

Serious epidemics have always been major events in the lives of everyone who experienced them and in time of war they have had a significant effect on military operations. But their larger effects have generally gone unnoticed because the epidemics themselves have left scarcely a trace on public memory. The influenza epidemic of 1918-1919 killed more people in a shorter time than any other disaster of any kind on record. Like the lesser smallpox epidemic described by Fenn, it had far-reaching effects on the conduct of the war that went with it and on the lives of everyone who survived it. But it received

? scant coverage from the press of the time and disappeared from public memory almost instantly. Paul Fussell found no occasion to mention it in *The Great War and Modern Memory*.⁴

It did not get serious examination by historians until 1976, when Alfred Crosby assessed its lethal extent. Crosby, in a searching afterword to his study, noted the attention that the epidemic received in memoirs and autobiographies and its almost total absence from twentieth-century literature and from the standard textbook histories of the United States. "The average college graduate born since 1918," he observed, "literally knows more about the Black Death of the fourteenth century than the World War I pandemic, although it is undoubtedly true that several of his or her older friends or relatives lived through it and, if asked, could describe the experience in some detail."⁵

⁴Oxford University Press, 1975.

⁵Crosby, *Epidemic and Peace*, pp. 314-315.

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Personal memo from
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Footnote on flu amnesia

That amnesia has also puzzled me for a long time.

There were (as always) exceptions.

I just heard read about 1918 flu in Mark Sullivan's *Our Times*, which I encountered when I was about 14 — in 1939. See encl.

In 1963 I was also much impressed by Lerner-Anderson's chart (encl.) which I have kept up to date and used in numerous lectures, writing, etc. (encl. Yale 4/25/01) Today, of course, "Emerging Infections" is a buzz word: because the web.

What do you make of the amnesia?
What like examples do you think of?

Sincerely,

SA11357)

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see pandemic ← flu
smallpox

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