

Frontline Defenders

By Cody Brown

Not all heroes wear capes, some wear scrubs and masks. The archetypal hero in the United States and across the world has changed over the last few months from superheroes to medical workers. Since the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic, medical workers (doctors, nurses, EMS workers, and their supporting staff) have worked on the healthcare frontlines to treat COVID-19 patients and protect our communities, sometimes at great personal risk. For example, in Georgia, as many as ten percent of confirmed COVID-19 cases were healthcare workers.¹ Despite the risks to their own health, and the ever-changing guidelines for dealing with COVID-19, these modern day superheroes have answered the call of protecting public health.



Photograph by Carrie Brown (used with permission)

In an effort to document the effects of the COVID-19 crisis, a team of historians at Arizona State University embarked on a project to capture real-time accounts of the pandemic. Whether firsthand stories, news articles, photographs, social media posts, etc. the project - aptly named *Journal of the Plague Year* after Daniel Defoe's 1722 novel of the same name - attempts to create a lasting archive of knowledge for present and future generations to learn about this uncertain time in our history. *Journal of the Plague Year* (JOTPY) has grown from a small vision of three professors at Arizona State University to a multi-national effort comprised of graduate students and faculty from around the world.² With nearly 8,000 items at the time of

writing this post, and growing, JOTPY has become a massive repository of real-time data that will be available for future generations and researchers.

Documenting the Frontline Experience

Part of my experience as a graduate intern on the JOTPY project has been to collect, compile, and organize the [#healthcareheroes](#) collection within the archive. I have a personal investment in this collection as my mother is a flight nurse at a local hospital and my brother is a firefighter/paramedic at a local fire department. I have heard some of their harrowing accounts. The goal of this collection is to give a voice to all the healthcare workers on the frontlines of this pandemic and to share their stories, like the story of the Georgia healthcare workers mentioned above. Not only is this collection about the stories of struggle, heartache, and joy coming from medical workers, but it also about stories of appreciation for those that have sacrificed so much. Across the country and the world, people have been expressing their thanks for healthcare workers in various ways, such as [Krispy Kreme's donation](#) to medical staff, various individuals using their artistic talents to write messages of appreciation for our healthcare workers, or communities coming together to [show their support](#).



Image courtesy of East Jefferson General Hospital, Metairie, LA (Facebook)³

The personal stories of our medical professionals have often gone unheard during this pandemic and it is important that we remember the effort and sacrifices they are making to ensure the health and wellbeing of our communities, here and around the globe. If you, or someone you know would like to contribute to the [#healthcareheroes](#) collection, check out the JOTPY archive and [share your story](#). By sharing your story or showing friends and family where they can share theirs, we can ensure that the voices of those fighting the battle with COVID-19 do not go unheard.

Other Collections in the Archive and How You Can Help

The #healthcareheroes collection is just one of many collections in JOTPY. Graduate interns at Arizona State University have created over a dozen unique collections within the archive and are actively looking for submissions to help fill silences for a wide range of individuals, many marginalized, from the [LGBTQ+ community](#) to [incarcerated individuals](#) to [rural voices](#). As the archive continues to grow, so too will the collections continue to grow and evolve, and new collections will be added. If you would like to view a full list of the JOTPY collections please visit the [calls page](#). If you have any questions about the #healthcareheroes collections please [contact me](#). For all other collections, contact information for the responsible intern can be found on their specific calls page.

We are all going through this difficult time together; and together we can ensure that this period in our history is not forgotten and is remembered as it happened, for better or for worse, by making our voices heard through *Journal of the Plague Year*.

Keywords: healthcare, pandemic, COVID-19, nurse, doctor

¹ Andy Miller, "10% Of Confirmed COVID-19 Cases In Georgia Are Among Health Care Workers," 90.1 FM WABE, last modified May 1, 2020, <https://www.wabe.org/10-of-confirmed-covid-19-cases-in-georgia-are-among-health-care-workers/>.

² Journal of the Plague Year Team, "Welcome · Covid-19 Archive," A Journal of the Plague Year, last modified August 5, 2020, <https://covid-19archive.org/s/archive/page/welcome>.

³ East Jefferson General Hospital, "Thanks to whomever has been leaving these encouraging messages at our entrance," , 2020, <https://www.facebook.com/ejhospital/>.