

Fall's History Project, 2022

"All historical experience must be imagined before it can be understood."

-Historian David Blight

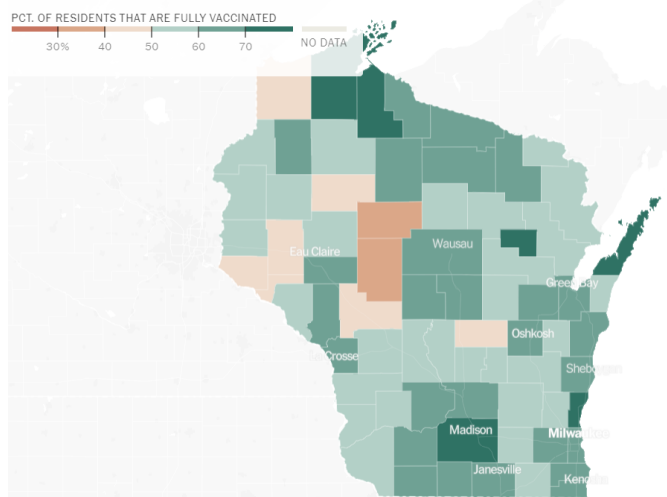
History as it Happens

Introduction

The central goal of the Falls History Project is to actively engage students in history by exploring an important aspect of past events in our local community. For the previous nineteen years, the student interns have investigated local history through primary research and interviews to establish an archive that can be used for future generations. History, as we know it, changes and evolves over time as new information becomes available. For this reason, this project chose to try to understand how our area dealt with the COVID-19 pandemic.

To accomplish this goal, Senior Paige Blackdeer served as our 21st intern and changed the direction of the Falls History Project this year. Paige understands that history, just like our society, is not static and that it changes over time. In her capacity and understanding of our world, she chose to do a podcast series, aptly titled *"History as it Happens,"* with complimentary videos to capture how our local community understands and manages the ongoing pandemic.

Vaccinations



Overview

The COVID-19 pandemic has shifted our social, political, and educational foundations in unforeseen ways that have impacted multiple generations of people from all walks of life. Despite the number of cases and deaths that followed, people began to question COVID and its impact on society. During this time the World Health Organizations (WHO) and the Center for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) began to advocate for inoculations against COVID, but this soon became an issue that divided many Americans, mostly along the political

spectrum. According to the [Brookings Institute](#), 92% of Democrats, 68% of Independents, and 56% of Republicans have been vaccinated, with 40% of Republicans who "don't plan" to get vaccinated against 26% of Independents, and 3% of Democrats.

As of 20 April 2022, the [New York Times](#) reports the United States has lost over 987,999 lives, with Wisconsin accounting for over 14,395 of them, and Jackson County with 43 deaths.

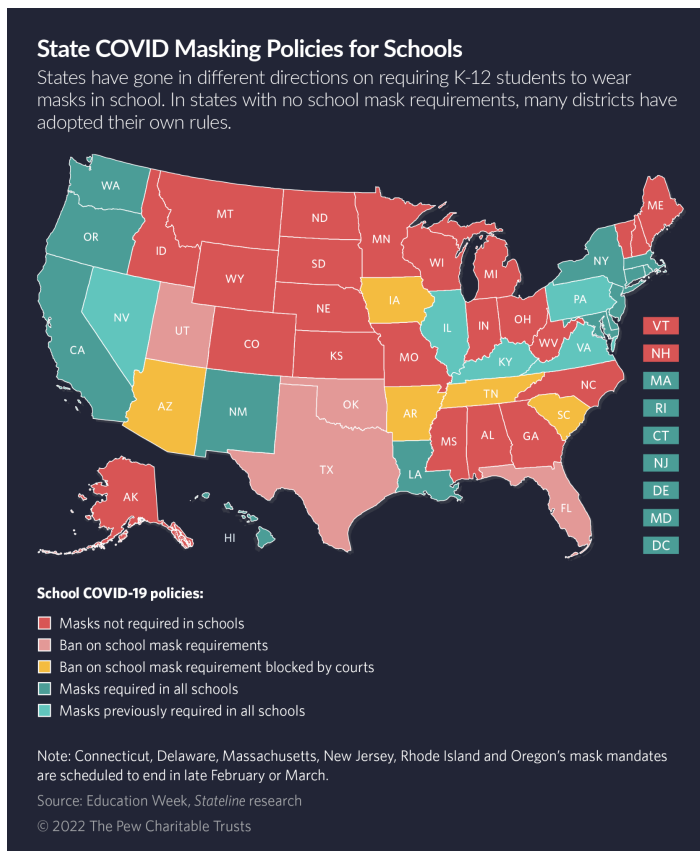
Despite these numbers and the urgings of the WHO and CDC, many Americans choose not to get vaccinated, with Jackson County well below the national and state average.

Age	United States	Wisconsin	Jackson County
ALL AGES	66%	65%	50%
5 AND UP	70%	69%	53%
65 AND UP	90%	95%	81%

COVID-19 has impacted our community in multiple ways that this year’s project hopes to shed some light on. This year, Paige Blackdeer had discussions with community members and students to better understand how this pandemic has affected them as individuals and us as a society.

Education

As the numbers began to rise after February of 2020, mask mandates began taking effect around the country. As these mandates began, so did the divisiveness in our country, state, and city. According to [Pew Research](#), Republicans were less likely to wear masks than Democrats (39% vs. 79%) and were far less likely to be fully vaccinated, as seen in the numbers above. What these numbers highlight is the divide between parties that then infiltrated into our local politics as the School District of Black River Falls began to institute a mask policy.



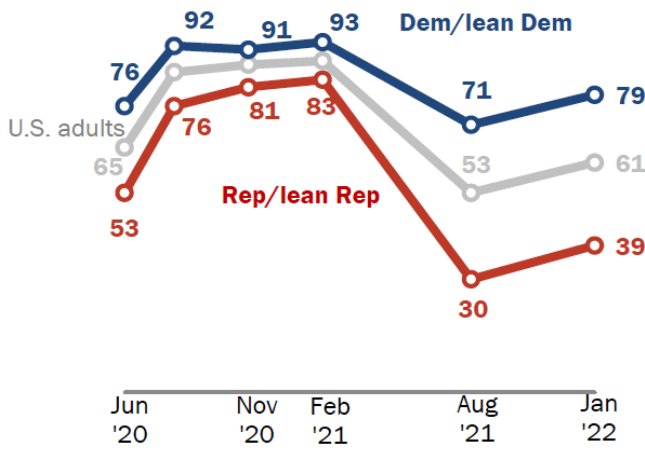
The impact of education has taken its toll on educators, students, and families. For this section, Paige has focused on two questions: How did students deal with the pandemic? How did educators and administrators deal with the pandemic?

Politics

The pandemic, which had the opportunity to unite our country to promote health and well-being for all, ended up dividing us instead based on safety measures. As the pandemic evolved and spread, Americans became more divided as different localities began instituting mask mandates and vaccination requirements. For this project, we reached out to the Republican and

Partisan divide in mask-wearing grew much wider in pandemic's second year

% of U.S. adults who say they have worn a mask or face covering all or most of the time in stores and businesses over the past month



Note: Respondents who gave other responses or did not give an answer are not shown.
 Source: Survey conducted Jan. 10-17, 2022.
 "Increasing Public Criticism, Confusion Over COVID-19 Response in U.S."

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Democratic Parties of Jackson County to better understand how they viewed the pandemic and safety measures enacted in our area.

We would like to thank Tom Walker and Linda Heller from the Jackson County Democratic Party for their support and time in this project.

Unfortunately, we were unable to get the Republican point of view as their party leadership chose not to take part in this project.

Health

The health of our country varied from area to area, often dictated by the mandates of the counties' and cities' requirements. What we also need to understand is how we have different levels of government: federal, state, local, and tribal. Our area is unique because we have that fourth government operating as well, so for this portion of the project Paige focused on how the Jackson County Department of

Health and the Ho-Chunk Nation Health Department utilized best practices and shared information to safeguard our citizens.

Intern Preface

“Your hardest times often lead to the greatest moments of your life. Keep going.
Tough situations build strong people in the end”

-Roy T. Bennett

As we all know and have felt, 2020 was a year of change and adversity. Along with the hardships, there have been some wonderful positives. Nonetheless, 2020 to now has been a historical period. With that all in mind, I present to you “History As It Happens”.

Last year when Mr. Youngthunder approached me with the thought of being this year's project intern, he also asked what I thought about the topics. Feeling the weight of the past year, whether it was my personal life or the hardships of others, I felt the need to tell these stories.

In the winter of 2021, I began working on this project. Deciding on a new way of presenting information, I had a lot to accomplish. Our podcast-style project is much different compared to projects of the past. With this project, we are hoping to make history and give the inside scoop as it's happening.

Introductions

- Video link: [Introduction To The 2022 Falls History Project](#)
- Audio link: <https://bit.ly/3w6Pfkx>
- Overview: In this episode, we did a short introduction on ourselves and the project. Mr. Paul Rykken, Mr. Eli Youngthunder, and I (Paige Blackdeer) are the ones in charge this year. The idea of the Falls History Project came from Mr. Rykken over 20 years ago and has since flourished. You can find more information on the origin of the project on the [Falls History Website](#).
- Mr. Rykken is a former social studies teacher for BRFHS where he taught First Nations, AP US History, Law and Society, and Global Politics, amongst other classes.
- Mr. Youngthunder currently teaches World History, US History, AP US History, and First Nations.
- I, Paige Blackdeer, am a senior at the high school and this year's intern. Usually, the project is written and meant to be read, but I went a different route this year and I hope you enjoy it!

Chapters One & Two: Covid (parts A and B)

- Video link: [Chapter 1: COVID in Jackson County/Black River Falls & Chapter 2: COVID and The Ho-Chunk Nation](#) Podcast link: <https://bit.ly/3w8d37v> & <https://bit.ly/3yfcc7l>

- Overview:
 - Part A: In this episode, I headed over to the Jackson County Health Department to talk with Tammy Handly, who oversees the Health Department. Along with Tammy, Julia Smith and Miranda Greenwald from the Black River Falls Memorial Hospital (BRFMH) joined in on the discussion. Our challenge was to tackle the topic of COVID and health. We started off with introductions, a quick rundown on what COVID is, and then moved on to its effects on Black River Falls. Additionally, we talked about the different recommendations for safety and how it's changed since the start of the pandemic. Near the end of the episode, we spoke about some more personal experiences and gave our overall thoughts. For me, it was interesting to see and hear from health workers during this worldwide crisis because COVID is an overarching theme of this project and talking about it gave me an interesting perspective, so I hope you enjoy it as well.
 - Part B: In this episode, I decided to hear another perspective on COVID, this time from representatives of the Ho-Chunk Nation. I spoke with Rosella Stanley, the director of Social Services, and Phyllis Smoke, a District 1 legislator for the Ho-Chunk Nation. We followed the same rough outline as the previous COVID video (introductions, COVID talk, and at the end some experiences). These two ladies offered interesting information due to their jobs. Social services, legislation, and the Nation itself were heavily affected by COVID, with some of it being finance-related, as the casinos closed, resulting in a lower stream of income.

Chapters Three & Four: The Election (parts A and B)

- Video link: [Chapter 3: The 2020 Election \(Democrat\)](#)
- Podcast link: <https://bit.ly/3se6NKC>
- Overview:
 - Part A: In this episode, we were able to talk with the Director of the Jackson County Democratic Party, Linda Heller. This episode highlights the Democratic view of the heated election of 2020. Linda used to be a Republican, in charge of the party in fact, and then switched to Democrat around Obama's time in office. I asked her how she felt prior to the 2020 election, how she felt after, how she thinks things are going now, and much more. She offered her opinions and it was very interesting to see how Democrats felt regarding this election. For me, it is also fascinating to learn about how COVID affected the election and people's feelings towards the candidates.
 - Part B: Our original idea with this project, and this topic specifically, was to get both political parties to discuss their experiences and views on the election and COVID. In this current climate, many Americans feel there is a heightened sense of polarization in this country and what happened with the Republican Party of Jackson County may show this. Mr. Youngthunder and I went into this topic very objectively and with a clear goal, as we were giving both parties an identical set of questions. We reached out to both the Republican office and the Democratic office. After multiple voicemails and attempted calls to the Republican office they

finally responded. They said, officially, that they didn't want to be involved at all. We then got in contact with someone separate from the official party, who put us back in contact with the party leaders. The party leader offered to look at the questions, then decide if they would be willing to discuss the matter. In the end, we did not receive any response to the questions given.

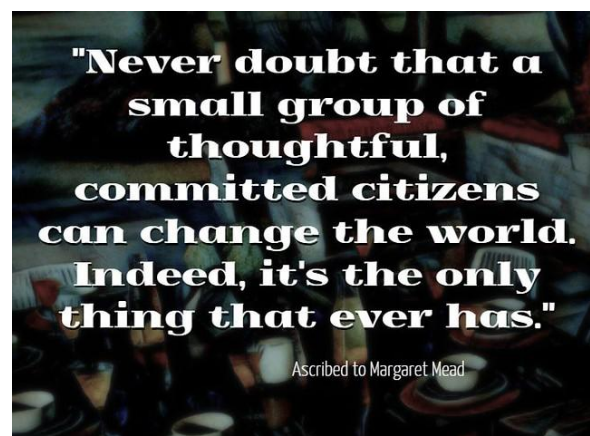
Chapter Five: The School

- Video link: [Chapter 5: The School](#)
- Podcast link: <https://bit.ly/3MTUDyd>
- Overview: As a current student of the Black River Falls High School, I thought it would be important to talk about the district. COVID and other events of the past two years have really had an impact on the school. We talked about those impacts, our predictions, and the current state of the schools. In this episode, we were able to talk with Dr. Shelly Severson, our superintendent, Luke Madsen, our current principal, and Tom Chambers, our former principal. Our district, like others, have experienced many COVID related effects and have had to handle the situation taking into consideration the political climate. One quote that struck was when Mr. Chambers said, *"I remember sitting down at a table talking with other administrators, and saying 'this is coming, I have no idea what's gonna happen, but it doesn't look good.'"*

**Regarding the masking policy, it's interesting because as I'm working on this we no longer have to wear masks at school.

Chapter Six: Life in BRF, a teen's perspective

- Video link: [Chapter 6: Life in BRF, a Teen's Perspective](#)
- Podcast link: <https://bit.ly/3ydfaty>
- Overview: This episode was made to highlight how life in Black River Falls is from the perspective of local teenagers. The featured students are Reese Cowley and Randall Blackdeer, both freshmen, Kaylee Sweno, Theta Dal Cerro, and myself, who are all seniors. We talked about trends, school, activities, our lives since the pandemic, and ourselves in general. We thought that these topics would give an interesting perspective to future listeners. One of the notable questions asked was how living in Black River Falls at this time compares to other places. An interesting one came from Theta, who stated, *"We have a very unique set of people in Black River,"* and then explained the differences in education between our city and other places.



Conclusion

- Video link: [Conclusion To The 2022 Falls History Project](#)
- Podcast link: <https://bit.ly/3yiJWRW>
- Overview: In the final installment of History as it Happens I was interviewed by our usual camerawoman Karsen Czarnecki. We talked about the project in total and how it felt to be done with the recordings. More work was yet to be done, but the largest chunk was done!

Final Thoughts

I was introduced to this project a year ago and I started working on it months ago. I feel like we've come a long way and we've made something great. The planning, the filming, and the writing have all come to an end and we all genuinely hope you've enjoyed this interesting perspective. The world is continually changing and I've been happy to capture that as well as I can. Do your best to put good out into the world and be a part of history.

I'd like to give a big shoutout to everyone involved in the creating process:

- Eli Youngthunder for advising and planning with me
- Paul Rykken for creating this project 20 years ago
- Karsen Czarnecki for helping record
- Quinn Hanson for helping record
- Julie Tiedens for editing our videos

And thank you one last time to everyone who participated and/or was interviewed!

And that's History as it Happens