39?accountid=2694>

It is often expressed that conflict and times of great stress are remarkably successful at revealing one's true colors, the influenza pandemic was no exception. The one aspect of American character perhaps most easily seen through the press coverage is the desire to avoid all blame and/or responsibility in any negative situation, often resulting in the use of a scape goat. In this instance, the most notable scape goats used were Germany and Spain. It has been previously explained that the United States attempted to manipulate the information coming in from abroad in order to use the spread of disease through the German troops for political gain and stabilization of morale. Yet, the media went one step further and accused the Germans of being the cause of the virus. In one *New York Times* article, titled, "Think Influenza Came in U-Boat: Federal Health Authorities See Possibilities of Men from Submarine Spreading Germs," the reporter explains that "outbreaks of Spanish Influenza... may have been started by German agents who were put ashore from a submarine."<sup>17</sup> The reporter goes on to blame the Germans for the outbreaks in Europe, perhaps purposefully neglecting to mention the mass movement of American troops that war had inevitably brought with it.

One of the other main targets for placing blame was, unsurprisingly, Spain. Much to Spain's chagrin, the name 'Spanish Flu' had stuck, even though there was no evidence the disease had originated there, merely that it had first been reported on by the Spanish press.<sup>18</sup> Nonetheless, the assumption that the flu originated in Spain was strong at the time and continues into modern day. One article by *The New York Times*, "Fumigate for Influenza: All on Spanish Ship Treated to Keep Out War Disease," revealed that as awful as this negative bias against

---

<sup>17</sup> "Think Influenza Came in U-Boat: Federal Health Authorities See Possibility of Men from Submarine Spreading Germs," *New York Times (1958-1922)*, September 19, 1918, p. 11, [https://ezpro.cc.gettysburg.edu:2260/cv\\_1485734/docview/100179074/23D15D33D1BA4A45PQ/69?accountid=2694](https://ezpro.cc.gettysburg.edu:2260/cv_1485734/docview/100179074/23D15D33D1BA4A45PQ/69?accountid=2694).

<sup>18</sup> Andrews, "Why was it Called the 'Spanish Flu?'".

Spain and Spaniards may have been, it did come with some incidental positives. This article, written before Dr. Cofer had even had time to declare that a quarantine would not be required.<sup>19</sup> While it is unfortunate that the Spanish ship was given unique treatment based on the stigma concerning its country of origin, it actually exemplifies what proper protocol should have been followed for each ship to arrive in the country in order to mitigate the virus' spread.

In 1918, there was not only a lack of information being communicated to the public, but there was a certain limit on the amount of knowledge available to the medical personnel. This, combined with the desire to waylay public panic, resulted in quite a bit of counterproductive reporting. As previously mentioned, there were often hazy and non-committal announcements regarding any quarantine protocol. This did change slightly as time progressed and as the epidemic within the United States grew more serious. Passing from August to September, there was a dramatic increase in the attention the disease received from the press. In each publication examined, the number of articles published on influenza increased exponentially in September and continued to increase into October and the winter months. With this newfound attention came guidelines on how to stay safe and details on what this silent killer really was. For example, in early October *The New York Times* explained to its readership that the disease did not pose a risk to or by travelers in sound health, but as this was contemporaneous with war time, mass travel was rampant and people with preexisting poor health also travelled, increasing the spread of disease.<sup>20</sup> While this was partially true, it was perhaps a bit too comforting as one of

---

<sup>19</sup> "Fumgate for Influenza: All on Spanish Ship Treated to Keep Out War Disease," *New York Times* (1857-1922), 3 July 1918, p. 9, [https://ezpro.cc.gettysburg.edu:2260/cv\\_1485734/docview/100232272/23D15D33D1BA4A45PQ/24?accountid=2694](https://ezpro.cc.gettysburg.edu:2260/cv_1485734/docview/100232272/23D15D33D1BA4A45PQ/24?accountid=2694).

<sup>20</sup> "The Influenza Quarantine," *New York Times* (1857-1922), 1 October 1918, p. 12, [https://ezpro.cc.gettysburg.edu:2260/cv\\_1485734/docview/100175765/23D15D33D1BA4A45PQ/122?accountid=2694](https://ezpro.cc.gettysburg.edu:2260/cv_1485734/docview/100175765/23D15D33D1BA4A45PQ/122?accountid=2694).

the most deadly aspects of the outbreak was that it did not simply target the elderly and the very young, but perfectly healthy young adults as well.<sup>21</sup>

With the increase in press coverage of the pandemic, specifics on what the disease were also augmented. As the disease began to peak in October, *The New York Times* revealed that “Spanish influenza resembles a very contagious kind of ‘cold,’ accompanied by fever, pains in the head, eyes, ears, back and other parts of the body, and a feeling of severe sickness.”<sup>22</sup> Furthermore, it was not necessarily the initial influenza symptoms that were so deadly, but the pneumonia that often followed.<sup>23</sup> These symptoms proved to be quite perplexing for medical personnel and its rapid spread quickly exhausted their resources. It was not until these peaks of cases in the Fall that a campaign for preventative measures, like quarantine, came in full force. Some of these measures were extremely strict, going so far as to declare openly coughing or sneezing without a handkerchief an arrestable offense.<sup>24</sup> Additionally, police had been ordered to break up large crowds.<sup>25</sup> Accompanying these measures came the introduction of essential workers wearing facemasks, which were equated to gas masks to enhance public understanding of its function.<sup>26</sup> Perhaps the most significantly advertised effort to combat the disease was the

---

<sup>21</sup> “1918 Pandemic,” *Centers for Disease Control and Prevention*, last revised 20 March 2019, <https://www.cdc.gov/flu/pandemic-resources/1918-pandemic-h1n1.html>

<sup>22</sup> “New Gains in Grip Here: 999 Cases Reported Yesterday, Will not Close the Schools,” *New York Times (1857-1922)*, 4 October 1918, p. 24, [https://ezpro.cc.gettysburg.edu:2260/cv\\_1485734/docview/100168094/23D15D33D1BA4A45PQ/140?accountid=2694](https://ezpro.cc.gettysburg.edu:2260/cv_1485734/docview/100168094/23D15D33D1BA4A45PQ/140?accountid=2694).

<sup>23</sup> Ibid.

<sup>24</sup> “Drastic Rule in Chicago: Will Arrest Persons Not Using Handkerchiefs in Sneezing,” *New York Times (1857-1922)*, 4 October 1918, p. 24, [https://ezpro.cc.gettysburg.edu:2260/cv\\_1485734/docview/100168149/23D15D33D1BA4A45PQ/141?accountid=2694](https://ezpro.cc.gettysburg.edu:2260/cv_1485734/docview/100168149/23D15D33D1BA4A45PQ/141?accountid=2694).

<sup>25</sup> Ibid.

<sup>26</sup> “Wearing ‘Gas Masks’ in Chicago: Street Sweeper Protecting Himself from Influenza Epidemic; County Hospital Nurse and Interne Adopting Precautionary Measures,” *Chicago Daily Tribune (1872-1922)*, 2 October, 1918, p. 17, [https://ezpro.cc.gettysburg.edu:2260/cv\\_1485734/docview/174438457/57233A890F2B4525PQ/99?accountid=2694](https://ezpro.cc.gettysburg.edu:2260/cv_1485734/docview/174438457/57233A890F2B4525PQ/99?accountid=2694).

development of a vaccine.<sup>27</sup> While this may have been semi-successful at both protecting those injected and at giving hope to the general population, there is no definite evidence that the vaccine was as successful as it was claimed, as majority of those who both received the vaccination and remained healthy were medical personnel who were taking extreme lengths to practice safe hygiene to protect their patients and themselves.<sup>28</sup> Nonetheless, it is clear that despite the lack of medical knowledge when compared with modern day, doctors, nurses, and public officials were somewhat successful at analyzing the disease with the equipment and knowledge at their disposal and raising public awareness and implementing beneficial, preventative protocol.

Taking a step back from the national scope of the disease, it is important to note that many people were and are equally dependent on local news sources as larger publications. In going through the *Gettysburgian* records of the era, I found that there were a mere two articles published during the time of the pandemic which included any mention of the disease. The first was published on October 23, 1918, amidst what appears to be the height of news coverage on the disease. In this article, Gettysburg College is urging the students to respect basic sanitary guidelines in order to help prevent the arrival of the disease on campus. The article reads, “The filthy habit of spitting on the floor must be broken for the sake of sanitization and avoidance of the ‘flu’ or some equally serious disease,” which specifically targeted cafeteria manners.<sup>29</sup> Approximately three months later, there was a small notice in the Phi Delta Theta updates:

---

<sup>27</sup> Tells of Vaccine To Stop Influenza: Dr. Copeland Says Discover has been Made by Dr. Park, City Bacteriologist,” *New York Times (1857-1922)*, 2 October 1918, p. 10, [https://ezpro.cc.gettysburg.edu:2260/cv\\_1485734/docview/100174419/23D15D33D1BA4A45PQ/127?accountid=2694](https://ezpro.cc.gettysburg.edu:2260/cv_1485734/docview/100174419/23D15D33D1BA4A45PQ/127?accountid=2694); “Find Serum to Stay Influenza, U.S. Adopts It,” *Chicago Daily Tribune (1872-1922)*, 29 September 1918, p. A1, [https://ezpro.cc.gettysburg.edu:2260/cv\\_1485734/docview/174433563/57233A890F2B4525PQ/88?accountid=2694](https://ezpro.cc.gettysburg.edu:2260/cv_1485734/docview/174433563/57233A890F2B4525PQ/88?accountid=2694)

<sup>28</sup> “1918 Pandemic,” *Centers for Disease Control and Prevention*.

<sup>29</sup> “Improvement Possible,” *Gettysburgian*, October 23, 1918, <http://digital.olivesoftware.com/Olive/APA/Gettysburg/SharedView.Article.aspx?href=GTY%2F1918%2F10%2F23&id=Ar00700&sk=5CF51039&viewMode=image>

“Snooze’ Trundle who has been very ill with the ‘flu’ at his home in Frederick, Md., returned on the morning of Jan. 13,” which was located directly below the notices that two of the other Phi Delta Theta brothers, who had been fighting overseas had been discharged and had been or would shortly be back on campus.<sup>30</sup> The only other contemporaneous mention of the flu in the *Gettysburgian* was published over two years later, on March 2, 1921 in the Alumni Page, “Ex-’20 Word Has been received that J C Lee, who had been confined at the sanitarium at Cresson since an attack of the flu in the fall of 1919, has passed away. Particulars of his illness and death are lacking.”<sup>31</sup> The information published in the *Gettysburgian* suggests that the College was quite fortunate and was not significantly affected by the disease. This inference is well founded as the articles referenced demonstrated that the reporters were not attempting to hide any evidence of the disease, yet the minimal references to it imply that it was not a pertinent issue for the campus community. This extreme fortune was most likely based both in the College’s luck and its semi-remote location. The reality was that many communities, both rural and urban, were devastated by this disease and many families grew accustomed to loss. In my own family two of my great grandmother’s four siblings, Elsie and William MacGarvey, died within one week of each other of the flu in September 1918.<sup>32</sup> Despite the relative recentness of this family history, it was somewhat difficult to acquire this information, as if it was not noteworthy enough to pass along through the generations. While these two examples are quite small case studies, they are

---

<sup>30</sup> “Phi Delta Theta,” *Gettysburgian*, January 15, 1919, <http://digital.olivesoftware.com/Olive/APA/Gettysburg/SharedView.Article.aspx?href=GTY%2F1919%2F01%2F15&id=Ar01000&sk=E74E131B&viewMode=image>

<sup>31</sup> “Alumni Page,” *Gettysburgian*, March 2, 1921, <http://digital.olivesoftware.com/Olive/APA/Gettysburg/SharedView.Article.aspx?href=GTY%2F1921%2F03%2F02&id=Ar00402&sk=70D11381&viewMode=image>

<sup>32</sup> John H. Loynes, “McGarvey, McGarvie, McGarvey, MacGarvey Family Story,” *The Keener Family Bookshelf*, p. 22.

very indicative of the public's ignorance of the situation at the time, which led to many of the intimate details being lost to history.

The pandemic of 1918 is a fascinating episode that cannot be fully covered within the bounds of this paper. It is one of the deadliest tragedies this world has ever seen, yet its inglorious nature means that it often gets glossed over, many instead choosing to focus their attention on the heroism of soldiers in the First and Second World Wars. In many ways, this is a case study into the old mantra that an ignorance of history leads to past events repeating themselves. When sifting through the thousands of articles written on the 'Spanish Flu,' I sometimes had to do a double take, checking if I was reading about the pandemic of 1918 or of 2020, the sequence events in each case take up shocking parallels: the initial denial, the desire to blame it on another country and label it as a foreign virus, the development of mandated quarantines, the use of facial masks, the rush to find a vaccine, the hospitals becoming overwhelmed, and the devastation on the population. What is more, it seems as if the media portrayal and public perception are quite similar as well. In both instances, a great ignorance surrounding the disease. From personal experience, I noticed that my peers did not know where the virus was spreading nor what its symptoms were, well after it was sweeping the nation. In both pandemics there has also been great conflict in what information is presented, oftentimes with different officials spewing different data and advice. These tragic events exemplify how dependent society is on the press for the information required to make educated decisions. The pandemic of 1918 may have been overshadowed by the war, but the pandemic of 2020 stands alone in the spotlight. Hopefully, this will increase the attention paid to both events by future generations, with any luck learning from our repeated mistakes and squandering whatever disease may target the human race next.

## Bibliography

“Alumni Page,” *Gettysburgian*, March 2, 1921,

<http://digital.olivesoftware.com/Olive/APA/Gettysburg/SharedView.Article.aspx?href=GETTY%2F1921%2F03%2F02&id=Ar00402&sk=70D11381&viewMode=image>

“Auschwitz: How Death Camp Became Centre of Nazi Holocaust” *BBC News*, 23 January 2020;

<https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-50743973>.

Chris Hedges, “What Every Person Should Know About War,” *The New York Times*, 6 July

2003, <https://www.nytimes.com/2003/07/06/books/chapters/what-every-person-should-know-about-war.html>.

“Denies Virginia Quarantine,” *The Washington Post (1877-1922)*, 17 September 1918, p. 3,

<https://ezpro.cc.gettysburg.edu:2260/hnpwashingtonpost/docview/145664872/994F68BCF4874821PQ/39?accountid=2694>.

“Drastic Rule in Chicago: Will Arrest Persons Not Using Handkerchiefs in Sneezing,” *New York Times (1857-1922)*, 4 October 1918, p. 24,

[https://ezpro.cc.gettysburg.edu:2260/cv\\_1485734/docview/100168149/23D15D33D1BA4A45PQ/141?accountid=2694](https://ezpro.cc.gettysburg.edu:2260/cv_1485734/docview/100168149/23D15D33D1BA4A45PQ/141?accountid=2694).

“Epidemic Grips German Soldiers: Disease Hampers Foe in Preparing New Offensive,” *The*

*Washington Post (1877-1922)*, 27 June 1918, p. 1,

<https://ezpro.cc.gettysburg.edu:2260/hnpwashingtonpost/docview/145644468/994F68BCF4874821PQ/19?accountid=2694>.

“Epidemic Guard for Port: All Incoming Steamships Watched for Signs of Spanish Influenza,”



*New York Times (1857-1922)*, 19 August 1918, p. 5,

[https://ezpro.cc.gettysburg.edu:2260/cv\\_1485734/docview/100201964/23D15D33D1BA4A45PQ/55?accountid=2694](https://ezpro.cc.gettysburg.edu:2260/cv_1485734/docview/100201964/23D15D33D1BA4A45PQ/55?accountid=2694).

Evan Andrews, “Why was it Called the ‘Spanish Flu?’: the 1918 Influenza Pandemic did not, as Many People Believed, Originate in Spain,” *History*, last revised 27 March 2020,

<https://www.history.com/news/why-was-it-called-the-spanish-flu>.

“Find Serum to Stay Influenza, U.S. Adopts It,” *Chicago Daily Tribune (1872-1922)*, 29 September 1918, p. A1,

[https://ezpro.cc.gettysburg.edu:2260/cv\\_1485734/docview/174433563/57233A890F2B4525PQ/88?accountid=2694](https://ezpro.cc.gettysburg.edu:2260/cv_1485734/docview/174433563/57233A890F2B4525PQ/88?accountid=2694).

“Fumgate for Influenza: All on Spanish Ship Treated to Keep Out War Disease,” *New York Times (1857-1922)*, 3 July 1918, p. 9,

[https://ezpro.cc.gettysburg.edu:2260/cv\\_1485734/docview/100232272/23D15D33D1BA4A45PQ/24?accountid=2694](https://ezpro.cc.gettysburg.edu:2260/cv_1485734/docview/100232272/23D15D33D1BA4A45PQ/24?accountid=2694).

“Germans with Fever Drop in Their Tracks: New Disease Strikes Very Suddenly and Men are in the Hospital at Least Six Days,” *New York Times (1877-1922)*, 9 July, 1918, p. 7,

[https://ezpro.cc.gettysburg.edu:2260/cv\\_1485734/docview/100210683/23D15D33D1BA4A45PQ/29?accountid=2694](https://ezpro.cc.gettysburg.edu:2260/cv_1485734/docview/100210683/23D15D33D1BA4A45PQ/29?accountid=2694).

“Grip Epidemic at Great Lakes Under Control: 1,000 Men Quarantined; Northwestern U. Camp Also Affected,” *Chicago Daily Tribune (1882-1922)*, 19 September 1918, p. 13,

[https://ezpro.cc.gettysburg.edu:2260/cv\\_1485734/docview/174390336/57233A890F2B4525PQ/43?accountid=2694](https://ezpro.cc.gettysburg.edu:2260/cv_1485734/docview/174390336/57233A890F2B4525PQ/43?accountid=2694)

“Grip Shuts Off Jackie Liberty at Great Lakes: Naval Camp Under Strict Orders to Stamp Out

Spanish Influenza,” *Chicago Daily Tribune (1982-1922)*, 20 September 1918, p. 9,

[https://ezpro.cc.gettysburg.edu:2260/cv\\_1485734/docview/174435554/57233A890F2B4525PQ/47?accountid=2694](https://ezpro.cc.gettysburg.edu:2260/cv_1485734/docview/174435554/57233A890F2B4525PQ/47?accountid=2694).

Guy Gugliotta, “New Estimate Raises Civil War Death Toll,” *The New York Times*, 2 April

2012, <https://www.nytimes.com/2012/04/03/science/civil-war-toll-up-by-20-percent-in-new-estimate.html>.

“Health Head Calls Influenza Inquiry: Eleven New Cases Arrive on Another Ship, but

Authorities are not Alarmed,” *New York Times (1857-1922)*, 16 August 1918, p. 16,

[https://ezpro.cc.gettysburg.edu:2260/cv\\_1485734/docview/100229116/23D15D33D1BA4A45PQ/51?accountid=2694](https://ezpro.cc.gettysburg.edu:2260/cv_1485734/docview/100229116/23D15D33D1BA4A45PQ/51?accountid=2694).

“Improvement Possible,” *Gettysburgian*, October 23, 1918,

<http://digital.olivesoftware.com/Olive/APA/Gettysburg/SharedView.Article.aspx?href=GTY%2F1918%2F10%2F23&id=Ar00700&sk=5CF51039&viewMode=image>.

Jessica A. Belser and Terrence M. Tumpey, “The 1918 Flu, 100 Years Later,” *Science* 359

(January 19, 2018): 255, <https://ezpro.cc.gettysburg.edu:2483/content/359/6373/255>.

John H. Loynes, “McGarvey, McGarvie, McGarvey, MacGarvey Family Story,” *The Keener*

Family Bookshelf, p. 22.

“New Gains in Grip Here: 999 Cases Reported Yesterday, Will not Close the Schools,” *New*

*York Times (1857-1922)*, 4 October 1918, p. 24,

[https://ezpro.cc.gettysburg.edu:2260/cv\\_1485734/docview/100168094/23D15D33D1BA4A45PQ/140?accountid=2694](https://ezpro.cc.gettysburg.edu:2260/cv_1485734/docview/100168094/23D15D33D1BA4A45PQ/140?accountid=2694).

Perry Robinson, “Huns have Epidemics: One is Influenza; Other is Spirit of Disobedience,” *The*

*Washington Post (1877-1922)*, 10 July 1918, p. 3,

<https://ezpro.cc.gettysburg.edu:2260/hnpwashingtonpost/docview/145667826/994F68BCF4874821PQ/27?accountid=2694>.

“Phi Delta Theta,” *Gettysburgian*, January 15, 1919,

<http://digital.olivesoftware.com/Olive/APA/Gettysburg/SharedView.Article.aspx?href=GETTYSBURGIAN%2F1919%2F01%2F15&id=Ar01000&sk=E74E131B&viewMode=image>.

Shuo Wang, “The ‘New Social History’ in China: The Development of Women’s History,”

*History Teacher* 39, no. 3 (May 2006): 315-317,

<http://ezpro.cc.gettysburg.edu:2118/ehost/pdfviewer/pdfviewer?vid=2&sid=a8a45ae0-5810-410a-8411-6f5f84f8e5ce%40sessionmgr103>.

“Spanish Influenza is Raging in the German Army; Grip and Typhus also Prevalent Among

Soldiers,” *New York Times (1877-1922)*, 27 June 1918, p. 1,

[https://ezpro.cc.gettysburg.edu:2260/cv\\_1485734/docview/100217180/23D15D33D1BA4A45PQ/20?accountid=2694](https://ezpro.cc.gettysburg.edu:2260/cv_1485734/docview/100217180/23D15D33D1BA4A45PQ/20?accountid=2694).

“Tells of Vaccine to Stop Influenza: Dr. Copeland Says Discover has been Made by Dr. Park,

City Bacteriologist,” *New York Times (1857-1922)*, 2 October 1918, p. 10,

[https://ezpro.cc.gettysburg.edu:2260/cv\\_1485734/docview/100174419/23D15D33D1BA4A45PQ/127?accountid=2694](https://ezpro.cc.gettysburg.edu:2260/cv_1485734/docview/100174419/23D15D33D1BA4A45PQ/127?accountid=2694).

“The Influenza Quarantine,” *New York Times (1857-1922)*, 1 October 1918, p. 12,

[https://ezpro.cc.gettysburg.edu:2260/cv\\_1485734/docview/100175765/23D15D33D1BA4A45PQ/122?accountid=2694](https://ezpro.cc.gettysburg.edu:2260/cv_1485734/docview/100175765/23D15D33D1BA4A45PQ/122?accountid=2694).

“Think Influenza Came in U-Boat: Federal Health Authorities See Possibility of Men from

Submarine Spreading Germs,” *New York Times (1958-1922)*, September 19, 1918, p. 11,  
[https://ezpro.cc.gettysburg.edu:2260/cv\\_1485734/docview/100179074/23D15D33D1BA4A45PQ/69?accountid=2694](https://ezpro.cc.gettysburg.edu:2260/cv_1485734/docview/100179074/23D15D33D1BA4A45PQ/69?accountid=2694).

“Wearing ‘Gas Masks’ in Chicago: Street Sweeper Protecting Himself from Influenza Epidemic; County Hospital Nurse and Interne Adopting Precautionary Measures,” *Chicago Daily Tribune (1872-1922)*, 2 October, 1918, p. 17,  
[https://ezpro.cc.gettysburg.edu:2260/cv\\_1485734/docview/174438457/57233A890F2B4525PQ/99?accountid=2694](https://ezpro.cc.gettysburg.edu:2260/cv_1485734/docview/174438457/57233A890F2B4525PQ/99?accountid=2694).

“World War 2 Statistics,” *Second World War History: The Great Global Conflict Day-by Day*,  
<https://www.secondworldwarhistory.com/world-war-2-statistics.php>.

“1918 Pandemic,” *Centers for Disease Control and Prevention*, last revised 20 March 2019,  
<https://www.cdc.gov/flu/pandemic-resources/1918-pandemic-h1n1.html>.