Reflection on the COVID-19 Pandemic

Assata Baker
Third Year
Political Science Major
History Minor
T.A Kaleb Herman Adney
History 129A
Teofilo F. RUIZ
18 May 2020
My Experience with COVID-19

As I sit down at the dining room table at my parents home to write this essay, I can’t help but feel some reluctance to write about myself. I find it difficult in any format to discuss my troubles because of guilt. I was raised to believe that someone somewhere may have it worse than me and to show respect by not complaining about my hardships. However, with age I’ve come to dispute the things I’ve been taught and take pride in telling my story whether it's good or bad. I have found strength in displaying the troubles I’ve had in life and specifically how COVID-19 has affected me.

A few weeks ago, in my History of Spain and Portugal online video lecture, we learned about the Spanish expeditions. I read about the Spaniards' voyages to explore Mexico and then conquer it. During Spain's encounter with the indigenous people of Mexico, the Spaniards unknowingly unleashed an epidemic of smallpox on the Native people. The people of Mexico have never been in contact with this disease and had no immunity to it. In “The Siege Tenochtitlan”, an indigenous person recalls the devastation this plague caused in their city. Smallpox killed a huge amount of the people and they felt every bit of pain from the dreadful sickness. “Sores erupted on [their] faces, [their] breasts, [their] bellies; [they] were covered with agonizing sores from head to foot” (The Siege Tenochtitlan 93). If the sick didn’t die from the disease, they died from hunger. They were paralyzed from the pain that they could not get up to
eat. Those without healthy loved ones to care for them died easily. The disease spread so quickly that it could not be halted. It appeared first in the “Fiesta of Teotlecco” when many people were crowded around each other (The Siege Tenochtitlan 93). Some people who caught the disease weren't affected as horribly as others. Those who were lucky had a milder form. Lastly, after all the suffering, the cases of smallpox did end up decreasing. Random cases would pop up sporadically and with generations to come it would continue to slow down. The after effects are what really hurt the region. The Spanish came back to claim Mexico and, because of the disease, the indigenous people were too weak to fight for their land.

COVID-19 is the modern day version of what happened in Mexico after the Spaniards' encounter with the New World. Similar to smallpox, no one in the world had experienced this disease. Therefore, no one has immunity to it. It began in one region and spread quickly throughout the whole world. Big gatherings like concerts, parties, and sporting games can cause a high influx of cases in a certain area. Similar to the Fiesta of Teotlecco, many people in one area can cause a spike of cases. Lastly, individuals may be bed ridden for weeks with horrible pains and end up passing away. While others have an easier time dealing with COVID-19 and may have a fast and easy recovery. On the other end, many people have never even come in contact with the disease. It's not the same for everyone, and it has affected everyone differently. However, in some way or another it has affected everyone. I cannot tell anyone else’s story but mine. Hence, this is how COVID-19 has affected my life.

I celebrated my birthday with my friends and family the weekend of March 6th 2020. It was a week before finals, and I was eager to enjoy a wild weekend. Since I planned to study for finals before my birthday, I was able to escape for a short time. At the time I was ignorant to
what was going to happen, and I was lucky to celebrate 22 years alive with people I admire and love. The following week, my boyfriend Angelo and I decided to be on strict quarantine at his father's house in San Diego since we thought it would be safer than being in Westwood, Los Angeles. His father's home is comfortable and grand and we had everything we needed to feel healthy and at peace. Except I wasn’t at peace.

The first week we were there it was spring break for me. I was comfortable and enjoyed my free time. We decided early on we would stay cautious. After the week ended we left due to disputes in the house. After all, it wasn’t as peaceful as I thought it would be. We drove to my home in LA and then to my parents home in Sacramento to be safer. It’s comical thinking back that I wanted to book a flight to Hawaii on March 25th. I contemplated escaping for a while to a beautiful cheap vacation. Then I was confronted by my friends for being selfish, and they were right. Although now I would do anything to be lying in Hawaii right now enjoying my life. The matter of the fact is booking a flight would be malicious. Even though I’m young and healthy and could possibly heal from COVID-19 quickly, doesn’t mean other people around me would.

Sacramento was only a short visit. It might not have been the safest to drive down the coast during a pandemic, but I needed to see my mom. Plus, as a college student, I have too many roommates, and I didn’t want Angelo to be a burden on them. We ended up going back to San Diego, even if it wasn’t the most enjoyable, and then school started. How naive was I to think that online class would be so easy. Seventeen units and a statistics class and all online courses, I was gasping for air by the first week. I didn’t necessarily feel welcomed where I was staying, but I didn’t want to go back to LA due to safety but mainly because I wanted to be with my boyfriend during these hard times. I’m blessed that I had him to comfort me. I didn’t have
my own desk to work at or my own space. Angelo’s space was my space and I loved it, for a while. We were clingy at first. I enjoyed every minute of the solitude we had together. We enjoyed each other's presence, and he was the one sweet thing that was going on in my life. Meanwhile, school was one of my hardships.

I don’t think professors understand what is happening in the world. I don’t think they understand its students' first time taking online classes. At first, I was drowning in school work, and I didn’t understand much. I was pulling my nails off my skin during the day and binge drinking at night. I was in my head about a lot of things but mainly the fear of failing. I can’t fail. However, for the first time ever, I think I might. I have always pushed myself to succeed. Even in trying times I pulled myself out of the heat. Trust me when I say it’s not easy. Although school was difficult, I was grateful to be in a safe home and mentally stable. For a while I was.

As I said before, Angelo’s father's home was comfortable. We had a pool, gym, food and most times it wasn’t bad. Yet, the home was cold. The people who lived there weren’t very inviting and Angelo and I walked on eggshells most of the time. After a little more than a month, it became too much and we left. At this time my mental health became too much for me to handle as well. Being in confinement for that long, without leaving the house, was exhausting. I become irritable and tricky. Angelo and I began to pick at each other like old scabs. I wasn’t comfortable with where I was at and school began to feel too overwhelming. I was doing school work every single day with few breaks in the week. School seems more difficult and time consuming when it’s online. I couldn’t focus and doing homework in the bed was not preferable. On a usual school day I would walk to the UCLA library and sit in a chair for 6 hours and go
home and enjoy the rest of my day. Now, I’m stuck in my head. Nothing makes sense to me, and I can’t stop daydreaming. After more than two months in quarantine I decided to call a therapist.

The first time I saw Edvard Munch’s, *The Scream*, I was a child. It didn’t make much sense to me at all, and I was actually quite scared. Now when I look at it, all I feel is understanding. That's how the world felt, that's how I felt. I get in my head a lot, I suffer from mental illness and before this month it had been years since I began to feel this low. Now I think I may understand how the indigenous people may have felt staying inside to avoid a disease. If the Spanish came to invade my home I wouldn’t be in the right headspace either.

When Angelo and I left San Diego we traveled down the coast again to Los Angeles and then Sacramento. We needed to stay at a place we could rely on. Somewhere we felt comfortable and loved. My heart aches for the people that don’t have any other options but to live in homes they don’t feel warm in. I didn’t want to go to my parents home because I prefer my own space, but it was my only option. I’m not getting along with one of my roommates. She doesn't quarantine properly, and I felt like my life was at risk. I didn’t feel safe in yet another home. Angelo and I stayed in LA for a week and left. I hate that I am forced to pay LA’s ridiculous rent prices on a home I can’t live in. Gratefully, because my mother is a health care worker and my father is able to work from home, I haven’t had any issues with money.

Angelo and I separated when we got to Sacramento. We decided he would go to his mothers and I would go to mine. I drove down the cost three times to find a place I would feel safe at. Things have gotten better for me personally, and I feel like I should have never complained. People have experienced far worse than me, but I also do feel obligated to tell my story. This quarantine has affected my mental health, my relationships, and my education.
Although it has taken a toll on my life, I am grateful it hasn’t affected my physical health or my loved ones’ health. I pray it never will. People around the United States are selfishly protesting the stay-at-home order because they want to feel free. While other people are dying and lives are affected far worse than what I could imagine. Although things are hard for me, I would stay inside for another year to keep other people safe. I am scared for the world, and I am unsure how it will come out of this troubling time.

The indigenous people suffered tremendously and many of their people passed away from what the Old World brought over to the New World. As a result, they weren’t prepared to fight back against the Spanish because of the devastation the smallpox had on the indigenous people. I fear what the after effects will look like after COVID-19 cases decrease. Even when the sickness becomes tame, the world will still have to worry about the outcome of the disease. I understand people are eager to reopen the country and keep the economy moving, but I believe people's lives are more important. The world will heal, eventually.