COVID-19 and the Current Natural Disaster Paradigm

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Assumptions of the Current Paradigm

- Disasters occur rapidly in time, in a temporal framework of seconds to a few days
- Disasters occur in a well-circumscribed geographical area, that is, with identifiable boundaries
- Disasters can be conceptualized as cycling through phases typically described as warning, response and recovery
- Disasters and their cycles are linear with each phase being characterized by specific actions to alleviate the impact of the disaster event

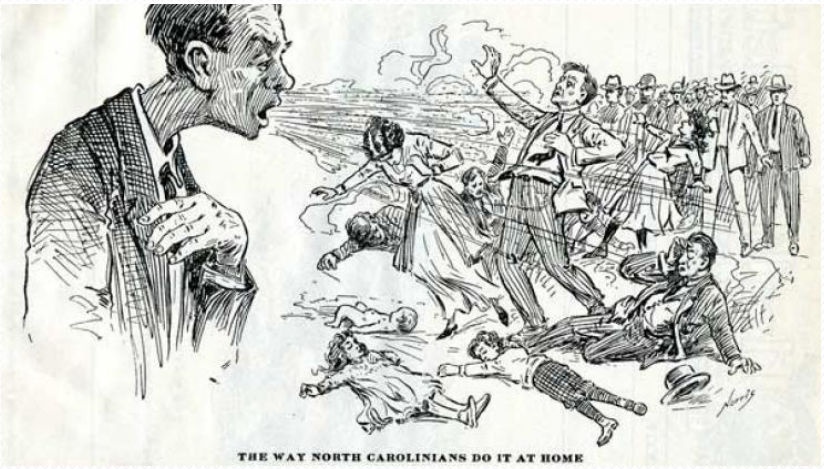
COVID-19 as a Disaster

- In conceptualizing the current pandemic, it didn't seem to fit very well into existing categories
- Our current paradigm is built around rapidly occurring disasters (e.g. earthquakes, volcanic eruptions, floods, wildfires)
- Temporal phases with discrete periods for warning, response and recovery
- What about disasters that evolve slowly?

Eric L. Hsu (2019). "Must disasters be rapidly occurring? The case for an expanded temporal typology of disasters." *Time and Society,* Vol.28(3) 904-921.

If you asked Americans: What was the nation's worst natural disaster?

Very Few would correctly identify the 1918-20 pandemic “Spanish” Flu



THE WAY NORTH CAROLINIANS DO IT AT HOME

Impact of 1918-20 Pandemic

- US fatalities: 675,000
- Worldwide: 50 million

Implications of the Current Paradigm

- It is skewed toward rapidly occurring natural disasters
- Gradual occurring disasters (droughts, famines, epidemics, climate change, etc.) are poorly modeled under this paradigm and consequences may be:
  - Low visibility both historically and contemporaneously
  - Low salience in terms of public perception and policy
  - Lesser attention from scholars and research funding sources
  - More difficult to respond to and recover from
  - Fail to gain the attention of relief agencies and foundation support
  - underestimate the complexities of the disaster
- We should expand the paradigm to incorporate these gradually occurring events