

## **Transcript of Interview with Erika Knox by Andrew Small**

**Interviewee:** Erika Knox

**Interviewer:** Andrew Small

**Date:** 12/08/2020

**Transcriber:** Victoria Clark

**Abstract:** Erika Knox is a student at Northeastern University in Boston, Massachusetts where she's taken a class on the history of global pandemics. In this interview, she discusses how the class has affected her view on the current COVID-19 pandemic.

**Andrew Small 0:02**

Hello and welcome. Today is Tuesday, December 8, 2020. My name is Andrew Small and I'm a second year Asian Studies major at Northeastern University in Boston, Massachusetts. And I'm joined today by Erica Knox, who is a graduating history major also at Northeastern, and this is part two of a two part interview series on living through the coronavirus pandemic. And today we'll be talking about the effects that studying past pandemics have had on our view of the current coronavirus pandemic. And so this interview will be uploaded to the COVID-19 archive project as a testament-as a testimony for those living through the pandemic. Erika, do you consent to this interview being uploaded and use as an oral history narrative?

**Erika Knox 0:45**

Of course, sounds great.

**Andrew Small 0:47**

All right, let's get right into it. So over the course of the past semester, we have been studying pandemics through a historical lens. And so do you think that studying past pandemics have changed the way that you view this current one?

**Erika Knox 1:02**

I think it definitely has. With learning about past pandemics, it's just so I guess shocking to think about how I didn't know about all these different diseases or viruses that had affected people before on a wide scale, um, on a wide scale effort, and I guess the word like even the word pandemic, like I didn't know epidemic outbreak, I didn't know anything about it. And learning about past pandemics really put this one into perspective, I guess, and just moved. I know I was able to see human reaction and the ways that the historically people have dealt with such horrible diseases.

**Andrew Small 1:46**

And what kind of pandemics specifically stuck out to you in history? And how do these relate to COVID-19?

**Erika Knox 1:55**

So I think the pandemics that stuck out the most to me, um, were the larger ones, or some of the most deadly ones that I guess I'd never had never known about or read about, even as a history major. So I'm thinking specifically of smallpox, which was eradicated in that 1980, I believe. And it's not around anymore, like nobody ever gets it. But just like the detrimental aspects of the disease itself, how quickly it kills people how quickly infected entire communities. It just makes me think about in terms of COVID, like, smallpox is extremely deadly. And things like cholera are extremely deadly. And if we had such a pandemic that was so deadly now with COVID-19 isn't as deadly, it's killed so many people and caused people to suffer. But I think it's just wild to have to put that in perspective where if you get one of those diseases, you have a, 60, 50-60% chance of dying. That really stuck with me and it's horrid, but it did.

**Andrew Small 3:07**

Yeah, no, it's definitely a terrifying situation at the end. On the topic of deaths, pandemic related deaths, with over 270,000 people dead in America, and cases spiking all over the country. How do you think this country could have benefited from learning from the responses to past pandemics?

**Erika Knox 3:25**

I think this country, America, could have been far more prepared for this pandemic. So when we've been learning about these historical pandemics, like even the plague, the black plague, and smallpox and even the 1918 flu, we think about how they didn't even have any medical knowledge or scientific knowledge about where these came from, and how to combat them. And we're sitting here in the 21st century, with COVID, and just knowing that we could have been more prepared for this, based on the information that we do have at our hands, is really shocking. And I think we would have benefited more by tracking and having more research in like infectious disease that was upcoming, which I think was in place or could have been in place but just wasn't.

**Andrew Small 4:24**

And kind of jumping off that do you think that past pandemics are forgotten by the general public? And if so why?

**Erika Knox 4:32**

Yeah, I definitely think it's an aspect of, like, I would be talking about what we learned in class and the different pandemics that we learned about with my family or friends and I'm like "Oh, isn't this crazy? Like, can you believe this happened like not even 100 years ago when thinking about the different flus, the 1918 and 1968 flus that happened?" And I think it's just it's easier for people to be able to move on from such trauma-traumas. And so they're often forgotten. And I think what goes along with that is the social ills they bring up, so you see a discrepancy in the way people are treated based on race, based on socioeconomic status. And these ills aren't addressed after the disease because things have gotten so much better because people aren't dying all over. But I think it's easier for people to be like "We've moved past, like nobody's dying. Nobody's getting sick anymore. Just move past and go on."

**Andrew Small 5:35**

That's an interesting point. Just kind of for the final question, do you think that we humans will ever learn from our past experiences with pandemics? And do you think it is possible to be more prepared for future pandemics? And if so, do you think that this could be easily implemented into our society?

**Erika Knox 5:54**

And I don't know if we'll ever learn from past pandemics. I mean, they've been going on for as long as history has gone on. And even, as I've mentioned, with the technologies we had to be prepared for these, prepared for COVID-19 and this pandemic, if we still seem to be, at least in America, unprepared. Or many people have been in denial of the disease. But, I mean, that being said, we do have the technologies to be prepared for this, I think it's just not easily implemented because a lot of the big aspects of these pandemics is the fear and the death and the scariness that they provide. And I don't think people always want to come head on to that. And people often deny it because they're afraid but it just leads to more suffering and destruction. Not to end on that.

**Andrew Small 6:53**

Not a great note to end on but.

**Erika Knox 6:54**

Yeah.

**Andrew Small 6:55**

Thank you so much for your answers today.

**Erika Knox 6:58**

Yeah, of course.

Transcribed by <https://otter.ai>