

Why so serious?

Written by Jasen Obermeyer

It's safe to say that 2020 is unlike any year we've experienced. It will go down as a historic year with watershed moments, that you almost feel like you're drowning in them.

How can one describe this year? Volatile, unpredictable, apocalyptic? Pretty much any negative word can be associated with 2020.

I could just say Covid-19 and leave this column at that.

Easily the defining moment of this year, of a generation probably. Covid-19 has changed the world in every single way, its grip still firmly in place everywhere.

I remember first discussing it, New Year's Eve 2019, and my mom was talking to my uncle about hearing a virus somewhere in China, I was opening the fridge, turned around and said it was reported in Wuhan, and what it was called.

When it was declared a pandemic, chaos broke. The world seemed to be falling apart. All the works of fiction that dealt with an event like this became true, revealing how fragile we are as a species, bringing out the best and worst in us. Now, words like lockdown, quarantine have taken on new meaning, and social distancing and facemasks are part of our everyday lives. The global recession, shutdown of events, travel; Covid-19 has been an Earth-shattering moment.

When this is all over, what things will go back to normal? What things will permanently change and become the new norm? What things are gone forever? The fear of unknown, the unpredictability, that unfortunately will be carried over in 2021.

Clearly, I could take up this whole newspaper talking Covid, so it's (probably?) best to move on.

There were the California and Australia wildfires, Britain leaving the European Union, and the shocking deaths of celebrities such as Kobe Bryant and Chadwick Boseman. There was the impeachment of President Donald Trump, and his successful acquittal.

We in Canada experienced our worst mass shooting in Nova Scotia, which unfortunately didn't get the coverage I think it should have.

Of course, the second biggest event was the Black Lives Matter movement, calling for racial justice after the deaths of George Floyd, Ahmaud Arbery, and Breonna Taylor involving police. Initially in the United States, it spread rapidly around the world, becoming a global event.

And to cap off the year was the U.S. election. With arguably the most contentious election in the country's history, it saw record voter turnout, and several days of nail-biting coverage to finish vote counting, before Joe Biden was finally declared the winner. But we only remember Trump's handling of election night and the days and weeks that followed. An election unlike any other.

Looking back through history, there are several years that pop up for historical reasons. 2001 for 9/11 and the subsequent War on Terror. 1989 for the start to the end of Cold War. 1929 for beginning the Great Depression. 1945 for the atomic bombs, end of World War 2, and start of the Cold War. And 1918 for the end of World War One and the Spanish Flu pandemic.

But these years either had one or two defining moments, that although were history changing, didn't keep piling on top of one another.

In particular though, 1968 really stands out as being very similar to 2020, especially in the States. Well known as the peak of the

counterculture, there was the Vietnam War that took headlines, the Tet Offensive breaking the American public's morale and support of the war. 2020 is Covid. There was the Civil Rights movement, and the assassination of Martin Luther King Jr. This year was the death of George Floyd and the Black Lives Matter movement/protest. And interestingly, through all these worldwide protests and destructive riots, U.S. President Lyndon Johnson shockingly announced his intent to not seek re-election that year, after previously winning one of the largest shares of the popular vote in history. He seemingly accepted defeat through all the turmoil and not wanting the job as the country was tearing itself apart, while this year on the other end of the spectrum, you had Trump falsely declaring victory, refusing to concede, and is poised to be dragged out of the White House kicking and screaming.

Both 2020 and 1968 are nation breaking, Earth shattering years, but 2020 takes it with the pandemic.

Though many things that have happened this year will carry into the next, there appears to be some hope with strong vaccine candidates, and Joe Biden taking office.

The weight of 2020 has been difficult to carry. In the years, and decades that follow, the new generations, how will this year be remembered? How will it be documented and told? What works of fiction, inspired by everything, will come out of this?

Though we all want to say "F*#\$ 2020," and quickly move on, perhaps we need to learn from it. As the saying goes, "those who don't learn from history are bound to repeat it."