

## The First Wave

This opening glimpse of the US COVID-19 pandemic focuses on its early manifestation in New York City between March and June 2020, when over 30,000 people were infected and some 2,000 died, first evidence of the virus's brutal impact.

Director Matthew Heineman depicts this calamity using great taste and restraint, embedding himself with care workers, doctors, and staff. For example, he treats the grisly reality of dead COVID victims being housed in refrigerated trucks matter-of-factly and at a distance, not dwelling on the lurid reality of death. Also, because this outbreak happened early on, it avoids the visceral political issues that later surfaced in coronavirus coverage. It was during the days when both COVID survivors were cheered by hospital staff as they left their facilities and when care givers were applauded in the streets as they finished their shifts. No longer are such scenes celebrated because they have become so routine.

"The First Wave" is a shattering origin story, with a focus on mitigating victims' agonies and the health care workers struggling to do something—anything—for their patients. At a time when there were no vaccines to ease the suffering, Heineman almost wholly concentrates on interviews with frustrated care givers and the families of victims, not so much on those who were sick. Highlighting family members' concerns, such as lacking access to their loved ones, is heart-rending, and the inability of caregivers to allay this ravaging illness is crushing.

No that anyone would want to re-visit those early days of the pandemic, the film still gives moviegoers a touching, early history of our pandemic life. *(This film is rated "R" for tough hospital scenes and runs 133 minutes.)*

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