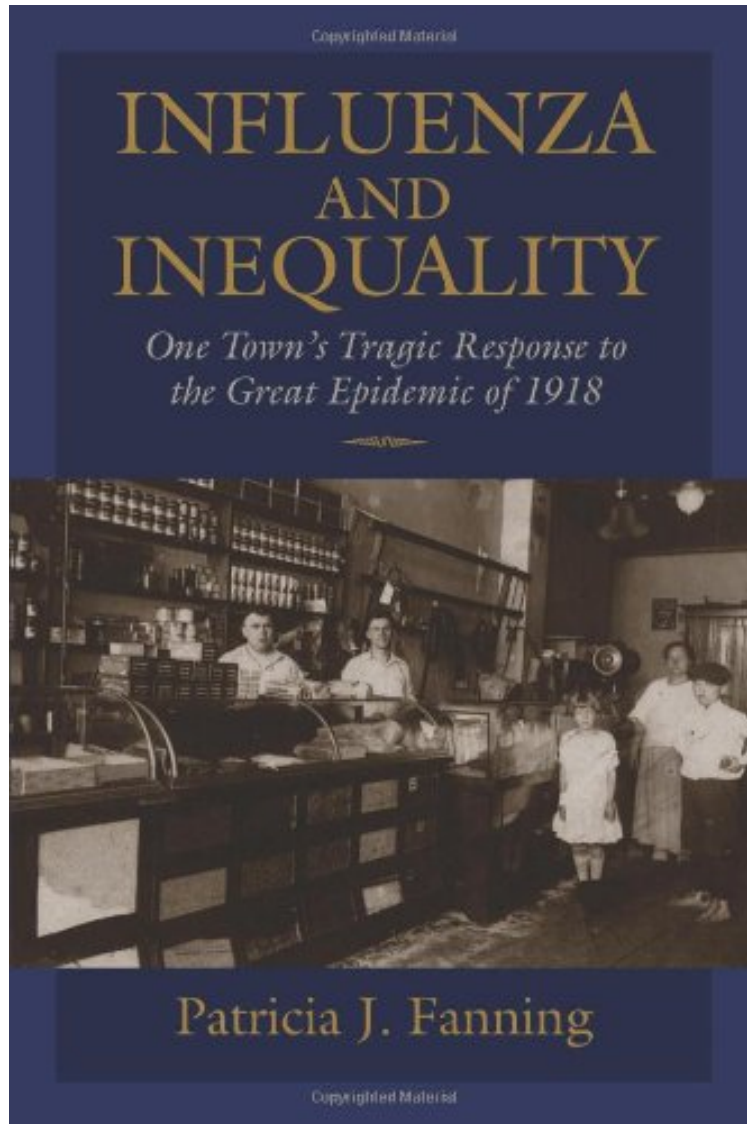


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Influenza and Inequality: One Town's Tragic Response to the Great Epidemic of 1918

Patricia J. Fanning

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The influenza epidemic of 1918 was one of the worst medical disasters in human history, taking close to thirty million lives worldwide in less than a year, including more than 500,000 in the United States. What made this pandemic even more frightening was the fact that it occurred when death rates for most common infectious diseases were diminishing. Still, an epidemic is not merely a medical crisis; it has sociological, psychological, and political dimensions as well. In *Influenza and Inequality*, Patricia J. Fanning examines these other dimensions and brings to life this terrible episode of epidemic disease by tracing its path through the town of Norwood, Massachusetts. By 1918, Norwood was a small, ethnically diverse, industrialized, and stratified community. Ink, printing, and tanning factories were owned by wealthy families who lived privileged lives. These industries attracted immigrant laborers who made their homes in several ethnic neighborhoods and endured prejudice and discrimination at the hands of native residents. When the epidemic struck, the immigrant neighborhoods were most affected; a fact that played a significant role in the town's response with tragic results. This close analysis of one town's struggle illuminates how even well-intentioned elite groups may adopt and implement strategies that can exacerbate rather than relieve a medical crisis. It is a cautionary tale that demonstrates how social behavior can be a fundamental predictor of the epidemic curve, a community's response to crisis, and the consequences of those actions.

"In a brilliant combination of scholarship and compassion, Fanning brings to life the American experience of the devastating 1918 flu epidemic. That blow passed, but surprise outbreaks still threaten our world. We ignore the politics of community response, where the life-saving decisions are made, only at our peril."Jeanne Guillemin, author of *Anthrax: The Investigation of a Deadly Outbreak*"*Influenza and Inequality* is a well-written and interesting book. Fanning provides a good study of nativism in a relatively small Massachusetts town and the difficulties local minorities faced. She raises interesting questions about the pandemic and its effect on both majority and minorities."The Historian"Historians once thought that the pandemic struck down its victims irrespective of class or ethnicity. Fanning dispels this error, demonstrating that immigrants and the poor in Norwood died in disproportionate numbers."Historical Journal of Massachusetts"As Fanning notes, some scholars have observed variations in mortality rates during the epidemic, but *Influenza and Inequality* is the first monograph to examine the reasons, both long- and short-term, behind such variations in morbidity and mortality. . . . Touchingly, Fanning extends her study of inequality to the treatment of the dead."Journal of the Gilded Age and Progressive Era"As a study of bias and the problems of immigration, *Influenza and Inequality* is quite good."The HistorianAbout the AuthorPatricia J. Fanning is associate professor of sociology at Bridgewater State University and author of *Through an Uncommon Lens: The Life and Photography of F. Holland Day*.