The Role of Nationalism During the 1918 Spanish Flu and COVID-19

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Introduction

For the last two years, humanity has been living through an event that seemingly occurs once in a century–the COVID-19 pandemic. It brought a screeching halt to daily life as we know it as it engulfed the world. As of this writing, over 6 million people worldwide have died from the coronavirus.[1] In the United States, the reported number of deaths stands at almost one million, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC).[2] The death toll in the US is so high that it surpassed that of the previous pandemic, the 1918-20 "Spanish Flu."[3] During the time of COVID-19, almost no one on Earth had experience living through a global pandemic. It was an event that was highly unusual, the kind that one would read in a history textbook. In fact, in light of the current pandemic, many people did start looking to history, to the 1918 influenza pandemic, hoping to draw parallels.

There is just one problem: the pandemic of 1918 is an event that is often rarely talked about in mainstream historical discourse. It is a case of so-called "collective amnesia," according to scholar Michael Barnes. "'We forget the Spanish Flu — one of the most consequential events of the 20th century — largely because it doesn't fit our sense of what a 'big' event looks like,' said Mark Lawrence, director of the LBJ Presidential Library."[4] Events like wars are burned into the minds of people learning history, perhaps because of their horrific outcomes. Deaths and destruction on a massive scale are often associated with wars because they are unnatural, unlike diseases and sickness. "We tend to think of history, by

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[1] "Coronavirus Death Toll." *Worldometer*, https://www.worldometers.info/coronavirus/coronavirus-death-toll/. Accessed 12 Apr. 2022.
[2] "Covid Data Tracker Weekly Review." *Centers for Disease Control and Prevention*, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/covid-data/covidview/index.html. Accessed 12 Apr. 2022.
[3] Branswell , Helen Branswell. "Covid-19 Overtakes 1918 Spanish Flu as Deadliest Disease in American History." *Statnews.com*, STAT News, 20 Sept. 2021, https://www.statnews.com/2021/09/20/covid-19-set-to-overtake-1918-spanish-flu-as-deadliest-disease-in-american-history/. Accessed 12 Apr. 2022.
[4] Barnes, Michael. "Collective Amnesia about Pandemics: Today's COVID-19 Suffering Much Like that of 1918." *Austin American Statesman,* Mar 28 2021, *ProQuest.* Web. 21 Sep. 2021.

contrast, as what people do. So an event like the First World War draws massive interest from historians, while the flu does not."[5] The issue with this approach to studying history lies specifically in the death toll in both types of events. While millions of people have died from fighting in wars, overall, far more people die from disease than from military action. The death toll from the current pandemic is in the millions, and it is still rising. It is already higher than from many military conflicts. The high casualty totals makes it critically important for historians to study the effect of naturally occurring events like pandemics. That means the current pandemic has made the one from 104 years ago relevant again. In fact, the events from 1918-1920 are relevant because of the eerie similarities that occurred in the two pandemics a century apart.

The first part of the thesis will delve into the medical aspect of the 1918 pandemic, to help provide greater context for the medical response that began in 2020. Although there was certainly ingenuity in the medical fields in their respective times, there were still barely any fundamental changes implemented to the American medical system at-large because of the pandemics. We still lack the kind of national healthcare system that exists in most other nations–healthcare systems that were set up in some countries as a direct result of the Spanish Flu. This work will also debunk a very popular misconception about the 1918 pandemic–that there were no vaccines developed against it. There were indeed vaccines 104 years ago, but influenza vaccinology was not as well-developed as it is today. That made the development of an effective vaccine against the Spanish flu impossible.

The second chapter will explore how very strong nationalism tainted the government response to the 1918 pandemic–something that also happened in the recent pandemic. President Woodrow Wilson Wilson did not even mention influenza once during the entire 1918-20 pandemic. Even after catching influenza himself at the end of World War I, Wilson

[5] ibid.

still never uttered a word about it. This seems shocking by today's standards, but it is true. On the other hand, President Donald J. Trump acknowledged COVID-19 after it appeared in 2020, but downplayed the pandemic from the beginning. He blamed China for bringing it to the US on the basis that COVID apparently originated in the city of Wuhan. Trump flooded the airwaves with poor information, including that disease would just disappear on its own. Trump's arrogance got the best of him, as he caught the disease himself just as Wilson had a hundred years earlier. Wilson's failure to speak out at all combined with Trump's constant misinformation united both presidents by the fact they oversaw and were complicit in negligible homicide.

The final chapter will analyze how elected officials a hundred years ago sowed distrust in the press for simply doing its job, complicating the medical response to the pandemic. This, too, was repeated during the pandemic that began in 2020. During the Spanish flu, newspapers and magazines were the way that information was spread publicly. And these papers were often filled with incorrect information, or were criticized for publishing correct but harsh reports on the pandemic. During the events of 2020, disinformation about the pandemic arose across print, audio and video reporting and in social media reports that could cross the world in just minutes. This led to disinformation, including conspiracy theories and anti-science sentiment, harming the public. "In our era of political polarization, 'fake news,' and tribal politics, trust in the media, government officials, and even science is fading. This can be catastrophic if an influenza or another type of pandemic arises. Under such circumstances, the public's failure to trust the guidance offered by public health officials may well make a bad situation worse."[6] The situation with the media affected

[6] "The 1918 Influenza Pandemic: Lessons Learned and Not-Introduction to the Special Section," AJPH Editorials. November 1st, 2018.

the medical response both during the Spanish flu and with Covid-19, despite the presence of advanced western medicine today.

It is worth noting that this thesis will mainly cover the 1918 pandemic. A historian's training is focused on the past, and it is our duty to bring events to light. There is no doubt that the pandemic 100 years ago was a very important world event. "Yet the disease was almost forgotten in the public sphere. Leaders raised few if any permanent memorials to the dead. They observed few if any ritual anniversaries. 'When I looked for memorials to the flu, I found nothing,' Brian Zecchinelli told *The New York Times* in 2020 after he and his wife, Karen, underwrote a memorial bench in Barre, Vt., to mark the 100th anniversary of the pandemic."[7] The pandemic was so "traumatic that it was apparently wiped from the collective memory."[8] Even in educational settings like American public schools, there is very little if any coverage in many history classes of what transpired. To those of us living through COVID-19, the emergence of another pandemic 100 years after one that rocked the world make it an ideal time to learn from the past to look for answers on how to survive the current one. But it should not have taken a pandemic to make another one relevant. If anything, it was essential that there was greater discourse about what happened in 1918 to better prepare for what 2020 threw at us.

When COVID-19 hit in 2020, many people did discover that historians wrote some excellent books about the Spanish Flu pandemic. Books such as John M. Barry's *The Great Influenza* and Laura Spinney's *Pale Rider* became best sellers due to what they covered. There were also books that were collections of primary sources that gave insight to what life was like from 1918-1920 during the pandemic. Books like Robert John Hadfield's *Virus*

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[7] Barnes, Michael. "Collective Amnesia about Pandemics: Today's COVID-19 Suffering Much Like that of 1918." *Austin American Statesman,* Mar 28 2021, *ProQuest.* Web. 21 Sep. 2021.
[8] Arnold, Catharine. *Pandemic 1918: Eyewitness Accounts From the Greatest Medical Holocaust in Modern History.* St. Martin's Press. New York. 2018.

1918: Spanish Influenza, The Words of People Who Lived It, and Catherine Arnold's *Pandemic 1918: Eyewitness Accounts From the Greatest Medical Holocaust in Modern History* served as said collections. Additionally, the newspapers uncovered on the Chronicling America database were primary resources that also gave good insight to help understand what people were living through at the time. This thesis differs from the books used because of its direct focus on nationalism, and how it played into the abysmal pandemic response in 1918. Barry's central argument is that leaders did not tell the truth about the severity of influenza. And Spinney's is that medical developments like disease surveillance bureaus and universal healthcare were lessons adopted in the wake of the events of 1918. These authors served as beginning points for this work, but this paper also reflects a wide range of primary and secondary sources. The central focus of this bachelor's thesis is on nationalism because of its effect on every aspect of the 1918-1920 pandemic. Because of World War I, nationalism ended up spoiling America's response to the pandemic. After laying out the argument in the three main chapters of this work, this work will draw conclusions about the effect of nationalism on the Spanish Flu and on the pandemic that began in 2020. History from a century ago has many useful lessons that we can take into the third year of the current pandemic.

Medical Ingenuity and Failure

The medical field is very complex in the modern age. The human species lives in an age of vaccines, disease surveillance bureaus, and advanced treatments. Medical technology has come such a long way to the point where humanity has been able to eradicate some diseases, like polio. However, other diseases still remain, and can become powerful enough to cause a public health crisis. This was the case with influenza from 1918-1920. What we have come to think of as modern medicine was mostly unavailable 100 years ago. "It is true that we live in the age of genomics, vaccines, antibiotics, mechanical ventilators, and other features of high-technology medicine that were unavailable in 1918."[9] This section of the paper will discuss the medical aspects of the pandemic of 1918-20. Poor federal planning of how to deal with the medical response to the pandemic of 1918-1920 had dramatic effects. It resulted in "an excess death toll of about 675,000 people. The nation then had a population between 105 and 110 million, while it was approaching 300 million in 2006. So a comparable figure today would be approximately 1,750,000 deaths."[10] While these awful figures are partially due to the medicine of the day being crude by today's standards, the medical response to the epidemic was also very much limited by the nationalism affecting the United States at the time, not just by medical limitations.

Changing demographics were one factor that affected the medical care available at the time of the 1918-20 pandemic. At the time, immigrants to the US were pouring into large metropolitan areas around major urban centers. This pandemic metric is critical, as a large

[9] *The 1918 Influenza Pandemic: Lessons Learned and Not-Introduction to the Special Section*. AJPH Editorials. November 1st, 2018.
[10] Barry, John. *The Great Influenza: The Story of the Deadliest Pandemic in History.* Penguin Books. 2018.

portion of viral spread occurs in crowded areas where people live close to one another. In the United States during the early 20th century, many people were moving to big cities because of the changes brought about by the industrial revolution. Cities like New York and Chicago thrived during the period. However, cities like those aforementioned were also notorious for pollution, demonstrating "that coal-fired generating capacity, a proxy for air pollution, led to significantly higher mortality rates during the pandemic" of 1918.[11] In the United States, the industrial revolution proved to be a test of human ingenuity on a technological scale, and the pandemic made things even more complicated.

As technology grew in the new 20th century, so did the advancement of the medical field. The 1918 influenza pandemic was, arguably, the first pandemic to see the implementation of ideas that would influence how later pandemics would be fought. With modern science, doctors are able to diagnose and fight sickness. But at the time of the pandemic in 1918, common people were just starting to become familiar with the idea that science can diagnose and fight sickness, thanks to new understanding of germ theory. "But at the turn of the century many people believed it, at least in the west. The main reason for their optimism was germ theory–the insight that germs cause disease."[12] Granted, the existence of bacteria were known long before the implementation of germ theory. "Bacteria had been known about for a couple of centuries, ever since a Dutch lens grinder named Antony van Leeuwenhoek passed a magnifying glass over a drop of pond water and saw that it was teeming with life, but they had been regarded as a kind of harmless ectoplasm–nobody suspected that they could make people ill."[13] But making people ill is exactly what some germs do. In fact, the discovery of germs being behind disease was radical at the time, but it

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[11] Brian Beach, Karen Clay, and Martin H. Saavedra. *The 1918 Influenza Pandemic and its Lessons for COVID-19*. National Bureau of Economic Research. NBER Working Paper No. 27673. August 2020 EL No. I10,J10,J24,N0. https://www.nber.org/papers/w27673. Accessed May 2nd, 2021.
[12] Spinney, Laura. *Pale Rider: The Spanish Flu of 1918 and How It Changed the World.* PublicAffairs, New York, 2017.
[13] ibid.

ended up paving the way for curing diseases. The pandemic of 1918 was the first pandemic that saw germ theory be understood on a wide scale basis, and not just by the highly educated, to help slow the spread of disease.

The theories of how germs can cause disease created a crucial part of fighting pandemics: vaccines. Germ theory also went hand in hand "with older ideas about hygiene and sanitation, germ theory now began to turn the tide on the crowd diseases. Campaigns were launched to purify drinking water and promote cleanliness. Vaccination programmes were imposed, though not without resistance…"[14] The resistance comes because people tend to be afraid of change, naturally. So when it comes to policies meant to promote public health, it would make sense there would be resistance to the new rules, given that germ theory was a radical concept. This was especially important when it comes to vaccinations.

Vaccines themselves have been around for ages. "The practice of immunisation dates back hundreds of years. Buddhist monks drank snake venom to confer immunity to snake bite and variolation (smearing of a skin tear with cowpox to confer immunity to smallpox) was practiced in 17th century China."[15] However, modern vaccinology as we know it in the western world came about thanks to the work of Doctor Edward Jenner in 1796. In that year, Jenner "inoculated a 13 year-old-boy with vaccinia virus (cowpox), and demonstrated immunity to smallpox. In 1798, the first smallpox vaccine was developed. Over the 18th and 19th centuries, systematic implementation of mass smallpox immunisation culminated in its global eradication in 1979."[16] That is not to say that the success of Jenner's vaccine did not come without opposition to the radical idea that was vaccinology. Fears and safety concerns came about, driving discourse when vaccinations started to gain popularity and became required to do things like going to school or one's job. Yet, despite these persistent fears, the

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[14] ibid.
[15] *A Brief History of Vaccination*. Immunisation Advisory Centre. 8 Jan 2020. https://www.immune.org.nz/vaccines/vaccine-development/brief-history-vaccination. Accessed 10 Jan. 2022
[16] ibid.

modern vaccine would go on to remain a critical staple of the medical field thanks to Jenner. The first vaccines were such a massive success that it is no wonder why when pandemics occurred in the modern era, the first goal often was to find a vaccine as soon as possible. The same was true in 1918, an age where the post-industrial revolution meant quicker vaccine production.

A popular misconception about the 1918-20 pandemic is that people persevered through it without vaccination. There seems to be three main reasons for this misconception. First is that 1918 seems like it was a long time ago, given that most of the people who lived through influenza have passed away with few living stories preserved. Second, it also could be that the trauma was so bad to the point the US would rather have buried the flu's memory in the dustbin of history. The time of the "Spanish flu" seems like forever ago to the human mind, even though 104 years ago in the span of history is not that long ago. This leads to the third reason, being that the pandemic is talked about so little in mainstream historical discourse that it is no wonder why a lot of people believe a vaccination program was not implemented. "In terms of knowledge of influenza as an infectious disease, not a great deal was understood at the time."[17] But despite there being limited understanding of the disease, there were indeed efforts to implement mass vaccinations. The literature including articles in the *Journal of the American Medical Association* is full of descriptions of vaccines being developed all over the US.

One such effort was reported in the Topeka, Kansas newspaper *The Topeka State Journal.* In December of 1918, a vaccine development effort had been underway "in the big state laboratories at Kansas university, Lawrence."[18] It makes sense that Kansas scientists

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[17] *The 1918-19 Spanish Influenza Pandemic and Vaccine Development*. The History of Vaccines, https://www.historyofvaccines.org/content/blog/vaccine-development-spanish-flu. Accessed 10 Jan. 2022.
[18] *The Topeka State Journal. [volume]* (Topeka, Kansas), 17 Dec. 1918. *Chronicling America: Historic American Newspapers*. Lib. of Congress. <https://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn82016014/1918-12-17/ed-1/seq-1/> Accessed 22 Apr. 2021.

were particularly interested in influenza, given that the first US cases were found there. After a devastating second wave, a third wave was inevitable, and scientists tried to move fast on vaccine development before it came. Apparently, there was a consensus amongst doctors that "a special serum may be required for a successful campaign against influenza in Kansas" due to a regular influenza vaccine not being as effective against the particular strain.[19] *The Topeka State Journal* never reported how many people were vaccinated. But it can be inferred that there is a lack of data because influenza was not a disease being tracked at that time in Kansas by a central public health body. In some places, such as Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, it only took for the arrival of influenza to make it "a 'reportable' disease, requiring physicians to notify health officials of any cases they treated. This would provide information about its movement."[20] This indicates the shortcomings of the lack of a central federal health system. Germ theory, vaccinations, and other medical developments were definitely things that advanced public health. But for these tools to be effective, changes had to be implemented systemically. And the vaccine effort in the US in response in 1918 shows no signs of being systemic.

Topeka wass far from the only mass vaccination effort occurring during the pandemic, and not just in the US. Several large American military units appeared to be ideal candidates for mass vaccination efforts to take place. There were lots of "available subjects, and systemic reporting of trial results."[21] Germ theory played a role in militaries being good testing subjects. A healthy military was a powerful military, especially in the age of conflict. World War I was going on just as the influenza strain made its presence known in Europe and in the US, making soldiers a priority for protection. "Vaccines were made and tested in

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[19] ibid.
[20] Barry, John. *The Great Influenza: The Story of the Deadliest Pandemic in History.* Penguin Books. 2018.
[21] Coombs, Howard G. *The Influenza Pandemic of 1918: Military Observations for Today. COVID-19: NATO in the Age of Pandemics*, edited by Thierry Tardy, NATO Defense College, 2020, pp. 61–70, http://www.jstor.org/stable/resrep25148.13. Accessed 17 Sep. 2021.

several militaries including Britain, Canada, and the United States."[22] There were plenty of vaccines to go around during the trials, but their implementation was not successful. "For instance, the United States Army Medical School produced and disbursed two million doses of a trial vaccine between October and November 1918. However, due to a lack of understanding of the pathology of the disease and emerging vaccine production capabilities, no conclusive results were obtained."[23] Despite insufficient results being garnered in the military trials, the effort to develop a vaccine in a quick amount of time is an effort that deserves commendation in and of itself, as a harbinger of more successful mass vaccination efforts to follow.

It is also worth noting how this was done in a time when vaccine technology was not as advanced as it is in the contemporary world. While 1918's events are not the first ones to see vaccines in action, it was the first one to see vaccines be highly emphasized and preached in conjunction with the new germ theory. It is unfortunate that American ingenuity was unable to produce a potent vaccine to protect against the influenza outbreak in 1918-20, as it could have saved thousands if not millions of lives. A coordinated government-led effort might have done so, but there is no evidence that one was ever ordered. After all, President Wilson never uttered a word about the pandemic in public. This is just another way in which American nationalism led to a poor medical outcome. That said, there is evidence that the US government was monitoring the vaccine effort, given that the head of the US Public Health Service, George McCoy, published an article in 1918 in the *Journal of the American Medical Association* entitled "The Failure of a Bacterial Vaccine as a Prophylactic Against Influenza."[24] Part of the problem with the vaccine development effort at the time of the

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[22] ibid.
[23] ibid.
[24] Wright, A.J. "'Astonishing Numbers': Vaccine Efforts In the 1918 Flu Pandemic." *Clinicaloncology.com*, https://www.clinicaloncology.com/COVID-19/Article/07-20/Vaccine-Efforts-In-the-1918-Flu-Pandemic/58. Accessed 22 Feb 2022.

1918-20 pandemic is that influenza was discovered in the 1930s to be caused by a virus, whereas many of the vaccines being developed between 1918 and 1920 assumed the culprit was bacterial.[25] Scientists were trying to end the pandemic through vaccines, but their medical efforts were misplaced because of the limits of medicine at the time, not only because of nationalism.

One part of the US government that did think systematically about vaccines was the US military. Influenza, pneumonia, and other viral and bacterial diseases were already affecting soldiers on the battlefields and trenches throughout the First World War. Unlike training with a rifle to kill another combatant, a soldier is "untrained in fighting diseases."[26] Diseases kill with precision and know the weak points of the human body well, allowing them to kill a human with ease without proper medical treatment. If militaries were going to fight diseases, they had to be smart and rethink their strategies. Vaccinating personnel through test trials and pleas to get simply were not going to assure a healthy and strong military in the long run–not unless there were compulsory measures in place. And that is exactly what happened.

The US military started floating around the idea of compulsory vaccinations in November of 1918. At Camp Lee, Virginia, the pneumonia vaccine had become "available for every officer, enlisted man and employee of the Army of the United States, according to a statement issued from the office of the Surgeon-General at Washington."[27] Everyone stationed at Camp Lee was informed of the "possibility that in the near future the anti-pneumonia vaccination will be compulsory, the same as the prophylactic inoculation against

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[25] Youngdahl, Karie. "Spanish Influenza Pandemic and Vaccines." *History of Vaccines*, https://www.historyofvaccines.org/content/blog/spanish-influenza-pandemic-and-vaccines. Accessed 22 Feb. 2022.

[26] *The Cure.* TELLS HOW TO STOP SPREAD OF GRIPPE. 02 Oct. 1918. America and World War I Part I. American Military Camp Newspapers.

[27] *The Bayonet.* MAY BE COMPULSORY. 08 Nov. 1918. America and World War I Part II. American Military Camp Newspapers.

typhoid and para-typhoid."[28] Furthermore, the military argued that further reasoning for compulsory vaccination was the lowering of the overall case index. "One of the most severe tests encountered by the officers was the administering of the vaccine to 12,000 volunteers at one of the other army camps. There during the following ten weeks, until the troops went overseas although pneumonia was slightly more prevalent elsewhere than formerly, among the 12,000 volunteers not a single case of the disease dv to these germs developed."[29] Not only did mandatory vaccinations work in lowering metrics, but they went a long way in ensuring that the US military was a healthy, capable fighting force. Going to the disease ridden trenches in Europe with various vaccines in soldiers' bodies made them immune to certain diseases there. But if the pandemic was to really have the tide turned, then people who were not in the army needed to be vaccinated rigorously as well.

Municipal leaders stepped into the void left by the lack of a coordinated federal vaccine effort. There had already been efforts to distribute an influenza vaccine to the public by December of 1918, a mere 9 months after the first US case was detected in Kansas. The city of Ogden, Utah, serves as one such case study. *The Ogden Standard* newspaper's front bulletin on December 5th read, *The Announcement is Official. Be Vaccinated Against "Flu."*[30] The public was urged to get jabs at the "earliest possible moment."[31] What perhaps was commendable about Ogden's effort was how all the City Board of Health was going to vaccinate people "FREE OF CHARGE" as a way to speed up the process of vaccinations.[32] The idea that one could walk into the doctor's office, get vaccinated no questions asked was radical for a country that heavily emphasized the monetary aspect of basic services like

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[28] ibid.
[29] ibid.
[30] *The Ogden standard. [volume]* (Ogden City, Utah), 05 Dec. 1918. *Chronicling America: Historic American Newspapers*. Lib. of Congress. <https://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn85058396/1918-12-05/ed-1/seq-9/> Accessed 12 Jan. 2022
[31] ibid.
[32] ibid.

medical care. Furthermore, Ogden's story also shows that free medical treatments in a public health emergency are not only ethical, but also a good incentive to get people to roll up their sleeves. It showed there was no blame to go around and emphasized something of an equality and patriotic aspect; everybody had equal opportunity to get a flu shot not just for the city of Ogden, but for the health of America as a whole.

However, as commendable as the mass vaccination efforts were, there is one notable flaw in the mass vaccination plans—that nationalism made many nations with vaccines unwilling to share them with others. The armies of the countries that launched those vaccination campaigns in 1918 included France, the United Kingdom and the United States. These three countries had one major thing in common, besides being allies in the war. They were superpowers with enormous wealth and power to show for it. Furthermore, due to their relative economic prosperity, it would make sense that they would acquire a multitudinous number of vaccine doses. A surplus of doses meant plenty to go around for their militaries, and their citizens, and perhaps next their allies and colonies. The problem, however, with the military mass vaccination approach was the role wealthy nations took throughout 1918-1920. Case in point, the three aforementioned nations were seen "taking a 'my nation first' approach to developing and distributing potential vaccines or other pharmaceutical treatments."[33] On paper, the idea that one's nation should be vaccinated first above all else is a powerful incentive for a rapid vaccination campaign. But, that neglected others in need—in particular, it excluded smaller, less economically powerful nations. Many of these nations were still colonies, with less wealth than the empires that oversaw them. This failure to share is what is known as "vaccine nationalism."

[33] Weintraub , Rebecca, et al. *The Danger of Vaccine Nationalism*. Harvard Business Review , 13 Sept. 2021, https://hbr.org/2020/05/the-danger-of-vaccine-nationalism. Accessed 19 Nov. 2021.

Vaccine nationalism is generally seen as immoral in and of itself. “This ‘vaccine nationalism’ is not only morally reprehensible, it is the wrong way to reduce transmission globally. And global transmission matters: If countries with a large number of cases lag in obtaining the vaccine and other medicines, the disease will continue to disrupt global supply chains and, as a result, economies around the world.”[34] This meant that while the rich countries were putting all their energy into vaccinating their militaries and populations as quickly as possible, few, if any, doses were shared with countries less fortunate than themselves. In other words, vaccine nationalism perpetuated the disease cycles in hard hit areas, especially in many colonies that did not have as much advanced medicine as the affluent counterparts. An argument could be made that the 1918 pandemic was the first modern pandemic to have seen vaccine nationalism at play.

Not only was vaccine nationalism found during the pandemic of 1918-20, but so was vaccine hesitancy. The rhetoric of “freedom above all else” also contributed to excessive vaccine resistance. Granted, there had always been some form of resistance to inoculations ever since the idea of vaccines was introduced. “But in America, resistance does not come primarily from people who misunderstand the science. Rather, educated and affluent people worry that vaccines are ‘unnatural.’ Hesitancy is also sown by mistrust people have of powerful institutions, such as the government or corporations.”[35] America may be a nation that prides itself on freedom, but during 1918, leaders did not stop and ask themselves what meaning the notion of freedom would take when it comes to public health.

While there is no denying how powerful vaccines were becoming, the first modern pandemic also saw some other practices that could mitigate the sickness. While this is far from the first pandemic in history to use non-pharmaceutical interventions to curb the spread

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[34] ibid.

[35] Sadowsky, Jonathan. *Vaccines and Epidemics: Lessons from History*. The Daily Case. Case Western Reserve University. 9 Apr. 2021, https://thedaily.case.edu/vaccines-and-epidemics-lessons-from-history/. Accessed 24 Jan. 2022.

of a disease, the pandemic of 1918-20 used them openly. One such approach " is to forcibly isolate the sick or individuals suspected of infection in their own homes," also known as quarantining.[36] "Quarantine was invented by the Venetians in the fifteenth century, when they forced ships arriving from the Levant to sit at anchor for forty days-*a quarantena*-before they allowed those on board to land."[37] The Venetians were a sophisticated society. They implemented quarantining not only in the interest of public health, but also because they understood public health connected to all aspects of their labor and economy. Without a healthy workforce, the quality of goods and services would have taken a toll. In a society where many laborers worked with or on ships, the need to maintain good hygiene was paramount to Venetians and their pioneering of the quarantine strategy. Granted, mass quarantining does mean a disruption in day-to-day activities for multiple people involved. But if applied right, the act of quarantining can save another person's life as much as the life of someone quarantined.

Another non-pharmaceutical intervention utilized in the Spanish Flu was the act of wearing gauze masks. Strategically, the masks were designed to cover the nose and mouth, thus blocking the spread of germs from person to person. At a time when vaccinology and people's understanding of influenza was limited, many fell back on non-pharmaceutical interventions largely to fend off the influenza strain because they were easy. Furthermore, wearing face masks did allow for some decree of normalcy to occur, with the exception being that some saw it as a minor inconvenience. "During the 1918 flu, Americans were also divided about masking."[38] Many were also divided about quarantining, and other non-pharmaceutical interventions meant to reduce viral spread, such as physical distancing. It is

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[36] Spinney, Laura. *Pale Rider: The Spanish Flu of 1918 and How It Changed the World.* PublicAffairs, New York, 2017.
[37] ibid.
[38] Sadowsky, Jonathan. *Vaccines and Epidemics: Lessons from History*. The Daily Case. Case Western Reserve University. 9 Apr. 2021.

no coincidence that Americans demonstrated such behavior. After all, the country is one that emphasizes strong "economic liberty," along with a sense of individual freedom.[39] There is nothing more American than the idea of freedom. But when the notion of liberty is used to justify neglect in a public health emergency, there will be a "mixed effect on public health," especially when taking into consideration that "shutdown decisions and mask wearing mandates have been adopted at the state and local level rather than the federal level."[40] A federal mask mandate during 1918-20 could have saved lives, but it never happened, likely because of the Wilson administration's fear of looking weak during World War. Nationalism however pushed some people towards wearing masks. "This sense of wartime duty—and the fear of being seen as a 'slacker'—may have motivated those who complied with mask orders in cities like San Francisco, Seattle, Denver and Phoenix."[41] Still, there is little evidence that mask wearing became highly politicized during the time of the Spanish flu.

President Woodrow Wilson was never seen wearing a mask in public and there is no indication he ever received a vaccine against the flu. He eventually "contracted the virus on April 3, 1919, shortly after arriving in Paris to negotiate the treaty that would end World War I."[42] This occurred after the Wilson administration downplayed the virus for much of the pandemic. Yet, interestingly, Wilson apparently knew the entire time how severe the pandemic was, even if he failed to say so in public. "He acknowledged it privately, since his oldest daughter, his personal secretary, multiple Secret Service members and even the White House sheep contracted the virus. He focused on getting through World War I, never

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[39] Brian Beach, Karen Clay, and Martin H. Saavedra. *The 1918 Influenza Pandemic and its Lessons for COVID-19*. National Bureau of Economic Research. NBER Working Paper No. 27673. August 2020 EL No. I10,J10,J24,N0. https://www.nber.org/papers/w27673. Accessed May 2nd, 2021.
[40] ibid.
[41] Little, Becky. "When Mask-Wearing Rules in the 1918 Pandemic Faced Resistance." *History.com*, A&E Television Networks, 6 May 2020. https://www.history.com/news/1918-spanish-flu-mask-wearing-resistance. Accessed 22 Feb. 2022.
[42] Ramsay, Annetta. "What Happened When President Woodrow Wilson Contracted the Spanish Flu." *Denton Record-Chronicle*, 9 Oct. 2020. https://dentonrc.com/news/landmarks_and_legacies/what-happened-when-president-woodrow-wilson-contracted-the-spanish-flu/article_2c1d2638-9fb7-5c2e-9f18-b4bb7c7c7256.html. Accessed 22 Feb. 2022.

speaking publicly about the pandemic."[43] If Wilson had mentioned the virus in political discourse at the time, the outcome would have likely looked very different. The medical system would not be as pushed to the brink as it was. Quite possibly, a potential nationwide mask mandate could have been introduced if he had taken action, as well. He could have led Americans towards better outcomes. He could have saved lives.

Other politicians also found themselves being criticized for their approach to the pandemic. Former Wyoming Governor John Eugene Osborne was one such politician, and also a doctor. During his US Senate campaign, he came under fire by the *Northern Wyoming Herald* for being complacent in Wilson's lack of effective influenza policies. "Osborne is a doctor by profession, but he has failed to respond to the call of his chief, President Wilson, and the public health service to help stay the scourge of Spanish Influenza, but has continued his political campaign in Wyoming while his opponent, Senator Warren, is attending to the needs of the nation in these strenuous war times at Washington."[44] This illustrates that a politician's approach to dealing with the pandemic was a point of importance for voters.

Perhaps the most significant health development that came about in the post-pandemic 1920s was also the most un-American one—the introduction of universal healthcare in multiple countries. Before this, healthcare was mostly for the rich. "Throughout the industrialized world, most doctors either worked for themselves or were funded by charities or religious institutions, and many people had no access to them at all."[45] The pandemic was brutal, and circulating blame towards the infected was no longer sustainable. "If health authorities learnt anything from the pandemic, it was that it was no longer

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[43] ibid.

[44] *The Northern Wyoming herald.* (Cody, Wyo.), 30 Oct. 1918. *Chronicling America: Historic American Newspapers*. Lib. of Congress. <https://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn92066926/1918-10-30/ed-1/seq-3/> Accessed 21 Sep. 2021.

[45] Spinney, Laura. "How the 1918 Flu Pandemic Revolutionized Public Health." *Smithsonian.com*, Smithsonian Institution, 27 Sept. 2017. https://www.smithsonianmag.com/history/how-1918-flu-pandemic-revolutionized-public-health-180965025/. Accessed 22 Feb. 2022.

reasonable to blame an individual for catching an infectious disease, nor treat him or her in isolation."[46] It also did not help that many medical systems around the world got battered by the influenza strain. Various governments around the world began putting in place single-payer systems as a means to toughen the infrastructure of their medical systems. Universal healthcare was as much an idea consisting of social sciences as much as medical science. Vladimir Lenin, for example, the first to institute national healthcare after the Communist Revolution of 1917, "realised that medicine should not only be biological and experimental, but also sociological."[47] He saw it as sociological because of the ability of single-payer coverage to give adequate treatment to the (often) neglected rural population, as much as their urban counterparts. This was paramount, especially as the early 1900's were a time of massive urban migration, thanks to the Industrial Revolution. Furthermore, the fairly new study of epidemiology was heavily tied into universal healthcare, as many saw it as a "cornerstone of public health."[48] Epidemiology required data to be analyzed in a pandemic, as developments were rapid and always changing. Having the state oversee the medical system also made it easier to track developments through a singular central system rather than through multiple entities.

Multiple governments instituted universal healthcare in the 20th century, in part to address the shortcomings of the Spanish Flu. "Many countries created or revamped health ministries in the 1920s. This was a direct result of the pandemic."[49] But the United States for decades has always hesitated to move to single-payer insurance, despite the horrendous death toll from 1918-1920. "This is due in part to a polarized political ideology that prioritizes

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[46] Spinney, Laura. *Pale Rider: The Spanish Flu of 1918 and How It Changed the World.* PublicAffairs, New York, 2017.
[47] ibid.
[48] ibid.
[49] Spinney, Laura. "How the 1918 Flu Pandemic Revolutionized Public Health." *Smithsonian.com*, Smithsonian Institution, 27 Sept. 2017, https://www.smithsonianmag.com/history/how-1918-flu-pandemic-revolutionized-public-health-180965025/. Accessed 22 Feb. 2022.

corrosive individualism over the common good."[50] The US holds on to the idea that people are responsible for themselves and should not be helped by the state is hyper-individualistic. It is impossible to estimate the number of Americans who died in 1918-20 simply because they lacked medical care, but that anyone died from a lack of care is a black stain on the American dream.

The pandemic of 1918 was the first modern pandemic that paved the way for medical developments we take for granted. "The importance of international collaboration and global health awareness may be the most significant lesson learned from the Spanish flu of 1918."[51] These lessons of collaboration went hand-in-hand with the concept of disease surveillance. For disease surveillance to be successful, cooperation between local health municipalities, the central government and individual citizens was essential. This is even more paramount on an international level, where a disease can have an outbreak anywhere in the world at any given time. This is illustrated in the establishment of the organization that "was the forerunner of today's World Health Organization (WHO)" in the early 1920's after the pandemic ended.[52] Yet, despite the changes, the US medical system fundamentally did not change in response to the Spanish Flu.

Many of the issues discussed in this chapter show that perhaps it was not a coincidence that the medical side of the pandemic played out the way it did in this country. At the time when the nation finally got involved in the Great War, it was more than prepared for war abroad. But it was ill prepared for the public health emergency abroad and at home. Even to this day, the US concerns itself with military matters so much to the point it is

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[50] Magill, Gerard. *Universal Health Care as a Human Right: The Argument of Dietrich Bonhoeffer.* Journal of Church & State, vol. 58, no. 3, Summer 2016, pp. 564–566. *EBSCOhost*, doi:10.1093/jcs/csw044. Accessed 12 Jan. 2022.

[51] Ryan, Jeffrey R. *Pandemic Influenza: Emergency Planning and Community Preparedness.* CRC Press, Taylor & Francis Group, LLC. 2009.

[52] Spinney, Laura. *Pale Rider: The Spanish Flu of 1918 and How It Changed the World.* PublicAffairs, New York, 2017.

"underprepared for a pandemic" compared to terrorist threats.[53] As terrible as wars and terrorist attacks are, they do not kill as many souls as pandemics often do. "Public health measures lack the drama of pulling someone back from the edge of death, but they save lives by the millions."[54] It was a lesson the US failed to realize, among others. The abysmal failure of the US to have a central medical system prepared for emergencies before and after the 1918 pandemic could have been addressed. But nationalism reared its head again and again in response to the Spanish influenza pandemic. And many of those same issues returned again in 2020.

The Politics of a Pandemic

When it comes to public health, the first group of people that often comes to mind are the medical professionals; doctors, nurses, medical researchers and scientists. Their roles do much for the medical field. Researchers and scientists contribute to innovation and problem solving, while nurses and doctors provide hands-on medical work in the field. However, while there is no denying the usefulness of the role of medicine and the experts behind it during a medical catastrophe, the politicians and other public officials have a much larger impact. Doctors may be the first to answer the call of duty in a pandemic to protect their patients, but public officials hold the power to make critical decisions that will affect the lives of millions. Abraham Lincoln once said that having power is the test of one's character. And test the character of public officials the pandemic of 1918 did, and it was a test that they failed abysmally in the United States.

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[53] Benjamin, Georges C. *Pandemic Influenza: Preparing for The Worst*. Administrative Law Review, vol. 58, no. 3, 2006, pp. 663–666. *JSTOR*, www.jstor.org/stable/40711926. Accessed 22 Apr. 2021.
[54] Barry, John. *The Great Influenza: The Story of the Deadliest Pandemic in History.* Penguin Books. 2018.

Although there were many factors that explained the failure of the politicians to deal with the influenza strain effectively in 1918 through 1920, nationalism was perhaps the biggest reason why the US government failed miserably to address the pandemic. The fact that the pandemic coincided with the US fighting in World War I is of key importance, as the war effort drove nationalism that overtook everything else in American society. The war effort also tied directly into disinformation about the pandemic and politicization of the pandemic, both of which led to disastrous effects. Nationalism weakened the medical effort and strengthened the disinformation campaign related to the Great Influenza.

As the pandemic began to emerge, American politicians were preoccupied with World War I. The western and eastern sides of the Atlantic Ocean felt differently about the raging conflict. "All of Europe was weary of the war. Only in the United States Anglophiles and Francophiles, most of them concentrated on the East Coast and many of them holding positions of power or influence, were not weary. Only in the United States Anglophiles and Francophiles still regarded war as glorious. And they put intense pressure on President Woodrow Wilson to enter the war."[55] America was a country founded during the Age of Empires, and it grew to inherit traits of European imperial might, including the need for glory. America at the time of WWI still wanted to continue its path towards becoming a superpower. While the US was initially hesitant to get involved, conflict in Europe presented itself as a golden opportunity for America to flex its muscles in a post-industrial revolution era. New technology and new tactics always came with every war. And with war, nations must be rallied behind a leader besides their generals and troops. Wilson once said, "'It is not an army that we must shape and train for war; it is a nation…'"[56] A leader wielding the power of a nation has the potential to do good, but also to do far more damage than guns and bombs.

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[55] Barry, John. *The Great Influenza: The Story of the Deadliest Pandemic in History.* Penguin Books. 2018.
[56] Bacevich, Andrew J. "Who Will Serve?" *The Wilson Quarterly (1976-)*, vol. 22, no. 3, [Wilson Quarterly, Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars], 1998, pp. 80–91, http://www.jstor.org/stable/40259777. Accessed 19 Oct. 2021.

Once a leader brings that aspect of war and ingrains it into their citizens at home, that nation spirit then becomes a powerful weapon. Weaponizing the US national interest was exactly what Woodrow Wilson did.

With America abroad and the war machine up and running, victory was what mattered most to President Woodrow Wilson. He also cared deeply about public opinion and public morale. And, like an army general leading his troops into battle, Wilson was intent to keep morale high--so high, in fact, that the Wilson Administration sought to control the press and integrate the war itself into everyday life. But there was one problem in his way. The press played a major role of being a watchdog to keep the US government in check. They were bound to catch him in the wrong. "Wilson was particularly concerned about the press and how it could hinder the war effort."[57] This was all the more reason to worry about his image to his nation, which he was forging into a weapon. Wilson's arrogance bested him, leading to the passage of his own notorious laws through Congress to try to control the press. The passage of the Espionage Act in 1917 saw the US implementing "controlled speech in ways, frightening ways, not known in America before or since."[58] The bill "and its amendment, the Sedition Act of 1918, added a new dynamic by denying Americans the right to express opposition to the conflict."[59] In other words, criticism of the war was not only bad press, but it was not to be spoken. There was also the aspect of people expressing "clear and present danger" through war opposition with the law in effect. That still does not change the fact that outright censorship spawned from such arrogance. Wilson's support of the Espionage Act was the action that inserted nationalism into everyday American life.

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[57] DeWitt, Petra. "'Clear and Present Danger': The Legacy of the 1917 Espionage Act in the United States." *Historical Reflections / Réflexions Historiques*, vol. 42, no. 2, Berghahn Books, 2016, pp. 115–33, http://www.jstor.org/stable/44631075. Accessed 19 Oct. 2021.
[58] Barry, John. *The Great Influenza: The Story of the Deadliest Pandemic in History.* Penguin Books. 2018.
[59] DeWitt.

While the US and its allies implemented similar policies in the conflict, there was one particular nation that chose to declare neutrality and not concern itself with petty wartime politics. On the Iberian Peninsula, Spain took that route. Unconcerned with morale and the war, Spanish journalists were able to do reporting without the fear of punishment. This was a move by the Spanish government that proved useful to the free flow of information when reports emerged of a disease killing soldiers in trenches and battlefields across Europe. "That meant the government did not censor the press, and unlike French, German, and British newspapers—which printed nothing negative that might hurt morale—Spanish papers were filled with reports of the disease…"[60] Viruses and various other diseases do not have national origins. They have no race, no color, no creed, no moral code, no principles tied to identity. Yet, Spanish reporting on the disease was how the notorious name of "Spanish Flu" ended up originating.

Nationalism led to an under-reporting of what would become the pandemic when it originated--not in Spain, but in the United States. Despite the flu having its notorious name be coined from reports overseas, it is worth noting that the US saw "a small wave of the disease sputter across the country in the spring of 1918, but went largely unnoticed except in military training camps." This was a far cry from the disease spread and deaths that Europe saw on the battlefields.[61] One would think that in the age of the Espionage Act, surely an exception could be made to alert the public about what was going on as the disease started to spread in the United States in early 1918. However, at the time the US military "received an intelligence report" about the influenza strain wreaking havoc there, the opposite occurred. "The US government used the same strategy for communicating about the disease that it had developed to disseminate war news."[62] The strategy was that the US government would

[60] Barry, John. *The Great Influenza: The Story of the Deadliest Pandemic in History.* Penguin Books. 2018.
[61] Barry, J. Pandemics: avoiding the mistakes of 1918. *Nature* 459, 324–325 (2009). https://doi.org/10.1038/459324a. Accessed 20 Oct. 2021.
[62] ibid.

simply not mention the outbreak. The Wilson Administration was asking itself why they should make an exception to the rules of the Espionage Act as the negative consequences of the early flu outbreak began to become noticeable in 1918. The country was in a war, and laws were in place to help maintain high national morale. The law was the law. However, just because something is legal does not make it morally right. And in the midst of a public health emergency, the last thing a leader should morally do is use their laws to justify their outright negligence.

Fast forward to fall 1918, when the influenza strain detected in Europe made its way onto US shores. Major cities such as Boston, Massachusetts and Philadelphia, Pennsylvania had become overrun with the disease in navy camps and other military installations. There were bad conditions that soldiers and sailors experienced while living in these places. Most significantly, they were cramped on top of each other in tight quarters that were not very clean. This was the kind of ideal place for germs to spread easily. "The epidemic was sweeping through the Philadelphia naval installations with comparable violence, as it had in Boston."[63] The strain spreading from the military installations into the greater urban areas was inevitable. People would get sick and spread it to their friends and families. Hospitals were then overrun. But public health was not very pressing for the federal government. Morale was still its highest concern. "As a result, when the full-blown and lethal pandemic wave arrived in the United States in September 1918, Wilson never made a single statement about it, and lesser public figures provided only reassurance."[64] This was not just seen on a federal level, but on a state level too. "Chicago's director of public health, for instance, decided not to 'interfere with the morale of the community,' explaining: 'It is our job to keep people from fear. Worry kills more than the disease.'"[65] The urge to provide reassurance that

[63] Barry, John. *The Great Influenza: The Story of the Deadliest Pandemic in History.* Penguin Books. 2018.
[64] Barry, J. Pandemics: avoiding the mistakes of 1918. *Nature* 459, 324–325 (2009). https://doi.org/10.1038/459324a. Accessed 20 Oct. 2021.
[65] ibid.

all would be fine in the face of danger is a natural human instinct. Humans are a species that naturally would like to hear good news, even in non-death situations, as it brings a sense of comfort. A sense that maybe, just maybe, if there is optimism involved, then the worst would be behind. However, this was not even close to being the case in 1918. In fact, the Wilson government embracing nationalism and choosing to protect morale led to the first casualty of the pandemic in the United States. "As California senator Hiram Johnson said in 1917, 'The first casualty when war comes is truth'."[66] By denying what was going on, more names were going to get added to the long list of people lost to the 1918 pandemic. It was only going to get more bloody from the moment nationalism chose protecting morale over protecting human lives.

The nationalism that the Wilson Administration conjured up was so ugly that it engrained itself into municipalities, further plaguing the already unstructured pandemic response. Perhaps the biggest demonstration of nationalism's stain came in the form of multiple war bond parades held across the country. The purpose of Wilson's Liberty Loan parades were to raise money for the war effort in multiple US cities. By focusing on big cities with big populations, the more war bonds could be sold, thus putting more money into the nationalist war machine. But cities also affected epidemiological metrics. "Infection didn't always arrive by sea, and the populations of the largest cities numbered in the millions."[67] High populations made cities perfect grounds to spread the diseases during the parades.

Perhaps the loan parade that occurred in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania was the most notorious of these parades. "Brimming with patriotism about the Fourth Liberty Loan Drive parade on September 28, 1918, Philadelphians were excited to help fund the war that was supposed to end all wars. City officials knew by then that flu was coming, yet little was done

[66] Barry, John. *The Great Influenza: The Story of the Deadliest Pandemic in History.* Penguin Books. 2018.
[67] Spinney, Laura. *Pale Rider: The Spanish Flu of 1918 and How It Changed the World.* PublicAffairs, New York, 2017.

until the epidemic was already underway."[68] Philadelphia's naval and army institutions had been overrun with the influenza leading up to the parade, with the city being the perfect tinderbox for viral spread due to its proximity to the installations. Interestingly, a warning was issued, even though there was a strong nationalist environment. "Ten days before the parade, the Bureau of Health issued a warning about the flu, and a public campaign was initiated against coughing, sneezing, and spitting." But there was a catch to the warning. "Seven days prior to the parade, the Bureau of Health made influenza a reportable disease."[69] Before the parade, influenza did not have to be reported to higher health bureaus. This further translated to very poor oversight of the disease due to the lack of criteria that fit reportable diseases. But the issue was not just a lack of criteria. The lack of reporting on influenza caused an unstructured mess that further jeopardized the greater federal pandemic response.

Furthermore, it did not help that Philadelphia's public health director, Wilmer Krusen, barely took any action to prepare for such events as the parade. In Krusen's mind, influenza was not that much of a threat to the residents--so much so to the point where "he made no contingency plans in case of emergency, stockpiled no supplies, and compiled no lists of medical personnel who would be available in an emergency..."[70] This was still despite daily reports of people dying from the influenza strain all around the area. As reported in *The Evening Bulletin,* Krusen was in denial about the seriousness of the outbreak. *"*Krusen insisted to reporters that the dead were not victims of an epidemic; he said that they had died of influenza but insisted it was only 'old-fashioned influenza or grip.'"[71] Except this was no ordinary influenza strain. It was one that preyed on young, healthy people, and thrived in crowded environments. It did not matter if it occurred outside. The parade was going to still

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[68] Collins, Kathleen L., Markel, Howard, Lieberman, Andrew P. "Truth and Transparency in a Time of Crisis." *Insight.* 2020;5(6):e138132. https://doi.org/10.1172/jci.insight.138132. Accessed 28 Oct. 2021.
[69] Ibid.
[70] Barry, John. *The Great Influenza: The Story of the Deadliest Pandemic in History.* Penguin Books. 2018.
[71] ibid.

be a perfect breeding ground for the virus to do what it was good at: killing. But this was of no concern to "public health director" Krusen. "Krusen declared that the Liberty Loan parade and associated rallies would proceed. None of the anxiety of the moment was reported in any of the city's five daily papers, and if any reporter questioned either Krusen or the Board of Health about the wisdom of the parade's proceeding, no mention of it appeared in print."[72] The parade occurred on September 28th, 1918. The concern that was in the air was overtaken by the joyfulness and fun of the event. Soon, however, joy would be steam-rolled by sadness. "Many became sick with influenza, and fear began to grip the city. Weeks later the news was even worse. Eventually, over 10,000 Philadelphians died from influenza."[73] But fear was not the cause of death of those poor Philadelphians. In fact, the disease alone was not responsible. Nationalism was also part of the cause, as people died under the guise of duty to one's country.

Even in Washington DC, a so-called American "patriotic beacon," there certainly was a national duty to raise money for the war, no matter what. "Let every citizen of the National Capital do his share to avoid the danger of this epidemic. And let no one fail by reason of the extraordinary measures now deemed necessary to do his part in promoting the success of the fourth liberty loan."[74] The national "duty" was simple: purchase war bonds for the war effort. But it was all a mask the entire time. The parades were never about patriotism. They were about nationalism under the guise of patriotism that manipulated the masses into attending mass super-spreader events. People like Krusen and other local officials (besides federal ones) had blood on their hands. Finally, the people were made fully aware of the disease. But by then it was too late.

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[72] ibid.
[73] Collins, Kathleen L., Markel, Howard, Lieberman, Andrew P. "Truth and Transparency in a Time of Crisis." *Insight.* 2020;5(6):e138132. https://doi.org/10.1172/jci.insight.138132. Accessed 28 Oct. 2021.
[74] *Evening star. [volume]* (Washington, D.C.), 02 Oct. 1918. *Chronicling America: Historic American Newspapers*. Lib. of Congress. <https://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn83045462/1918-10-02/ed-1/seq-1/> Acessed 27 Oct. 2021.

The Liberty Loan parades in Philadelphia, Washington DC, and elsewhere were just the beginning. Paranoia soon took over the US, effectively turning the country into something resembling a dystopia. Officials outlawed public gatherings. They also required people to wear gauze masks in public. Even the act of coughing and sneezing alone was terrifying. With so much fear running rampant in the country, this prompted rather questionable local public health responses on the local level. In Chicago, Illinois, for instance, the public health commissioner, Dr. John Dill Robertson, "ordered the police to 'arrest thousands, if necessary, to stop sneezing in public!'"[75] A similar case occurred in New York, New York. The public health council "adopted a rule making it a misdemeanor for any person to sneeze in a public place anywhere in the state without covering the mouth or nose. Violators will be rigidly prosecuted. Punishment will be $500 fine or one year in prison or both."[76] Furthermore, arrests over refusals to comply with mask mandates were not uncommon in the country. Notably, San Francisco, California had a moment when "police arrested 110 people on 27 October alone for failure to either wear or keep their masks properly adjusted."[77] These responses prompted major backlash from residents, the most notable of which was questioning the legality of these measures and arrests. Americans, being the freedom loving people they are, believed these measures were "'absolutely unconstitutional'" and not "legally enacted."[78] Individual people were politicizing the pandemic. To some, local ministries were also guilty of doing the same.

There were particular issues for immigrant communities. In Norwood, Massachusetts, several immigrant communities were targeted on the basis that the public health authorities

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[75] Arnold, Catharine. *Pandemic 1918: Eyewitness Accounts From the Greatest Medical Holocaust in Modern History.* St. Martin's Press. New York. 2018.
[76] Hadfield, Robert John. *Virus 1918: Spanish Influenza, The Words of People Who Lived It.* Thick and Mystic Media. 2020.
[77] Arnold, Catharine. *Pandemic 1918: Eyewitness Accounts From the Greatest Medical Holocaust in Modern History.* St. Martin's Press. New York. 2018.
[78] ibid.

"convinced themselves that unsanitary living conditions alone had caused the severe outbreak of influenza and that those at fault should be held responsible."[79] In the eyes of the town's residents and the governing body, nativism had already run rampant due to anti-German sentiment in the war. Feelings of anti-immigration towards other ethnicities were also fueled by notorious living conditions. The events of "the epidemic had provided confirmation of their beliefs that immigrants, especially those residing in South Norwood, were inferior and even dangerous."[80] The politicization of public health services had resulted in the forceful eviction of immigrant communities in the town. Essentially, Norwood's public health service blamed immigrants for the spread of influenza, justifying the controversial response in its eyes. This was all despite the fact that diseases have no ethnicity. But that still did not deter the town of Norwood from launching its public health campaign under the guise of "health safety."

These separate cases demonstrated something greater in the overall US response in the 1918 pandemic. Despite the attempts to alleviate fears, fear itself inevitably arrived with the mistrust going on. "Fear makes people vigilant. It impels them to notice things they might not otherwise have noticed; to pay attention to certain associations and ignore others; to remember prophecies they might previously have dismissed as absurd."[81] Furthermore, there was an overall sense of politicization in the greater picture prompted by the non-pharmaceutical interventions (NPIs) in place across multiple US cities. While NPIs have good intentions, even if they take an economic toll on the country, politicization spawned out of them. Politicization led to the blaming of people for simply coughing or sneezing, as well

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[79] Fanning, Patricia J. *Influenza and Inequality: One Town's Tragic Response to the Great Epidemic of 1918.* University of Massachusetts Press, 2010. EBSCOhost, search-ebscohost-com.avoserv2.library.fordham.edu/login.aspx?direct=true&db=e000xna&AN=1245288&site=ehost-live&scope=site. Accessed 5 May. 2021.

[80] ibid.

[81] Spinney, Laura. *Pale Rider: The Spanish Flu of 1918 and How It Changed the World.* PublicAffairs, New York, 2017.

as major ethnic groups who had bad circumstances due to systemic barriers in place. Attempts to downplay the pandemic was already a fatal mistake already in of itself, but blaming others for viral spread was just as fatal. Furthermore, even though community leaders eventually told the truth about the pandemic, many of their responses were still large failures. Not telling the truth "can be catastrophic if an influenza or another type of pandemic arises. Under such circumstances, the public's failure to trust the guidance offered by public health officials may well make a bad situation worse."[82] Throughout the events of 1918-1920, that is exactly what happened. When leaders played politics with public health, it was no longer about science. It is pure politics.

To say the US handled the pandemic in 1918 badly would be too kind-so kind in fact, that their responses cannot be called anything other than an outright abysmal disaster. While not every other country handled their own responses perfectly, some managed to do a few things right. Australia, for instance, had a fairly robust quarantine system. "One report stated that, during the period October to December 1918, there were 128 deaths from influenza in Victoria with a population of 1,411,004, and 207 deaths in New South Wales with a population of 1,804,654."[83] This illustrates that their death toll was significantly lower than the US' because Australian leaders told the truth, something American leaders clearly did not. America was so blinded by its own geopolitical conquests in the Great War that it neglected its own citizens when influenza arrived. So much so to the point where it "was almost forgotten in the public sphere. Leaders raised few if any permanent memorials to the dead. They observed few if any ritual anniversaries."[84] Simply put, the Great Influenza was an event

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[82] "The 1918 Influenza Pandemic: Lessons Learned and Not-Introduction to the Special Section," AJPH Editorials. November 1st, 2018.

[83] GEALOGO, FRANCIS A. "The Philippines in the World of the Influenza Pandemic of 1918-1919." *Philippine Studies*, vol. 57, no. 2, Ateneo de Manila University, 2009, pp. 261–92, http://www.jstor.org/stable/42634010. Accessed 24 Jan. 2022.

[84] Barnes, Michael. "Collective Amnesia about Pandemics: Today's COVID-19 Suffering Much Like that of 1918." *Austin American Statesman,* Mar 28 2021, *ProQuest.* Web. 21 Sep. 2021.

where the US "lost its institutional memory" in the aftermath.[85] Since 1918, all future pandemics since have been a case of collective amnesia, one way or another. That is because despite familiarity with pandemics in post-influenza America, the most powerful pandemic fighting tool is often neglected: the truth. If leaders in 1918 simply told the truth and not spent their time playing politics, the 1918 pandemic for the US would have played out completely differently than it did. If America wanted to be patriotic then, it would have told people the truth and not let the glory of war blind its judgement and transform patriotism into nationalism. And if America was really as patriotic as it claimed to be, it would have learned from its history and not try to hide the pandemic. The US government ought to be ashamed of the negligible homicide it committed in 1918. It is truly astounding how the events of 1918-1920 do not carry the same merit of failure in mainstream discourse as the Vietnam War or Watergate do, given the massive loss of life that was avoidable.

Nationalized Media

When a public health crisis breaks out, information is very critical in the response to combat it and protect human lives. The people need to be informed about not only how to protect themselves, but also how to protect others. Information is also bound to change the

[85] Lind, Michael. "The Case for American Nationalism." *The National Intere st*, The Center for the National Interest, 17 May 2015. https://nationalinterest.org/feature/the-case-american-nationalism-10328. Accessed 1 Dec 2021.

more that is learned about a disease. As that happens, regular updates should occur as the situation progresses. In other words, mass information outlets like newspapers are tasked with one of the most important jobs in an entire pandemic response: telling the truth. In the United States during the 1918 influenza pandemic, what happened instead was the opposite. Rather than being transparent with their audiences, many mass communication sectors tried to minimize the fears of the deadly virus by downplaying it. This was because the media landscape had become so nationalistic that it was considered bad publicity if something that was not optimistic was reported in the papers. This chapter will analyze the role of nationalism in the media, and how it contributed to the abysmal American pandemic response from 1918-1920 and loss of thousands if not millions of American lives.

In the time of World War I, there were concerns about disloyalty to the US war machine across the country. Amongst these was anti-German sentiment in places like Pennsylvania. It was so high, in fact, that "US Army officials asked Pennsylvania Gov. Martin Grove Brumbaugh if he needed federal troops to maintain order among the Pennsylvania Germans, not realizing the difference between Pennsylvania Germans (whose ancestors had arrived in the eighteenth century and who had patriotically served in the armed forces during wartime) and German Americans."[86] There was so much anti-German sentiment to the point "pro-German" fears took over much of the American population and government. This was also the case with the labor union Industrial Workers of the World (IWW) in Montana. They were staunchly anti-capitalist and anti-war. They held "widespread strikes in the lumber and mining industries, which threatened to severely curtail the country's war production."[87] In other words, dissent was problematic and it was an issue that needed to

[86] Guenther, Karen. "A Question of Loyalty: German Churches in Reading During the First World War." *Pennsylvania History: A Journal of Mid-Atlantic Studies*, vol. 84, no. 3, Penn State University Press, 2017, pp. 325–53, https://doi.org/10.5325/pennhistory.84.3.0325. Accessed 8 Mar. 2022.
[87] Clemens P. Work. "Good Night with the Stars and Stripes, Army, Navy and Mister Damned Wilson." *Montana: The Magazine of Western History*, vol. 55, no. 4, Montana Historical Society, 2005, pp. 16–35, http://www.jstor.org/stable/4520741. Accessed 9 Mar. 2022.

be dealt with by officials. “Suppression of dissent was couched in patriotic terms, giving citizens permission to engage in extreme behavior that would have repelled them in ordinary times. In this climate of fear and hysteria, most citizens cheered-or at least did not protest-governmental and private actions against dissenters.”[88] To be anti-government meant being unpatriotic in the eyes of the Woodrow Wilson Administration in war time. Something had to be done. If mass communication was a tool used by those to gain support for dissent, then it sure could be used to discourage it. The press would be needed to play a role in fostering nationalism and muting dissent.

President Wilson had a particularly deep fear of dissenters and traitors. “Even before entering the war, Wilson had warned Congress, “There are citizens of the United States, I blush to admit,...who have poured the poison of disloyalty into the very arteries of our national life...Such creatures of passion, disloyalty, and anarchy must be crushed out.”[89] But he also knew that he could not just simply get legislation passed overnight via executive order to get the problem resolved. In order to secure the press and take care of the dissent problem, Wilson needed not only a cooperative Congress, but he needed legislation on the table that could be used against those who passed information that the Wilson administration saw as going against American interests. Besides limiting dissent, the president also desired for the media to spread nationalism and create an information machine of loyalty to bolster the war effort.

The passage of the Espionage Act in 1917 would be how he got his way. “The Espionage Act of 1917 prohibited obtaining information, recording pictures, or copying descriptions of any information relating to the national defense with intent or reason to believe that the information may be used for the injury of the United States or to the

[88] ibid.
[89] Barry, John. *The Great Influenza: The Story of the Deadliest Pandemic in History.* Penguin Books. 2018.

advantage of any foreign nation. The act also created criminal penalties for anyone obstructing enlistment in the armed forces or causing insubordination or disloyalty in military or naval forces."[90] The act did not apply only in regards to matters concerning the military, such as opposition to the draft. The law also affected mass communication broadly. The Act empowered the US Postal Service to help find spies, dissenters and draft dodgers. "The piece of legislation gave postal officials the authority to ban newspapers and magazines from the mails and threatened individuals convicted of obstructing the draft with $10,000 fines and 20 years in jail."[91] The US Postal Service became a key part of implementing the Espionage Act, and its head had great powers to censor. "Postmaster General Albert S. Burleson ordered local postmasters to report any suspicious materials. Along with Attorney General Thomas Watt Gregory, Burleson led the way in aggressively enforcing the Espionage Act of 1917 to limit dissent."[92] It is important to remember how much information was passing through the mails at this time, magnifying the Postmaster General's power to censor. "In an age before radio and television, when most of the information circulating in the country came from magazines or leaflets sent through the mail, this was extraordinary power."[93] The Espionage Act was amended and broadened in the Sedition Act of 1918, which "prohibited certain types of speech as it related to the war or the military. Under the act, it was illegal to incite disloyalty within the military; use in speech or written form any language that was disloyal to the government, the Constitution, the military, or the flag; advocate strikes on labor

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[90] Asp, David. "Espionage Act of 1917." *Espionage Act of 1917*, First Amendment Encyclopedia , https://www.mtsu.edu/first-amendment/article/1045/espionage-act-of-1917. Accessed 8 Mar. 2022.
[91] Digital History, "The Espionage Act of 1917." https://www.digitalhistory.uh.edu/disp_textbook.cfm?smtid=3&psid=3904#:~:text=In%20June%201917%2C%20Congress%20passed,and%2020%20years%20in%20jail. Accessed 26 Mar. 2022.
[92] Asp.
[93] Desjardin, Skip, September 1918: *War, Plague, and the World Series* (New York: SImon & Schuster, 2018) p. 119. https://books.google.com/books?id=WLZTDwAAQBAJ&pg=PT152&lpg=PT152&dq=espionage+act+1917+effect+on+press+spanish+flu+skip&source=bl&ots=1FdJZgQwtR&sig=ACfU3U0iOuJ7AERoOClEa2kXc_vmW_lPpA&hl=en&sa=X&ved=2ahUKEwjZiMbS9-T2AhWKj4kEHXjyCvc4ChDoAXoECBYQAw#v=onepage&q=espionage%20act%201917%20effect%20on%20press%20spanish%20flu%20skip&f=false. Accessed 26 Mar, 2022.

production; promote principles that were in violation of the act; or support countries at war with the United States."[94] The Sedition Act was repealed in 1920, leaving many sections of the Espionage Act in place to this day.[95]

Naturally, the passage of the Espionage Act prompted many criticisms to arise, including allegations that it would violate freedoms guaranteed by the First Amendment. Particularly, freedom of the press and freedom of speech were at stake. The act meticulously targeted news outlets so precisely that "74 newspapers had been denied mailing privileges" in accordance with the law.[96] In addition, many arrests were made during war time. About "2,000 people were charged under the Espionage Act during World War I, and some jailed were members of the press, according to Geoffrey Stone, a professor at the University of Chicago Law School and author of *Perilous Times: Free Speech in Wartime from the Sedition Act of 1798 to the War on Terrorism*."[97] The Espionage Act was challenged in court, but was upheld. "There were almost immediate challenges to the law in the court. In 1919, the Supreme Court eventually ruled in *Schenck v. United States* that the law was constitutional because it dealt with clear and present dangers to the United States. Hence, it was not trying to suppress free speech in broad and general terms as it related to citizens and the press."[98] The Espionage Act ended up quashing dissent, but also suppressed news about the pandemic as its by-product. Newspapers all over the country self-censored their news to avoid prosecution under the new law. "The Wilson administration had taken drastic

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[94] Boyd, Christina L. "The Sedition Act of 1918." *The First Amendment Encyclopedia*. https://www.mtsu.edu/first-amendment/article/1239/sedition-act-of-1918#:~:text=Sedition%20Act%20of%201918%20(1918)&text=1912%2C%20public%20domain)-,The%20Sedition%20Act%20of%201918%20curtailed%20the%20free%20speech%20rights,and%20expanded%20limitations%20on%20speech. Accessed 26 Mar, 2022.

[95] ibid.

[96] Asp.

[97] Gupta, Rani. "Reporters or Spies?" *The Reporters Committee for Freedom of the Press*, 2006, https://www.rcfp.org/journals/the-news-media-and-the-law-fall-2006/reporters-or-spies/. Accessed 14 Mar. 2022.

[98] Totally History. "The Espionage Act of 1917." Totally HIstory. https://totallyhistory.com/espionage-act-of-1917/. Accessed 26 Mar. 2022.

measures–likely the most extreme in American history–to control what was written about the government, the war and the war effort, both by the press and by individual citizens."[99] This would inadvertently lessen coverage of the pandemic and keep useful information from spreading, lest people and press be prosecuted for violating the Espionage Act.

In fact, one reason the pandemic became known by the moniker "Spanish Flu," even though it originated in the United States, was that it was initially underreported by an American press that had already started widespread self-censorship due to the Espionage Act. By the time "Spanish Flu" was detected, many believed it had emerged in Spain. Spain had adopted a position of neutrality during the war, leaving its press as one of the only ones unaffected by government pressure to provide only good news during wartime. "News of the sickness first made headlines in Madrid in late-May 1918, and coverage only increased after the Spanish King Alfonso XIII came down with a nasty case a week later. Since nations undergoing a media blackout could only read in depth accounts from Spanish news sources, they naturally assumed that the country was the pandemic's ground zero."[100] Spain's case also shows the fatal mistake of tying a virus to a country. In reality, viruses know no national boundaries because they do not write policy for who they infect and do not. The Spanish knew this. "Although King Alfonso of Spain was one of the victims of the influenza epidemic in 1893 and again this summer, Spanish authorities repudiate any claim to influenza as a 'Spanish' disease."[101] They understood not to associate viruses with countries as a step crucial to combatting the influenza strain. Furthermore, perhaps Spanish authorities also took this stand as to not try to look bad to the global community. An inference can be made that

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[99] Desjardin, p. 119.
[100] Andrews, Evan. "Why Was It Called the 'Spanish Flu?'." *History.com*, A&E Television Networks, 12 Jan. 2016, https://www.history.com/news/why-was-it-called-the-spanish-flu. Accessed 16 Mar. 2022.
[101] *The Bamberg herald. [volume]* (Bamberg, S.C.), 17 Oct. 1918. *Chronicling America: Historic American Newspapers*. Lib. of Congress. <https://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn86063790/1918-10-17/ed-1/seq-7/>Accessed 17 Mar. 2022.

the dubbing of the flu as a Spanish one also led to resentment of Spain similarly to how there was anti-German sentiment in the US.

The US, being concerned with morale, attempted to downplay the impending arrival of the deadly disease. "The same need for governmental control of the press in America worked against the urgent need to inform the population about the burgeoning epidemic and the possible means of prevention," explains Dejardin. "The earliest outbreaks were being spun in newspapers as 'reassuring' and reports insinuated, with no foundation whatsoever, that the worst had already past."[102] In July of 1918, for instance, the *Alexandria (VA) Gazette* stated that, "New York is in little danger of an epidemic of the influenza, which started in Spain and spread to the German armies."[103] Additionally, the newspaper article proceeded to make a rather bold assumption about Spain in this entry. "'I think the epidemic in Spain, [Health Commissioner Copeland] said, 'is a mild duplicate of the one we had in this country in 1889 and 1890, when everyone was ill from grip, then a new disease."[104] Although this is one of many articles about the pandemic, it is representative of how other American news outlets viewed it. The act of referring to it as simply a common flu was unfortunately rather typical for the time period, so as to not upset morale during the war. Downplaying the deadly disease like this was an everyday occurance for months, even though it would ultimately become the undoing of the press machine Wilson created.

Officials were limiting information of the disease so much to the point where even they were not sure if the influenza pandemic had actually hit the US or not. In September of 1918, one New York paper wrote that influenza "has been brought to some of the American Atlantic coast cities, officials here fear, but they are awaiting further investigation and

[102] Desjardin, p. 120.
[103] Alexandria Gazette. "No Influenza in U.S." July 16, 1918.
[104] ibid.

developments before forming definite opinions."[105] Further on, the article mentioned that measures would be needed, but officials appeared hesitant to implement them. "There is little means of combating the disease at this time except by absolute quarantine, and that obviously is impossible at this time, because it would require interruption of intercourse between communities as drastic as was resorted to in the dread days of yellow fever in the South."[106] Officials knew how terrible disruptions in everyday life would be if the influenza strain were to ravage America. That is why the press used careful language to try not to alarm the public about what was to come.

However, by the time influenza clearly did make it to the United States and could no longer be denied, the language in the press started to change. Perhaps this was done out of fear rather than genuine public health concern. "If the people of this country do not take care the epidemic will become so widespread that soon we shall hear the disease called 'American' influenza.'"[107] An inference can be made that there was a fear about Americans being stigmatized over the disease that they did not control. That is ironic, considering there was a hint of blaming Spain behind the name "Spanish Flu." Nevertheless, something had to be done. In the minds of Americans, there was nothing more American than patriotism. The messaging had to be changed to incorporate patriotic elements in the influenza response. After all, this was the era of the masses in America during the pandemic. "It was the first global pandemic to occur in the era of 'mass society,' as the early 20th- century intellectuals were just beginning to term it. As such, the Spanish influenza offered an object lesson in how quickly a disease that was both deadly and easily communicable could cut through 'the

[105] New York Tribute. "Spanish Influenza Here, Officials Fear." September 12, 1918.
[106] ibid.
[107] *The Bamberg herald. [volume]* (Bamberg, S.C.), 17 Oct. 1918. *Chronicling America: Historic American Newspapers*. Lib. of Congress. <https://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn86063790/1918-10-17/ed-1/seq-7/>Accessed 17 Mar. 2022.

masses' in spite of public health efforts to prevent its spread."[108] This was also in the age in which mass communication would be incorporated into the health response.

One of the most powerful tools in spreading information about the pandemic was not just newspapers and other news sources, but the silver screen of the cinema. Films and newsreels shown in movie theaters were the only way other than news photography in which visual images were shown to the masses to inform them about events, including the pandemic. One example of this occurred in Detroit, Michigan. What made Detroit an outlier was its approach to movie theaters during the pandemic. The movie industry was hit hard during the pandemic, with many theaters shutting down under public health orders to mitigate the spread of the virus. Yet, despite this, Detroit did something rather unconventional. Rather than close, the city "utilized movie theaters as educational spaces rather than close them down."[109] Those who ran the theaters recognized the potential of education as a mass communication means. Combined with the motion picture as a mass medium, the idea of educating the masses had the potential to be effective. The motion picture *Spreading Spanish Influenza* was a test run of such a case. "The film's use of a narrative structure is an indicator of the way that it aimed to combine education and entertainment, providing audiences with important health information while still engaging them with a story."[110] Utilizing a popular entertainment medium as an educational tool was powerful in the age of when mass communication was becoming more and more common.

However, in the age of mass communication, there was also another issue that arose with new mediums. That was misinformation, and the early information age fell prone to it. It

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[108] Tomes, Nancy. "'Destroyer and Teacher': Managing the Masses During the 1918—1919 Influenza Pandemic. Public Health Reports (1974-) , APRIL 2010, Vol. 125, Supplement 3: The 1918- 1919 Influenza Pandemic in the United States (APRIL 2010), pp. 48-62. Sage Publications, Inc.

[109] Strassfield, Ben. "INFECTIOUS MEDIA: DEBATING THE ROLE OF MOVIE THEATERS IN DETROIT DURING THE SPANISH INFLUENZA OF 1918." Historical Journal of Film, Radio & Television. Jun2018, Vol. 38 Issue 2, p227-245.

[110] ibid.

was easy for disinformation to pass off as educational advice in news materials–particularly in the print press. In one case, an Iowa newspaper, the *Decorah Public Opinion,* reported that the flu was not a disease driven by the spread of germs. In fact, a supposed doctor, C.B. Spates, made the claim in the paper. "'I can produce all the symptoms of Spanish 'Flu' in a perfectly healthy individual at any time,' declared the doctor, 'and I will not use germ cultures for the purpose either. I would only need to direct him to perform some arduous form of labor which would profuse perspiration."[111] To Spates, the flu was caused by "atmospheric conditions."[112] That was deadly misinformation, as germ theory had already been established at the point of when the article was written, which was during the pandemic. An inference can be made that Doctor Spates wanted to ease the panic of Decorah citizens, but he did so without presenting hard scientific evidence behind the disease.

Spates was not the only health figure to have downplayed the severity of the disease. The Exira, Iowa newspaper, the *Audubon County Journal*, also recorded misinformation. A "flu committee" was formed in Des Moines. The entry mentioned that soldiers who gained immunity to the virus were recognized by the committee. When asked about how they retained immunity, the following was written: "'These people are keeping themselves in good health by right attitude of mind,' said Dr. W.C. Witte, chairman of the committee. "Many people contract diseases mainly through fear of them, and this fear is the first thing we have to overcome in conquering the epidemic."[113] In other words, the solution was literally spelled out in the title of that article: "Quit Thinking About Influenza."[114] The article was essentially telling its readers to not live in fear, to just go on with life and not think about the danger of influenza. But simply not thinking about the disease does not stop it. Influenza did not care

[111] Decorah Public Opinion. "Says 'Flu' Not Germ Disease." Decorah, Iowa. October 16, 1918.
[112] ibid.
[113] Audubon County Journal. "Quit Thinking About Influenza." Exira, Iowa. October 24, 1918.
[114] ibid.

what somebody thought of it as long as it could infect, and potentially, kill them. This article is a textbook example of misinformation killing, as an inference could be made that some of those who died most likely argued they were not going to live their life in fear before death took them.

The media aspect of the 1918 pandemic had a lot of complexity to it. On the one hand, there were legitimate concerns and efforts to educate the public about the disease. But there was still a sense of nationalism intertwined with it. Perhaps it was out of fear of the US eventually being blamed for circulating influenza if something was not done. "If the people of this country do not take care the epidemic will become so widespread that soon we shall hear the disease called 'American' influenza," reported *The Bamberg (SC) Herald*.[115] It was also a time period that also saw the rise of disinformation on a mass communication scale, including the embracing of conspiracy theories in the name of easing fears. There are three large motives why many fell back on these theories: "epistemic motives — the need for ready-made causal explanations of certain problems or phenomena in order to regain a sense of certainty. Existential motives — the need to regain control over one's situation or environment. Social motives — 'the desire to belong and to maintain a positive image' of oneself and the society that one inhabits or wishes to inhabit."[116] Perhaps it was no coincidence that the reporting of the pandemic played out this way. Due to laws being passed like the Sedition and Espionage Acts, the spreading of information would have been initially limited to a degree due to the mission to protect morale by President Wilson. But eventually, the truth was bound to come out. The problem was that because the influenza strain was not reported earlier, many more lives were lost. It also did not help that the preservation of

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[115] *The Bamberg Herald. [volume]* (Bamberg, S.C.), 17 Oct. 1918. *Chronicling America: Historic American Newspapers*. Lib. of Congress. <https://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn86063790/1918-10-17/ed-1/seq-7/>Accessed 17 Mar. 2022.

[116] Cohut, Maria. "What the COVID-19 Pandemic and the 1918 Flu Pandemic Have in Common." *Medical News Today*, MediLexicon International, 29 Sept. 2020, https://www.medicalnewstoday.com/articles/the-flu-pandemic-of-1918-and-early-conspiracy-theories#The-controversy-around-aspirin. Accessed 31 Mar. 2022.

morale in wartime took up much of what could have been part of an informed, science-based response. One would think that in the age of early information sharing that it would be used for the greater interest of public health. And even though it was to a degree, the limiting and altering of information was also something very hard to combat during the time. Many died from the flu in part because of the US government limiting information, despite the presence of the First Amendment. Information is a powerful tool that eventually finds its way to the masses, but it is very easy for the masses to interpret said info differently due to what those in power want them to believe. Sadly, that statement held true during the pandemic of 2020 in an age where information was in many more places than in 1918.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the pandemic of 1918 was one where nationalism defined the American response. World War I was burned into most aspects of daily life, to the point where the US government was blinded by its desire to have upbeat morale in the time of conflict. What resulted was an event that was very tragic because the US government did not tell its citizens the truth from the get go. Instead, nationalism was prominent to the point where it got in the way of an effective response to the crisis. What resulted in the end was an act of negligible homicide committed by the Woodrow Wilson administration. To say that the United States was woefully unprepared would be a massive understatement. The failure to contain the virus from 1918-1920 was so abysmal that it should be considered as one of the greatest failures of the US government of all time. This disaster should be up there with the likes of Watergate in terms of presidential failure and the Vietnam War in terms of numbers of casualties. It is truly astonishing how the events of 1918-20 are important in US history, but the failure of the Wilson administration is rarely mentioned in mainstream historical discourse. There is no question that President Wilson failed the American people during the 1918-20 pandemic, although countless national, state and local government officials tried to step up and do the right thing by bringing public health concerns to the forefront.

The pandemic of 1918 had many lessons for the pandemic of 2020. Telling the truth was a critical one, because not doing so ended up elevating the fears of those who had to live through both pandemics. Time and time again, the US saw President Trump spread misinformation during the early months of COVID-19. Although much of the US press

pushed back on President Trump's more ridiculous assertions, like that the virus would just disappear on its own, Trump often used the presidential megaphone very effectively to spread his nationalistic message. Additionally, it is wrong to assign blame to a specific party for a natural disease. Pandemics are not without "the fear of infection, involuntary quarantine, travel restrictions and subsequent political antagonisms…"[117] During influenza and Covid-19, we saw such antagonisms as people tried to assign blame to multiple parties. In 1918, it was immigrants living in poor living conditions and those with German ancestry blamed by US officials for spreading the virus. A similar thing happened in 2020, when officials blamed people of Asian descent, particularly of Chinese background, for spreading COVID-19. But it is not ethical to assign blame to anyone for viral spread. The respective viruses were the real enemies at the times of the pandemics. If President Woodrow Wilson had said something about the virus and been more open to an honest US response, without blaming, the pandemic response would have likely been completely different in 1918. The same goes for President Donald J. Trump in 2020, who dragged his feet on government efforts like instituting masking until he left office in January 2021.

Perhaps the biggest lesson to be gleaned from this thesis is the difference between nationalism and patriotism. They do share the similarity of love for one's country, at least on paper. But where they differ is how love for one's country is expressed. George Orwell, author of *1984,* had a take on the two. "According to him, nationalism is a feeling that one's country is superior to another in all respects, while patriotism is merely a feeling of admiration for a way of life. These concepts show that patriotism is passive by nature and nationalism can be a little aggressive."[118] In the United States, nationalism is presented to us

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[117] Doshi, Peter. "How Should We Plan for Pandemics?" *BMJ: British Medical Journal*, vol. 339, no. 7721, 2009, pp. 603–605. *JSTOR*, www.jstor.org/stable/25672625. Accessed 18 Apr. 2021.

[118] S, Prabhat. "Difference between Nationalism and Patriotism." *Difference Between Similar Terms and Objects*, 26 Feb. 2018. http://www.differencebetween.net/language/difference-between-nationalism-and-patriotism/. Accessed 26 Apr. 2022.

in the form of American exceptionalism. The idea that America was an exceptional nation on the basis it was fighting for freedom from the Germans in World War I while taking away citizen's freedoms was hypocritical in of itself. It resulted in a bad pandemic response, a truly exceptionally bad one. Over one hundred years later, American exceptionalism was put on full display across the globe, with the nation long having the worst death toll from COVID of any country on earth.

Where nationalism and patriotism also differ is in terms of the history of the country. If a person truly loves their country, not only would they want the best for it, but they would also want to learn from the worst parts of its history for a better tomorrow. Those who learn from history and strive to apply its lessons to the homeland are patriotic. Nationalism involves rewriting history or simply not acknowledging it to better suit a particular vision. The US was definitely nationalistic during the events of 1918 because it made no effort to remember the victims of the influenza pandemic. There were no memorials, no lessons in schools, and no acknowledgement by the president of the heavy cost of the Spanish Flu. The US just threw away the memories of 1918-1920 into the dustbin of history. Maybe that pandemic was too traumatizing to be treated in any other way. Or maybe there was an idea that by simply pretending that these events did not occur, everything would be fine. Except it was not, as not learning from the past left us susceptible to repeating those mistakes a century later.

Part of the reason why the COVID-19 response failed was because we did not learn from the Spanish influenza pandemic. In 2020, the US failed to convince many Americans to change their behaviors to minimize the chance of virus spread. The government failed to institute nationwide masking orders that could have saved lives. It failed to inform Americans honestly about what was known about COVID-19. What would be scary is if we forget about COVID and do not learn from it. This is especially important not only because COVID is still

going on, but because another pandemic on a global scale–one potentially far more lethal–could happen when we least expect it. American leaders need to acknowledge the lessons of COVID and influenza if it wants to be a patriotic nation. This is exactly why the study of history is so important. A better tomorrow is only possible if we acknowledge the past in the present. The key to preventing the next pandemic requires us to learn lessons from influenza and COVID if we are to conquer another one.

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