

REFLECTION ON THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

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It is true when they say that everything can change within a matter of seconds. One day you are going about your daily routine and the next you are being quarantined for a month. I think that I can speak for everyone when I say that no one could have pictured 2020 turning out this devastating way, with thousands of people dead and millions infected all over the world. Throughout these past two months, everyone's daily lives have changed and no one really has a concrete idea about what kind of world we will be living in by the time this year ends. What will be the new norm? Can we even go back to how things were? Will we go into an economic depression that will devastate millions of families even more so than they are now? Will there be more deaths? When will we find a cure? There are many questions about the future unanswered and although people have been doing their best to comply with federal and state policies implemented for our safety, there are many who are tired and want their right of free will to be exercised. This economic devastation, disruption of resources, and the amount of decimated populations have shown us how underprepared we are in combating a national and global emergency.

I am a full-time third-year History major with two part-time jobs who spends more time in traffic or waiting for it to calm down than at school and work. The one positive thing I can say that this pandemic brought, would be the absence of traffic. Being from Los Angeles, one knows to allow yourself a good hour and a half to get to places, there is almost always some kind of hold up that just takes unnecessarily too long. The only downside to this is the reason for the less traffic is that that people are not going out to work, doing errands, or out having fun because of the Stay at Home Order that began ending March. The first thing I remember hearing about the virus was that it started in Wuhan China, in an open market where they sold all kinds of animals,

including bats. China is where it is claimed that the virus came from, now, there are all kinds of theories and investigations going on; to name a few, the virus is man-made in a lab in Wuhan, bio-warfare against the U.S., and even that the U.S. sent it to China. I don't think we will know the exact details of the cause and repercussions caused by the virus until a few years have passed because it has been and still is a very sensationalized topic by the news.

I kept on seeing on social media how markets were being emptied. The pictures and videos showed emptied racks, it seemed something out of a movie. I first thought it was some kind of hoax or people getting the images from a movie and posting it on social media to sensationalize this, but on my day off from school before work, I went to the market with my mom and was shocked. Just to get in the Food 4 Less parking was a struggle. As we finally found parking, I was approached by a woman who handed me her cart and said "good luck". I work for a high-end market called Bristol Farms in Santa Monica, so I can understand other market's operations and setups since they are all more or less the same, but I was so shocked by what I found. No market in the U.S was ready for this pandemic. Everyone was taking everything they could get their hands on and looked like they were running around like chickens with their heads cut off. There was no toilet paper, disinfecting wipes and products, no meat, very few perishables, and more. The lines were also insane, they would go all the way down the food isles. After this experience at Food 4 Less, everything changed pretty quickly for me and my family.

To start off, I beginning finals week at school which got pushed to an online format, which I did not mind because two out of my three finals were papers either way. My job at Los Angeles Mission Community College gave us two weeks off with pay while they figured how

they would be transitioning. My job at the market was actually giving me more hours because things were so crazy busy. Compared to other people's stories during the first weeks of the pandemic, my family and I were faring pretty well. My mom and dad still had their jobs and we didn't have to struggle to see who would be taking my little sister to school since schools were closing down. Since I was in finals, I took a week off from Bristol Farms, but a lot of things were different.

We could not be in the store without masks and gloves, we had to constantly be washing out hands in addition to the implemented sanitizing and handwashing every thirty minutes. It was all very surreal for me, I think the reality of what we were living in had not hit home for me just yet. Things became real for me when one of my coworkers contracted the virus. I had not seen him for a week, so I did not know he had not been coming into work. The market had not let us employees know that there was someone that had contacted the virus until two weeks after. Once I found out that he had contacted the virus I called him to find out he was living out of his car because he had been the only one taking care of his grandmother and was scared of infecting her. He said he was fine, but the virus is very deadly to the elderly and those with serious underlying diseases. I was shocked to find this information. Although I may have been okay, there were other people very close to me that were not faring well. I think this was the situation that really made this pandemic a reality for me. Someone I knew that was a dear friend to me could possibly pass away. Fortunately for him, he was able to get a room in a hotel courtesy of Bristol Farms because it was found that he contracted it through the store working. He also came out to be symptom-free and is now able to go back to work.

Although my friend was lucky to survive this pandemic that has been deadly to thousands of people, many are struggling and still are. My dad had to take leave from his job because it was not considered essential, my mother had and I had to pick up more hours and risk exposure to help ends meet. All I could watch was the news, which all the could talk about was the virus and how it was devastating countries all over the world. You see places like New York having bodies covered on the street because they have way more that they can handle. You hear about people dying in quarantine by themselves without their family, or families having a loved one die in with them and not being able to even get them out because of the strict quarantine laws in some countries. You hear a surge of domestic violence, suicides, and the need for people to work in mental health hotlines. You see people coming together to donate to needy families, food banks, and supporting local businesses. You now see people going out to strike the state and federal laws of the quarantine to fight for their choice to go out and work because even with all the help being given out economically by the government it is not enough to sustain one's family.

No one was ready for the economical and psychological toll that the Coronavirus would take on people and their families. I personally thought I would benefit from online classes because it would save me time in traffic and the need of spending money on gas; but the reality is that one hour and fifteen-minute classes are taking me longer to complete because of all the added work I have to do around the house on top of me having to work from home. Luckily I still have kept both my jobs but the one from home is even more work than on a regular day by calling and interacting with students who are going through tough situations and have no one else but us workers calling them about their online classes to talk about what they are feeling. Going out to work is both a blessing and a curse because you do run the risk of infection but it

provides you extra money and relief from being at home all day. I never thought I would see the day where I would be sick of watching TV and being on my phone, but I am. Although it is wonderful that during these times I get to see my family more than I have since the beginning of the year because everyone is always busy with work or school or both, we need a break from each other. Not being able to directly see your friends or just go out and enjoy a cup of coffee without being afraid that either your coffee or your friend may cause you to contract the virus is causing a lot of people anxiety.

People are getting tired of being inside or having to wear stuffy masks everywhere you go. You now see in the news security guards are being shot because they have asked people to put on their masks. Nurses and doctors who are at the frontlines are being overworked and thrown in with little protection at times because there is not enough protective gear; they can't see their families for weeks because they may risk spreading the infection to them. Nurses and doctors in Mexico are getting threatened and harassed because people are ignorant of the fact that they are the only ones that can help us, even though they are also the ones most likely to pass on infections. People are going crazy and wild. There is no cure yet and people don't understand how a virus that resembles the flu has not yet been conquered given all the technology that we have.

They say every couple of years there are generations that have to deal with these kinds of epidemics. With history at our fingertips, we can see how a single virus can decimate populations all over, especially now that we have the ability to travel faster across the nation and world. This virus makes me think back to the indigenous who had their empires demolished and brought to extinction due to diseases brought one by other countries like the Spaniards did when

they came to the Americas. The indigenous had been isolated for 1500 years from the world, they had no antibodies or vaccines to protect them from the invasion of these diseases brought onto them¹. Now in our modern age, this virus was able to shut down the whole world from what seems like one day to another. We can see how very fragile we are as humans when an epidemic like this hits us and we have no vaccine. Although the deaths are still not nearly enough to compare to the deaths of the indigenous, it will still be marked deeply in our history books in years to come.

Whether it is during colonization times where technology like the one we have today was never even dreamed of or during present times when people think we should have the power to overcome this virus, there will always be something to remind us of our fragile beings as humans. We may be at the top of our food chain but that does not mean we are indestructible. We don't need our technological weapons to end ourselves, there are plenty of things in nature that could have great effects on our population. During these times that have forced us to slow down our fast-paced worlds, we should take time to appreciate what and who we have around us because we never know if we can have it ever again. One second you are going about your daily routine and the next your world is changed so much you can't even recognize it.

¹ Ruiz, lecture 4 (4/27/20)