

# Contours of Care: The Influenza Pandemic, Public Health, and Asian American Communities in southern California, 1918-1941.

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## Contours of Care: The Influenza Pandemic, Public Health, and Asian American Communities in southern California, 1918-1941

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Main Content

Metrics

Author & Article Info

## Abstract

The Influenza Pandemic killed as many as 60 million people worldwide in 1918. Contemporary American history renders this specific epoch as part of the “American Experience.” Through research in oral histories alongside state archives, this dissertation examines public health and medicine in the interwar period between 1918 and 1941. The Influenza Pandemic offers an entrée into discussions of public health, wellness, and medicine through an examination of care during and after the crisis. Current historiography examines the attitudes of public health officials and local mandates in racializing bodies of color, using disease as the marker for citizenship and belonging. In dialogue with scholarship about public health, this work examines the importance of mutual aid, professionalization, and alternate medicine as challenges to prevalent medical discourses.

Health was a contested environment. Communities of color, especially Asian Americans, navigated through a marketplace of options, making choices grounded on availability, affordability, and an understanding of healthcare and public health. Japanese American physicians and Chinese herbal doctors presented options for communities of color in combating health inequalities in southern California. In doing so, they formed an important counter conversation to public health that rendered the Asian American community as health menaces. Significantly, the work of these men and women, alongside their families presented a challenge to medical discourses in the early part of the twentieth century.

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## Main Content

### Jump To

#### Article

- Abstract
- Main Content

#### Metrics

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