

# COVID-19: The Great Unifier

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“FINALLY!” whispered my best friend Savannah, as she glanced at her phone. On the cusp of our fifth hour in the majestic Powell library, we were deep into the ever so dreaded week ten of winter quarter. Before I could even begin to ask her what she had seen, there was an immediate change of the energy in the room. As I looked up from my textbook on interest groups and ideology, it appeared those around us also had their attention away from their readings and toward their phone screens. “It’s official!” Savannah squealed. As she opened her mouth to reveal the contents of the email she had just read, it registered for me. It was the news we were anxiously awaiting. Classes were moved online until week two of spring quarter. Upon initial thought, I was ecstatic. This had meant finals were online and our spring break extended. Daydreams of my Lake Havasu spring break trip filled my imagination. Yet, something in my gut told me this was the furthest thing from what we had all so desperately hoped for. I was right.

News of the corona virus was a topic we consistently discussed in passing, a problem that felt distant from us. The issue was raised in my classes weekly, and professors and classmates alike reassured one another that the disease was overblown. The sound of “It’s like the flu! Don’t worry guys” became as familiar to my ears as “Have you started the reading yet?”. But with each passing day, it seemed as though this virus was getting closer and closer. As the numbers exasperated, I knew the email informing us the remainder of spring quarter being remote was imminent. From here, the snowball effect commenced. Campus closed, university housing encouraged students to go home, Westwood became something of a ghost town, and most of the United States was put under stay at home orders.

Finals week of winter quarter was an especially difficult time for my roommates and I. The immediate repercussions of the stay at home orders were felt in our very own apartment. My

roommate Lauren was rather quickly furloughed from her local job at Tocaya Organica, and her loss of income raised concerns about our rent that was due in a matter of days. Even if my other roommates and I had been able to scavenge a few extra dollars each, it would not have nearly been enough. While most landlords around the country were accommodating considering the unique crisis, the only response we received from ours was, “This is still a *business*.” The thought of final examinations were the least of our worries when we did not know if we would have a roof over our heads the following month. My other roommate, Ricci, is an employee at In-N-Out Burger. Unlike Tocaya Organica, In-N-Out promised their workers their regularly billed checks, despite the reduction of their shifts. In other words, employees would be receiving their full paychecks for the duration of the stay at home orders. Once quarantine restrictions are relaxed, my roommates and I plan on making an active effort to support businesses, like In-N-Out, that elected to put their employees first in these tough circumstances.

Approximately four weeks after finals, my aunt was diagnosed with COVID-19. Having lived in Queens, New York City, one of the epicenters of the outbreak, her diagnosis did not come as a shock, but the anxiety of it consumed me. At age 55, with underlying health conditions, we were extremely concerned with her wellbeing. Hours upon hours of CNN coverage placed the most morbid thoughts into my head, causing my sleep and appetite to quickly vanish. With the help of the incredible doctors at Mount Sinai Hospital, she recovered and was discharged a week after her admittance. While we were lucky to celebrate her recovery, others have not been so fortunate, including one of my closest friends from home. She lost her stepfather, the only father figure she has ever had, on May 5th, two days before her board exam

for nursing school. With the human toll to this virus being so large, it is easy to lose sight of how each loss affects an even greater number of individuals.

As a transfer student, I can't help but feel a profound sense of grief due to the timing of this pandemic. Compared to traditional students who have four years at this university, we have only two. With that in mind, I approached every single day here with gratitude, savoring every moment I had to experience. The thought of initially losing just two weeks of spring quarter created a wedge in my heart, so losing the entire quarter was nothing short of devastating. Having worked tooth and nail to make it to this prestigious university, it feels as though my time was robbed. I had my spring quarter planned to every detail, a well deserved few months of memorable, almost cinematic, life experiences. After our spring break trip to Lake Havasu, I would get to experience my very first Coachella music festival. Then, just a few weeks later, I'd take on Las Vegas for the first time with most of my graduating class. Moreover, the end of spring quarter was going to be met with my highly anticipated summer abroad program, accompanied by my best friends. Since December, we had been counting down the days until we would be in London, Paris, Amsterdam, and Brussels studying the political institutions of the European Union. The winter nights would turn into winter mornings as we fantasized about our upcoming brunches in Notting Hill and our sunset picnics along the Seine. COVID-19 certainly took from me what I value the most in my life, creating memories with the ones closest to me.

In darkness, there is always light. Despite all of the loss I have felt in the past two months, I have found a window of opportunity. I had always planned on taking a gap year before law school to study for the monstrous LSAT. Adequately preparing for the test, while simultaneously going to school and working, seemed like a tough feat. However, now, with

normal life cancelled for the foreseeable future, I have never had more time on my hands. I will be dedicating this time to study for the LSAT and working on my law school applications, thus moving up the timeline to my ultimate dream. Each day I inch one step closer to my life goal.

Dwelling on my own sense of loss, I often forget that the entire globe at large is reeling from the effects of this disease. This is not the first time the world has experienced a global pandemic, and it certainly will not be the last. Christopher Columbus introduced the Columbian exchange into the new world, and while it brought new products and livestock, it also introduced infectious disease. Smallpox was responsible for wiping out nearly all of the native population. This aided in the Spanish conquest of the Aztecs, as the disease was able to kill off more people than any of their weapons ever could (Ruiz, Lecture 4/22). As the world grips with the implications of COVID-19, modern medicine and technology will not allow us to have the same fate as the Aztecs. The FDA was able to approve the drug Remdesivir for emergency use, and promising human trials for vaccines are underway around the globe. Technology has made it possible to flatten the curve through online platforms that let us work and attend school from the comfort of our homes. Nonetheless, this pandemic highlighted several shortcomings of our government. Healthcare is not accessible to all, and if insurance companies did not take the initiative to waive fees for corona treatment, many would avoid getting tested and treated, exasperating the spread. Furthermore, we were set up for failure in the handling of this disease. President Trump had dismantled the National Security Council's pandemic response team two years before the pandemic started. I argue that with this task force in place, the U.S. could have been much better prepared for what was to come, and the government will take precautionary measures to prevent such an outcome from happening again.

While we are united in our attempts to defeat this virus, I do worry countries will blame and punish China for their handling of the disease, sparking an all out war. The political consequences for China could be detrimental, and globalization will ensure these effects will be felt throughout the world. Similarly, the state of the world economy sparks a sense of unease within me. I believe we will be in a type of recession the world has yet to see, one that I will be graduating directly into. Mentors and professors instilled in us that our first job out of college can have a great impact on the trajectory of the rest of our careers. With possibly no jobs on the market, I can not help but ponder what will become of the career I spend day and night working towards. Additionally, the world we have come to know will likely never be the same. The September 11th attacks forever changed the way we flew, and even the attitudes the Arab world had towards the West completely transformed. In the aftermath of COVID-19, we will continue to be acutely aware of every surface our hands touch like never before, and look to our fellow humans with some suspicion. Universities will probably limit the number of students living together in a single space for good. Concerts, graduations, and large gatherings will likely cease to exist for the foreseeable future. The dining out experience could change forever, with only disposable menus and social distancing guidelines in place. Movie ticket sales were already in worrying decline, COVID-19 could perhaps speed up the inevitable transition to streaming and mark the end of the traditional screening experience. The length of isolation has also raised concerns about mental health. There has been an exponential increase in depression and anxiety, something that could be felt long after quarantine is lifted.

As we head into our third month of quarantine, we are as physically distant from one another as we have ever been, but COVID-19 has been the great unifier. We are all feeling the

ramifications of this virus, some more than others. Still, this disease does not care if you are male or female, where you live, or what you do for a living. We have an equal chance of contracting it. It has forced us to slow down, shining a light on the fragility of human life and our interdependence on one another. The world, for the first time, has been united in its effort to combat one common enemy. We are suffering the losses together, as one human race, and will bask in the joys of the cure that we will find together, as one human race. The world will be a better place as a result of it. The devastating Bubonic Plague may have ravished Europe, but it also brought about the Renaissance, and with it, some of the most beautiful and compelling works of art. This pandemic has similar potential to usher in an era of innovation and new ideas we have yet to see, and some day soon, we will meet again.

Works Cited

Ruiz, Teofilo F. April 22, 2020. University of California, Los Angeles. Los Angeles, CA.  
Lecture.