

Interview Analysis: How Can We Save Black and Brown Lives During a Pandemic?

Objective:

You will be able to...

- Analyze data showing the disproportionate effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on Black and brown communities
- Trace these disparities to structural and historical factors of race and poverty in the United States using *The 1619 Project*
- Understand how journalists use interviews to tell stories, and contrast edited interviews with other forms of reporting
- Draw on research to find solutions which could counteract racialized discrepancies in COVID-19's impact

Warm-up:

1. You've surely heard a lot on the news and on social media about the coronavirus (COVID-19). What have you heard?

- Who does it affect?
- Are there any groups in particular that have been hard hit? Why or why not?

2. This lesson will explore the finding that Black and brown communities are over-represented in COVID-19 [mortality statistics](#). Does this surprise you? Why or why not?

3. To understand this finding, this lesson will draw on an interview done by Science Magazine with Dr. Sandra Crouse Quinn, a public health expert.

- What is an interview?
- What are some of the ways the interviews can be used in journalism?
- What other tools can journalists use to tell stories?
- Why might an interview be a helpful reporting tool for this subject?

Background:

The reporting this lesson explores comes from the Pulitzer Center-supported project, [The Science of COVID-19](#), featuring dozens of stories from Science Magazine reporters, many of whom have decades of experience covering infectious disease. We will focus on an interview

between Ann Gibbons of Science Magazine and Dr. Sandra Crouse Quinn, a public health expert at the University of Maryland, College Park.

Their discussion centers on the over-representation of minority communities in coronavirus deaths — where, for example, Black people compose 32% of Louisiana's population, but 70% of the state's deaths from COVID-19. Dr. Quinn explains that the phenomenon of epidemics disproportionately burdening marginalized communities is not new. She goes on to describe how these trends can be traced to historical disenfranchisement and poorer health across the board for many communities of color.

Here is a list of vocabulary that might be useful for this lesson:

- [Epidemic](#)
- [Chronic disease](#)
- [Structural](#)
- [Middle class](#)
- [Disparity](#)
- [Punitive](#)

Introducing the Reporting:

Resource 1: “How Can We Save Black and Brown Lives During A Pandemic? Data From Past Studies Can Point the Way”

Read Ann Gibbons's [reporting](#) from *Science Magazine*.

Write down your answers to the following questions on a separate sheet of paper.

1. What data does the reporting use to support the thesis that minorities are overrepresented in coronavirus deaths? Provide an example.
2. According to the reporting, public health researchers say that “the reasons are no mystery.”
 - a. Why, according to the article, do they say that?
3. What does Dr. Quinn find “frustrating and tragic”?
4. Why, according to Dr. Quinn, is it important to document such disparities with data?
5. Dr. Quinn says that “we were stunned by minority groups’ inability to do social distancing because of where they live and work.”
 - a. What is social distancing?
 - b. What factors make practicing social distancing more difficult for many members of minority groups like Spanish-speaking Latinx people?

6. Provide a few examples of measures that Dr. Quinn says could help reduce mortality rates among minority communities.
7. According to Dr. Quinn, what would some of the long-term effects of these mortality rates be on the African American middle class?

Reflection:

Write down your answers to the following questions on the same sheet of paper.

1. The reporting says that many local health departments are still not releasing data on race and the coronavirus.
 - Why might that be?
 - Is it important to gather and release such data? Why or why not?
2. In addition to higher rates of pre-existing illnesses and less access to healthcare, the reporting says that minorities experience constant “weathering” from discrimination which harms their health.
 - Look up the definition of “weathering:” (*the action of the weather conditions in altering the color, texture, composition, or form of exposed objects -Merriam Webster*). What is this word describing in the context of this article?
3. The article provides some examples of livelihoods, including cleaning homes and working in restaurants, which make it difficult to socially distance.
 - What are some others?
 - What other factors not mentioned would make it harder for someone to stay at home and avoid exposure?
4. Dr. Quinn speaks about the importance of trust and understanding between communities and healthcare workers.
 - Why might this be important?
 - Why could it be especially important that Black and brown Americans see their own community members in health roles? (In other words, why is representation important in this context?)
5. This reporting is in the format of an interview transcript.
 - What are some other formats that you’ve seen reporting take?
 - Why do you think that the journalist chose to publish this piece as an edited interview with an introduction?
 - What are the advantages of interview transcripts over other formats?
 - What are the disadvantages?

Extension Activities:

Option 1: Investigate structural causes

In this reporting, Gibbons and Dr. Quinn explored some of the structural causes that underpin the over-representation of Black and brown people affected by the coronavirus. Dive deeper into potential structural causes of this by reading an essay from *The 1619 Project* and [writing](#) your own essay connecting the ideas from *1619* to the current crisis. Find the full issue here, and the essay is on pages 44 and 45.

The 1619 Project aims to re-frame the foundational date of the United States from 1776 to 1619, the year that the first African slaves arrived in the American colonies. In his essay "Why doesn't the United States have universal health care? The answer begins with policies enacted after the Civil War," Jeneen Interlandi traces racial disparities in healthcare and back to slavery and "white ambivalence." After reading, write an essay yourself connecting Interlandi's work to the current COVID-19 crisis and what you learned from Science and Dr. Quinn. Include the following in your writing:

- What is Interlandi's central thesis?
- How does the legacy of slavery and of the Civil War inform your understanding of the current crisis?
- Given your understanding, do you agree with Dr. Quinn's proposed solutions? Why or why not?
- In your opinion, what other steps can be taken?

Option 2: Letter-writing

The reporting states that many jurisdictions, especially local health departments, are not releasing data on race during the COVID-19 crisis. Online, look up data from your local health department on coronavirus deaths and hospitalizations — is there data related to race? If not, and you think there should be, write a letter to your local health department or another representative at the city, local, or state level urging them to document the coronavirus's effects by race.

In your letter, be sure to explain why it is important to release data on potential racial disparities and feel free to suggest other measures discussed in the lesson that you agree could help your community counteract over-representation of Black and brown people in mortality statistics.