Pandemics in Comparison

A comparative analysis of Durham’s response to pandemics in 1918 and 2020
How did Durham respond to the second wave of the influenza pandemic in 1918, and how is Durham responding to the COVID-19 pandemic today?

What difference does a century make?
Utilizing various qualitative research methods, we analyzed newspaper articles from 1918, along with articles, tweets, and emails from 2020.

Analysis tools included NVivo software and Matrix Coding.
Primary Sources
Matrix coding & NVivo

Disease Trajectory
Health Systems Response
Government Response
Public Response
Unintended Consequences
Findings

Comparative Analysis

A Comparison Through Different Lens:

★ Disease Trajectory
★ Health Systems Response
★ Government Response
★ Community Outreach
★ Impact of World War I
★ Politics
★ Churches
★ Marginalized Communities
Disease Trajectory

1918
- 5,000 cases, 96 deaths
- Population of ~30,000

2020
- 3,340 cases and 62 deaths as of 6/25/2020
- Total population of more than 300,000

Durham Morning Herald, October 2, 1918

16 Deaths in Local Report
Records Published From Sunday Night to Last Night
SITUATION IS SERIOUS

Durham Morning Herald, October 15, 1918

First Victim of Influenza
Mr. C. H. Kid, of West Durham, Died Yesterday Afternoon

Durham Morning Herald, October 9, 1918

County Epidemic Nears Its Close
Conference of Leaders Will Be Held at the End of the Week

Durham Morning Herald, November 5, 1918

Epidemic Shows More Decrease
Only 24 New Cases Were Reported by the Board Yesterday

Durham Morning Herald, November 6, 1918
Health Systems Response

- Shaped by Govt. officials AND healthcare administrators.
- Temporary structures built outside of hospitals to treat an overflow of patients.
- Primary response is preventative measures - hospital treatment is the last resort.

**Similarities**

**Differences**

- Technology. In 2020, hospitals have far more powerful technology (ventilators, oxygen masks, testing kits).
- Staff shortages. Dominated the published health systems response in 1918.
1918
Response coordinated and executed by Durham County and City of Durham. Recommendations given by state and national health departments

2020
Local government plays an important role but many aspects of response are controlled by state and federal governments

During both epidemics, the government took actions to limit large gatherings by closing schools and churches, and limiting business operations
Impact of World War I

- Durham lacked medical staff in 1918 → women called on to serve community
- Volunteering & following health regulations = “patriotic”
  - Otherwise, a “slacker”
- Influenza pandemic and relief efforts treated as a war front
- Flu deadlier than military combat

2020 & Patriotism

- Some consider regulations as a violation of constitutional rights
In 1918, illness was not a sufficient excuse to submit a mail-in ballot.

Today, the CDC recommends flexible voting options to reduce infection, not all politicians support the idea.
During both epidemics, most churches expressed support for the restrictions, though backlash existed.

In 2020, churches were central to protests against lockdown, with the ban eventually being struck down by the state supreme court.
Marginalized Communities

1918 & Influenza

- Racial disparities
- Targeting of Hayti community
- Death rates higher for white citizens in second wave
  - Potentially due to herd immunity developed by previous wave of flu that disproportionately impacted Black communities
Marginalized Communities

2020 & COVID-19

❖ **Structural racism** has caused Black people to be disproportionately impacted by COVID-19 in health-related and financial circumstances.

❖ Immigrant families who are undocumented are **blocked from federal aid** and necessary healthcare access.

Takeaways

The **accumulation** of inequalities and denials to basic needs and livelihood has exacerbated the devastating impact of the pandemic on marginalized communities of color.

*A century later, and our systems continue to fail minority groups in times of crisis.*
Conclusion

Lingering Questions and Future Implications

Understanding the lasting impact of the influenza in Durham and contemplating lingering questions for our near future.
Future Implications

1918

- Influenza → Durham increased sanitary precautions and health guidelines

2020

- COVID-19 → ?

We are living through a pandemic that is revealing the racial disparities in many aspects of life (healthcare, police brutality, etc.)

- Will we see systemic changes?
- How are the Memorial Day celebrations and the early reopening of states impacting the pandemic? How might protests for racial justice impact (or not impact) COVID-19 cases?

Will any preventative measures, such as wearing masks, be normalized as a result of COVID-19?
Our sources

- *Durham Morning Herald* newspaper articles from September 26 to November 28, 1918
- A selection of *Durham Herald-Sun* articles from March to May of 2020
- Duke University emails
- A selection of Tweets collected through Ncapture
- Music: "Royalty Free Music from Bensound":

*not all sources listed above have been addressed in this presentation, as this presentation captures only a portion of our total research.*
Thank you.

Do you have any questions?

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