

Mandri Randeniya

Hist 129A: Rebeca Martinez

May 17, 2020

A Terrible 2020

I started hearing about COVID19 towards the end of January 2020. Back then, it was an intangible force halfway across the world. It seemed so foreign and irrelevant to my life at the time. I was focused on getting ready to go to London for my study abroad in the summer, thinking about how to celebrate my 21st birthday with all my girls in our apartment, and getting ready to watch my best friend graduate from college. Everything I had worked so hard for was finally coming together to a point where I could see the finish line. I was convinced that 2020 was going to be the best year yet and some virus on the other side of the world wasn't going to stand in my way.

So how did I get from not knowing about the coronavirus in January to being quarantined in my house because of it in May? I'm honestly not sure. UCLA initially told us that everything was normal and COVID19 was not going to affect our education. As the rest of the world got more and more paranoid, we seemed to be living in our own oblivious little bubble in the middle of Westwood. When we finally got the news that our classes were going to be cancelled for the rest of winter quarter because of COVID, my friends and I were so excited. To us, it was just an excuse to get out of a couple classes. I even tried to plan a trip to Hawaii with my friends so I could take advantage of the historically low flight prices. At one point, a roundtrip ticket to Hawaii was just two hundred dollars as opposed to the usual eight hundred. I thought the virus

and the fear of catching it would just be a temporary phase that would allow me to have some much needed free time. I never thought that when I left UCLA to go home to Arizona for spring break that I would be staying there until September.

Though the rest of the world had been dealing with the virus, when it finally came to the United States, it swept across the nation like a wildfire. Because we hadn't dealt with a virus of this caliber, the nation wasn't ready to deal with the consequences. Hospitals were overwhelmed with the number of patients. They didn't have enough rooms or breathing treatments for people. Healthcare workers were forced to work even longer hours to keep up with the flood of patients. People couldn't say goodbye to their dying loved ones in person because they weren't allowed in the hospital due to fear of infection. People were dying left and right but no one seemed to be able to do anything about it. One of the only historical instances that this could be compared to would be the spread of European diseases to the New World. According to indigenous sources detailing the siege of Tenochtitlan, "a great many died from the plague, and many others died of hunger [because] they could not get up to search for food and everyone else was too sick to care for them"¹. Though "the plague" this record is referring to is smallpox, it is startling to realize that it is actually applicable to our situation today. Our country is not only suffering in regards to health, but also economically. Those who are able to go outside cannot because of the possibility of becoming sick. Because of this and social distancing measures that must be put in place for the safety of the citizens, businesses had to make adjustments. Many businesses have been forced to close down because they could not survive without a steady profit and many people have lost their jobs. For example, my sister was one of the top employees at an escape room in Phoenix

¹ Indigenous authors. The Siege of Tenochtitlan. "The Plague Ravages the City". 92.

where she was earning a decent salary to pay off her car. Because of COVID19, the escape room shut down and she is now financially indebted to my parents.

What started as an early end to winter quarter turned into online classes for spring quarter. The study abroad I was so excited to experience was cancelled because international travel became unsafe. As a Production Assistant for UCLA Athletics, I was reassured that my job was secure and that I would need to be present for NCAA events even if we weren't going to be playing against a visiting team. However, twenty-four hours later, I was told that all NCAA sports were going to be suspended due to the risks associated with the virus. Just like that, I was unemployed. I was forced to move back home to Arizona so that I could get a refund on my university housing. This brought on a whole slew of problems in itself. I hadn't lived with my parents while being in school for three years. So, when I moved back in with them, my relationship with them changed. Before COVID19, I loved being home with my parents doing nothing but bingeing Netflix. However, now that I am forced to take online classes in my parents' house, I find myself getting snappy and irritated with them for little things that wouldn't have been an issue before. Though my mother is just trying to be helpful, it drives me crazy that she constantly barges into my room during my Zoom lectures.

These Zoom lectures are also a complete waste of time when they are not simply recorded and uploaded to the class website. Students cannot properly focus on the lecture when they are not in a classroom environment. Personally, I know many people who turn off their camera, mute themselves, and sleep during their live lectures to watch the recorded lecture at 2x speed at their leisure. Zoom is a not only difficult for students, but also teachers. For example,

my English professor forgot about his lecture, so the whole class logged off after waiting for thirty minutes. However, I think the most depressing thing about Zoom is the need for it. We have started substituting face-to-face interaction with virtual interactions. Zoom happy hours, events where each respective participant drinks from their drink of choice, have begun popping up because bars aren't open for drinking with friends. However, the most bizarre virtual development that occurred because of the Coronavirus is the emergence of virtual graduations. Most of the graduations, regardless of the level of education, are being substituted with the virtual variety. My best friend graduated in May of 2020. She was looking forward to walking down the aisle to receive her diploma while being cheered on by her friends and family. However, what she was left with was a single slide with three sentences and a picture on a PowerPoint to recall the moment.

All the depressing feels that I had associated with being in Arizona when I was in high school came crashing back with a vengeance. I felt hopeless once again. The only way for me to battle this depression was by finding new hobbies. Tik Tok has become one of my most used apps because of the quarantine set place across the nation. I will spend hours upon hours staring at my phone until my eyes dry up or my hand starts to ache. I have completely exhausted all of my Netflix recommendations. I've also found myself taking several long drives to nowhere. When you eventually start to feel stir crazy staring at your ceiling for the tenth time of the day, just getting out of the house is a priority. Humans are inherently social creatures. If we aren't able to interact with other people, we tend to feel neglected and lonely. These mental health factors are what make COVID19 even more dangerous.

People are panicking. At the beginning of the pandemic, people were panic-buying essential items such as food and toilet paper in bulk. This led to store shelves being completely empty. Many low-income families who could not afford to buy items in bulk were left helpless. Some people even tried to make a profit on the panic by reselling hand sanitizer at a higher cost. Everyone is social media shamed if they break social distancing rules or go out without wearing masks. People have begun to post throwback photos on Instagram with captions like “Don’t yell at me, this was taken five months ago” to preemptively avoid criticism. I was one of those unlikely people who happened to have a twenty-first birthday happening during quarantine. In Arizona, the stay at home orders lifted the day before my birthday so my sister and I decided to throw a little party at her apartment to celebrate. However, I couldn’t focus on the party completely because I was so nervous and paranoid that I was putting people at risk. We kept our gathering less than fifteen people and checked people’s temperatures at the door. We decided to forgo getting a cake for cupcakes so we could limit the spread of germs. I was looking forward to this birthday for years, yet I couldn’t get over feeling selfish to properly celebrate.

There is also a theory making its way through social media that some people had gotten the Coronavirus towards the end of 2019, but recovered without knowing what it actually was. I’m starting to believe I was one of those people. In December, I got really sick with flu-like symptoms, a horrible cough, body aches to the point I couldn’t move, and headaches. It lasted about two weeks. I went to the Ashe center after about a week of not being able to properly function. Though they did make me get a chest x-ray and a breathing treatment, they didn’t test me for COVID19. At that point they didn’t really have the capabilities to test us. After a few days, the symptoms went away with some antibiotics and steroids. I figured I had just caught a

really awful strain of the flu and it was finally over. I've never seen the Ashe center give me anything useful for when I'm sick. In fact, the last time I went there with a sprained ankle, they prescribed me eye drops and told me to just wait out the foot pain. This time they prescribed me four different medications, all targeting different illnesses. I don't think they knew what I had, but the aggressive medicinal tactic clued me into the fact that it was serious. A few days later I got a personal message from my doctor asking me how I was feeling. She said that if any of my symptoms persisted, I had to come back to the Ashe center right away. I was even more taken back to not only get a prompt response from the Ashe center, but also a personal one from my doctor. Luckily, I got better. However, I think I was one of those people who caught the earliest version of COVID19 and developed some kind of immunity towards it.

The worst part about this pandemic is that no one really knows when it is going to end. The only indication of an end time is given by rapidly changing models and simulations. However, we don't know enough about the virus itself to even get reliable data for these models. People are glued to their news channels, watching the morbid list of death rates skyrocket each day. I've never truly experienced war time, but I imagine this is what a world war would look like. I've never experienced my world looking like a ghost town, but that's what it has turned into. However, all of this came with a few crucial realizations. No matter how advanced and unrivaled we think we are, something even smaller than the human eye can register can bring entire countries to their knees. No one was prepared for such an epidemic. It goes to show that no matter how much we study the past or try to learn about our surroundings, we will never be able to truly understand nature. Furthermore, the emergence of COVID19 showed me how vulnerable we are as a society. Certain people refuse to acknowledge the hardships of other because they are

comfortable with their own lives and want to live in their own bubbles. However, when they are left vulnerable, they expect help from everyone else. This cannot be the case any longer. This pandemic has affected every single person on this planet in some manner. Therefore, we must learn to have empathy and spread kindness amongst one another especially at a time like this. If it had to take a pandemic to teach humankind the value of spreading love instead of hatred and being cognizant of the less fortunate, then maybe this is had to happen as a lesson to us all.