

Addie Nofal

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Flu Files

The historical artifact that I chose to analyze was a comic from the *Fort Wayne Sentinel* on December 7, 1918. The comic, called *Bringing up Father in Fort Wayne*, depicts a wife, who is wearing a mask during the Spanish Flu pandemic, and a husband who refuses to do so. After the wife throws household objects at him, he eventually goes to get a mask. The husband character, Jiggs, was actually someone who was rough around the edges and did not exactly fit into society's standards. The wife, Maggie, was concerned throughout the entire comic with "Bringing up" Jiggs to a higher social position. So, it seems that this comic is made to ridicule those who did not want to wear a mask at this time, since the character who is not wearing the mask is seen as uncivil and unrefined. It was published in Fort Wayne, Indiana, where, despite low numbers of flu cases, the Board of Health recommended wearing masks and banned public gatherings to prevent the spread of cases. After there were only a few cases, they lifted these restrictions and recommendations, only for the amount of cases to spike in Fort Wayne. In response to this, city officials made masks mandatory. In fact, one could be arrested for not wearing a mask. This was around the beginning of December, right around the time this comic was published.

However, just days after mandating masks, city officials dropped the mandate, finding it too difficult to enforce. Against health officials' wishes, wearing a mask was no longer mandatory, and the mask mandate was not in place long enough to really make a difference. In Indiana, it seemed that many places at this time were going back and forth on mandates and recommendations. This is similar to the COVID-19 pandemic currently happening in 2020. Mask

mandates and recommendations are implemented very inconsistently then and now. Some places only recommend wearing masks out in public, in some places it is mandatory, and in some places recommendations or mandates are non-existent. Mandates are also often dropped when perhaps they should be maintained, just like in Fort Wayne, Indiana in 1918. It is interesting to know that the U.S. has not really learned from history, and instead made the same mistakes that made cases spike in Fort Wayne, and death rates rise during the Spanish Flu Pandemic. This comic and its context remind me of criticisms made now in 2020, of people who refuse to wear masks because they believe the pandemic is made up or overexaggerated, similar to Jiggs who says, “It’s all bosh! You won’t catch me wearin’ one!” The reasoning of those who will not wear masks during pandemics seems to be similar even 100 years later.

