Pandemic Photographic Essay: 1918 Spanish Flu and 2020 COVID-19

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This year, the world was faced with an unexpected and unprecedented difficulty—managing a new global health crisis and pandemic. In early March, the United States began closing schools, universities, and “non-essential” businesses. Individual counties implemented “Stay-at-Home” orders, while instituting “social distancing” and encouraging the wearing of face masks to prevent a large outbreak. Novel Coronavirus, or COVID-19, has changed the way we live, work, and socialize. As students of history, we look back to similar instances of public crisis, specifically the 1918 Spanish flu, which occurred at the same time as the Women’s suffrage movement was gaining momentum, to learn, grow, and prepare. This photographic essay will chronicle both pandemics and take a different twist on current events in the United States. On May 25, 2020, George Floyd, an African American man, was killed by police in Minneapolis, Minnesota. Currently, the world is experiencing a grave pandemic and national protests for George Floyd and Black Lives Matter. Both events are shaping our lives and are slated to leave their respective marks on history.

Stay-at-Home orders have encouraged citizens across the country to do their part to stop the spread of COVID-19, but protesters in major cities like Los Angeles, Minneapolis, and Washington, D.C., have gathered by the hundreds to protest police brutality and racial violence. As the United States pushes its people to wear masks and stay six feet apart, its people of color “can’t breathe” and are looking for answers. We are living through history and we hope this photographic essay will be timely and informative.
U.S. Naval Hospital. Corpsmen in cap and gown ready to attend patients in influenza ward. Mare Island, California. December 10, 1918.  

Medical Department-Influenza Epidemic 1918. Masks for protection against influenza. New York City, conductors wearing masks.  

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48 War Department. 1789-9/18/1947, National Archives, 45499323.
A group of people standing outdoors wearing masks over their mouths. This was probably during the Spanish flu epidemic of 1918. One of the women has a sign reading “Wear a mask or go to jail.”

50 Raymond Coyne, “Locust Avenue, masks on” California Revealed. Mill Valley Public Library, November 3, 1918.
https://californiarevealed.org/islandora/object/cavpp%3A70110
Precautions taken in Seattle, Wash., during the Spanish Influenza Epidemic would not permit anyone to ride on the street cars without wearing a mask. 260,000 of these were made by the Seattle Chapter of the Red Cross which consisted of 120 workers, in three days.\footnote{American National Red Cross Collection. [Ca 1918 or 1919]. Library of Congress Prints and Photographs Division Washington, D.C. 20540 USA http://hdl.loc.gov/loc.pnp/pp.anrc}

“Allons tous à la consultation. Il est plus facile et moins coûteux de prévenir la maladie que de la soigner. [Let’s all go to the consultation. It is easier and cheaper to prevent the disease than to treat it.]”\footnote{Alice Dumas, American Red Cross in France, Wellcome Library, http://catalogue.wellcomelibrary.org/record=b1465366}
Line of people waiting for flu masks. The man in uniform and the nurse in the doorway are wearing masks, as are a few of those in line. A sign on the window bearing the Red Cross logo reads: “Influenza. Wear Your Mask.” A sign underneath reads: “Enlist in the Army. We Must Win.” Text written under photo: “At 30 Montgomery St Waiting in line for Masks.” San Francisco, 1918.53

“Physicians vaccinating each other at C.E. [Central Emergency] Hospital” San Francisco, 1918.54

Street scene showing police officer wearing flu mask and pointing to well-dressed man who is maskless. Signs in the windows advertise the flu masks and various war bonds. Text written under photo: “Say! Young Fellow Get a mask or go to jail.” Written beneath that is “Flue [sic] Epedemic [sic] 1918 A few scenes about town.”

Protestors at 38th Street and S. Chicago Avenue in Minneapolis on May 26th, the day after the death of George Floyd in Minneapolis, Minnesota.

A man stands on a burned-out car on Thursday morning as fires burn behind him in the Lake St area of Minneapolis, Minnesota.  

Protestors in Chicago on May 30, 2020, Nam Y. Huh / Associated Press.

https://www.flickr.com/photos/number7cloud/49945886467/  
58 Kareem Abdul-Jabbar, “Don’t Understand the Protests? What You are Seeing is People Being Pushed to the Edge” LA Times (May 30, 2020),  


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59 A. Daniele Iannotti, https://commons.m.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Ian_Art_Photography_-_Italy_100_people_queuing_at_a_supermarket_during_coronavirus_outbreak_mar-2020.jpg  
60 Mina Noei, https://www.mehrnews.com/photo/4861758/
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Black Lives Matter protestors in Coachella Valley, CA, demonstrating and adhering to COVID-19 face covering regulations. Photo by Amelia Lindell.

61 Nessma Elaassar, https://commons.m.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Egypt_covid19.jpg
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Black Lives Matter march through a Coachella Valley, CA street. Another visual of protestors adhering to county health guidelines pertinent to COVID-19. Photo by Amelia Lindell.


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