

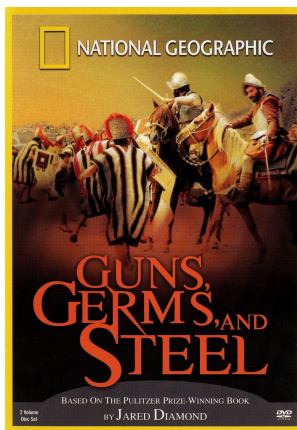
Case Studies & Resources:

Putting the Coronavirus into a Humanities Perspective

The coronavirus pandemic will have a lasting impact on millions of people worldwide. It will be on par with other major pandemics, including The Black Death and Spanish Flu. While this virus may be new and more deadly than others, there are plenty of examples from history of impactful and similar pandemics.

For those interested in the historical perspective, here are some case studies and resources, including fiction and non-fiction books, articles, documentaries, films, museums and websites.

Guns, Germs & Steel: The Fates of Human Societies



The Pulitzer-Prize winning book by Jared Diamond was published in 1997 and was later turned into a National Geographic/PBS documentary. Diamond, a professor of geography and physiology, spent years researching, traveling and seeking to explain why Eurasian and North African civilizations have survived and conquered others throughout human history. The influence of geography on societies and cultures is one factor, along with technological and immunological advantages. Eurasian diseases weakened and reduced populations that had no immunity, especially in the Americas when the conquistadors came in the 15th and 16th centuries.

The Black Death



The Black Death is something we all learned about in world history or Western civilization. It was the most devastating pandemic recorded in human history, originating in China, wiping out $\frac{1}{3}$ of Europe's population and is considered by many historians to be the end of the Middle Ages. There have been many books, articles, documentaries and museum exhibits about it.



Case Study: The Black Death in Siena, Tuscany, Italy

Siena was one of the hardest hit cities during The Black Death. Arriving in May 1348, it would wipe out half the population. Siena experienced a “golden age” before The Black Death and had a population of 50,000 before 1348. The plague's impact devastated the arts and city projects were abandoned or scaled back. The city was surpassed by Florence, which would become the center of The Renaissance after The Black Death ended in 1350.

Resources:

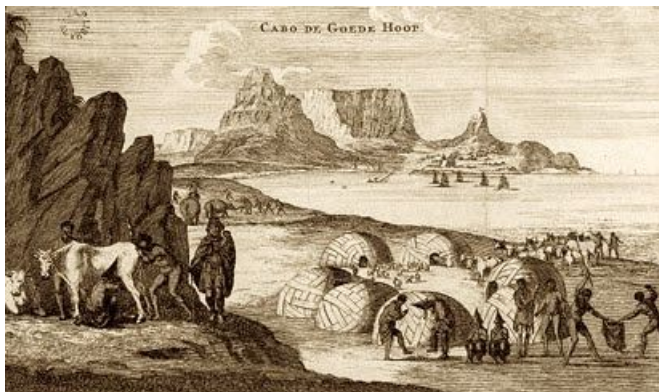
- [*Siena in The Middle Ages*](#)
- [*Siena: Italy's Medieval Heart & Soul*](#) (by Rick Steves, travel writer)
- [*Sculpture in Siena before the Plague*](#) (by Stephen N. Fliegel, La Gazzetta Italiana)
- [*La Pestilenza: The Black Death in Italy*](#) (by Pauline Montagna, The History Buff)
- Agnolo di Tura, [*Life in Siena during The Plague*](#) (primary source, 1348)

Selected Books on The Black Death:

- *The Black Death* by Philip Ziegler
- *In the Wake of The Plague: The Black Death and The World it Made* by Norman F. Cantor
- *The Black Death and The Transformation of The West* by David Herlihy
- *Year of Wonders: A Novel of The Plague* by Geraldine Brooks
- *The Decameron* by Giovanni Boccaccio (1353)
- *The Black Death: The Great Mortality of 1348-1350 - A Brief History with Documents*, translated & edited by John Aberth

Videos, Websites & Other Resources on The Black Death:

- [*What was the Black Death?*](#) - This website by Medievalists.net includes news, videos, podcasts and articles all related to The Black Death.
- [*Plague Fiction: Why authors love to write about pandemics*](#) (The Guardian)
- [*The Black Death's aftermath isn't cause for optimism about covid-19*](#) (by Eleanor Junega, The Washington Post)
- [*From The Black Death to coronavirus: What we haven't learned from history*](#) (World Economic Forum)
- [*The Coronavirus is not The Black Death*](#) (by Ken Mondschein, Medievalists.net)
- [*I'm a historian who has studied the Black Death. During my coronavirus quarantine, I thought, 'Will people fear us?'*](#) (by Alizha Holstein, MarketWatch)
- [*London's newest museum remembers plague, persecution and philanthropy*](#) (ianVisits)
- [*The Black Death: The Greatest Catastrophe Ever*](#) (by Ole Benedictow, History Today)
- The Plague (The History Channel)
- Return of The Black Death (BBC)
- In Search of History: Scourge of The Black Death (The History Channel)



Case Study: Cape Peninsula, South Africa Smallpox Epidemic

In February 1713, smallpox epidemic came to The Cape of Good Hope in South Africa when a Dutch ship came to port. The disease impacted the indigenous and colonial population of the Cape Peninsula. By May 1713, smallpox reached pandemic proportions in South Africa, wiping out many tribes.

Resources:

[Smallpox Epidemic Strikes at The Cape](#) (South African History Online)

[Smallpox at The Cape](#) (Ancestors South Africa)

[The Khoikhoi Population, 1652-1780: A Review of the Evidence and Two New Estimates](#) (by Sumner La Croix, African Economic History Network)

[The Story of Smallpox](#) (from *Guns, Germs & Steel* by Jared Diamond)

Case Study: The Great Famine in Ireland



So many Americans of Irish descent can trace their family origins back to The Great Famine that struck Ireland multiple times from 1845 to 1849. Ireland relied primarily on the potato for sustenance and when a blight struck the crop, people began to starve. One million Irish would die and at least one million would emigrate to North America and other parts of Europe. It was the worst natural disaster in nineteenth century Europe.

Resources:



- [Portumna Workhouse](#) (opened in 1852 in County Galway as a place for poor relief for those impacted by The Great Famine). Today it is a museum and historic site, and one of the only preserved Irish workhouses open to the public. The website includes visitor and historical information, videos and other resources. Photo taken by Tom Marabello when he visited there in 2016.

- [Ireland's Great Hunger Museum](#) at Quinnipiac University in Hamden, Connecticut. The museum opened in 2012 and includes artifacts, works of art and literature, all related to The Great Famine.

- [BBC History - The Irish Famine](#) (by Jim Donnelly, BBC History)
- [Irish Potato Famine](#) (history.com website)
- [James Mahoney](#), Cork artist and eyewitness to The Great Famine (primary source, 1847)
- [How infection shaped history: Lessons from The Irish Famine](#) (by Dr. William G. Powderly)
- *The Great Hunger: Ireland, 1845-1849* by Cecil Woodham-Smith
- *Famine Echoes: Folk Memories of The Great Irish Famine: An Oral History of Ireland's Greatest Tragedy* by Cathal Poirteir
- *The Great Irish Potato Famine* by James S. Donnelly, Jr.
- *The Killing Snows: The Defining Novel of The Great Irish Famine* by Charles Egan
- [Ireland's Great Hunger and The Irish Diaspora](#) (documentary)
- [Black '47](#) (movie)

Case Study: The Spanish Flu



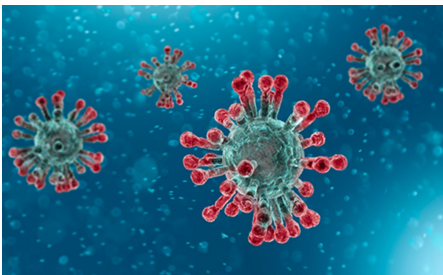
The Spanish Flu or 1918 pandemic has come up a lot during the coronavirus. This influenza pandemic lasted from January 1918 to December 1920, infecting 500 million people worldwide and killing between 17 and 50 million people. One of human history's deadliest pandemics, it was first observed in the United States in Haskell County, Kansas in January 1918. 675,000 Americans died from the Spanish flu.

Photo: Seattle police officers wearing face masks, 1918.

Resources:

- [*What the 1918 flu pandemic can teach us about COVID-19, in four charts*](#) (by Sara Chodosh)
- [*The site of origin of the 1918 influenza pandemic and its public health implications*](#) (by John M. Barry, Journal of Translational Medicine)
- [*Exhuming the Flu: Remembering the Spanish flu 100 years later*](#) (by Rebecca Rego Barry, Science History Institute)
- *Pale Rider: The Spanish Flu and How it Changed the World* by Laura Spinney
- *The Great Influenza: The Epic Story of the Deadliest Plague in History* by John M. Barry
- *As Bright As Heaven* by Susan Meissner (novel)
- [*Spanish Flu: The Forgotten Fallen*](#) (film)
- [*Primary Sources: Influenza of 1918*](#) (online primary sources and articles)
- [*Influenza Pandemic & World War I*](#) (video lecture by Historian Nancy Bristow)
- [*Comparing the Influenza Epidemic of 1918 to the Coronavirus*](#) (by John Barry)
- [*Pandemic: The Story of the 1918 Flu*](#) (BBC documentary)
- [*Influenza 1918 The American Experience*](#) (PBS documentary)

Coronavirus Today & In History



With coronavirus still spreading and impacting millions of people worldwide, there remains a lot of uncertainty. The projections are hundreds of thousands could die from it just in The United States. Millions of people have lost their jobs, schools and offices are closed, and many of us have been ordered to stay at home. Coronavirus will certainly end up in history textbooks, films, literature, the arts and museums. Like

The Black Death and Spanish Flu, it will have a devastating impact that could transform lives, countries, economies and work forces. The human impact is unknown and its history is yet to be

written. We can hope for the best, follow guidelines and help our fellow citizens by keeping physical distance. We can also learn from history by studying past epidemics and natural disasters, reading books and articles, watching films, interviews and podcasts.

General Coronavirus Resources:

- [*History's deadliest pandemics, from ancient Rome to modern America*](#) (timeline/resource)
- [*From The Black Death to coronavirus: What we haven't learned from history*](#) (World Economic Forum)
- [*The Coronavirus is not The Black Death*](#) (by Ken Mondschein, Medievalist.net)
- [*I'm a historian who has studied the Black Death. During my coronavirus quarantine, I thought, 'Will people fear us?'*](#) (by Alizha Holstein, MarketWatch)
- [*What the 1918 flu pandemic can teach us about COVID-19, in four charts*](#) (by Sara Chodosh)
- [*Comparing the Influenza Epidemic of 1918 to the Coronavirus*](#) (video interview by John Barry)
- [*Coronavirus lockdowns have changed the way Earth moves*](#) (by Elizabeth Gibney)
- [*The human impact of COVID-19 and how business can help*](#) (by John Scott)
- [*What the coronavirus means for climate change*](#) (by Meehan Crist, The New York Times)
- [*Coronavirus will change the world permanently. Here's how*](#) (by Politico Magazine)
- [*11 ways pandemics have changed the course of human history*](#) (by Debanjali Bose, Business Insider)
- [*America has suffered great loss before. Here's how we may learn to cope with coronavirus death toll*](#) (by Marco della Cava, USA Today)
- [*An oral history of the coronavirus pandemic*](#) (by The Washington Post)
- [*Covid-19 learning module for social studies by NCSS & World History Digital Education*](#) (lesson plans/curriculum project - history, geography, economics, government, current events)

Coronavirus and Other Virtual Resources from State Humanities Councils:

- [*How do we stay connected during coronavirus?*](#) (by Moira K. Smith, Alaska Humanities Forum)
- [*Digital Resources for Distance Learning*](#) (by Connecticut Humanities)
- [*Video Explorations of Florida's history and culture*](#) (by Florida Humanities Council)
- [*State of Aloha*](#) (documentary and resources for Hawai'i Statehood 50th Anniversary, Hawai'i Council for the Humanities)
- [*Eve Ewing reflects on 1919 Chicago race riot through poetry*](#) (link from Illinois Humanities Council)
- [*Kansas Stories*](#) (by Humanities Kansas)
- [*Imagine Maine's Story: A Bicentennial Library Toolkit*](#) (by Maine Humanities Council)
- [*Rhode Tour*](#) (by Rhode Island Council for the Humanities)
- [*Texas Originals*](#) (by Humanities Texas)
- [*Humanities Digital Programs*](#) (by Vermont Humanities)
- [*BackStory Anniversary Favorite American History Podcasts*](#) (by Virginia Humanities)
- [*Think Wyoming Podcasts*](#) (by Wyoming Humanities Council)

Thomas Quinn Marabello, a former history teacher, compiled these resources to be shared and used within the humanities community and state councils. He used *Guns, Germs & Steel: The Fates of Human Societies* in Socratic Seminars with students, spent a summer in Italy as part of a National Endowment for the Humanities seminar, and visited the Portumna Workhouse through a seminar at The National University of Ireland, Galway. Tom got his BA in History from Marymount University and his MA in Medieval and Early Modern European Studies through the Liberal Studies Program at Georgetown University. He is the Events Manager at the Federation of State Humanities Councils and lives in Washington, DC.