



# RESOURCE & DISCUSSION GUIDE

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## ABOUT COVID DIARIES NYC

COVID DIARIES NYC chronicles the lives of five young filmmakers, ranging in age from 17 to 21, who turn their cameras on themselves to tell the stories of their families during the first wave of the Covid-19 pandemic in New York City. The deeply personal film illuminates the plight of essential workers and their families during the early days of the Covid-19 crisis as they navigate the deadly virus and a country riven by social upheaval.

With original animation by Rosemary Colón-Martinez, COVID DIARIES NYC is comprised of five brave and at times heart wrenching first-person profiles that provide profound insight into these young people's experiences as they process the impacts and meaning of the Covid-19 pandemic:

**"The Only Way to Live in Manhattan"** follows Marcial Pilataxi, who lives with and helps his grandmother at a building where she works as the superintendent. They wrestle with the increasing amounts of tenants' garbage because of those sheltering at home. Marcial makes food deliveries and tries to maintain normalcy with his friends as the city he knows changes against the backdrop of the pandemic and a city torn apart by unrest in the wake of George Floyd's murder.

**"My COVID Breakdown"** follows Aracelie Colón, who struggles with her mental health as her father continues to go to work at the post office every day while the threat of the virus looms. **"When My Dad Got COVID"** follows Camille Dianand, who is concerned about her father, a subway mechanic for the MTA. After a coworker dies from the virus, her father contracts Covid-19 and the family faces life and death terror.

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## ABOUT COVID DIARIES NYC

**“No Escape From New York”** follows Shane Fleming, whose parents lose their jobs, leaving the family worrying about mounting bills, growing debt and their need to move out of New York City. They decide to go on a road trip to escape their problems, but the issues his mother and father face follow them wherever they go.

**“Frontline Family”** follows Arlet Gualpa, who watches with her family as ambulance after ambulance arrives at their apartment building in Washington Heights to take away residents who die from the virus. Despite their fears, her parents, a bus driver and home care attendant, carry on with work and try to overcome their anxieties about their family’s exposure.

HBO Documentary Films’ COVID DIARIES NYC is a DCTV production, directed by Marcial Pilataxi, Aracelie Colón, Camille Dianand, Shane Fleming, Arlet Gualpa, and Rosemary Colón-Martinez; produced by Jon Alpert, Jesse Perez Antigua, Sade Falebita, Naomi Mizoguchi, and Johnny Ramos; executive produced by Carrie Penner, Perri Peltz, and Matthew O’Neill

### ABOUT DCTV:

Founded in 1972, DCTV is a renowned media center in New York City where community screenings and discussions, youth media and continuing education programs, and affordable filmmaking resources all exist side by side with DCTV’s own, award-winning documentary productions. DCTV Youth Media provides free filmmaking training, mentorship and professional development for NYC teens and young adults.

## CONNECTING THE THEMES IN COVID DIARIES NYC

Thank you for watching COVID DIARIES NYC. We hope the film and this guide will provide an opportunity for additional conversation and action and that it helps connect you to some of the themes addressed in the film. If you or someone you know is in a crisis, Text **UNDERSTAND** to **741741** for free, 24/7 crisis counseling.

COVID DIARIES NYC touches upon many issues impacting the filmmakers' families, New York City, and society at large. Through this film, we witness how Covid-19 is uniquely impacting essential workers and their loved ones. We watch the protagonists battle mental health challenges one of the five stories really focuses on this) exacerbated by the pandemic. These stories about Covid-19 and mental health are told by filmmakers whose voices we rarely hear — young people and people of color. We hope this documentary will inspire conversation and action related to Covid-19, mental health, and the importance of uplifting underrepresented voices in film.



# COVID 19

## WHAT TO KNOW



Over 500,000 Americans have died from Covid-19. This virus is affecting everyone, but Black and brown communities are disproportionately impacted. Americans of color are at a greater risk because centuries of injustices have created a system in which Black and brown people are more likely to work essential jobs that expose them to the virus, less likely to have health insurance, more likely to have existing health conditions, and less likely to be treated when ill.

- The hospitalization rate for Covid-19 patients is four times as high for Black, Latino, and Native American people compared to their white counterparts. ([CDC](#))
- Job losses during the pandemic have hit workers in low-wage occupations particularly hard. From December 2019 to December 2020, the percentage decrease in employment in low-wage occupations was more than twice as great as in middle-wage occupations (-12.5% vs. -5.3%). At the same time, employment in high-wage occupations increased marginally over this period.” ([Pew](#))
- Latina and Asian women have experienced sharper job losses in Covid-19 downturn than other workers. ([Pew](#))
- Black and Latino workers are more likely than white workers to work outside the home as essential workers. ([LeanIn.org](#))
- Two-thirds of Black and Latina women do not have enough savings to live at the poverty line for three months if they lose their jobs. ([Women’s Wealth Gap](#))

# COVID 19

## WHAT TO KNOW



Frontline and essential workers have been branded as “COVID heroes” during the pandemic. There’s no doubt we must acknowledge the heroic actions of the people who keep our communities running in the midst of this crisis. However, by simply labeling them heroes and applauding their service, we dismiss the humanity of frontline and essential workers. “Hero” implies someone who is unafraid and unbreakable, but as COVID DIARIES NYC beautifully illustrates, those who work essential jobs during this pandemic fear for their lives and are deeply vulnerable. Essential workers face this crisis with courage, not because they want to but because they have no other choice. “He’s going into battle everyday. No freedom from work,” filmmaker Arlet’s mother says when describing the daily responsibility of her husband who continues working as a bus driver during the pandemic. “I’m afraid of bringing this sickness into my house and contaminating my family,” Arlet’s father shares. “This is our life. We could die any second. This is not a game, its reality. We’re scared.”

Instead of putting our brave neighbors on a hero’s pedestal, let’s honor their sacrifices by treating them the same way we would our close friends and family — protect them. **Protection is gratitude.**

# COVID 19

## WHAT TO DO:



1, Stay safe during the pandemic by taking the following precautions

- Always wear a mask
- Stay six feet apart
- Wash your hands for at least 20 seconds
- Stay away from crowds, poorly ventilated places
- Learn more [here](#)

2. Get vaccinated once you are eligible

- Use the [CDC Vaccine Finder](#) or this [NPR resource](#) to find vaccine information in your state
- If you are in New York City looking to book an appointment for the COVID vaccine, [TurboVax](#) can help you quickly see where appointments are available.
- [SOMOS COVID Vaccination](#)
- Watch the [CNN Town Hall](#)

3. Donate if you are able

- Give to a local mutual aid fund. [Mutual Aid Hub](#) offers a nationwide listing of food pantries and community refrigerators and freezers.
- Donate to [OFW Emergency Fund](#) to provide immediate cash assistance to restaurant employees, delivery drivers and others who are tipped in the industry.

# COVID 19

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS



- 1) In Marcial and Shane's stories, we see how the filmmakers and their families were eager to escape the confines of quarantine. At what points during the pandemic have you felt like you had to leave your quarantine space? What decisions did you make, and how did those decisions affect those around you?
- 2) All the filmmakers show themselves and loved ones fearing for each other's lives. Who have you tried to protect during this time? What does this protection look like?
- 3) A common theme across stories is a lack of transparency about what was happening with the virus. Parents talked about uncertainty in their workplaces, and Aracelie asked if it was safe to take ibuprofen. Where did you turn to look for answers about the pandemic?
- 3) What type of confusion or misinformation did you encounter? What trusted sources helped you navigate this pandemic?
- 4) The documentary shows families using disinfectants, masks, and other items to protect against the virus. How did your family assemble its COVID survival kit? What were the challenges and emotions that arose while you were acquiring what you needed to stay safe?

# COVID 19

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS



5) In Arlet's film, she shares that her friend's brother did not receive proper care and died of COVID, likely because of systemic racism in the healthcare system. How have you seen the pandemic disproportionately impact communities of color? Are there any organizations or leaders you believe are combating racial disparities in COVID cases?

6) Arlet's father says, "If I don't pay our rent we are in the street. I don't care that my life is in danger. At least I have a job." Have you or your parents had to make the choice between work and your safety during the pandemic? Have you been able to go to school? What was the decision like to go back to school or not to return in person? What types of sacrifices have you made? What has this experience revealed to you about your privilege and power?



*"More than anything, I hope audiences take living in a pandemic more seriously. People are dying and families are suffering, and this will continue to happen as long as there are people holding massive 'gatherings' and refusing to wear masks. I truly hope people see what my family, and many families, have gone through, and take the necessary precautions so that they never have to endure the same thing." -*

Filmmaker Camille Dianand

# MENTAL HEALTH

## WHAT TO KNOW



- During the pandemic, about 4 in 10 adults in the U.S. have reported symptoms of anxiety or depressive disorder, which is up from 1 in 10 adults who reported these symptoms from January to June 2019. ([Kaiser](#))
- A Kaiser Family Foundation Poll from July 2020 found that many adults are having difficulty sleeping (36%) or eating (32%), increases in alcohol consumption or substance use (12%), and worsening chronic conditions (12%), due to worry and stress over the coronavirus. ([Kaiser](#))
- A CDC survey from the summer of 2020 reveals that 18-24 year olds reported the highest level of symptoms of anxiety and depression and one quarter said they seriously considered suicide. There were higher percentages among unpaid adult caregivers, essential workers, and Hispanic and Black responders. ([CDC](#))
- Parents, friends, family members and educators who are concerned about young adults in their lives should ask specifically and directly about feelings of depression, mental health or suicide and have resources on hand. (See resources below)

# MENTAL HEALTH

## WHAT TO DO:

1) Make sure you and your loved ones know of mental health resources

- The Crisis Text Line: anyone in the US can text UNDERSTAND to 741741 for free, 24/7 crisis counseling.
- You can call SAMHSA's National Helpline – 1-800-662-HELP (4357) which is a free, confidential, 24/7, 365-day-a-year treatment referral and information service (in English and Spanish) for individuals and families facing mental and/or substance use disorders.
- Parents and guardians seeking emotional support can contact the National Parent Helpline at 855-427-2736. If you are looking to help young people impacted by trauma or toxic stress, read Girls Inc.'s guide.

2) Donate to mental health organizations if you are able:

- The Loveland Therapy Fund - With the barriers affecting access to treatment by members of diverse ethnic and racial groups, the Loveland Therapy Fund provides financial assistance to Black women and girls seeking therapy nationally.
- NAMI - NAMI is the nation's largest grassroots mental health organization. When you make a financial contribution to NAMI, you help provide a national network of support and resources, both online and in communities across the country.

# MENTAL HEALTH

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:



1) We are all missing our communities during this time, but young people are uniquely impacted by social isolation. Marcial was so eager to socialize that he snuck out in the middle of the night. Aracelie hung up pictures of her friends to feel closer to them. How has the pandemic affected your friendships? Have you and your inner circle developed any new rituals or explored new forms of connection?

2) What have you discovered about your mental health during the pandemic? What changes have you noticed? What are your coping mechanisms to deal with this stressful and emotionally taxing time?

3) How have you shown up for loved ones who feel overwhelmed, depressed, and/or anxious during the pandemic? What resources do you have at your disposal and which ones do you wish were available?



"The lack of awareness of Mental Illness in people of color inspired me to make this film. I hope that the audience becomes more aware of mental illness and create a space to help people who struggle with anxiety and or depression." - Filmmaker Aracelie Colon

# UNDERREPRESENTED VOICES IN FILM

## WHAT TO KNOW:



Film and television shape how we see the world. For too long, people of color and women haven't had opportunities to share their perspectives through these mediums. While it may appear that we are seeing more representation in Hollywood, the industry is still dominated by white men, especially behind the scenes.

- In 2019, people of color claimed a 15.1 percent share of the directors from that year's top films, a four-percentage-point decline from the 19.3 percent figure posted in 2018. People of color would have had to nearly triple their share of directors in 2019 to attain proportionate representation. ([UCLA](#))
- In 2019, 84.9 percent of the directors for top Hollywood films were white. ([UCLA](#))
- While white writers dominated the credits for top Hollywood films in 2018 (89.6 percent), among the minority groups only Blacks (5.2 percent) and Asians (3 percent) posted significant shares of the total writers that year. ([UCLA](#))



"There are so many ways that this pandemic has affected our lives and it's important to share these stories. So people can see them and have a sense of community so they don't feel alone." - Filmmaker Arlet Guallpa

# UNDERREPRESENTED VOICES IN FILM

## WHAT TO DO:



### 1) Support the work of filmmakers of color

- Watch content made by BIPOC. Even if it's free — your views are still helpful.
- Follow BIPOC filmmakers on social media and share their content
- If your film or TV crew is looking for talent, check out [ARRAY](#).

### 2) Join and support organizations uplifting underrepresented voices in media

- [Appalshop](#)
- [BAVC](#)
- [Brown Girls Doc Mafia](#)
- [DCTV](#)
- [Firelight Media](#)
- [Kartemquin Films](#)
- [Third World Newsreel](#)

### 3) Chase your dream

- Learn from [DCTV](#)
- Read about [COVID-NYC Documentary Project — The Gotham Center for New York City History](#)



*"There are many different types of people and different experiences. There are also many ways to tell a story. Even if the conflict is the same, no person will have the same perspective and form of expression." - Animator Rosemary Colón-Martínez*

# UNDERREPRESENTED VOICES IN FILM

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:



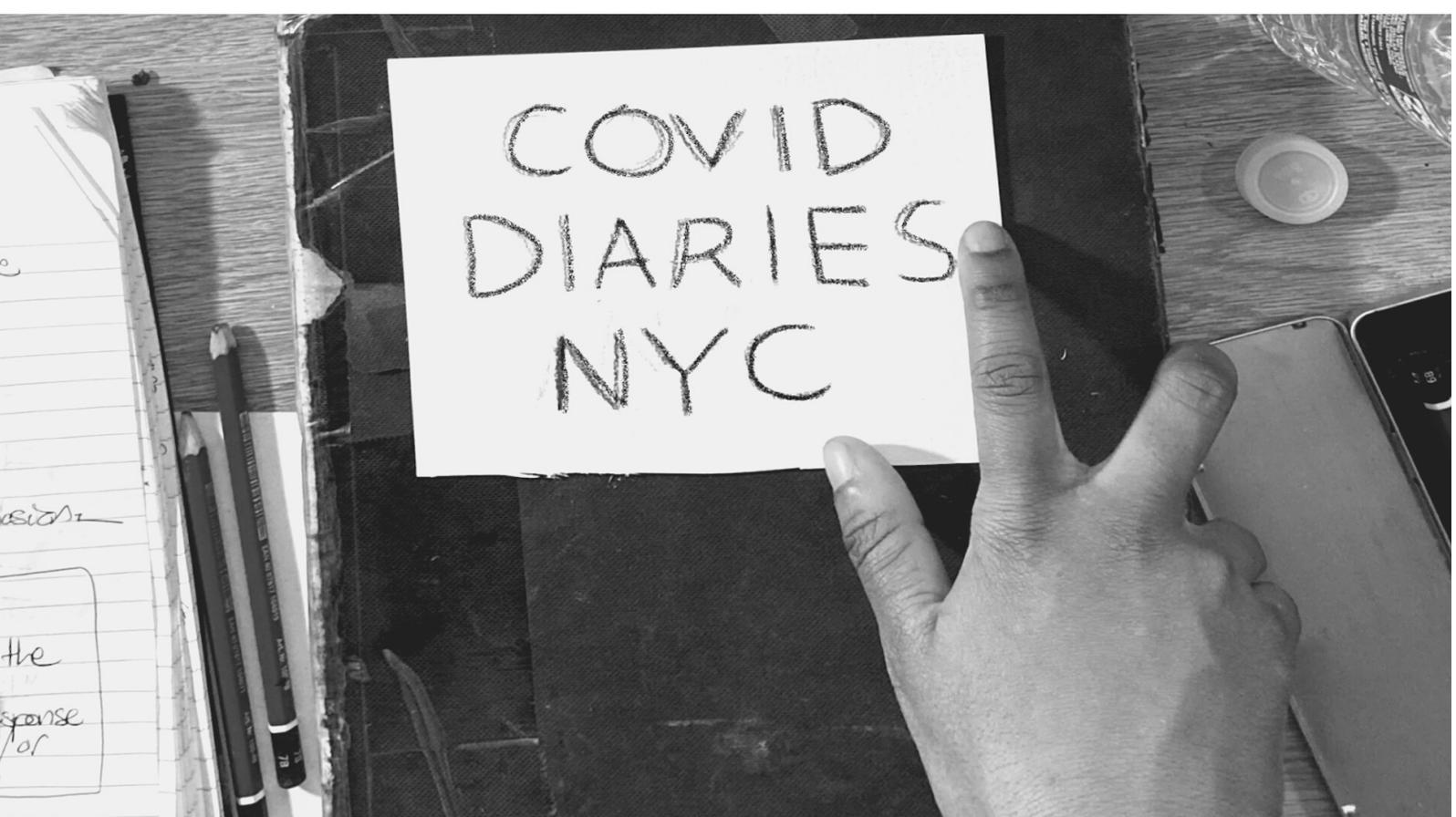
- 1) Marcial, Camille and Arlet's films paint intimate portraits of their immigrant families. Did these teach you anything new about the American immigrant experience? Where else have you seen authentic immigrant stories told?
- 2) What voices and stories dominate your world right now? What voices and stories do you feel are missing?
- 3) What roles do film and TV play in shaping your perception of the world?
- 4) Who are some current filmmakers of color illustrating the world we live in today? How can you better support them?



*"Film and any art is supposed to be fun and free for expression. Make the film you want to see. That you will be proud of. Always fight for your vision, even if people don't agree with you. That's how your voice shines." -*

Filmmaker Marcial Pilataxi

**THANK YOU.**



COVID  
DIARIES  
NYC

The image shows a hand holding a small white piece of paper with the words 'COVID DIARIES NYC' written in a hand-drawn, blocky font. The paper is placed on a dark surface, possibly a desk. In the background, there is a wooden desk with various items: a notebook with some handwritten text, a pencil, a pen, a water bottle cap, and a smartphone. The overall scene suggests a workspace or a desk where someone is documenting their experiences during the COVID-19 pandemic.