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Southern DAILY

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Two wealthy dads convicted in first U.S. college admissions scandal trial



Private equity firm founder John Wilson arrives at federal court in Boston for the first day of jury selection in the first trial to result from the U.S. college admissions scandal. REUTERS/Brian Snyder

BOSTON, Oct 8 (Reuters) - Two wealthy fathers who were the first to face trial in the U.S. college admissions scandal were convicted on Friday of charges that they corruptly tried to buy their children's way into elite universities as phony athletic recruits.

A federal jury in Boston found former casino executive Gamal Aziz and private equity firm founder John Wilson guilty on all charges they faced in a case centered on a vast, nationwide fraud and bribery scheme that involved many other parents.

The verdict followed 10-1/2 hours of jury deliberations and four weeks of trial in a case that exposed inequalities in higher education and the lengths wealthy parents would go to secure spots for their children at top schools.

The two are among 57 people charged over a scheme in which wealthy parents conspired with California college admissions consultant William "Rick" Singer to fraudulently secure college placement for their children through fraud and bribery.

Report ad Singer pleaded guilty in 2019 to facilitating cheating on college entrance exams and funneling money from the parents to corrupt coaches and athletics officials in order to secure the admission of their children as fake athletes.

Prosecutors alleged that Aziz - a former Wynn Resorts Ltd (WYNN.O) executive also known as Gamal Abdelaziz - in 2018 paid \$300,000 to secure his daughter's admission to the University of Southern California (USC) as a basketball recruit.

Prosecutors said Wilson, who founded Hyannis Port Capital, paid \$220,000 in 2014 to have his son falsely designated a USC water polo recruit and later in 2018 paid another \$1 million to try to secure spots for his twin daughters at Stanford and Harvard universities.

"What they did was an affront to hard-working students and parents," Acting U.S. Attorney Nathaniel Mendell said. "But the verdict today proves that even these defendants, powerful and privileged people, are not above the law."

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Aziz, 64, and Wilson, 62, sat emotionless as the verdict was read out loud finding them both guilty of conspiring to commit mail fraud and wire fraud and conspiring to commit federal programs bribery.

Wilson also was convicted on six other fraud, bribery and tax counts. They face the prospect of years in prison when they are sentenced in February, though the longest sentence any parent has received in the scandal so far was nine months.

Both men are expected to appeal. Their lawyers contended they too were conned by Singer, who they said kept them in the dark about his scheme's mechanics and led them to believe their money was being used for university donations, not bribes. read more

"It's obviously not the result he was looking for, but that's our system, and

that's why they have appellate courts," said Brian Kelly, Aziz's lawyer. "So that's what we'll be doing next."

'DOESN'T MATTER' WHAT SPORT

The trial hinged in large part on recordings investigators secretly obtained of the two parents with Singer, who became the chief cooperating witness in the "Operation Varsity Blues" investigation.

The probe ensnared executives and celebrities including actresses Lori Loughlin and Felicity Huffman, who were among 47 defendants who agreed to plead guilty. read more Former President Donald Trump pardoned one parent.

Prosecutors did not call Singer to testify, instead relying on his recorded calls with parents.

In a call prosecutors played for the jury, Singer told Wilson that it "doesn't matter" what sport they were paired with and that he would "make them a sailor or something."

Wilson laughed and responded: "Is there a two for one special? If you got twins?"

In both parents' cases, prosecutors said Singer and others working with him created athletic profiles used in the admissions process that included made up information about their children.

Laura Janke, a former USC soccer coach who has admitted taking bribes from Singer, testified that he later paid her after she left the school to create a profile for Aziz's daughter that falsified her height, team position and accolades.

More trials are expected, with another one set for November.

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LOCAL NEWS

Maintenance error caused Facebook's 6-hour outage, company says

Oct 5 (Reuters) - Routine maintenance on Facebook's network stitching together its data centers caused Monday's collapse of its global system for more than six hours, the company said on Tuesday.

The outage was the largest that Downtechnology, a web monitoring firm, said it had ever seen. It blocked access to apps for billions of users of Facebook (FB.O), Instagram and WhatsApp, further intensifying weeks of scrutiny for the \$1 trillion company.

At a U.S. Senate hearing on Tuesday, a former employee turned whistleblower accused Facebook of putting profits before people's safety, which the company denies.

In a blog post, Facebook Vice President of engineering Santosh Janardhan explained the company's engineers issued a command that unintentionally disconnected Facebook data centers from the rest of the world.

While users lost access to one of the world's most popular messaging apps - as WhatsApp has more than 2 billion users - employees were also blocked from internal tools.

(Also Read: Senator asks Facebook CEO to answer questions on teen safety)

The outage knocked out tools that engineers would normally use to investigate and repair such outages, making the task even more difficult, Facebook said.

The company said it sent a team of engineers to the location of its data centers to try to debug and restart the systems.

However, it took the company extra time to get engineers inside to work on the servers due to the high physical and system security in place.

Facebook added that its program audit tool had a bug, and failed to stop the command that caused the outage.

"Every failure like this is an opportunity to learn and get better," Janardhan wrote. "From here on out, our job is to ... make sure events like this happen as rarely as possible."



Facebook logo and stock graph are displayed through broken glass in this illustration taken October 4, 2021. REUTERS/Dado Ruvic/Illustration

Editor's Choice



Members of a Chinese opera troupe wearing protective masks to prevent the spread of the coronavirus prepare before performing at a shrine during the annual vegetarian festival in Bangkok, Thailand. REUTERS/Athit Perawongmetha



A soldier places a military hat on a child during "The Great Force of Mexico" exhibition organized by the Mexican Army, in Ciudad Juarez, Mexico. REUTERS/Jose Luis Gonzalez



A demonstrator masqueraded as Sebastian Kurz in prison clothes and handcuffs takes part in a protest against Austrian Chancellor Kurz in front of the headquarters of the Austrian People's Party (ÖVP) in Vienna, Austria. REUTERS/Lisi Niesner



Indian Air Force (IAF) Advanced Light Helicopter (ALH) 'Sarang' team performs during the 89th Air Force Day parade, at Hindon Air Force Station in Ghaziabad, India. REUTERS/Anushree Fadnavis



Lava is seen through the window of a kitchen from El Paso following a volcanic eruption on the Canary Island of La Palma, Spain, September 28, 2021. The Cumbre Vieja volcano, which has been ejecting a destructive cocktail of ash, smoke and lava since Sept. 19, has destroyed more than 800 buildings, as well as banana plantations, roads and other infrastructure. REUTERS/



Children run holding flags during a candlelight vigil on Canada's first National Day for Truth and Reconciliation at Chiefswood Park in Ohsweken, Ontario, Canada September 30, 2021. REUTERS/Carlos Osorio

Southern DAILY Make Today Different

BUSINESS

COVID-19 Toll Not As Heavy, But The Pandemic Is Not Over U.S. COVID-19 Deaths Officially Surpass 1918 U.S. Flu Deaths



Compiled And Edited By John T. Robbins, Southern Daily Editor

U.S. COVID-19 deaths have now surpassed the 675,000 estimated deaths that occurred during the H1N1 influenza pandemic of 1918, but SARS-CoV-2 hasn't exacted as heavy a toll as that pandemic. With a national population of around 103 million people at that time -- about a third of the current total of 330 million Americans -- the 1918 pandemic killed roughly 1 in 150 people in the U.S.; COVID has killed 1 in 500 Americans. Globally, the 1918 flu wrought more havoc than COVID, too, infecting about 500 million people, or a third of the world's population at that time. It killed about 50 million people globally, according to CDC estimates. SARS-CoV-2 has infected nearly 230 million people around the world and killed some 4.7 million of them. There are many reasons for the differences in infection and mortality. The 1918 pandemic hit while the world was enmeshed in World War I and international travel was frequent; hospitals didn't have the same medicines and technology at their disposal to treat patients; the cause of the illness was unidentifiable and therefore a test, targeted treatment, or vaccine was impossible.



During the COVID-19 pandemic, global travel came to a halt and public health measures such as social distancing and masking were implemented relatively rapidly, vaccines were produced in record time, and treatments were investigated in real-time with a few proving helpful (with more still in development). Still, misinformation and disinformation campaigns stymied the effectiveness of some of those approaches in the U.S., and the virus threw humanity a curveball with the far more transmissible Delta variant. "Since May, [more than] 100,000 Americans unnecessarily lost their lives because they chose not to get vaccinated," tweeted Peter Hotez, MD, PhD, of Baylor College of Medicine in Houston. "They fell victim to the vile yet unopposed antisocial aggression from 3 sources: The far right including members of U.S. Congress, Governors, conservative news outlets; the 'disinformation dozen' identified by CCDH; and Russian propaganda." With the U.S. now averaging some 2,000 deaths per day, and the potential for sustained, high levels of transmission to spawn another variant, SARS-CoV-2 can still wreak much more havoc. Whether that ever reaches 1918 H1N1 proportions remains to be seen. The comparison to the 1918 flu pandemic also serves as a reminder of

the risk that influenza poses. Since 1918, three other influenza pandemics occurred in the U.S.: H2N2 in 1957, H3N2 in 1968, and H1N1 in 2009. These pandemics were all far less severe than the first H1N1 pandemic. But that doesn't mean another killer flu -- or another deadly coronavirus -- outbreak is off the table.

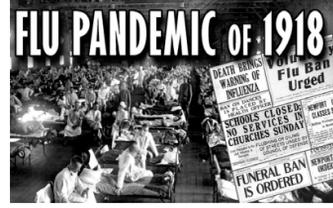


A reflection on the progress made since the 1918 pandemic by two CDC scientists published in Science for the 100-year anniversary of that outbreak concludes: "Philosopher George Santayana pointed out, 'Those who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it.' We are no doubt more prepared in 2018 for an infectious disease threat than in 1918. But it is critical to remember that preparation only stems from a global commitment to share data about viral isolates, support innovative research, and dedicate resources to assess the pandemic risk of new and emerging influenza viruses from zoonotic reservoirs." (Courtesy medpagetoday.com)

COVID Has Now Killed As Many Americans As The 1918-19 Flu COVID-19 has now killed as many Americans as the 1918-19 Spanish flu pandemic did -- approximately 675,000.

The U.S. population a century ago was just one-third of what it is today, meaning the flu cut a much bigger, more lethal swath through the country. But the COVID-19 crisis is by any measure a colossal tragedy in its own right, especially given the incredible advances in scientific knowledge since then and the failure to take maximum advantage of the vaccines available this time. "Big pockets of American society -- and, worse, their leaders -- have thrown this away," medical historian Dr. Howard Markel of the University of Michigan said of the opportunity to vaccinate everyone eligible by now. Like the Spanish flu, the coronavirus may never entirely disappear from our

midst. Instead, scientists hope it becomes a mild seasonal bug as human immunity strengthens through vaccination and repeated infection. That could take time.



"We hope it will be like getting a cold, but there's no guarantee," said Emory University biologist Rustom Antia, who suggests an optimistic scenario in which this could happen over a few years.

For now, the pandemic still has the United States and other parts of the world firmly in its jaws. While the delta-fueled surge in infections may have peaked, U.S. deaths are running at over 1,900 a day on average, the highest level since early March, and the country's overall toll topped 675,000 Monday, according to the count kept by Johns Hopkins University, though the real number is believed to be higher. Winter may bring a new surge, with the University of Washington's influential model projecting an additional 100,000 or so Americans will die of COVID-19 by Jan. 1, which would bring the overall U.S. toll to 776,000. The 1918-19 influenza pandemic killed 50 million victims globally at a time when the world had one-quarter the population it does now. Global deaths from COVID-19 now stand at more than 4.6 million.



Photo shows a demonstration at the Red Cross Emergency Ambulance Station in Washington during the influenza pandemic of 1918. Historians think the pandemic started in Kansas in early 1918, and by winter 1919 the virus had infected a third of the global population and killed

at least 50 million people, including 675,000 Americans. Some estimates put the toll as high as 100 million. (Library of Congress via AP, File)

The Spanish flu's U.S. death toll is a rough guess, given the incomplete records of the era and the poor scientific understanding of what caused the illness. The 675,000 figure comes from the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

The ebbing of COVID-19 could happen if the virus progressively weakens as it mutates and more and more humans' immune systems learn to attack it. Vaccination and surviving infection are the main ways the immune system improves. Breast-fed infants also gain some immunity from their mothers.

Under that optimistic scenario, schoolchildren would get mild illness that trains their immune systems. As they grow up, the children would carry the immune response memory, so that when they are old and vulnerable, the coronavirus would be no more dangerous than cold viruses.

The same goes for today's vaccinated teens: Their immune systems would get stronger through the shots and mild infections.

"We will all get infected," Antia predicted. "What's important is whether the infections are severe."



Something similar happened with the H1N1 flu virus, the culprit in the 1918-19 pandemic. It encountered too many people who were immune, and it also eventually weakened through mutation. H1N1 still circulates today, but immunity acquired through infection and vaccination has triumphed. Getting an annual flu shot now protects against H1N1 and several other strains of flu. To be sure, flu kills between 12,000 and 61,000 Americans each year, but on average, it is a seasonal problem and a manageable one. Before COVID-19, the 1918-19 flu was universally considered the worst pandemic disease in human history. Whether the current scourge ultimately proves deadlier is unclear.

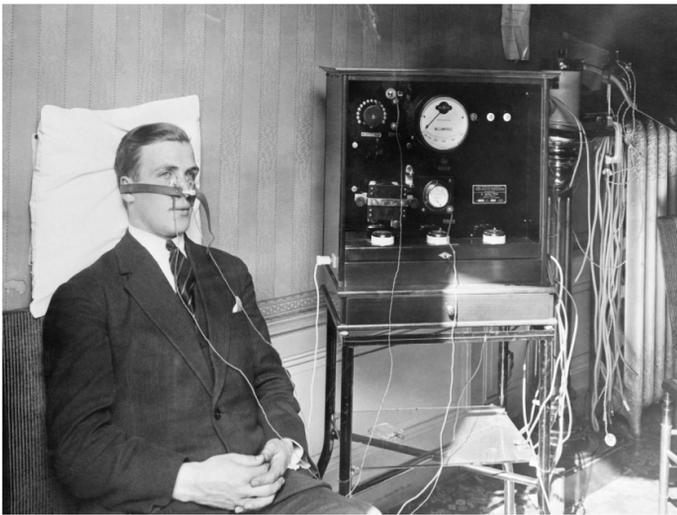
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Southern DAILY Make Today Different

COMMUNITY

(Article continues from above)

U.S. COVID-19 Deaths Officially Surpass 1918 U.S. Flu Deaths



Compiled And Edited By John T. Robbins, Southern Daily Editor

In many ways, the 1918-19 flu -- which was wrongly named Spanish flu because it first received widespread news coverage in Spain -- was worse. Spread by the mobility of World War I, it killed young, healthy adults in vast numbers. No vaccine existed to slow it, and there were no antibiotics to treat secondary bacterial infections. And, of course, the world was much smaller. Yet jet travel and mass migrations threaten to increase the toll of the current pandemic. Much of the world is unvaccinated. And the coronavirus has been full of surprises. Professor Border of the University of Lyon in France demonstrates a machine he claimed could cure cold and flu symptoms in under one hour in about 1919. Markel said he is continually astounded by the magnitude of the disruption the pandemic has brought to the planet. "I was gobsmacked by the size of the quarantines" the Chinese government undertook initially, Markel said, "and I've since been gob-gob-smacked to the nth degree." The lagging pace of U.S. vaccinations is the latest source of his astonishment. Just under 64% of the U.S. population has received at least one dose of the vaccine, with state rates ranging from a high of approximately 77% in Vermont and Massachusetts to lows around 46% to 49% in Idaho, Wyoming, West Virginia and Mississippi. Globally, about 43% of the pop-

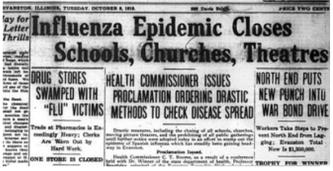
ulation has received at least one dose, according to Our World in Data, with some African countries just beginning to give their first shots.

"We know that all pandemics come to an end," said Dr. Jeremy Brown, director of emergency care research at the National Institutes of Health, who wrote a book on influenza. "They can do terrible things while they're raging."

COVID-19 could have been far less lethal in the U.S. if more people had gotten vaccinated faster, "and we still have an opportunity to turn it around," Brown said. "We often lose sight of how lucky we are to take these things for granted."

The current vaccines work extremely well in preventing severe disease and death from the variants of the virus that have emerged so far.

What's even more remarkable about the 1918 flu, say infectious disease experts, is that it never really went away. After infecting an estimated 500 million people worldwide in 1918 and 1919 (a third of the global population), the H1N1 strain that caused the Spanish flu receded into the background and stuck around as the regular seasonal flu. But every so often, direct descendants of the 1918 flu combined with bird flu or swine flu to create powerful new pandemic strains, which is exactly what happened in 1957, 1968 and 2009. Those later flu outbreaks, all created in part by the 1918 virus, claimed millions of additional lives, earning the 1918 flu the odious title of "the mother of all



days, a Pfizer executive said Wednesday. The company is studying whether annual shots with the current vaccine will be required to keep immunity high.

One plus: The coronavirus mutates at a slower pace than flu viruses, making it a more stable target for vaccination, said Ann Marie Kimball, a retired University of Washington professor of epidemiology.

So, will the current pandemic unseat the 1918-19 flu pandemic as the worst in human history? "You'd like to say no. We have a lot more infection control, a lot more ability to support people who are sick. We have modern medicine," Kimball said. "But we have a lot more people and a lot more mobility. ... The fear is eventually a new strain gets around a particular vaccine target."

To those unvaccinated individuals who are counting on infection rather than vaccination for immune protection, Kimball said, "The trouble is, you have to survive infection to acquire the immunity." It's easier, she said, to go to the drugstore and get a shot. (Courtesy apnews.com)

The 1918 Flu Pandemic Never Really Ended After infecting millions of people worldwide, the 1918 flu strain shifted -- and then stuck around.

An unthinkable 50 to 100 million people worldwide died from the 1918-1919 flu pandemic commonly known as the "Spanish Flu." It was the deadliest global pandemic since the Black Death, and rare among flu viruses for striking down the young and healthy, often within days of exhibiting the first symptoms. In the United States, the 1918 flu pandemic lowered the average life expectancy by 12 years.



What's even more remarkable about the 1918 flu, say infectious disease experts, is that it never really went away. After infecting an estimated 500 million people worldwide in 1918 and 1919 (a third of the global population), the H1N1 strain that caused the Spanish flu receded into the background and stuck around as the regular seasonal flu. But every so often, direct descendants of the 1918 flu combined with bird flu or swine flu to create powerful new pandemic strains, which is exactly what happened in 1957, 1968 and 2009. Those later flu outbreaks, all created in part by the 1918 virus, claimed millions of additional lives, earning the 1918 flu the odious title of "the mother of all

pandemics."

The Deadly Virus Struck in Three Waves

Jeffrey Taubenberger was part of the pioneering scientific team that first isolated and sequenced the genome of the 1918 flu virus in the late 1990s. The painstaking process involved extracting viral RNA from autopsied lung samples taken from American soldiers who died from the 1918 flu, plus one diseased lung preserved in the Alaskan permafrost for nearly 100 years. Now chief of the Viral Pathogenesis and Evolution Section at the National Institutes of Health (NIH), Taubenberger explains that genetic analyses of the 1918 flu indicate that it started as an avian flu and represented a completely new viral strain when it made the leap to humans shortly before 1918. Lab tests of the reconstructed 1918 virus show that in its original form, the virus's novel encoded proteins made it 100 times more lethal in mice than today's seasonal flu. The 1918 pandemic struck in three distinct waves over a 12-month period. It first appeared in the spring of 1918 in North America and Europe largely in the trenches of World War I, then reemerged in its deadliest form in the fall of 1918, killing tens of millions of people worldwide from September through November. The final wave swept across Australia, the United States and Europe in the late winter and spring of 1919. But did the 1918 flu simply "go away" after that third wave? Absolutely not, says Taubenberger.

Virus Mutates Into Seasonal Flu



Since the whole world had been exposed to the virus, and had therefore developed natural immunity against it, the 1918 strain began to mutate and evolve in a process called "antigenic drift." Slightly altered versions of the 1918 flu reemerged in the winters of 1919-1920 and 1920-1921, but they were far less deadly and nearly indistinguishable from the seasonal flu. "The 1918 flu definitely lost its real virulence by the early 1920s," says Taubenberger. But what's truly incredible, according to genetic analyses, is that the same novel strain of flu first introduced in 1918 appears to be the direct ancestor of every seasonal and pandemic flu we've had over the past century. "You can still find the genetic traces of the 1918 virus in the seasonal flu that circulate today," says Taubenberger. "Every single human infection with influenza A in the past 102 years is derived from that one introduction of the 1918 flu."

Welcome to the Pandemic Era

The 1918 flu pandemic was by far the deadliest flu outbreak of the 20th century to date, but it wasn't the only one to qualify as a pandemic. Even with the advent of the first seasonal flu vaccines after World War II, the flu virus has proven capable of some unexpected and deadly genetic tricks. In a normal flu season, vaccine scientists can track the most active viral strains and produce a vaccine that protects against changes in the human flu virus from year to year. But every so often, viral genes from the animal kingdom enter the mix.

"If one animal is infected with two different influenza viruses at the same time," says Taubenberger, "maybe one virus from a bird and another from a human, those genes can mix and match to create a brand new virus that never existed before." That's what happened in 1957 when the 1918 flu, which is an H1N1 virus, swapped genes with another bird flu giving us the H2N2 pandemic, which claimed a million lives worldwide.



A man receives a shave from a barber wearing a mask during the ongoing flu pandemic, Chicago, Illinois, 1918. Chicago Sun-Times/Chicago Daily News Collection/Chicago History Museum/Getty Images.

It happened again in 1968 with the creation of the so-called "Hong Kong Flu," an H3N2 virus that killed another million people. The so-called "Swine Flu" pandemic of 2009 has an even deeper backstory. When humans became infected with the 1918 pandemic flu, which was originally a bird flu, we also passed it on to pigs. "One branch of the 1918 flu permanently adapted to pigs and became swine influenza that was seen in pigs in the US every year after 1918 and spread around the world," says Taubenberger. In 2009, a strain of swine flu swapped genes with both human influenza and avian influenza to create a new variety of H1N1 flu that was "more like 1918 than had been seen in a long time," says Taubenberger. Around 300,000 people died from the 2009 flu pandemic. All told, if 50 to 100 million people died in the 1918 and 1919 pandemic, and tens of millions more have died in the ensuing century of seasonal flus and pandemic outbreaks, then all of those deaths can be attributed to the single and accidental emergence in humans of the very successful and stubborn 1918 virus.

"We're still living in what I would call the '1918 pandemic era' 102 years later" says Taubenberger, "and I don't know how long it will last." (Courtesy history.com)