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Living History: the Coronavirus & its Effects

I can honestly say that this is not a paper that I ever expected to be writing as I have never really put much thought into the occurrence of a pandemic or anything of the sorts. I'm sure that I'm not the only one who didn't predict a widespread illness to cut our Winter quarter short and to force our education to go completely online for the foreseeable future. But here we are, living in a world that has been dramatically affected by the coronavirus. In this paper, I will do my best to explain how covid-19 has impacted me and the world around me. In order to do this, I will break this paper into essentially two parts. Part one will explore the coronavirus's effects on me, and I will break this down further into three subcategories: school, family, and social life. In part two, I will attempt to place the coronavirus into the correct political and historical contexts in order to connect the pandemic to society at large.

Considering that I'm writing this paper for school, I believe that discussing the effects of coronavirus on my academics is an adequate starting point. Before getting into the specifics of how the coronavirus has been consequential in terms of my school life, I will provide some background on myself. I'm a political science major currently at the end of my junior year, but I transferred to UCLA from a community college in northern California, so the pandemic has cut my first experience away from home short. To put it simply, I was not expecting such an abbreviated first year. Furthermore, I would be lying if I said that online classes have not been a challenge. In fact, I have personally found the shift to online classes to be rather difficult, and if I were to bet, I'm not alone in this experience. For me, the most difficult part of the shift online is the lack of structure that physically going to school provides. I have frequently found myself doing work late at night, and my schedule has

essentially flipped from being morning heavy before the pandemic to increasingly evening-oriented. I shoulder most of the responsibility for not creating a more normal, more responsible schedule for myself, but I didn't really think that doing school without going to school would be such a challenge.

Aside from losing the schedule provided by attending school in person, receiving an education online has taken a great deal of self-teaching. I don't think that becoming more reliant on oneself when it comes to learning is the worst thing to ever happen, but it has been one of the more difficult effects of coronavirus on my education. At the beginning of the quarter, it was rather hard for me to know if I was understanding the material in my classes in an adequate manner. I believe that this was the result of the lack of interaction that seems to be an inherent part of receiving an online education. To put it differently, not having the student-professor dialogue that's commonplace in a more traditional learning environment has made honing in on what's important from a specific source or lesson much more awkward. I attribute this to the fact that it's more challenging to ask questions, or to receive clarification on specific aspects of a course's material, online than it is in person. I believe there are two elements about my experience that have exaggerated the lack of student-professor interaction: pre-recorded lectures and the (typically) individual appointments to answer questions that stem from pre-recorded lectures. Pre-recorded lectures prevent questions from being asked as they come up, and individual question-answering periods prevent students that aren't asking questions from receiving clarification on an issue that they might not have thought they needed if not for someone else's inquiry. To summarize, the lack of structure provided by the online-learning experience and the emphasis on self-teaching have made schooling during the coronavirus challenging. That being said,

I'm adapting to these challenges, and I'm sure many others at UCLA and other schools are as well.

While I could write an entire paper on the effects of the pandemic on education, I will spare my readers that polemic. I'd like to shift the conversation now towards how my family has been affected by the coronavirus and the subsequent lockdown. This is another topic that I could write an essay on, but I will keep it as brief and to the point as possible. Considering that I'm writing this paper for a class on the history of Spain, where Christianity and festivals are of particular importance, I'll start with Easter.

Holidays and familial celebrations are extremely important to my family, and rarely (actually never) do we not get together for important days. So, not celebrating Easter with my family is illustrative of the impact that coronavirus has had on normality and cultural rituals. Personally, I found not celebrating Easter with my family to be extremely disappointing because I don't get to see them very often, and I value my family more than anything else. In lieu of an in-person celebration, we had a family Zoom session, but it did not capture the same gratification and happiness I get when I spend time with my cousins, aunts, and uncles. While I'm sure celebrations of holidays, birthdays, and other important events will return, I cannot help but to feel for those who had to forgo the celebration of major, one-off events as a result of the pandemic. For example, as an aspiring lawyer it was disheartening to see UCLA School of Law's Class of 2020 forced to graduate over a livestream. While a live-streamed graduation does not take away any of the prestige or accomplishment that comes along with earning a degree, whether at the undergraduate- or graduate-level, a graduation ceremony is an integral part of the celebration of such an achievement and a right of passage. While I agree that keeping the event from happening in person was the right decision to make, it does not make the consequences of it any more palatable.

In addition to the impact of the coronavirus on family events, I have also experienced differences at home with my immediate family. To start, the coronavirus has actually brought us back together because both my sister and I are in college and were largely away from home (I was obviously in Los Angeles while my sister was closer to home in San Francisco). So, being able to come back home and having the opportunity to spend time with my mom has actually been an unquestionable positive for me as a result of the pandemic. However, just prior to the outbreak of the coronavirus, about half of my house had to be blocked off because there was asbestos found in its walls, so the living situation has been rather cramped. That being said, I'm extremely grateful for having a roof over my head during these tough times as many don't. I think putting the difficulties that I have faced as a result of Covid-19 into perspective is a good way to deal with them. If a more congested home environment and the previously discussed academic challenges are the worst that I have to face, then I consider myself to be extremely lucky as many find themselves in much more dire straits. Being content with what I have has undoubtedly made dealing with these trying times much easier.

To wrap up the first part of this paper, I'd like to discuss the impact of the coronavirus on society and social life in general. I think this is where the pandemic will have the most lasting effects because I believe that it will lead many to dramatically rethink large gatherings. I'm very curious to see how things like sporting events, night clubs, and other activities that typically draw crowds are changed by social distancing and the very real possibility that something like the coronavirus could happen again. I'm particularly interested in whether or not live sports will be played anytime soon. My friends and I bond over sporting events, and sports, such as baseball, football, boxing, and mixed martial arts, have played an integral role throughout my life. Recently, the Ultimate Fighting Championship (UFC) started holding events with no crowds, and I wonder if this will set the example for

major events going forwards. I know California's government has been in protracted talks with sports leagues such as Major League Baseball (MLB), the National Basketball Association (NBA), and the National Football League (NFL) about if and when they can resume operations. If major sports leagues go the route of the UFC and have no live audiences, how long will that last? Will there ever be a return of crowds or gatherings in the tens of thousands? These are questions that don't seem to have clear answers. Furthermore, I'm sure there will be more than enough people willing to make up those crowds, but is it responsible to even let them assemble without a clear and effective treatment for Covid-19? I'm sure that I'm not alone in wondering about the future of social gatherings and how they will be changed.

The discussion of changing social events and regulations regarding them brings me to part two of the paper which addresses the political ramifications and historical context of the coronavirus. Because politics and economics are so intertwined with one another, I will include them in the same conversation. I will then connect the pandemic to the past and compare it to events in Spanish history.

Much like many other aspects of today's society, the coronavirus has been highly politicized, and a left-right divide exists on how to manage it. Many on the political right blame the Democrats for trying to stir up controversy to hurt Trump in the upcoming presidential election in November, however, that seems to be a rather nonsensical argument because it's quite evident that the coronavirus is truly a pandemic with potentially mortal ramifications. Nonetheless, this argument has led many states and politicians to advocate for a hasty reopening. While the economy has undoubtedly suffered as a result of the coronavirus, it seems illogical to attempt to fix the economy at the risk of a coronavirus-rebound. That being said, many people are in financial trouble as a result of the

coronavirus's effects on the economy which could arguably be a bigger problem in and of itself. Nevertheless, I personally believe that there can be positives drawn from this situation as it has illuminated the lack of preparedness, not only domestically but internationally, in terms of how we deal with a truly global illness. International institutions have not done what they have been designed to do, but I don't believe that means they need to be entirely abandoned either. I see the coronavirus as something that could actually solidify global institutions through a reaffirmation of the benefits of an organized, coordinated response by countries around the world. Despite the possibility of benefits, it's not clear if this will be the case, and it's very likely that it won't be, unfortunately.

To connect this back to Spanish history, the subject matter of the class I am writing this for, a pandemic is not unique to current events. For example, the Iberian Peninsula was hit extremely hard by the Black Plague during the 14th century which caused the economies around Castile and Catalonia to stop. The plague was then followed by political upheaval in the region. Of course some of the unrest was the consequence of the death of a king, but the United States and countries around the world can still learn from Spain's history. 14th century Spain (the region, not the country which wasn't unified until much later) provides an example of the troubles societies may face if the pandemic is handled incorrectly. Despite the shortcomings in how the coronavirus has been handled, I doubt it will devolve into something that leads to the disintegration of societies.

It is odd writing this paper knowing that what is currently going on will most likely be included in future history books. It's not often that one can safely assume that what they're experiencing will mark an important part of the historical record, but that is what we are experiencing now. I'd like to end on a more positive note as much of the coverage of the coronavirus is rather bleak (to put it lightly). I believe that our experience with Covid-19 can

lead to better and more well-rounded policy in the future, and I think it provides us an opportunity to reflect on what we do have, something that people often don't do. While these times are tough, it is imperative to look on the bright side of life in order to get through difficult moments such as these.