

Reflection on the Covid-19 Pandemic

Juan Carlos Hernández

Senior, Class of 2020

Spanish Major

French and Francophone studies Minor

Professor Teofilo F. Ruiz

TA. Emily Bolender

History 129A: Late Medieval and Early

Modern Spain

May 16, 2020

Our life's as we had become accustomed to have been challenged, altered into a new reality caused by the unforeseen pandemic, Covid-19. All across the globe many countries have been affected and the world is left wondering with many uncertainties and questions. How long will this pandemic last? When will our life return to what we once knew? What will our life's look like once it's over?

Many countries have declared restrictive measures in response to the virus. Most placing lockdowns, shelter in place orders, quarantines, stay at home responses, all limiting social interactions in order to slow down the spread of the coronavirus. It's all we see about in the media whether one's listening to the radio or watching the news, the world tunes in every day for updates but it seems that every day is the same as the one before. There is talk about potentially finding a vaccine or any medication remotely close but it's still early on thus today is yet another day in quarantine.

If I'm being completely honest I've stopped watching the news as often. I feel that it only covers the negative, or the scary and it's not healthy to keep indulging into it. I came back to my parents house since everything is now virtual and online. My parents are getting old, they're both in their sixties, that's why I'm tired of the news channels. It only projects fear, stress and uncertainty to them as the media tends to cover mainly the new numbers of deaths and cases yet very rarely the recovered ones. I'm not sure why, it must really say something about the media if we have to go onto twitter and social media to find positive news coverage. I guess the more frightening and dramatic the news coverage is the more attention it receives.

A part of me also believes that If we had a better government, maybe we wouldn't be in such a bad situation. I mean isn't the United States of America supposed to be the strongest, best, richest country in the world? At least that is what it illustrates itself to be, so why is it in the

worst shape? I could tell you what the USA is number one in right now, Covid19 cases and deaths... I recall back in late January when the outbreak began to be talked about. Many countries began to listen but even more so they began to take actions, while the USA sat back and watched.

I work for Apple Inc; you may be wondering why I bring this up. Every year in February we host a “close your rings” challenge which is a fitness goal we set with apple team members all around the globe. This year around mid-January we were told that the challenge would be postponed because our team members in China weren’t doing so well in health so we’d wait for them to get better so that we could do the fitness challenge with every Apple member. That was all the information we were given, which may have been confidential... I can’t recall. Most of us didn’t think much of it since we had little to no information of the outbreak that was occurring in China during the time. Now I bring this up because it makes me realize that we did have information about the virus back in January here in the states. I mean certainly If a company had this information then the government must have known as well, right? I now just realized this, but the virus didn’t become a big deal in the states until March, almost two months later.

You may be wondering why it took so long for the USA to respond to the virus that was spreading across Asia, Europe and the world rapidly, I too wonder. I hate to pinpoint one specific person at fault but if you claimed the virus was a hoax and still after all the deaths in the USA claim that we must open up our economy as soon as possible with total disregard to the medical experts; well then you can’t make it any easier Donald. This is why I believe that if we had a better government that prioritized the people over its capitalistic economic growth, the United States wouldn’t be in the situation it is in now.

On Friday the 20th of March I went to Cuba, despite the outbreak, which still wasn't as serious here in the USA. I went on a humanitarian project and my experience definitely put things into perspective regarding Covid 19 and other social issues as well. It is no secret that Cuba is considered a second or even third world country, but these terminologies can be confusing regarding what they refer to. We cannot deny the fact that Cuba is an underdeveloped country that encompasses an economically poor and weak structure. This is due to many reasons but perhaps primarily the fear of communism in the Americas by the United States. Around this time of my trip many Latin American countries such as El Salvador began closing their borders so many flights were cancelled and many people who were in the countries at the time were stuck at least until humanitarian planes arrived. A part of me was scared that I may too stay quarantined in Cuba, but since I was going with my sister we said if we did get stuck at least we'd be together. It would also give us an opportunity to stay in Cuba longer and document more of our trip since she likes to vlog and journalize, and I knew at some point I'd be able to talk about my experience in Cuba.

My journey to Cuba began from Los Angeles, California. I took an uber to LAX, my driver asked me why I was going to Cuba of all places. I explained to him that I was going on a humanitarian trip in aid of the Cuban people and in my luggage I had masks and hand sanitizers that I personally purchased myself. He also asked about the U.S. policies and restrictions which make it difficult for Americans to travel to Cuba. This is true, for many years the USA has oppressed Cuba and has limited travel to the country due to its political differences. I explained how I was able to visit Cuba since my visit concurred with the authorized travel categories placed by the US government, but that I would have to do a layover outside the united states to get a visa and couldn't fly directly into Cuba.

The airport was a desert, while it usually takes over an hour to get into arrivals this time it took minutes, it felt as if I were still on the freeway. I grabbed my baggage and headed inside to meet up with my sister. Some people were wearing masks and gloves, but most weren't and there were no social distancing measures put in place; but then again the airport was deserted. My sister and I checked in for our first flight laying over in El Distrito Federal de México, Mexico City. That was one of the choices of layover for visas since Panama had already closed its borders. Before exiting the plane into the Mexican airport, we were told by flight attendants that we would be questioned and have our temperatures taken. They asked over ten questions regarding our health attempting to see if we had any symptoms. They also asked if we had been in contact with anyone who displayed these symptoms, and then told us all to apply hand sanitizer.

The flight from Mexico to Cuba was pretty empty and was primarily filled with Cubans returning home. I think my sister and I were the only "tourists" on the flight. On this flight they made us sit at least one seat apart from one another so I couldn't sit with my sister. Upon our arrival in Cuba we were once again questioned and had our temperatures checked. We were also told that on that following Tuesday we'd have to leave the country since on that very same day we arrived, President Miguel Díaz Canel announced the closure of its borders and that all non-Cuban citizens must leave the country or remain quarantined for the next 30 days. That was unfortunate because for the next three days our activities were limited since everything was closing on the island nation. Restaurants, parks, beaches and public places were all closed to the public as strict restrictions were being put into place. While it was upsetting I completely understood that the president wanted safety for his people and was strict for prevention. During

this time there were only 5 Corona cases and 1 death in the country, all of which were Italian and European tourists who had now been isolated. Did someone say smallpox?

In the Americas, the arrival of Europeans brought over diseases to many indigenous lands. When Columbus arrived in the Americas he brought with him many illnesses that plagued the indigenous of smallpox, influenza, and other viruses; killing off a vast amount of the population. These were large epidemics recorded in the Americas, and now in the 21st century the world sees the rise of Covid 19. When a virus that no one has seen before spreads quickly across it creates fear in people and alludes devastation. This occurred during the colonization of the Americas which facilitated the conquer of the new world as it was known. In the past few months we once again see the spread of a new and unknown virus and even with today's medical advancements the world struggles to contain it.

The few days I spent in Cuba I was able to meet a few *Cubanos* who were truly great and hospitable. Everyone in the country was now wearing face coverings either masks or cloths. In fact, to the few restaurants and public buildings we did get to go into we had to wash our hands with bleach since there wasn't any hand sanitizer. It was definitely strange, but this shows how despite few resources, Cuba was taking precautions against the virus. Many hotels closed as tourists left the country. Many *Cubanos* mentioned that the next months would be difficult since their economy relied on tourism for income. My flight back to Mexico was canceled since the borders would be closed during that date of departure so I had to change it. We went to the airport on Sunday to attempt and change our flights but all we were told was to be at the Havana airport Tuesday morning at 2 a.m. The only flight leaving for Mexico was one scheduled at 6 a.m. but there weren't enough seats for everyone to board. The day prior we had spoken to an airline representative and attempted to change our tickets but were unsuccessful. That night at

the airport there were over five hundred people attempting to board that flight to Mexico. People from all over the world, Spain, Argentina, USA, France, etc. There were also many people attempting to board flights to other countries. I recall some argentine people in line with us who were upset because Argentina had closed their borders and they couldn't return home but would prefer to remain stuck in Mexico than in Cuba.

Before we knew it, it was six a.m. and we were nearing the front of the line but hadn't boarded the flight. Just then I recognized the assistant from the other day who had told us he couldn't change our flights, so I went over to talk to him and he thankfully recognized me. He admitted there were a few seats left but that they were ordered to first bored mothers and children but if there was any space left he would board us. At around 7:25 a.m. he called us out of the line and hand wrote the last two tickets for that flight, while informing all others that Mexico would be sending an empty humanitarian rescue flights but that the time or day of arrival was unknown. I was relieved my sister and I would be able to go back home but was also upset because many people stayed behind, and I knew the stress they were in to return back home during those uncertain times. Many in the line were upset and argued asking why we got to board the flight. We tried to explain that we had spoken to the representatives the day before but understandably people were frustrated thus we left.

When we arrived in Mexico, again before exiting the plane we were questioned and had our temperatures taken. We were then able to reschedule our returning flight later that day back to Los Angeles. Once again before boarding the flight we were questioned regarding where we had been and if we had come into contact with anyone displaying any symptoms. When we arrived at LAX I was expecting an intervention, one for being in Cuba but primarily because the Coronavirus pandemic had gotten a lot more serious since the day we had left. I thought they'd

also question us and check our temperatures but instead we were given a piece of paper, a sort of questionnaire with about 5 questions regarding our whereabouts and if we had any symptoms. Then we picked up our bags and when passing through immigration and security the only question we were asked was if we had tobacco... We were literally out of the airport in about 5 minutes. No one was personally questioned, no one was asked to put hand sanitizer on. In fact, no one had even collected the paper questionnaire that we had filled out. Welcome back to America.

Now I'm home and have been quarantined with my family for the past couple months. Thankfully I'm working from home, but many others haven't been so fortunate. Having course work keeps me entertained although I get bored a lot, I guess it's better to be bored than to be sick though. I keep in contact with friends and family in various places including the people I met back in Cuba. We talk about their situations and how they're holding up. Thankfully everyone I know hasn't caught the virus; I wish I could say the same for others, but the reality is that all around the world Covid has claimed thousands of lives. My family in El Salvador is still sheltered in place, the borders remain closed and the President enforced strict laws for preventative measure. Thankfully these continuous efforts have worked as case numbers and deaths remain low in the country. My friends and family in Spain and France are slowly returning to work and their daily lives but claim it still feels strange and uncertain. I wish I could say that here in the USA things are returning to normal as well but that would be a lie. Instead many U.S. Americans have sought to protest the virus and the quarantine rules since they believe temporary inconvenience is oppression when in reality they have no idea what real oppression is. There have also been some people injecting and ingesting Lysol, bleach, and disinfectants after good old Donald suggested doing so.

In perspective I realized that this pandemic is showing the world not to underestimate power or overestimate in some cases. Overall it makes one question, what are our priorities as a country, as one world? On the brightside mother nature is healthier than it was before the pandemic broke out but who knows how long that'll last. I wonder what people will take with them from this experience and what they'll revert to... only time will tell.