



JOURNAL OF PLAGUE YEAR PUBLIC ARCHIVE: INTERNSHIP

January 2021-May 2021

Portfolio by:

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Reflection Essay

The overall experience of the internship was a very positive one. Before beginning the internship, my only knowledge of public history, and the archives as well, was very general and non-practical. Before coming on as part of the internship team, I knew that these were things I needed to develop. Having completed the internship, I am much more confident in my ability to practice public history and organize an archive.

Before beginning the internship, I knew that collecting oral histories was going to be part of the archives. As someone who had not collected oral histories, I was concerned about my ability to collect these and collect them well. However, collecting and archiving oral histories was one of my favorite parts of the internship. This is something that I would like to do more of and further develop my ability to collect and archive them.

One thing I did struggle with was the monotony of curating. Curating for this particular project is one of the most important jobs and the entirety of the archive depends on curation. The daily work of curating stories certainly pushed me and helped me learn about my strengths and weaknesses. My preferred items to work on were oral histories and my collection. However, curating, I believe, is the job on which the archive hinges. Without curators, there would be no archive. Similarly, without contributors, there would be no archive. Reaching out to people was something as well that I enjoyed, but I received very little response. However, this was very important for the archive. Overall, I learned a lot and this knowledge will no doubt help me in my future endeavors.

Mission Statement

The mission of the Journal of the Plague Year archive is to crowdsource public information and personal stories to preserve and document experiences related to the COVID-19 pandemic. Collection plans, in nature, feature or highlight various themes of an archive. Thus, religion, being such a major theme in the lives of many, should be highlighted. Highlighting religion gives adherents of all faiths a platform to share their pandemic experience and how COVID-19 has affected their religious life and culture

Collection Plan

Collection Scope

A major goal of this collection is to make sure all religions and faith groups can share how their beliefs have aided them throughout the pandemic and how aspects of their faith may be able to aid those of a different faith or those who are areligious. The purpose of this collection is to provide a seat to all religions so that we can adequately preserve their stories. For this collection, the major, overarching theme must be diversity. One voice cannot represent the whole of world religions. As such, the goal of this collection is to be all-inclusive.

Some key themes this collection will be targeting is how the faith of people has helped them cope with issues like loss, sickness, and death. Additionally, if someone's faith or religion has failed them during this time, that story needs to be told and heard as well. Finally, the historic goal of

this collection is to preserve how the pandemic has impacted various religions and religious traditions, as well as how various religions and faiths have impacted people during the pandemic.

Acquisitions

As previously stated, a pivotal aspect of this archive will be diversity. Thus, it will be crucial to reach out to people of various faiths and ask them to contribute their stories. This can be done in various ways. One can reach out directly to their friends via social media platforms. The only potential issue with this option is that often, social media accounts tend to be echo chambers wherein it is more difficult to be diverse. Another option is to directly reach out to various faith communities via their religious gathering place. This would encourage faith leaders to also contribute to the archive. Many methods will need to be employed to adequately survey a great diversity of faiths and religions.

Evaluation

This collection will certainly add to the list as no current collection can or will house every story about religion. While some stories about religion will certainly overlap with other collections, stories purely about religion and COVID-19 are left out of a collection. In this sense, having a collection dedicated to religion highlights religious stories and encourages people to submit stories about religion. While there is not current collection devoted to religion or religious cultures, a tag is extant for religion. Thus, while religion and religious cultures do not have a collection, there is a current way to preserve stories about religion and religious cultures.

Key/Sample Items in Collection

<https://covid-19archive.org/s/archive/item/39402>

1. Rebecca Jean Smith
2. This is a litany, or a series of prayful petitions, to God during the COVID-19 pandemic.
3. It is unclear where this took place, but it is within the Episcopal Church.
4. The date attributed to the litany is January 19, 2021.
5. This story relates well to the overall religion collection because it displays how a religious group is praying and worshipping during COVID-19.

<https://covid-19archive.org/s/archive/item/39080>

1. Myer Bloom
2. This item is a story about one person's religious, specifically Jewish, experience.
3. It looks as though the story comes from Melbourne, AU.
4. The date attributed to the story is March 1, 2021.
5. This contribution shows a different religious aspect outside of worship. It tells the story of celebrating religious holidays within Judaism.

<https://covid-19archive.org/s/archive/item/38269>

1. Kris Engdahl
2. This item details how the PCUSA in Massachusetts is dealing, and has dealt with COVID-19.
3. Brookline, MA.
4. The date attributed is February 10, 2021.
5. The thing I really like about this story is that is somewhat all encompassing. It touches on high holidays in the Christian world while also discussing aspects of how the church is worshipping.

<https://covid-19archive.org/s/archive/item/11847>

1. Ellie Kennedy, Tom Beazley
2. This item focuses on the teaching of love in Islam, Judaism, and Christianity.
3. NA
4. The date created is April 9, 2020.
5. While the other articles I have put in this section focus on worship and holidays of various religious groups, this article focuses on the teaching of love within the three Abrahamic faiths.

<https://covid-19archive.org/s/archive/item/30153>

1. Britton McNerlin
2. This article deals with how Buddhist monks and nuns are dealing with the pandemic.
3. Heatherdale, P.E.I, Canada
4. October 16, 2020
5. This article speaks to how Buddhist monks are protecting themselves and one another from the COVID-19 pandemic.

Call for Submissions

Hello [person I am reaching out to]. My name is Brandon K. Presley and I am reaching out on behalf of the Journal of Plague Year online digital archive. As you know, over the past year, the COVID-19 pandemic has affected everyone in different ways. As a student in the MA program in History at Arizona State, I have the opportunity of working with the archive. Over the past year, the program has been collecting personal stories for the Journal's public archive. At the present time, I am working on collecting stories revolving around religion. Religion plays a pivotal role in lives of many, and thus, it is important to see how various religions and religious cultures have been affected by the pandemic. Some potential examples for a submission would be stories about how the pandemic has changed your own personal spiritual practices or how COVID-19 has impacted the corporate religious service wherein you engage. However, any story engaging your faith would be helpful for the religion collection of the archive.

The digital, online archive is user-friendly. Simply navigate to <https://covid-19archive.org/s/archive/page/Share> to share your story. When submitting a story, fill out the following required fields: Title, Description, Contributor Name (the name of the person submitting the story), Accepted File Types (this would be for items like PDFs, photos, videos, etc.), and a time frame for the story. If you have any further questions, please feel free to reach out to me at bkpresle@asu.edu. Your help and stories are much appreciated as we work to preserve the happenings throughout this pandemic.

Blog Post

Title: Religion – What is it good for?

Religion. The sibling of the other notable controversial topic at family gatherings: politics. Arguably, the COVID-19 pandemic has only created a more rigid divide in people's lives and opinions. However, we must bridge this divide as religion plays a major role in the lives of many Americans. The way to successfully be united is to listen to differing voices while respecting people of all faith traditions. Thankfully, while the pandemic has exposed the deep fault line between people of varying religious traditions, it has also demonstrated how religious groups can work together and how faith-based organizations can serve the needs of society.

COVID-19 and Religious Unity

The COVID-19 archive displays religious unity in two ways: first, by displaying stories of how various religious groups are working together to help those in need during the pandemic, and secondly, by encouraging voices of all faith backgrounds to contribute. During the pandemic, division has been at the heart of many. Seeking to create rifts, many have been successful; however, certain stories in the religion collection highlight how this has not always been the case. One article entitled, "Love your neighbour: Islam¹, Judaism² and Christianity³ come together over COVID-19," focuses on how the three Abrahamic faiths are working together during the pandemic. To cooperate with one another, an open dialogue is present between the three faiths to discuss their similarities and their differences. Chiefly, however, each faith holds the common belief regarding the inherent value of human life. Thus, the faiths are cooperating to combat the virus.⁴

Another example of religious unity within the collection is the sheer amount of voices present. Through diversity, the archive shows unity. The religion collection holds stories from a host of religions, from Christianity, to Judaism, to Islam, and also faiths like Buddhism, Bahai, and more. The pandemic has impacted all religions and faiths. By hearing and sharing stories from how the pandemic has impacted various faiths, readers are able to see how faith groups are reacting during adverse times.

¹ Islam has much in common with Judaism and Christianity regarding love of neighbor. C.f. *A Common World: Muslims and Christians on Loving God and Neighbor*, ed. by Miroslav Volf, Ghazi bin Muhammad, Melissa Yarrington (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2010).

² Judaism highly values community and one's love for their neighbor. C.f. Joseph Telushkin, *A Code of Jewish Ethics: Love Your Neighbor as Yourself* (New York: Bell Tower, 2009).

³ In Christianity, the practice of charity/love is historic and integral to one's faith. C.f. Joseph Sollier, "Love (Theological Virtue)," in *The Catholic Encyclopedia*, Vol. 9. New York: Robert Appleton Company, 1910. Accessed 28 Mar. 2021 <http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/09397a.htm>.

⁴ This story can be found here: <https://covid-19archive.org/s/archive/item/11847>

Love your neighbour: Islam, Judaism and Christianity come together over COVID-19



Religious Culture, Practice, and Charity during COVID-19

Key parts of religious culture and various faiths are charity and service. In an article published by Harvard Divinity School, five authors discuss how love, service, and giving, plays an important role in the discussed faiths.⁵ Judaism, Christianity, Islam, Buddhism, and Sikhism all place a high value on charity and service, especially during difficult times. The practice and teaching of charity comes from a belief in the value of human life and the importance of loving one's neighbor.

The pandemic has highlighted the role of charity in various faiths. The USAID (United States Agency International Development) published an article detailing exactly how religious groups are helping neighbors as the pandemic rages. These faith-based organizations are helping both their neighbors in their home countries while also investing a lot of resources into countries overseas.⁶ The act of loving one's neighbor while giving and serving to those who have been sick or in need has been encouraging while the pandemic continues to rage.



⁵ Jon D. Levenson, Dudley C. Rose, Jocelyne Cesari, Chris Berlin, Harpreet Singh, "Why Give? Religious Roots of Charity," *Harvard Divinity School*, November 26, 2018. Accessed March 27, 2021: <https://hds.harvard.edu/news/2013/12/13/why-give-religious-roots-charity>.

⁶ This story can be found here: <https://covid-19archive.org/s/archive/item/41028>.

Takeaway

While the pandemic exacerbated some divisions between Americans, the religion collection of the archive is a place where unity and diversity are clearly visible. While not all religious organizations have done their part, what many have done should encourage everyone and show the benefit that religious organizations can indeed have for society. In spite of reduced charitable giving, faith-based organizations have continued to pour into the communities and lives of many.

Journal

January 11-17, 2021 – Week One

Please reflect on the readings/activities related to what is an archive? What is the JOTPY archive and whose history is it preserving?

This week, I spend quite a bit of time learning how to use the Journal of the Plague Year website. I explored the stories of others while also looking to see what other people found to be significant. In addition to this, I also worked to familiarize myself with the responsibilities I will have as an intern archivist over the next fourteen weeks. The responsibilities as a curator and an archivist regarding the Journal are significant. Archivists and public historians have a duty to make sure all people are given a seat at the table and to make sure that no story is silenced. Thus, in preserving an archive, deciding what is “permanently valuable” is an incredible, and humbling, responsibility.

In addition to familiarizing myself with the course and my responsibilities, I also spent a good deal of time completing the pandemic prompts for module one. By completing these prompts, it not only allowed me to share my story with others, but it also allowed me to reflect on the past year of my own life through the pandemic. While everyone has a unique story to tell, we all have experienced many of the same things: financial stress, social and physical isolation, fear over the possibility of losing family members, etc. The Journal is way for people to not only tell their story to each other, but a way to preserve these stories for the next generation who could also experience yet another pandemic. Thus, the Journal is a collection of stories, news articles, and dealings about what we have collectively, and independently, experienced over the course of the pandemic.

Bibliography

SAA, "What are Archives?" (Updated 12 Sept 2016).

January 18-24, 2021 – Week Two

Please reflect on the readings/activities related to archival silences. How are they created? What are the current silences in the archive? What can you do about archival silences?

Archival Silences are indeed a major problem when it comes to archives. Silences ultimately occur when the stories of people are omitted, either purposefully or inadvertently, from the historical archive. I like the questions that Fuentes asks in her book. Fuentes, who wanted to research the lives of female slaves in the Caribbean, had a major problem in doing so because a lack of their stories in the archive. In speaking of the archives and some narratives are silenced, she writes, “What would a narrative of slavery look like when taking into account ‘power in the production of history?’ That is, how do slaveholders’ interests affect how they document their world, and in turn, how do these very documents result in persistent historical silences?” (Fuentes, 5). Slave holders, in general, viewed the lives of their slaves only as investments and thus they had little to no intrinsic human value. Because of this belief, the stories of these women were not adequately recorded in the archive. This creates a gap in the way we are able to reconstruct an accurate, historical narrative.

As an archivist, the goal is to be as inclusive as possible. It is important that everyone be given a voice and have their story told in the archive. Without the stories from a diversity of backgrounds, future historians will not be able to accurately see into the past. Historical reconstruction is already difficult because of difficulties with interpretation; if entire narratives and stories are omitted, whether intentionally or unintentionally, the reconstruction becomes all the more difficult. This week, I worked to identify potential silences and I worked to address them. It will always be impossible for one person to identify all silences, but because many people are working on this journal it ensures the inclusion of a diversity of voices.

Bibliography

Fuentes, Marisa J. *Dispossessed Lives: Enslaved Women, Violence, and the Archive*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2016.

January 25-31, 2021 – Week Three

Please reflect on the readings/activities related to what does "light touch," curation mean? Why is it important to curate with a light touch? What are the dos and don'ts of curation for the JOTPY archive? Finally, what collection are you most interested in working on and why, alternatively is there an obvious silence you'd like to address in the archive?

From the way I understood the reading, light touch curation is essentially how it sounds. For most, I believe it would be very easy to go through and edit the items in the archive. However, light touch curation avoids doing this. Rather than edit what someone has written, light touch curation categorizes and classifies what has been written and contributed. Specifically regarding the JOTPY archive, no censorship should take place. Additionally, no items are to be deleted. The job of curators is to, in a sense, take a submitted story and describe it with specific tags and to properly categorize the item.

I am most interested in further continuing the work that has been started on the rural voices collection. Being from a rural area of east Tennessee, I would like to see this collection grow. Additionally, I would be interested in building a collection around the responses of various religions. Within the archive, there are many items pertaining to responses of various world religions, however, I think it would be beneficial to have a collection devoted to religious cultures and their responses to the pandemic. This is not so much a silence, per se; rather, it would be an concerted effort to systematize what is already extant in the archive.

February 1-7, 2021 – Week Four

Why is privacy important in an archive?

From this week, I quickly learned of the ethical difficulties that accompany working in the archive. For some, work may be done with a private archive, simplifying the potential ethical concerns. However, JOTPY is a public archive. As such, it is of the utmost importance to protect the identity of those who contribute to the archive. Many circumstances can magnify the importance of privacy. Many minors may not think anything about posting potentially harmful or compromising information. Thus, the archiver/curator must protect personal information. When posting stories

or pictures about participation in protests, it is very important to blur or redact (preferably redact) faces in the images to protect people's identity.

If one does not respect privacy in the archive, major problems could occur. If someone posts a relative's name and their medical diagnoses regarding COVID-19, this could be a HIPAA violation, leading oneself open to potential lawsuits. If a curator does not redact personal information, it could also lead to a contributor or a creator being targeted, especially if the contribution pertains to protesting. Thus, it is incredibly important to protect personal information, not only for oneself but especially for those contributing to the archive.

February 8-14, 2021 – Week Five

How can JOTPY increase public participation?

Because JOTPY is a public, crowdsourced archive, it relies almost exclusively on outside participation. Thus, for JOTPY to continue to succeed and grow, public participation must also grow. I think the best way for the journal to grow is for those involved to reach out to fellow universities (something that has definitely been done), to reach out to news stations to perhaps do a story on the archive, to make social media posts calling for stories, etc. For the religion collection, I am planning on getting into contact with several religious leaders in my area. Being in a moderate-sized city like Knoxville, most faith groups are represented. In a concerted effort to hear from various religious leaders, strides must be made for them to know that their voices will be valued in the archive.

While historians are not reporters, historians and archivists, like reporters, must dig for stories, but in a different way. Specifically for JOTPY, the archivists and historians are not writing the stories of others, but are instead encouraging others to submit their own stories. Public participation in the archive is all about public awareness and the public knowing that their voices are valued. The only way these things can be known to the public is through archive workers reaching out to various people who can help get news of the archive to the public.

February 15-21, 2021 – Week Six

Were you successful in getting someone outside the internship to contribute to the archive? What challenges, if any, did you face?

In asking several people to contribute Friday, I have yet to have my reaching out pay dividends. Nonetheless, I feel confident at the very least I can get a few of my friends to certainly contribute. In my emails to various religious organizations Friday evening, I have yet to hear back. However, because the vast majority of religious groups perform their services and rites on the weekends, I am hopeful to hear back from at least a couple at some point this week. In addition, I am planning to reach out to more groups this week to cast a wider net. I have not run into any real issues other than not seeing contributions as of yet.

February 22-28, 2021 – Week Seven

In what ways does social media expand access to the archive? In what ways does it marginalize groups and potential participants?

Social media is something that nearly everyone in our modern society has, yet it is also something that most people admit is bad for society and culture. Social media helps to make possible things like the JOTPY archive. It gives a platform for archivists to share the archive itself. In this way, there are many people who are now able to share their own story to make sure that it is preserved. Essentially, social media expands awareness for more effective crowdsourcing.

The most problematic part of using social media to spread awareness is that this does not guarantee participation in the archive. Many people who posts calling for submissions are not likely to submit for various reasons. I would imagine that most of the submissions to the archive are not from social media outreach, but are instead from archivists personally reaching out to people they know and asking for submissions, rather than a scripted social media post. Furthermore, using social media only reaches those who have and use social media. This excludes many senior citizens, many who are marginalized and do not have access to technology, and those who view social media as essentially negative and choose to not participate. Overall, social media is a tool, I believe, that we should use, but not one that we should rely upon heavily.

March 1-7, 2021 – Week Eight

This week, I prepared to perform three interviews. The assignment calls for two, however, I think the third will add to multiple collections. Originally, I set out to interview a friend of mine who is a Protestant pastor in rural Tennessee as well as my brother-in-law who is a first-year marine. Both of these voices would add to a couple of collections, if not more. Furthermore, I think both could bring an interesting perspective to the archive. The third person I chose to interview is a friend of mine who is a chaplain reserve in the Army. This person would fall into several collections, and again, would bring a different voice to the archive.

For my assignments this week, I have only submitted the work for the chaplain and the pastor. I have set up an interview time and built a list of questions for my brother-in-law, but I am awaiting his completion of the informed consent form. We have, however, set up an interview time next week. Overall, the work this week was interesting. It was much harder than I expected to build good interview questions. Nonetheless, I am looking forward to the interviews.

March 8-14, 2021 – Week Nine

What is it like to conduct an oral history? And what are the steps involved?

Conducting an oral history was challenging. While I certainly enjoyed it, I found it difficult to not treat the interview like a discussion. The steps that I followed were conducting a pre-interview, getting a filled-out release form, and writing the questions. In doing this, I was able to prepare for asking questions. However, because interviews are not scripted events, there are always things that occur that you cannot really prepare for, but instead, you have to pay close attention to ask good follow-up questions. The transcription of the oral history also took a great deal of time (and I am

still not sure I did it just right). Nonetheless, I thoroughly enjoyed the process and would happily do it again. Getting to hear people's stories and experiences is something that is truly special.

March 15-21, 2021 – Week Ten

What goes into an oral history project? Could you see yourself doing more of these in the future?

In preparation for an oral history, a great deal of time and effort is expended. First, the interviewer writes the questions, sets up a meeting time, then transcribes the meeting. All in all, this takes quite a bit of time, even with the help of modern technology like a.i. Personally, I enjoyed the oral histories. Though they took a good bit of time, sitting down with someone who comes from a different life and perspective and hearing them talk about their experiences is very helpful and insightful. Additionally, oral histories are great in preserving stories because not only can they be heard, but when transcribed they can also be read.

March 22-28, 2021 – Week Eleven

Why is it sometimes more difficult to write for a public audience?

Writing for a public audience is difficult, especially if one does not often write for a public audience. Being in an academic setting, the use of subject-specific jargon that laymen do not often hear creates the likelihood of either miscommunicating or failing to communicate the author's idea at all. Thus, it is important to avoid high academic terminology. What makes this especially difficult is trying to explain a thought or concept without using an academic term that encapsulates said thought. Additionally, it is absolutely imperative that the writer defines their terms (though this is also the case with academic writing, but to more extent popular writing). Finally, popular writing needs a lot more creativity to effectively garner attention and keep the reader interested.

March 29-April 4, 2021 – Week Twelve

How has the internship prepared you for future academic, personal, or professional endeavors?

The internship has been helpful first and foremost in helping me understand the archive in a more practical way. Throughout my historical study thus far, the archive is one of the most discussed aspects of research, and rightfully so. However, until one deals with themselves, it is difficult to truly grasp what working with the archive is like. Understand the archive in a practical way is helpful both academically and professionally. Personally, I have learned how to interact much more over technology while using apps like Zoom.

April 5-11, 2021 – Week Thirteen

What are strategies to provide effective peer feedback?

Any time I have provided feedback to peer I have tried to implement the same style that most professors have when they give feedback. I always find positives things to say about the project, paper, etc. before I give any critique. In the past, I have also had to write a number book critiques. I try to structure feedback like a book critique. Overall, I think what is most important whenever providing feedback is to point out all of the good things someone has done first before offering criticism.

April 12-18, 2021 – Week Fourteen

There is a major difference in writing between the two. For academic writing, while one does need to define terms, the writing can assume a base level of knowledge from the reader, then if one is writing for a public audience. Public writing also needs to use more creative and eye-catching language to keep a reader's attention. This is not to say that academic writing should be boring, but it is to be much more formal. Personally, I am not comfortable at this point writing for a public audience. Having been through one MA program in Theology and nearly 24 hours through Arizona State's MA in history, I am fairly comfortable with academic writing, but far less comfortable with public writing.

April 19-25, 2021 – Week Fifteen

How would you describe the JOTPY internship experience? What was it like working as an intern on this project?

The internship, while challenging due to working and taking another course concurrently, was very fulfilling and educating. I have learned a great deal about the historical archive and how silences can occur. For the historian/archivist, it is very important to work to include all perspectives, not just one's own. I believe, generally, that many silences are unintentional. Because of this, it is important to have many people of diverse backgrounds to ensure that all voices are properly heard and archived. I also believed the teamwork aspect, over a long distance, was helpful as well. Overall, my experience was very positive.