

# Recording Human Stories in a Time of Crisis

Written by Raj Dandekar | Alex Klenk | Chioma Onyenokwe | Emilia Perez | Henry Poskanzer



Health workers at Madrid's La Paz Hospital hold a minute of silence to remember Joaquin Diaz, the hospital's chief of surgery who died because of the coronavirus. (Photo Credit: Manu Fernandez/AP, 2020)

# **Recording Human Stories in a Time of Crisis**

An Interactive Qualifying Project submitted to the Faculty of  
WORCESTER POLYTECHNIC INSTITUTE in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Bachelor of Science

by  
Raj Dandekar, Alex Klenk,  
Chioma Onyenokwe, Emilia Perez, Henry Poskanzer

Date:  
May 13, 2020

Report Submitted to:

Worcester Polytechnic Institute Global Lab

Professors Uma Kumar and Ingrid Shockey  
Worcester Polytechnic Institute

This report represents work of WPI undergraduate students submitted to the faculty as evidence of a degree requirement. WPI routinely publishes these reports on its web site without editorial or peer review. For more information about the projects program at WPI, see <http://www.wpi.edu/Academics/Projects>.

# Abstract

In late December of 2019, scientists in Wuhan, China identified a new respiratory disease and named it COVID-19. The subsequent outbreak of this virus was global, infecting millions and killing thousands. We recorded stories from around the world of the varied experiences of living through a global pandemic. We conducted online semi structured interviews using Zoom. The stories we recorded created a collection of unique perspectives on what it was like to live through the pandemic outbreak of the novel coronavirus.

# Executive Summary

In December of 2019, scientists identified a respiratory disease that had previously never been found in humans which began a global pandemic unlike any other in modern history. The scientists named the disease COVID-19 and it was highly contagious with no vaccine at the time of this report. As of May 2020, there were over 4 million cases worldwide across over 200 countries (Center for Disease Control and Prevention, 2020). Our project documented stories of individuals living through this pandemic, as well as societal and environmental changes that were a result of COVID-19. In addition to recording stories, we tracked the evolution of certain responses as the disease spread progressed. Through our objectives, we were able to track the experience of living through the coronavirus pandemic and preserve this time in history.

## **Background**

The COVID-19 disease progressed and rapidly spread around the globe. From its discovery in late 2019, it took only two months for 100,000 people to contract the disease, and the number of cases doubled from 1,000,000 to 2,000,000 in just thirteen days in April (COVID-19 dashboard by the Center for Systems Science and Engineering (CSSE) at Johns Hopkins University, 2020). The United States, like many other countries, implemented travel bans as well as a national emergency (Muccari & Chow, 2020). Many policies were implemented specifically to deal with COVID-19, but a lack of enforcement and understanding in the general public meant there was little mitigation of the disease. Due to the nature of the pandemic, it affected people in different ways, and our team had to ensure that these delicate stories were framed in a just light. We wanted to ensure that the interviewee was in control of their own narrative and that we understood their situation in terms of the pandemic. These considerations allowed us to accurately document a subject's story while remaining conscious of their situation during the pandemic.

## **Methodology**

To achieve our goal of tracking the experience of living through this unprecedented time in history, our team identified three main objectives. First was to record the personal stories from individuals across a spectrum of cultures, occupations, locations, and ages. Many of these semi-structured interviews were conducted remotely based on a sample of convenience. We also utilized a snowball sampling method to reach out to additional participants. All subjects were given

the option to remain anonymous. Our second objective was to track the evolution of personal responses and adaptations as the pandemic unfolded. Due to the quickly evolving nature of the disease, we predicted participants' opinions and experiences were likely to change throughout the course of the project. We identified several individuals who agreed to conduct supplemental interviews to reflect these changes. Our final objective was to document community and environmental changes as a result of measures enacted in response to the pandemic.

## Results and Discussion

In fulfillment of the above goal and objectives, we were able to successfully map fifty-three separate multimedia entries, spanning ten countries total, into an archive made publicly available on WPI's Global Lab website (see Figure A).



*Figure A:* Screenshot of our final map of stories, with fifty-three entries spanning ten countries.

After analyzing these varied experiences collected in the form of personal interviews, stories, photographs, and videos, we ultimately drew conclusions about the shared experience of living through this pandemic.

Our tracking of this pandemic relied heavily on collecting stories and artifacts that could be mapped to synchronous events in the global response. Therefore, key to this archive was documenting stories through interviews from individuals willing to share their experiences and their perspectives on the months following the start of the pandemic. These stories highlighted attitudes, emotions, traumas, and adaptations to the timeline as the pandemic unfolded, allowing us to identify trends and patterns in our subjects' personal experiences, so as to make broader claims about the global response to COVID-19. Some of our most striking observations from this process are summarized by frequency of occurrence in the figure below.

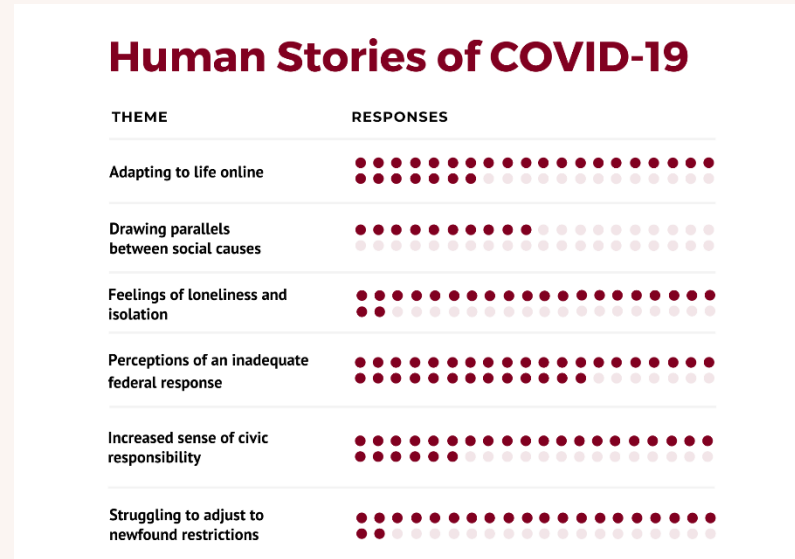
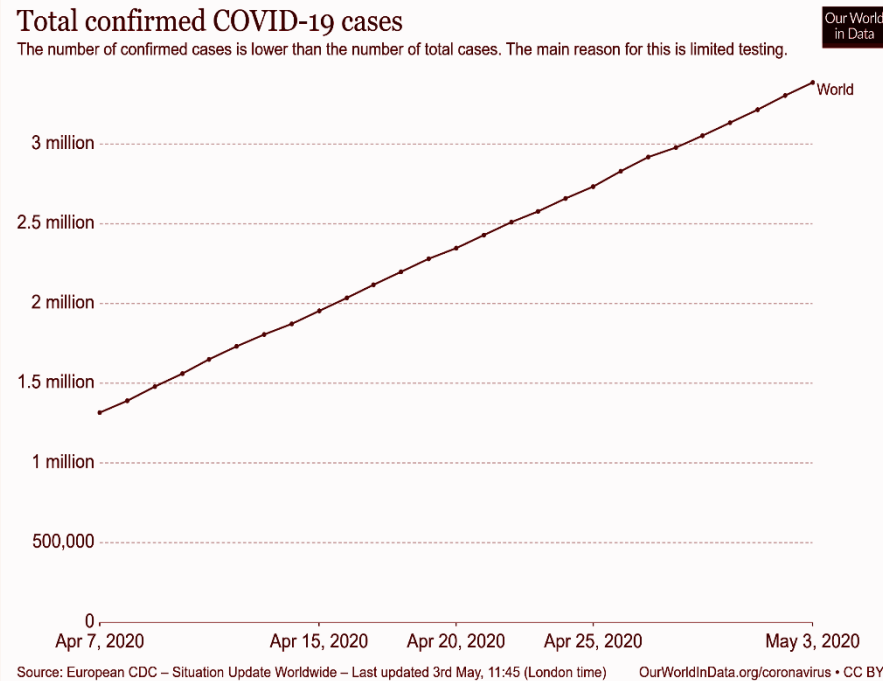


Figure B: Recurrent themes brought up by our forty interview/story respondents.

We conducted our first interview on April 6, 2020, and continued to complete sets of interviews up until May 3, 2020. Within this time period, the number of COVID-19 cases in the world more than doubled (see Figure C).



*Figure C:* Increase in world cases over the course of our data collection process.

Thus, a critical part of tracking stories during the pandemic was to further contextualize the changing landscape in which the pandemic was situated using supplemental media collected in fulfillment of our third objective. We received several submissions from eager participants willing to showcase their communal observations. Below is a single image from the New York Times that stood out to us as an apt reflection of this crisis' visual landscape.





*Figure D:* A field of onions in Idaho waiting to be buried. Americans eat many more vegetables when meals are prepared for them in restaurants than when they cook for themselves (photo credit: Joseph Haerberle/NYT, 2020).

The purpose of our project was to track many dimensions of the human experience as they developed in real-time, and we felt the scene pictured above perfectly encapsulates the absurdity of the situation the world now finds itself in. The shortcomings of the U.S. food supply chain laid bare in this photo are but one of many such inequities that came to light globally in the throes of this pandemic. This did not go unnoticed by many of our respondents, who consistently expressed regret that no one — neither government nor individual — was properly prepared for the COVID-19 pandemic. Despite the initial shock, though, it appears that over time, our subjects became more and more familiar with their new living conditions, however begrudgingly, with some even going as far as to make more confident future predictions. Tracking the experiences during the pandemic also raised the question of how we would adhere to a sense of civic responsibility. Some people felt strict obligations to obey the social distancing measures put in place to ensure the continued safety of



those around them. Others believed that the government had a responsibility to protect its constituents from harm, particularly its most vulnerable populations. Others took up the responsibility to support the essential workers. All in all, respondents were quick to recognize privilege disparities in people's COVID-19 experiences.

### **Recommendations and Conclusion**

Based on the findings of our research, we suggest that recording and preserving the human experience of living through historical events be continued through the practice of the Interactive Qualifying Project (IQP) research format offered at WPI. By collecting dozens of accounts from people across the world detailing their life at different points in time throughout the pandemic, we have created an archive that future historians, experts, or interested parties can look back on. In the same way that we now look back on accounts of the Spanish Flu in 1918 to inform decisions made about pandemics today, humans in the future may look back on the accounts collected here to inform their choices. Continuing this work to look beyond science and into the humanity of tragedy helps societies honor, remember, and learn from the challenges faced by the people that constitute them. Digital storytelling using data such as that presented in the interactive map of our final deliverable (Appendix F) allows for a visualization of how the pandemic's effects were felt on a global scale, to be documented and amplified for future reference, which we hope ultimately translates into clearer, actionable pandemic preparedness policy, at least at the federal level.

# Acknowledgements

Our team would like to sincerely thank the following individuals, without whom this project could not have been successful:

Dr. Ingrid Shockey and Dr. Uma Kumar for their insights and contributions on this project and report and for guiding us through uncharted territory.

Each and every person who took the time to share with us during what has been a difficult time for many. We asked a lot of people to reflect on a situation that was still unfolding, and we are grateful for their participation in our project.

# Authorship

Our whole group worked together to develop this report. Before writing each chapter, we met to discuss its contents and assign sections. We then edited the chapter together for content, grammar, and other potential errors. We would like to give a special thanks to Henry for developing the virtual map that we used to display our stories. We would also like to thank Emilia for her work done on formatting this final report.

# Meet the Team

From our bedrooms, basements, college apartments, and family homes our team came together to refocus our project on the current pandemic outbreak of COVID-19.





## **Raj Dandekar**

Hi, my name is Raj Dandekar and I am a junior at WPI studying mechanical engineering. I live in Hopkinton, MA and have lived here for my whole life. While I was excited to travel for IQP, doing the project remotely from home has been a great experience. I have heard many interesting perspectives from around the world about COVID-19 and am glad that this period in history will be preserved through these stories.



## **Alex Klenk**

Hello! My name is Alex Klenk and I'm a junior at Worcester Polytechnic Institute where I'm studying Aerospace Engineering. I was born in Kilchberg, Switzerland and now live in McLean, Virginia. It has been a very unique experience to catalog and collect human stories from this unique period in history. This project has taught me a lot about the importance of collecting and archiving people's experiences and stories. It has also provided an opportunity for me to connect with people around the world despite the travel restrictions that are in place.



## **Emilia Perez**

Hi there! My name is Emilia Perez and I am a junior studying civil engineering. Doing IQP from my apartment has been quite the experience. Pivoting from ecotourism to collecting the stories of those living through this unique time in history has been both eye opening and exhausting. I am grateful to have had this experience to challenge myself and the idea of what it means to complete an interactive project.



## **Henry Poskanzer**

Hi! I am a junior at WPI, studying computer science and math. I am originally from Palo Alto, California, and I also worked there for the duration of this project. I am sad that I was not able to travel internationally for this project, but I am also grateful to have talked to people from a variety of locations. I enjoyed hearing a lot of unique stories and perspectives of the COVID-19 pandemic.



## **Chioma Onyenokwe**

Hi! My name is Chioma Onyenokwe and I'm a third-year Robotics Engineering major at WPI, originally from Lagos, Nigeria. The cataclysmic progression of this virus has exposed some of our world's great inequities for all to see; so many people have had their lives almost entirely upended by this pandemic, the effects of which will undoubtedly be felt for many years to come. I am so grateful to have been part of a project documenting the varied perspectives of those living through this remarkable time in history, my team included, curating an archive of people's experiences in real-time. I think our contribution to the oeuvre of works being borne during this time will be an invaluable tool for remembering some otherwise untold experiences.



# Table of Contents

Abstract .....	ii
Executive Summary .....	iii
Acknowledgements .....	ix
Authorship .....	x
Meet the Team .....	xi
Table of Contents .....	xiii
List of Figures .....	xv
Introduction .....	xv
What Makes a Pandemic? .....	2
Background .....	3
Developing a Timeline .....	4
Ethical Considerations of Documenting Stories .....	5
Using Digital Storytelling to Shed Light on Societal Divides .....	10
What We Learned .....	10
Methodology .....	11
How We Did It .....	12
Objective 1: Record Personal Stories .....	12

Objective 2: Track the Evolution of Personal Responses .....	13
Objective 3: Document Community and Environmental Changes .....	13
Results and Discussion .....	15
Part 1: Results.....	16
Part 2: Discussion.....	31
Recommendations .....	32
Recommendations .....	33
Conclusion.....	34
References .....	35
Appendices.....	37
Appendix A. Project Process Chart.....	38
Appendix B. Consent Form.....	39
Appendix C. Story Sharing/Interview Introductory Statement .....	40
Appendix D. Story Sharing Prompt Questions .....	42
Appendix E. Recurring Interview Questions .....	43
Appendix F. Working Links.....	44
Appendix G. Community/Environmental Introductory Statement .....	45
Appendix H. Community/Environment Changes Questions .....	46

# List of Figures

Figure 1: A timeline of social and government events beginning with the initial outbreak of COVID-19.	4
Figure 2: . Headlines focus on integration in schools, libraries, and transportation. From Langston Hughes and Milton Meltzer, <i>A Pictorial History of the Negro in America</i> (New York: Crown Publisher, Inc., 1956, as cited in Capshaw, 2014).	6
Figure 3: "I'm Hustle Man! That's all you need to know" (Stanton, 2016, p.377)	7
Figure 4 . "You're going to misconstrue what I say" (p. 37);	8
Figure 5 "These experiences were so meaningful to me that I don't want you to soundbite them" (p. 11).	8
Figure 6: Headline encapsulating StoryCorps founder, Dave Isay's, outlook on interviews (Kniffel, 2005).	9
Figure 7: A screen shot of the interactive map developed by the team to display the data collected.	16
Figure 8: Summary of story/interview responses.	17
Figure 9: Increase in world cases April 7th to May 3rd (OurWorldinData)	21
Figure 10: Millions of pounds of beans and cabbage have been destroyed at R.C. Hatton farms in South Florida and Georgia. (Photo Credit: Rose Marie Cromwell/NYT, 2020)	23
Figure 11: A field of onions in Idaho waiting to be buried. Americans eat many more vegetables when meals are prepared for them in restaurants than when they cook for themselves. (Photo Credit: Joseph Haeberle/NYT, 2020)	24
Figure 12: A sign posted in a Shaw's located in Shrewsbury, MA indicates customers are only allowed to purchase a limited quantity of certain products. (Photo Credit: Emilia Perez, 2020)	25
Figure 13: A photo in a Price Chopper in Worcester shows a sign posted by the store apologizing for an increase in egg prizes citing an increase in demand. (Photo Credit: Emilia Perez, 2020)	26
Figure 14: A sign posted in the same Giant Food store asks patrons to limit their purchases to necessities only. (Photo Credit: Alex Klenk, 2020)	27
Figure 15: An image taken at a Giant Food grocery store in northern Virginia shows limited amounts of bottled water available. (Photo Credit: Alex Klenk, 2020)	27
Figure 16: Family members sit separately to abide by social distancing rules during a party held on May 02, 2020. (Photo Credit: Alex Klenk, 2020)	28
Figure 17. Newly married Tyler and Caryn Suiters embrace following their marriage ceremony in Arlington, Virginia, on April 18. The Rev. Andrew Merrow and his wife, Cameron, were the only other attendees at the ceremony, which was held at St. Mary's Episcopal Church	29
Figure 18: A protester holds up a sign protesting wearing a mask. April 18th, 2020 in Austin TX. This slogan is often used by women protesting for the right to an abortion. (Photo Credit: Sergio Flores/ Getty Images,2020)	30
Figure 19: US Vice President Mike Pence visits Dennis Nelson, a patient who survived the coronavirus and was going to give blood, during a tour of the Mayo Clinic in Rochester, Minnesota, on Tuesday, April 28. Pence chose not to wear a face mask during the tour despite the facility's policy. Credit: Jim Mone/AP	34

# Introduction

An unchanging ocean, a barely recognizable beach in Santa Monica (Photo Credit: Philip Cheung/NYT, 2020).



## **What Makes a Pandemic?**

This report was written during the global pandemic to require citizens around the world to quarantine during the coronavirus pandemic of 2020. It generated a dramatic shift in the global economy, and in life as we knew it. In late December of 2019, scientists in Wuhan, China had identified a new respiratory disease that had previously never been found in humans and named it COVID-19. The outbreak generated a global response unlike any other in modern history. The disease was highly contagious, and there was no vaccine at the time of this report. Recent studies suggested that COVID-19 could even be spread by carriers who do not show symptoms (Center for Disease Control and Prevention, 2020). In response, governments around the world restricted travel, closed borders, non-essential businesses, and recommended people practice social distancing to reduce the risk of further spreading the virus. Grocery stores were often empty and many people found themselves working from home or taking online classes with minimal to no contact with others.

As of May 2020 there were more than 3.5 million cases worldwide (Center for Disease Control and Prevention, 2020). Since its first officially recognized infection on January 14, 2020, the United States had the highest number of cases. The death rate ranged from 3.5% in the United States to 5.9% globally and even higher in vulnerable communities (Worldometer, 2020).

Our goal was to track the experience of living through this unprecedented time in history. Toward that end, we identified three objectives. First, we recorded the personal stories from individuals across a spectrum of cultures, occupations, locations, and ages amidst the Coronavirus Pandemic. Second, we tracked the evolution of personal responses and adaptations as the pandemic unfolded. Third, we documented community and environmental changes as a result of measures enacted in response to the pandemic. These stories provided an archive of experiences and responses reflecting the range of deeply personal responses to the COVID-19 pandemic.



# Background

A group catches up in a well-spaced circle in a parking lot in Council Bluffs, Iowa, on Friday (Photo Credit: Calla Kessler/ NYT, 2020).





# COVID-19 TIMELINE

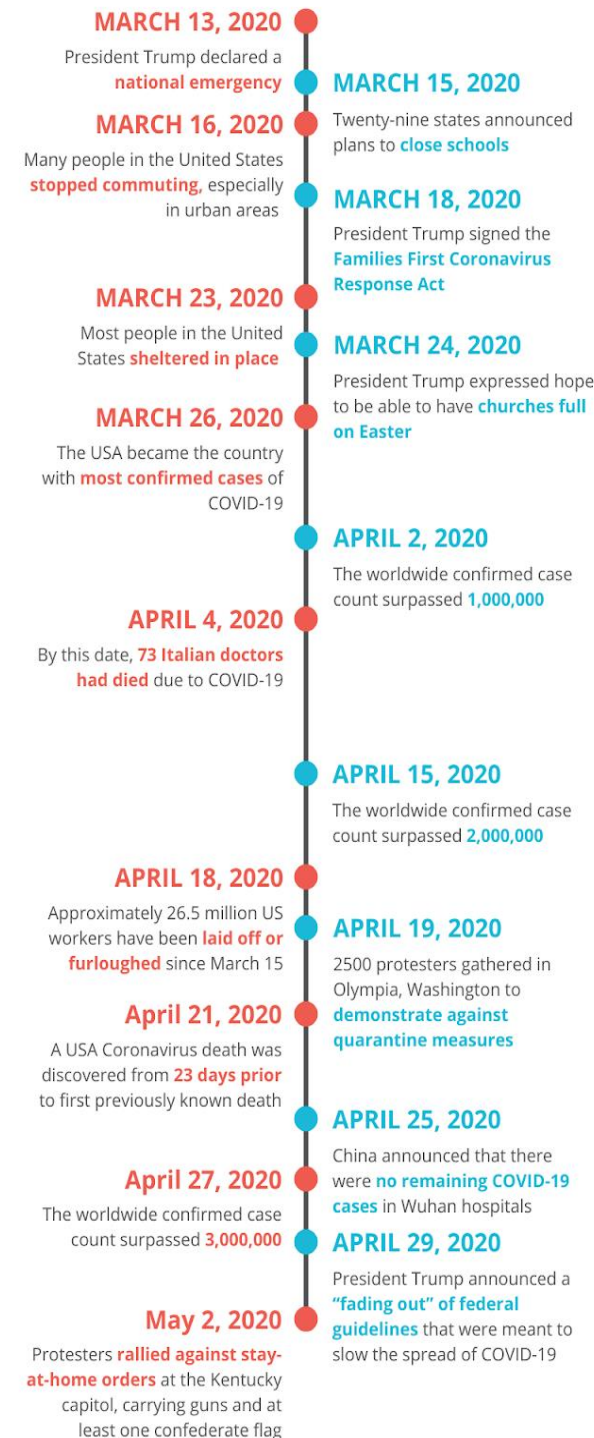
Below is a brief timeline of major events and milestones from the **COVID-19** pandemic prior to May 2020 (adapted from multiple sources, March/April/May, 2020).

## Developing a Timeline

This chapter provides context for our project through analysis of recent research and media reporting related to the governmental and societal response to the COVID-19 outbreak. Additionally, we present how digital storytelling has evolved as a tool to document history across social and conventional media platforms. As the conditions of the COVID-19 pandemic evolved rapidly and dramatically, we determined it was vital to develop a timeline documenting the pandemic evolution, governmental action, and societal response. This timeline provided contextual information about the state of the pandemic prior to and during the period in which the team conducted research (See Figure 1).

The various benchmarks on this timeline include United States and international governmental actions, societal responses, and information about the general state of the pandemic. The contextual information contained in this timeline should be used to get a picture of the state of the pandemic throughout the team's research period.

Figure 1: A timeline of social and government events beginning with the initial outbreak of COVID-19.



### DECEMBER 31, 2019

Dozens of cases of pneumonia confirmed from an unknown cause in **Wuhan, China**

### JANUARY 7, 2020

A new **Coronavirus** was identified as the cause of the disease

### JANUARY 11, 2020

China reported the **first death** caused by COVID-19

### JANUARY 20, 2020

First case of COVID-19 confirmed **outside China**

### JANUARY 23, 2020

China placed Wuhan under **quarantine**

### JANUARY 21, 2020

First case of COVID-19 confirmed **in the USA**

### JANUARY 30, 2020

The WHO declared the outbreak a **global public health emergency**

### JANUARY 31, 2020

The White House announced a **ban on entry** of foreign nationals who have traveled to China recently

### FEBRUARY 11, 2020

The WHO proposed the name **COVID-19** for the new disease

### FEBRUARY 24, 2020

The **USA stock market crashed**, and US President Trump stated "the Coronavirus is very much under control in the USA"

### FEBRUARY 29, 2020

**First death in the USA** caused by COVID-19

### March 6, 2020

The worldwide confirmed case count surpassed **100,000**

### MARCH 7, 2020

Korea Centers for Disease Control and Prevention reported that 63.5% of confirmed cases in South Korea were related to an infected attendee of **Shincheonji Church of Jesus**

## Ethical Considerations of Documenting Stories

In curating the varied stories of individuals experiencing this pandemic worldwide, our team was bound to interact with potentially traumatized respondents. We recognized early on that our archive would not exist in a vacuum, so much of our preliminary work needed to entail learning how to frame these delicate stories in a just light. This section puts forward three key lessons we learned from our exploration of ethical journalism in the face of sustained tragedy.

### *Lesson 1: Historically Contextualize the Experiences of Your Primary Sources*

“The truth is that serious perils to the existence of humanity have become a fact of contemporary life” (Wuthnow, 2010, p. 8). Our team has taken this idea one step further by asserting that novel as this particular situation may seem, the world we live in is no stranger to catastrophe, the casualties of which tend to exist at the intersection of historic disenfranchisement. From war to environmental degradation, the communities hardest hit have most likely already received their fair share of systemic blows (Reid-Pharr, 2016; Bullard, 2019). In the U.S., for instance, studies have found that poor, non-white, disabled, and incarcerated people are seeing COVID-

19 death and infection rates far higher than the general population (Crenshaw et. al, 2020). Coupling this with western hegemonic ideas of *who* exactly is “spreading” these diseases — see: “the Chinese Virus,” “West African Ebola,” and other such platitudes, the — you get conditions ripe are ripe for potentially violent stigmatization (Abeyasinghe, 2016; Gusterson, 2020; Illing, 2020). Hamilton suggests that *archive* (as a colonialist, epistemological tool) can be used to further cement these divides by necessarily excluding groups deemed *other* (2011).

This is why the work we are doing to challenge these notions is especially important; in the words of Jasmin Howard, a graduate research assistant for the Civil Rights in Black and Brown Oral History Project (CRBB), we must strive to “recognize . . . people who are often ignored as experts on their own lived experiences [and] history” (Moye, 2019, p. 197). Figure 2 depicts one such useful example of archival contextualization regarding some of the progress made due to the U.S. Civil Rights Movement.



A Negro teacher in New York City, whose pupils are of varied racial backgrounds.



Camaraderie in a school cafeteria.

**134,000 NEGROES IN MIXED SCHOOLS**  
t States and Washington  
vs Some Desegregation,  
sporting Service Says

**RACIAL BARS DROP IN MANY SCHOOLS**  
ster White Classes  
ral Regions—  
e Is Amicable

**SOUTH'S LIBRARIES OPENING TO NEGRO**  
Two Surveys Show Extensive  
Trend in Recent Years, but  
Urge Need to Expand It

**Segregation's End On Buses, Trains Ordered by I.C.C.**  
Applies To Interstate  
Passengers  
Separate-Equal  
Policy Reversed

**INTEGRATION GAIN IN CAPITAL HAILED**  
Quakers Report Racial Bars  
Show a 'Startling' Drop,  
City Has a 'New Look'

By ALVIN SHUSTER  
d to The New York Times  
NGTON, Oct. 6—A



A map showing the reaction of the various Southern states to the edict on integration a year after the Supreme Court decision.

Figure 2: . Headlines focus on integration in schools, libraries, and transportation. From Langston Hughes and Milton Meltzer, *A Pictorial History of the Negro in America* (New York: Crown Publisher, Inc., 1956, as cited in Capshaw, 2014).

## *Lesson 2: Center Your Archive Around the Unique Perspectives of Its Contributors*

Beyond positioning these stories within a larger, global context, we must ensure that they remain grounded primarily in the experiences of our sources. So far, we have seen that the U.S., in particular, has a long-standing oral history tradition. Documenters like Brandon Stanton, who recently started a project called Humans of New York (HONY), are doing the necessary work of translating these stories into a digital landscape. On his website, Stanton explains the evolution of his project's goal over time: "The initial goal was to photograph 10,000 New Yorkers on the street . . . [A]long the way, I began to interview my subjects in addition to photographing them. And alongside their portraits, I'd include quotes and short stories from their lives" (Stanton, 2020). Below are some one-line stories curated by the historian in 2015.

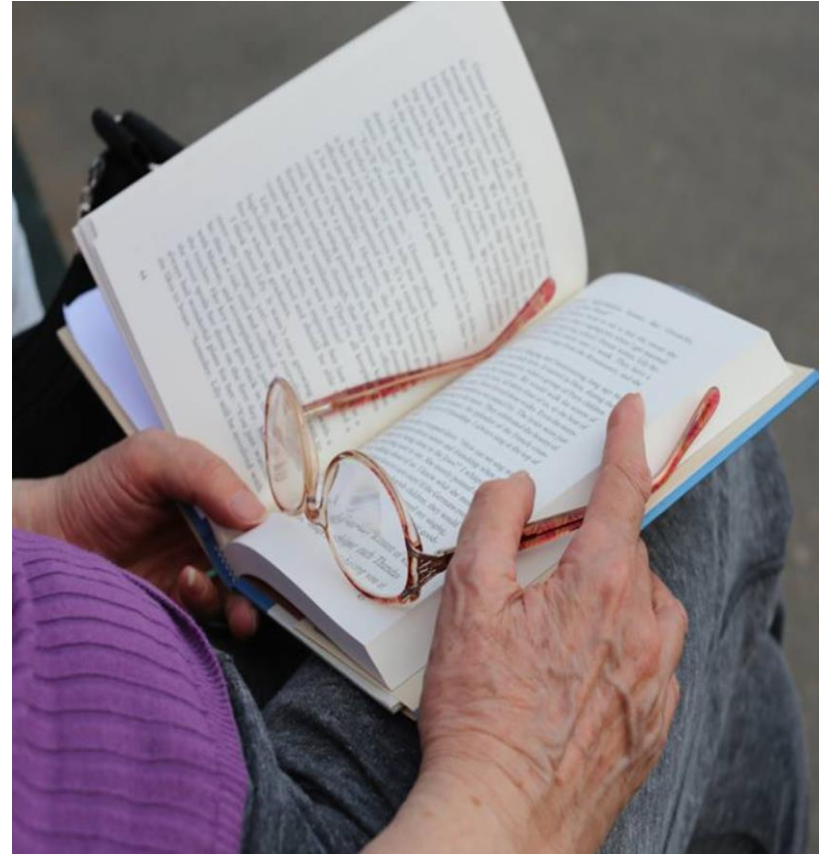


*Figure 3: "I'm Hustle Man! That's all you need to know" (Stanton, 2016, p.377)*





*Figure 4 . “You’re going to misconstrue what I say” (p. 37);*



*Figure 5 “These experiences were so meaningful to me that I don’t want you to soundbite them” (p. 11).*

Popular media critic, Vinson Cunningham, suggests that the three subjects pictured above, the “conscientious objectors,” make for the most compelling stories (2015). Thus, we can not, and should not, rely blindly on pictures to tell people’s stories. Instead, we should attempt to overcome the implicit abstraction that comes with digitized history by emphasizing the unique perspectives and retellings of the people behind the photos (Baer, 2008; Pagenstecher, 2018; Gartrell, 2019).

### ***Lesson 3: Allow Interviewees to Control Their Own Narrative***

Finally, we must make sure to develop empathetic modes of questioning. By recognizing that we, too, are experiencing this pandemic, we can create a sort of rapport in the interview setting, complicity strengthening the bonds we have with our participants. Folklore storytelling in this way allows survivors “to refute and counteract the effects of negative legendry,” giving them “the opportunity to own their own stories” (Lindahl, 2006; Horigan, 2018, p. 34). This is a sentiment clearly shared by David Isay, the founder of StoryCorps, another varied oral history project, as this excerpt pictured below in Figure 6 clearly shows.

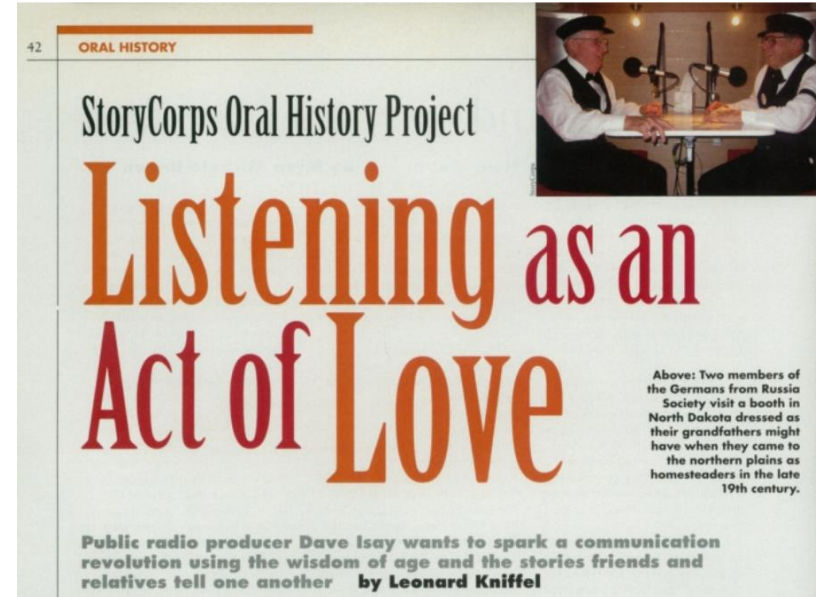


Figure 6: Headline encapsulating StoryCorps founder, Dave Isay’s, outlook on interviews (Kniffel, 2005).

Ultimately, we must move past iconoclastic ideas of *memory* as inherently “emergent, claimed, and . . . ratified” during interviews but, rather, to a place where we can, as compassionately as possible, reproduce people’s stories for a public audience (Bartesaghi & Bowen, 2009, p. 239)

## **Using Digital Storytelling to Shed Light on Societal Divides**

We look, now, to the project experiences that our peers at Worcester Polytechnic Institute (WPI) have similarly used social media for the purposes of posterity, in order to see the impact of sharing stories to gain support for a movement. For the past two years, students from WPI have conducted a project in India to record stories from local residents about climate change. Their work gathers recordings of residents telling stories of climate change. The teams have further analyzed and compared the responses to scientific research, and have created short video productions. The goal of the project was to humanize the climate change movement, in the hopes that it would raise awareness on the resulting issues that these communities face when trying to adapt to these changes. For example, a key finding of the 2019 project was that a “...common belief among residents is that there is a lack of government action pertaining to climate change and help for struggling farmers. We concluded that there is a gap between government policy and knowledge in villages” (Agrawal et al., 2019). The team found that much of the policy pertained to the cities, but rural communities were

more directly affected by climate change. Policies relating to issues in these communities that the government did act on were often not followed. These problems therefore escalate and become more difficult to mitigate. The stories that the team captured also capture the local perception of climate change policy implementation, exposing the disconnect between government efforts and effects in these communities. These stories could also be used as reference for future action against as well as documenting the historical aspect of climate change.

## **What We Learned**

In an age of digital storytelling, the record can be documented and amplified quickly – but the potential repercussions of sharing these stories can be either positive or negative based on their content and framing. Allowing the viewer to fully understand the external factors at play in someone’s narrative and ensuring that there is no added opinion of the interviewer were methods that we applied when creating prompts and conducting interviews. Proper implementation of digital storytelling over social media can shed light on many social issues.



# Methodology

Munich, A subway without commuters. (Photo Credit: Laetitia Vancon/ NYT, 2020)



## How We Did It

In this chapter, we detail our methods for collecting stories, photos, and videos from individuals in response to the COVID-19 outbreak of 2020. Our goal was to track the experience of living through this unprecedented time in history. As such, our team identified the following three objectives that would best allow us to accomplish this goal:

1. Record the personal stories from individuals across a spectrum of cultures, occupations, locations, and ages
2. Track the evolution of personal responses and adaptations as the pandemic unfolded.
3. Document community and environmental changes as a result of measures enacted in response to the pandemic.

These methods are further outlined in a chart located in Appendix A.

### Objective 1: Record Personal Stories

The focus of our project relied on recording personal stories relating to the COVID-19 pandemic. We recorded semi-structured interviews using a sample of convenience to find interviewees. A sample of convenience “relies on available subjects—those who are close at hand or easily accessible” (Lune & Berg, 2017, p. 32). Due to the limited nature of

engagement during the pandemic, all participants needed to be sourced remotely and interviewed online. We also used samples of convenience and a snowball sampling method to find additional participants. All interviewees completed a consent form and/or gave their permission on video in person. The consent script can be found in Appendix B, giving us permission to use their story and image.

We wanted to collect these stories from a broad range of experiences in order to record how the pandemic affected individuals in different ways. Therefore, our approach to interviews was to conduct as often as possible to add information to the archive. Members of the group reached out to friends and family to find participants with a range of ages, occupations, locations, and cultures. A few of the interviews required translation to English, and subtitles were used in the video for clarity when necessary.

The interviews were semi-structured to prompt interviewees to tell stories. Situational questions and introductions were planned in advance, and can be found in Appendices C through E. We provided options for how participants would prefer to be interviewed. They were given the options of a video call or audio call that would be recorded, a written response to the prompts, and creating their own video of their response and stories. Participants also uploaded their own



responses to the prompts in their preferred medium to the archive.

Basic information and key points from each story collected were entered into rows in an excel sheet. The team then went through each interview and color-coded similar responses. This created a matrix that displayed a visual representation of the data made it easier to identify trends. This matrix can be found in Appendix F.

## **Objective 2: Track the Evolution of Personal Responses**

The COVID-19 pandemic sparked a variety of quickly-evolving conditions and situations through rapid changes in case numbers, governmental interventions, personal restrictions, and various other impacts. Due to this dramatic situation, the responses were highly dependent on the date that the interviews were conducted. To produce a more comprehensive and accurate archive of personal responses to the COVID-19 pandemic, we performed follow-up interviews with numerous subjects to capture how their responses to the pandemic evolved over time.

To conduct this analysis, we identified individuals who were willing to conduct an additional interview to supplement the first. We also asked subjects to provide some predictions for what conditions of the pandemic might be like by the time of the

next one. Following their first interviews, we developed a second set of interview questions for each subject. These consisted both of repeated questions from interview one and new questions based on topics discussed by each subject in their first interview.

After completing the intervals, we compared the interview transcripts to see how our subjects' responses evolved in the period between interviews. In order to ensure a seamless analysis process, our team chose to code this data in ways meaningful to our project's first two objectives. Incorporating some of the key principles of research triangulation proposed by Erlingsson & Brysiewicz, we developed a preliminary matrix of prompt responses, abstracted into categories with similar themes, and organized by color (2017; see Appendix F). We then mapped this pertinent information against our timeline highlighting key changes in the state of the COVID-19 pandemic, according to the specific area that each subject was located.

## **Objective 3: Document Community and Environmental Changes**

We collected photographs, media footage, and videos of the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic to supplement the stories in our archive. The pandemic caused physical changes to

communities worldwide including, but not limited to, changes in curfews, street traffic, and air quality. Photographs and videos were essential to illustrating some of these enormous changes to the physical world, as well as giving our archived stories some much-needed context.

We captured some of the photography and videography ourselves. When we encountered interesting sights reflecting the pandemic, we recorded them. However, the shelter-in-place orders hindered our ability to seek out these scenes.

Since we were unable to travel for the duration of the project, we reached out to peers, photographers, and journalists

for contributions. We found relevant records on social media sites including Instagram, Facebook, and Twitter, subsequently reaching out to the people who posted these photographs or videos, asking a few questions about their recording(s), and requesting permission to use them in our project. As with the other interviews, we allowed the photographers to answer our questions in one of several formats: a recorded video or audio call, written statements, or a video they make themselves. See Appendix G for our introductory statement to these potential participants, and Appendix H for our detailed inquiries about photo submissions.

# Results and Discussion

India, during tourist season without tourists, boats without passengers. (Photo Credit: Atul Loke/NYT, 2020)





## Part 1: Results

After data collection we mapped all fifty-three separate multimedia entries, spanning ten countries total into an archive made publicly available to WPI's Global Lab. A screenshot of this map is shown below.

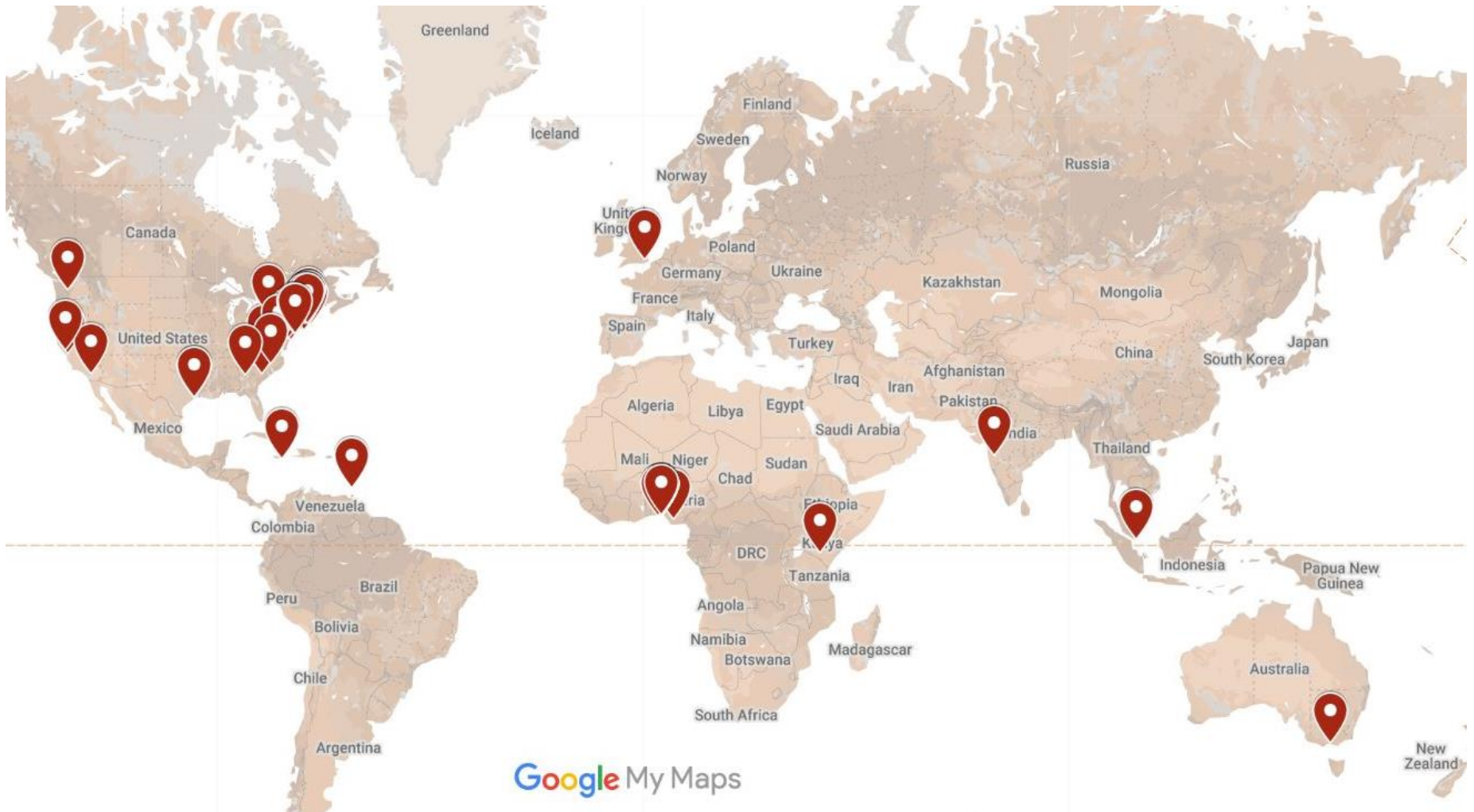


Figure 7: A screen shot of the interactive map developed by the team to display the data collected.

# Human Stories of COVID-19

THEME	RESPONSES
Adapting to life online	
Drawing parallels between social causes	
Feelings of loneliness and isolation	
Perceptions of an inadequate federal response	
Increased sense of civic responsibility	
Struggling to adjust to newfound restrictions	

### *Highlighting shared experiences living through COVID-19*

Our tracking of the experience of the COVID-19 pandemic relied heavily on collecting stories and artifacts that could be mapped to synchronous events in the global response. Therefore, key to this archive was documenting stories through interviews from individuals willing to share their experiences and their perspectives on the months following the start of the pandemic. These stories highlighted attitudes, emotions, traumas, and adaptations to the timeline as the pandemic unfolded.

While our respondents often seemed vaguely satisfied with their local government's response to the pandemic, most expressed a genuine lack of clarity on both local and federal policy. Of the initial fourteen subjects we interviewed earlier near the start of the response, seven were residents of New England. Van Harting, a student from Plymouth, Massachusetts, responded "I think in my town and state the official response is fairly appropriate, just not fully understood by citizens - some people still don't understand

social distancing and why it's important" (April 7, 2020). Another participant also mentioned a lack of good preventative measures being practiced despite government action. Sydney Messey, a student from Milford, Connecticut, where residents were urged to shelter in place, noticed the beaches in her town were "getting really busy, [with] hundreds of people at once . . . touching arm to arm [and] using it as a big reunion" (April 11, 2020).

Another common thread across most of the experiences, is a desire for better pandemic preparedness, particularly on the parts of federal governments who should be best equipped to handle emergency situations. United States residents were especially vocal about these qualms. Many of our U.S.-based respondents expressed concerns about the potential for the country's inadequate social safety nets to stymie recovery efforts. Some, like Lindsey Zabelski, a long-time educator living in southern New Jersey, empathized with the millions of people suddenly thrust into unemployment who were "still waiting" to receive benefits during these especially trying times (April 13, 2020). Others, like Asha Sherring, a health care worker from Hopkinton, Massachusetts, believed it to be imperative that the nation "really pay attention to [the fact] that people don't have healthcare" so as to ensure widespread access to future treatments (April 7, 2020).

Persistent critique of the federal government's direct response to this outbreak was a sentiment echoed by most of our sources,

regardless of location. Many spoke freely about their dissatisfaction with their country's testing, treatment, and containment capabilities, like the Stamford mother who has become especially fearful of the implications this could have for towns like hers, located on the outskirts of New York City, which "are seeing folks leave [the city] and bring the COVID-19 infections into [them]" (Entry 14, April 12, 2020). An ocean away, Dr. Odili of Delta, Nigeria shares similar concerns about the effects unchecked state travel could have on disease spread, given that treatment facilities in her local area tend to be overstretched and under-resourced. Speaking further of a COVID-19 patient newly admitted to the local teaching hospital where she works, she mentions that they might have to "shuttle back and forth between . . . two cities to receive adequate care" (April 8, 2020). Some, like Nigerian-American pre-med student, Ruth Iwelumo, further asserted that conditions would continue

**"I think the United States is, unfortunately, gonna be near the forefront of how *not* to manage a pandemic."**

**- ANDREW VISOCAN (APRIL 7, 2020)**



to deteriorate globally if governments did not adopt policies unique to their citizens' situations: "I don't think that the measures being put in place in the U.S. (or in the west in general) should be used everywhere . . . asking for a lockdown in a place like Nigeria, for instance . . . with the levels of poor people there, how are they supposed to eat . . . how are they supposed to survive?" (April 7, 2020).

**"Prepare, prepare, prepare at all levels - individual, city, state, federal, cross-national. The catastrophic loss of life was avoidable - we were all asleep at the wheel."**

**- ENTRY 14 (APRIL 12, 2020)**

Young adults composed another significant demographic of respondents with unique insights. Of the subjects interviewed, eight were college students in their early twenties, five of whom discussed their experiences adapting to new learning environments. For all these students, that meant coming to terms with online coursework. These students described a number of difficulties and worries produced by these new conditions. Andrew Visocan, a student attending Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University (VPI) and still living in his apartment near the campus at the time of his interview, stated, "online conferencing is good, but it just isn't able to

capture the same amount of information [as in-person classes]" (April 7, 2020). Students also noted the difference between working from home rather than being on campus.

The need to significantly adjust one's professional life in direct response to the virus was not an experience unique to college students; several subjects commented on changing work

**"In-person instruction gives an opportunity to ask questions and hold more fluid conversations with the teacher."**

**- ANDREW VISOCAN (APRIL 7, 2020)**

conditions such as job insecurity or adapting to working from home. Lindsey Zabelski described how she and her husband had to file for unemployment after he was let go from a high school position assisting special needs students. For some of the people interviewed, working fully or primarily at home came with schedule changes, new job requirements, and other unusual conditions (Entry 15, April 13, 2020). However, one anonymous subject stated that working from home had produced some positive conditions for them (Entry 14, April 12, 2020). They said they appreciated the freedom and flexibility that came with working from home and were also better able to accommodate their child's homeschooling. Another anonymous interviewee,

describing the conditions of constantly working from home, stated that “it’s felt like work never really ends and I have no break from the pressure” (Entry 11, April 8, 2020).

Another frequently cited phenomenon was an intrinsic desire for in-person interaction. More than half of our interviewees mentioned missing their friends or feeling lonely. People continue to communicate with each other electronically, but not as much in person. According to one subject, “it’s hard to feel like you’re getting the same connection as when you are with them in person” (Bailey Berg, April 6, 2020). There seems to be a correlation between this phenomenon and the

**“It’s hard to feel like you’re getting the same connection as when you are with them in person.”**

**- BAILEY BERG (APRIL 6, 2020)**

participant’s occupation.

Students reported that they lacked company more often than members of the workforce.

Early responses mentioned frustrating changes in ordinary activities. A few noted the way they go grocery shopping. Some of the changes noted by people were social distancing measures being implemented into store’s procedure by posting signs for shoppers to stay 6 feet away from each other

and using tape to mark out increments of 6 feet where shoppers should stand in line. Another person mentioned the emotional experience of visiting the grocery store during this time “...when I return from the shopping, too, I- I actually feel kind of traumatized by it, because you go through and there’s aisles with nothing... It has made me also look at our privilege and how fortunate we are” (Lindsey Zabelski, April 13th, 2020)

**“... when I return from the shopping, too, I- I actually feel kind of traumatized by it, because you go through and there’s aisles with nothing.”**

**- LINDSEY ZABELSKI (APRIL 13, 2020)**

### *Evolution of responses*

We conducted our first interview on April 6, 2020 and continued to complete sets of interviews up until May 3rd. Within this time period the number of COVID-19 cases in the world more than doubled. The graphic below depicts the increase in total cases throughout the world from our first interview to our last.

## Total confirmed COVID-19 cases

The number of confirmed cases is lower than the number of total cases. The main reason for this is limited testing.

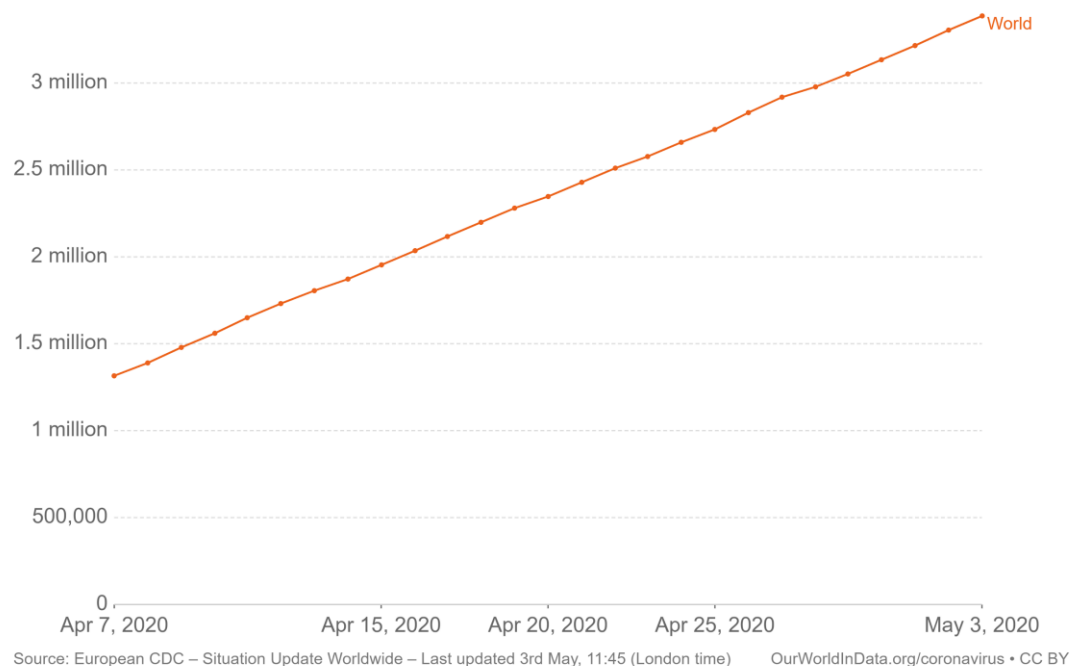


Figure 9: Increase in world cases April 7th to May 3rd (OurWorldinData)

Despite the rapidly growing number of cases some participants in our recurring interview series reported minimal changes in their lives during this time. While the initial shift into a social distanced world was drastic for most people there was minimal difference in their day to day lives during the time spent in lockdown. Many echoed their responses from the first interview.

While some began to feel the tedium of lockdown, others were still experiencing drastic differences in their lives. EMT Benen ElShaks discussed how his job has changed over the weeks “we are losing people to areas that are worse off and some people are afraid to work. Today is the first time I’ve been home for more than 12 hours in a week and a half. I worked 96 hours last week.” (Benen Elshaks, April 28th, 2020). Additionally, over time participants began to express increased empathy for those out of work due to the pandemic. Some considered themselves privileged to still have employed parents during this time. Others tried to imagine what it might be like to be a small business in this situation “I can't imagine what it would be like to be a small restaurant that can't take out or delivery because they haven't had income in months and their bills won't be put on hold” (Ramona Bago, April 21st, 2020). Whether or not there was a difference in daily activities or thought process it is clear that the pandemic affected each person in a different way as time in lockdown wore on.

Each interviewee was also asked if there were any types of lessons to be learned from this experience. Among these responses many hoped for better preparedness for similar situations in the future. Some hoped that government responses

the world over would have reacted better to this crisis, one interviewee even stated, “I hope the next time the world sees something like this, we act fast” (Entry 16, April 14th, 2020). Overall, people across all ages, occupations, and origins shared that had hope, hope that humans could learn from a bad situation. Further, this hope was unwavering, as it was found in most first and second interviews despite the evolution of circumstances in between interviews.

Participants were also asked to predict when life might return to ‘normal’ - if such a thing is even possible. A pattern emerged in these responses over time and reflected that many people thought the social distancing measures would end sooner than they had originally predicted in their first interview. In one participant's first interview, they stated: “Realistically, I’ll give it a year. I’m trying to be optimistic but I don’t think COVID-19 is just going to die because the weather gets warmer”, as she reflected about when life may return to how it was before the pandemic (Ramona Bago, April 7th, 2020). However, in her second interview she said, about the same topic “maybe by the end of the summer (about 4 months away) because I heard that Florida has started to open again but I don't know if that's true. I also heard about Germany reopening but we have so many more cases than Europe so we shouldn't compare ourselves to them.” (Ramona Bago, April 28th, 2020). In 3 weeks, her prediction

shortened by eight months despite a rise in total cases worldwide. Other responses to this question exhibited similar trends.

### **Documenting the Evolution of Environmental/Community Changes**

A critical part of tracking stories during the pandemic, was to document the changing landscape in which the pandemic was situated. From mid-March to mid-May, the urban landscape in most communities changed dramatically. In rural communities and in remote landscapes, the many reports of changing ecological dimensions were found in the media. Here we collected images that reflected the visual landscape of the crisis.

### ***The US Food Supply Chain***

Many places around the world felt the effects of the pandemic outbreak ripple through many aspects of their lives. On April 11th, 2020 the New York Times released an article about the effects of the pandemic and subsequent social distancing measures on farmers. The report detailed the repercussions of the steep decline in restaurant sales and how farmers are managing their excess product that has nowhere to



go. Millions of pounds of vegetables are being plowed over as they ripen in fields, millions more are picked and buried in pits on farm property. The article included these moving images that depict the scale and stark reality of the effects on the food supply chain. (Yaffe-Bellany & Corkery, 2020))



*Figure 10: Millions of pounds of beans and cabbage have been destroyed at R.C. Hatton farms in South Florida and Georgia. (Photo Credit: Rose Marie Cromwell/NYT, 2020)*





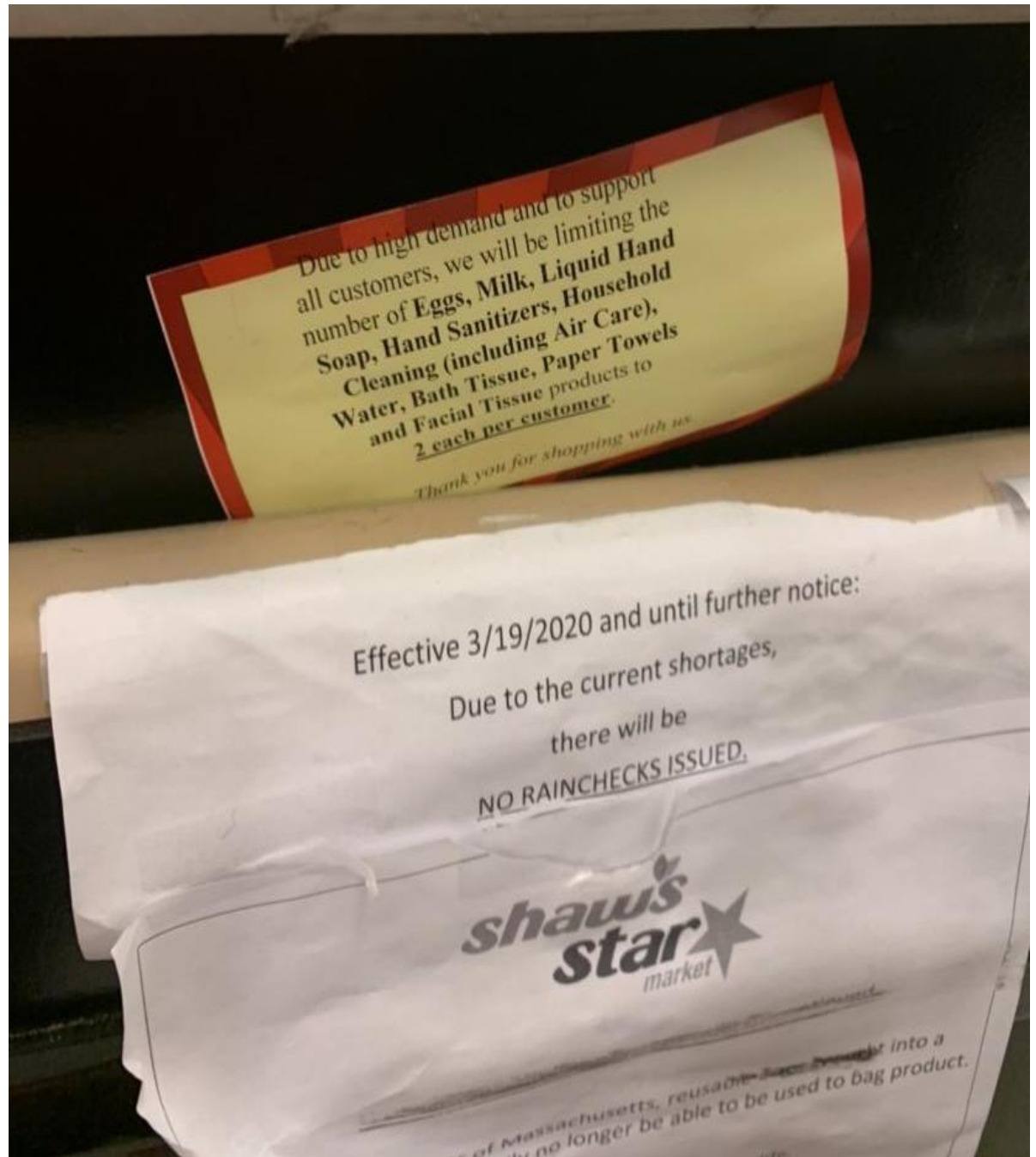
*Figure 11: A field of onions in Idaho waiting to be buried. Americans eat many more vegetables when meals are prepared for them in restaurants than when they cook for themselves. (Photo Credit: Joseph Haerberle/NYT, 2020)*



The article explained that the waste was not limited to vegetables, as “ The nation’s largest dairy cooperative, Dairy Farmers of America, estimates that farmers are dumping as many as 3.7 million gallons of milk each day. A single chicken processor is smashing 750,000 unhatched eggs every week.” (Yaffe-Bellany, 2020).

Despite this report, much of the photos collected by the team seemed to tell a different story about food availability in the nation. Across the United States signs were posted throughout grocery stores limiting the quantity that customers can purchase of certain items. Many of these signs were found in egg and dairy sections, and at the checkout. Photos below depict how new rules were communicated to customers.

*Figure 12: A sign posted in a Shaw’s located in Shrewsbury, MA indicates customers are only allowed to purchase a limited quantity of certain products. (Photo Credit: Emilia Perez, 2020)*





*Figure 13: A photo in a Price Chopper in Worcester shows a sign posted by the store apologizing for an increase in egg prizes citing an increase in demand. (Photo Credit: Emilia Perez, 2020)*



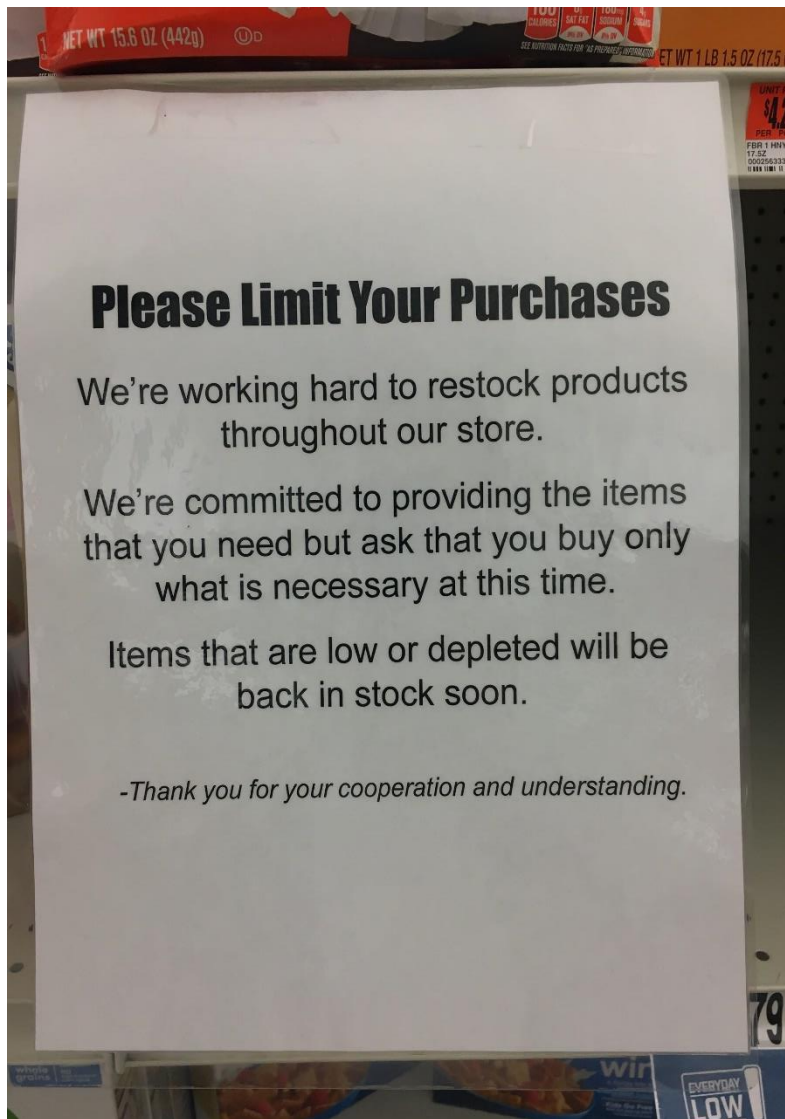


Figure 14: A sign posted in the same Giant Food store asks patrons to limit their purchases to necessities only. (Photo Credit: Alex Klenk, 2020)

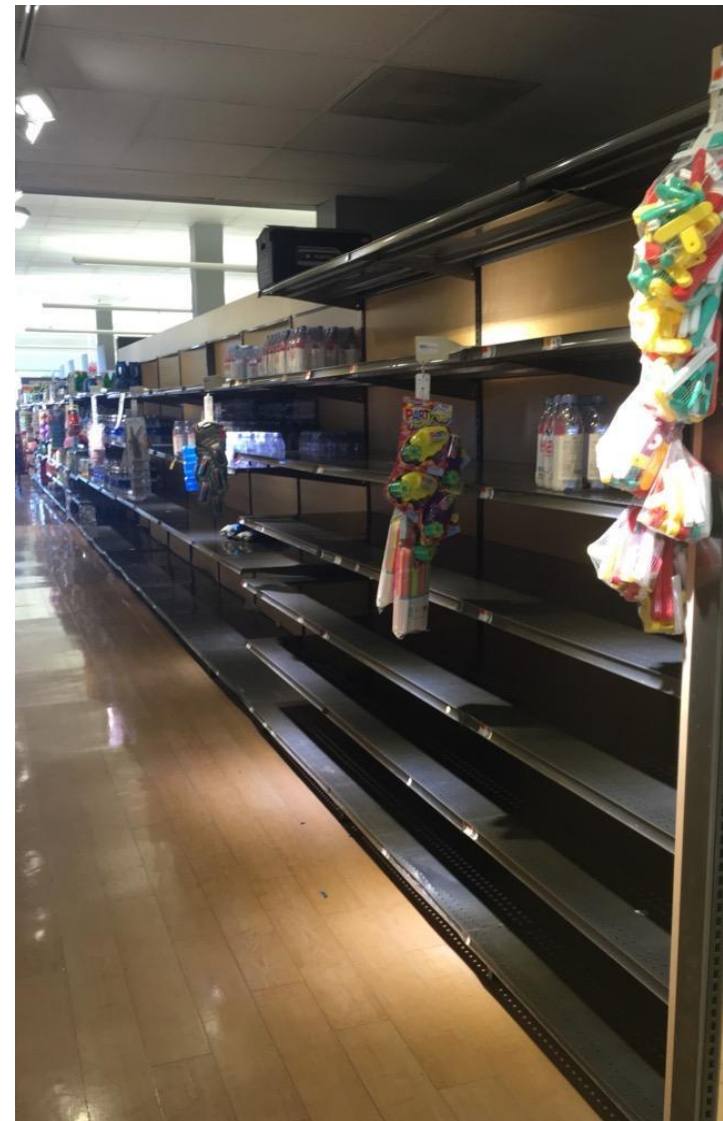


Figure 15: An image taken at a Giant Food grocery store in northern Virginia shows limited amounts of bottled water available. (Photo Credit: Alex Klenk, 2020)



These images illustrate the confusion about the food supply. Citizens were simultaneously seeing empty shelves or shortage notices while large news outlets reported about the abundance of food farmers were dumping.

### *Family relationships*

Due to the quarantine regulations put in place to minimize the spread of the virus, families and friends were physically separated from one another. In an attempt to celebrate a birthday together, one family held an outside gathering in which family members from different households stayed a minimum of six feet apart at all times.



Figure 16: Family members sit separately to abide by social distancing rules during a party held on May 02, 2020. (Photo Credit: Alex Klenk, 2020)



### *A New Normal*

Across the world everyone was adapting to a new way of life. News outlets like the New York Times collected many photos of the strange new world everyone found themselves in. From empty roads, classrooms, and beaches to angry protests demanding a return to life we once knew these photos captured what living in this time was really like (Kimmelman, 2020). The photo shown here (Figure 17) is just one of many collected to showcase life in this time and others are shown throughout this report.



*Figure 17. Newly married Tyler and Caryn Suiters embrace following their marriage ceremony in Arlington, Virginia, on April 18. The Rev. Andrew Merrow and his wife, Cameron, were the only other attendees at the ceremony, which was held at St. Mary's Episcopal Church.*

## Additional Findings

Among the findings we found an additional small but unique trend in responses to questions about the lessons learned from this pandemic. Three people discussed awareness of other global issues. Bailey Berg, a 21 year old student in New Hampshire mentioned in her second interview that she hopes “the people protesting for the right to do what they want with their bodies recognize the irony in their actions. Women are told all the time what they can and can’t do with their bodies by these same people” (Bailey Berg, April 21st, 2020). This was in reference to the anti-lockdown protests that began to take place throughout the United States in mid-April.



*Figure 18: A protester holds up a sign protesting wearing a mask. April 18th, 2020 in Austin TX. This slogan is often used by women protesting for the right to an abortion. (Photo Credit: Sergio Flores/ Getty Images, 2020)*

This connection to other, long term social issues did not stop there. Two other interviewees mentioned the world's quick and drastic response to the outbreak of COVID-19 and related it to the world's response, or lack thereof, to climate change. Van Harting explained that while we are currently in the midst of a global crisis and looking to scientists for evidence and advice there is also a much greater threat to humanity that is not receiving that same attention. Harting hopes that “our response to the pandemic makes people more ready to accept the reality of the climate crisis and we will achieve the political will to take stronger decisive action to mitigate the impact of climate change.” (Van Harting, April 7th, 2020) Another interviewee, Benen Elshaks echoed this sentiment explaining that both climate change and COVID-19 are “both tragedy of the commons issues” and he believes people are reluctant to alter their lifestyle to reduce environmental impact because climate change is currently not an immediate threat. Elshaks explains that “People hear projections about climate change impacts ‘50 years from now’ and don’t care but with Coronavirus people hear that there will be impacts in two weeks and start to care.” (Benen Elshaks, April 28th, 2020).



## Part 2: Discussion

The purpose of our project was to track many dimensions of the human experience as they developed in real time. As of the date of our first interview, April 6, the worldwide COVID-19 case count had already exceeded one million cases and many communities across the United States and worldwide were put under shelter-in-place orders. Residents were not allowed to leave their homes except for essential tasks like grocery shopping or going to the doctor or if they were essential workers. Tracking the experience of the pandemic during this time, we found that that no one — neither government nor individual — was prepared for the COVID-19 pandemic. There was consensus across our data that communities worldwide were in shock. Life had been changing at a rapid rate and people around the world had to adapt to a new situation almost daily. Newly implemented social distancing measures significantly changed the ways in which people were asked to interact, learn, and perform daily tasks. Many interviews conducted early in the month of April focused on adjusting to these new quarantine conditions, which had typically been enforced in the last couple of weeks. Students focused heavily on adapting to online learning, while older adults discussed working from home and job insecurity. The worldwide case count from the first to last

interviews increased by over two and a half times. By the end of the month, there were over 3 million confirmed cases throughout the world. Tracking experiences as the pandemic grew, we found that over time, our subjects seemed to become more familiar with their new living conditions. These changes became a new ‘normal’. A grudging acceptance of the quarantine life conditions was common, with many people stating they believed that the effects of the pandemic would be felt for a long time.

Tracking the experiences during the pandemic also raised the question of how we would adhere to a sense of civic responsibility. Some people felt a strict obligation to obey the social distancing measures put in place to ensure the continued safety of those around them. Others took up the responsibility to show support for the essential workers, including healthcare workers, first responders, and store clerks. On the other hand, some subjects reported witnessing other people who were either unaware of their civic responsibility, or unwilling to fulfill it. For instance, a lot of protests had sprung up to end the shelter-in-place orders (Muccari & Chow, 2020). Protesters were eager to return to work and assert their individual rights. By gathering in public places, they deliberately disobeyed the shelter-in-place orders. These protesters do not seem to believe that social distancing is their civic responsibility.

# Recommendations

New York A major transit hub, the Oculus, in a city no longer on the move. Victor J. Blue for The New York Times



## **Recommendations**

The recommendations below are based on the findings of our research. These recommendations include suggestions for continuing the type of work completed in this study and preservation of this work. Also outlined here are recommendations developed based on trends in the data collected.

### ***Continued Collection of Human Stories***

Based on our findings we recommend that recording and preserving the human experience of living through historical events be continued through the practice of the IQP. Through collecting dozens of accounts from people across the world detailing their life at different points in time throughout the pandemic we have created an archive that future historians, experts, or interested parties can look back on. In the same way that we now look back on accounts of the Spanish Flu in 1918 to inform decisions made about pandemics today, humans in the future may look back on the accounts collected here to inform their choices. Continuing this work to learn not just the science but the humanity in tragedy can do much to prevent human suffering in the future.

We recommend that future projects be developed by WPI and other universities in which students will collect and process stories of significant events around the world. For universities, projects of this type offer an opportunity to create an archive of data which would be extremely useful to faculty, students, and other researchers working on synergistic topics.

### ***Human Stories Archive***

The COVID-19 pandemic is unlike any other event in modern history and should be tracked and archived. Some data can remain in an interactive medium such as our map to allow viewers to visualize and engage the stories. We recommend that universities play a role in hosting the data generated by these projects. Having this data easily accessible would greatly benefit the transfer of knowledge as we share and learn from our global experiences.

### ***The Question of Health***

Many of our responses raised the question of clarity in policies that are enacted in times of crisis and the strategies for education about these policies. We noted that a number of participants mentioned that they know or have seen people who did not understand social distancing and preventative measures from the disease. Increased clarity and enforcement of policies

would reduce the rate that the disease spreads. Education could include advertisements on radio or TV, and easy accessible information online. Widespread knowledge about the disease and how it spreads would increase the amount of people that are following government recommendations. The scope of this project is not to make recommendations to public health and safety, but our respondents were deeply aware of disparities in how healthcare outreach and safety-nets played a role in critical outcomes for different communities and countries.



*Figure 19: US Vice President Mike Pence visits Dennis Nelson, a patient who survived the coronavirus and was going to give blood, during a tour of the Mayo Clinic in Rochester, Minnesota, on Tuesday, April 28. Pence chose not to wear a face mask during the tour despite the facility's policy. Credit: Jim Mone/AP*

## Conclusion

Collecting and archiving human experiences is an important aspect of responding to major events in history. The COVID-19 pandemic was unprecedented in modern history and produced extreme conditions which forced individuals, society, and world governments to learn and adapt. We hope that by documenting human stories we are able to honor, remember, and learn from the challenges faced by people living through the pandemic. Throughout the duration of this project we collected stories from a myriad of people and recorded radically different thoughts and feelings from person to person. We learned that each person reacted to drastically new ways of living in their own unique way, but even then the commonalities could be found across region, occupation, age, and other variables. We hope that through the collection of these human stories we have been able produce useful data for future researchers looking to understand the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic.



# References

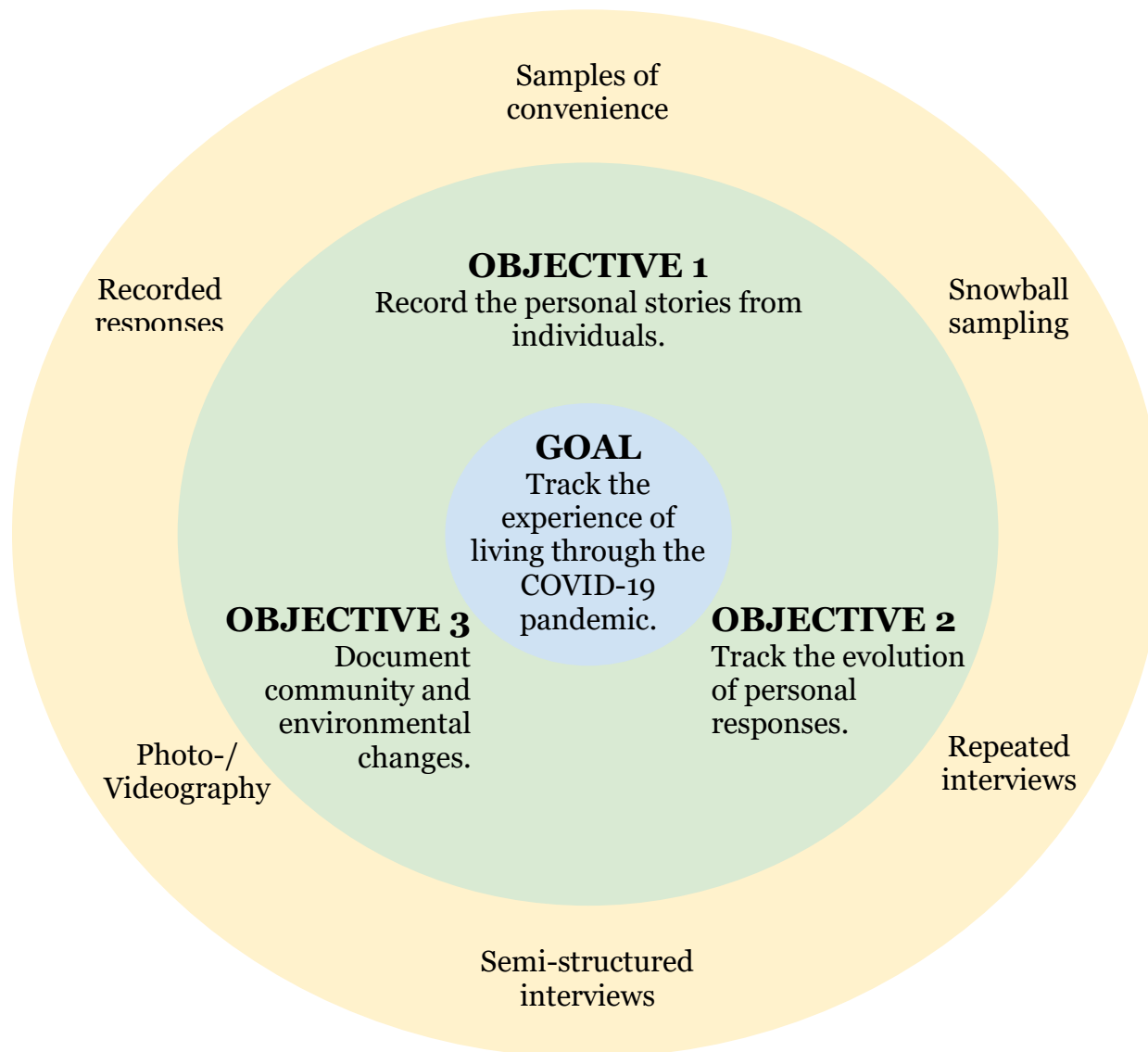
- Abeyasinghe, S. (2016). Ebola at the borders: Newspaper representations and the politics of border control. In *Third World Quarterly*, 37(3), 452-467. doi:10.1080/01436597.2015.1111753
- Bartesaghi, M., & Bowen, S. (2009). The acquisition of memory by interview questioning: Holocaust re-membling as category-bound activity. *Discourse Studies*, 11(2), 223-243. Retrieved April 12, 2020, from [www.jstor.org/stable/24049759](http://www.jstor.org/stable/24049759)
- Bullard, R. (2019). Addressing environmental racism. *Journal of International Affairs*, 73(1), 237-242. doi:10.2307/26872794
- Canipe, C. (2020, April 2). The social distancing of America. Retrieved from <https://graphics.reuters.com/HEALTH-CORONAVIRUS/USA/qmymkmwpra/>
- Capshaw, K. (2014). Pictures and Nonfiction: Conduct and Coffee Tables. In *Civil Rights Childhood: Picturing Liberation in African American Photobooks* (pp. 65-119). University of Minnesota Press. Retrieved April 11, 2020, from [www.jstor.org/stable/10.5749/j.ctt9qh35z.5](http://www.jstor.org/stable/10.5749/j.ctt9qh35z.5)
- Center for Disease Control and Prevention. (2020). Coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19). Retrieved from <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/index.html>
- CNN (2020) In Pictures: The novel Coronavirus Outbreak. *CNN*. Retrieved from <https://www.cnn.com/2020/03/19/world/gallery/novel-coronavirus-outbreak/index.html>
- COVID-19 dashboard by the center for systems science and engineering (CSSE) at Johns Hopkins University. (2020). Retrieved from <https://coronavirus.jhu.edu/map.html>
- Crenshaw, K., Ensler, E., Flanders, L., Glaude, E. S. Jr., Poo, A., Roberts, D., Starks, A. [African American Policy Forum]. (2020, March 28). (*Pt 1*) *Under the Blacklight: The Intersectional Vulnerabilities that COVID Lays Bare* [Video File]. Retrieved from <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OsBstnmBTaI>
- Cunningham, V. (2015, November 3). *Humans of New York and the cavalier consumption of others*. Retrieved April 24, 2020, from <https://www.newyorker.com/books/page-turner/humans-of-new-york-and-the-cavalier-consumption-of-others>
- Erlingsson, C.L., & Brysiewicz, P. (2017). A hands-on guide to doing content analysis. *African Journal of Emergency Medicine*, 7, 93 - 99.
- Gusterson, H. (2020, March 23). *What's wrong with "the Chinese Virus"?* Retrieved from [https://www.sapiens.org/column/conflicted/coronavirus-name/?fbclid=IwAR2CnIxpF0Q\\_9TssrkLUpx3ue0SKZm86krHYKFVGFY3gxr32hYR0puAIU](https://www.sapiens.org/column/conflicted/coronavirus-name/?fbclid=IwAR2CnIxpF0Q_9TssrkLUpx3ue0SKZm86krHYKFVGFY3gxr32hYR0puAIU)
- Hamilton, C. (2011). Why archive matters: Archive, public deliberation and citizenship. In Anderson B., Anthony Appiah K., Bernal M., Dineo Gqola P., Hamilton C., Mangcu X., et al. (Authors) & Mangcu X. (Ed.), *Becoming Worthy Ancestors: Archive, public deliberation and identity in South Africa* (pp. 119-144). Johannesburg: Wits University Press. Retrieved April 10, 2020, from [www.jstor.org/stable/10.18772/22011085324.11](http://www.jstor.org/stable/10.18772/22011085324.11)
- Horigan, K. (2018). "Establish some kind of control": Survivor interviews. In *Consuming Katrina: Public Disaster and Personal Narrative* (pp. 17-34). Jackson: University Press of Mississippi. doi:10.2307/j.ctv5jxp5k.5

- Illing, S. (2020, March 4). *Why pandemics activate xenophobia: The coronavirus is much more than a public health problem*. Retrieved from <https://www.vox.com/policy-and-politics/2020/3/4/21157825/coronavirus-pandemic-xenophobia-racism>
- Kennedy, D. (2020, April 4). Coronavirus taking toll on nurses, doctors around the globe. *New York Post* Retrieved from <https://nypost.com/2020/04/04/coronavirus-taking-toll-on-nurses-doctors-around-the-globe/>
- Kimmelman, M. (2020). The great empty. Retrieved from <https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2020/03/23/world/coronavirus-great-empty.html>
- Kniffel, L. (2005). StoryCorps Oral History Project: Listening as an act of love. *American Libraries*, 36(11), 42-45. Retrieved April 24, 2020, from [www.jstor.org/stable/25649798](http://www.jstor.org/stable/25649798)
- Lindahl, C. (2006). Survivor to survivor: Katrina stories from Houston. *Callaloo*, 29(4), 1506-1507. Retrieved April 10, 2020, from [www.jstor.org/stable/4488492](http://www.jstor.org/stable/4488492)
- Long, H., & Van Dam, A. (2020, April 9). 6.6 million Americans filed for unemployment last week, bringing the pandemic total to over 17 million. *The Washington Post* Retrieved from <https://www.washingtonpost.com/business/2020/04/09/66-million-americans-filed-unemployed-last-week-bringing-pandemic-total-over-17-million/>
- Moye, J. (2019). Everybody say freedom: Using oral history to construct and teach new civil rights narratives. In Jeffries H. (Ed.), *Understanding and Teaching the Civil Rights Movement* (pp. 197-208). Madison, Wisconsin: University of Wisconsin Press. doi:10.2307/j.ctvvsqcd0.20
- Muccari, R. & Chow, D. (2020, March 10). Coronavirus timeline: Tracking the critical moments of COVID-19. Retrieved May 2, 2020 from <https://www.nbcnews.com/health/health-news/coronavirus-timeline-tracking-critical-moments-covid-19-n1154341>
- Rashid, R. (2020, March 9,). Being called a cult is one thing, being blamed for an epidemic is quite another. *The New York Times* Retrieved from <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/03/09/opinion/coronavirus-south-korea-church.html>
- Reid-Pharr, R. (2016). War archive. In *Archives of Flesh: African America, Spain, and Post-Humanist Critique* (pp. 29-71). New York: NYU Press. doi:10.2307/j.ctt1bj4qsh.5
- Rinkunas, S. (2020). Your body is a bioweapon. Retrieved from [https://www.vice.com/en\\_us/article/4agz9n/my-body-my-choice-doesnt-apply-to-coronavirus-covid19](https://www.vice.com/en_us/article/4agz9n/my-body-my-choice-doesnt-apply-to-coronavirus-covid19)
- Stanton, B. (2015). *Humans of New York: Stories*. United States: St. Martin's Publishing Group.
- Stanton, B. (2020). *Humans of New York: About*. Retrieved from <https://www.humansofnewyork.com/about>
- Scruggs, G. (2020, April 19,). About 2,500 protesters converge at Washington State Capitol against stay-at-home order. *Reuters* Retrieved from <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-health-coronavirus-washington/about-2500-protesters-converge-at-washington-state-capitol-against-stay-at-home-order-idUSKBN22201H>
- Taylor, D. (2020, April 28). How the coronavirus pandemic unfolded: A timeline. *The New York Times*. Retrieved from <https://www.nytimes.com/article/coronavirus-timeline.html>
- Worldometer. (2020). Coronavirus update (live): 1,577,783 cases and 93,673 deaths from COVID-19 virus pandemic - worldometer. Retrieved from <https://www.worldometers.info/coronavirus/>
- Wuthnow, R. (2010). *Be Very Afraid: The Cultural Response to Terror, Pandemics, Environmental Devastation, Nuclear Annihilation, and Other Threats*. United Kingdom: Oxford University Press, USA.

Yaffe-Bellany, D., & Corkery, M. (2020). Dumped milk, smashed eggs, plowed vegetables: Food waste in a pandemic. Retrieved from <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/04/11/business/coronavirus-destroying-food.html>

# Appendices

## Appendix A. Project Process Chart





## Appendix B. Consent Form



We are a group of students from Worcester Polytechnic Institute (WPI) in the United States. We are conducting interviews to learn more about the experience of living through the COVID-19 outbreak of 2020. Your participation is voluntary.

Do we have your permission to publish your story in our archive?

Yes ☐ | No ☐

Do we have your permission to include your photo/video?

Yes ☐ | No ☐

Will you allow us to include your name and other identifying information?

Yes ☐ | No ☐

Sign:

Print:

Date:

---

## **Appendix C. Story Sharing/Interview Introductory Statement**

Hello! I am a third-year student at Worcester Polytechnic Institute (WPI) currently working with a team on a project to track the human experience of living through the ongoing pandemic outbreak of COVID-19. If you are interested, we would like to add your personal experience to this archive in either written, audio, and/or video format.

There are two ways we have developed to collect and share stories. If you are interested in participating you can choose whichever option you feel most comfortable with. For both of these options you can share through a video and/or audio story you record, we can record your video (or just audio over video chat), or you can simply share your story with us in writing. You would simply need to let us know which recording format — transcription vs. audio(-visual) — works best for you on a rolling basis. Please note that you also have the option of remaining anonymous when publishing your story, whatever it may be, in our archive. Ultimately, we just want to reiterate that how we structure the interviews is completely up to you. If there is a way you want to share your story that we haven't mentioned above please let us know and we will work with you to develop a way you can share that is comfortable for you.

Option 1: We will present you with a few question prompts, which you can choose to respond to by simply sharing your experience living through this pandemic. We intentionally have made prompts open-ended so that you can share what feels most important to you at this moment in time.

Option 2: We would like to find participants that we can interview, and then conduct a follow-up interview within the coming weeks. The purpose of this is to learn about the diverse ways we currently perceive the pandemic, and exactly how unfolding events over the course of a few weeks may change these perceptions.

Thank you for taking the time to consider being a part of our project. We truly believe that this is a unique time in human history and feel privileged to be given the opportunity to share your story. Let us know if you would like to participate or have any questions. You can message me back here or reach out to the whole team via our group email: [gr-Humanstories@wpi.edu](mailto:gr-Humanstories@wpi.edu).

[sign-off + signature]



## **Appendix D. Story Sharing Prompt Questions**

Hi there! The following are prompt questions we have provided as a ‘jumping-off point’ for you to tell your story. We recognize it can be difficult to know what to share, so we have provided these questions to give you a little guidance. We left them open-ended for you to share your story without being limited. That being said, if you want to share information that doesn’t relate to these questions, feel free to just share whatever story you would like. Our goal here is simply to document the human experience through this unique time in history, and every perspective is valid and important to this work.

### **Prompt Questions:**

1. If recording video/audio please state at the beginning of your video: “I (state your name) give permission to have my video/audio recorded and published through WPI.”
2. Please tell us a little bit about yourself (Name, Age, Occupation, Location).
3. What has been the most notable change (if any) in your daily life since the outbreak of COVID-19 began to affect your daily activities?
4. How have your relationships/social life changed since the outbreak of COVID-19?
5. How has your professional life changed since the outbreak of COVID-19?
6. How do you think this moment in time will be remembered in history?

## **Appendix E. Recurring Interview Questions**

1. If recording video/audio please state at the beginning of your video: “I (state your name) give permission to have my video/audio recorded and published on the archive at WPI.”
2. Please tell us a little bit about yourself (Name, Age, Occupation, Location).
3. What is life like where you are? (Shelter in place, only some businesses closed, business as usual, etc)
4. How have local businesses responded to this turn of events?
5. Do you think the proper preventative measures are being taken in your area? Should authorities do more/less to mitigate spread?
6. Have you had to adapt the way you typically live due to the COVID-19 pandemic since the previous interview? If yes, what have been some significant changes?
7. Are there any lessons you hope you or others learn from this experience?
8. How do you think this situation will develop over the near and distant future?

## **Appendix F. Working Links**

Interview Matrix:

<https://docs.google.com/spreadsheets/d/16qrF81cyv7nHOWJxEYyoVlaXgHuVc-TX9PUbkW7LBPA/edit?usp=sharing>

Map of Stories:

<https://drive.google.com/open?id=1ofVpufm8MGjKXtAj5ucbgA8qkR6L7zYU&usp=sharing>



## **Appendix G. Community/Environmental Introductory Statement**

Hello! I am a third-year student at Worcester Polytechnic Institute (WPI) currently working with a group of four peers on an Interactive Qualifying Project (IQP), where our goal is to contribute to an archive that tracks the human experience of living through the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic. We saw that you recently posted a photo of [insert brief description of community/env change here] and we would like to include it in our archive of changes caused by the pandemic. We would also like to include a brief statement from you to provide context for the photo.

We truly believe that this is a unique time in human history and feel privileged to be given the opportunity to record it. Let me know if you would like to participate or have any questions. You can message me back here or reach out to the whole team via our email: [gr-Humanstories@wpi.edu](mailto:gr-Humanstories@wpi.edu).

[sign-off + signature]

## **Appendix H. Community/Environment Changes Questions**

Hi there! Thank you for agreeing to share your photo with us! We'd really appreciate it if you could provide us with context by answering the following questions.

1. If recording video/audio please state at the beginning of your video: "I give permission to have my video/audio recorded."
2. Please tell us a little bit about yourself (Name, Age, Occupation, Location).
3. Can you give a brief explanation of this photo? (what is happening, where it was taken, how it varies from what might normally occur)
4. Why did you feel compelled to record this moment?
5. Is there anything else you want to share?