

Covid-19:

Unequal Symptoms in 21<sup>st</sup> Century U.S.

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History 129A: Social History of Spain and Portugal

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Whether it is United States, Latin American, or European history, the trilogy of social, political, and economic inequality is too familiar in the events that have led to the world today. I did not believe that I would be a witness to another world event that will change the course of history: Covid-19. History 129A – Social History of Spain and Portugal: Age of Silver in Spain and Portugal 1479 – 1789 discusses the social composition of Spain and its many social flaws as well as its own historical events that influenced the turnout of the modern world. The arrival of Spanish settlers to the Americas brought two old worlds together, while simultaneously eliminating almost the entire indigenous populations through warfare and disease. Amidst the decimation and suffering of these populations, I tend to wonder: Did indigenous people worry about health insurance? Did they worry about not being eligible to receive government economic aid? Was immigration status a concern? Of course, I realize that some of these questions cannot be applied to indigenous people who suffered through pandemics in the last five centuries. Although these social categorizations may have not applied to indigenous peoples, they are the reality my family has dealt with since the emergence of Covid-19, limiting our options in our already limited world.

Fortunately, my family is generally healthy, but a healthy status can change instantly. On Monday April 8, my father began complaining of abdominal pain. On Wednesday April 10, while I was at work, my mother explained to me that my father fell under a high fever and began having severe chills and body aches. After those symptoms passed, my mother, sister, and I monitored my father closely as we were legitimately worried about his health. I became frustrated in learning that my sister did not make the decision of taking him to the hospital that night, especially since in my mind, a college-educated and education professional like her would have the common sense to make such decision. But the more I discussed the matter with my sister, I realized that taking the

logical decision of taking my father to hospital was a risk itself since patients infected with Covid-19 were also there. If my father was not ill with the virus, the odds of getting infected would be much higher in a place where one is supposed to be healed. However, we took a different decision the following days.

Although avoiding danger is the human reaction to certain situations, my family had to make the decision for the good of my father. On Sunday April 12, my father once again began feeling severe abdominal aches, high fever, and body aches. After transporting him to Valley Presbyterian Hospital in Van Nuys, we were informed that my father was suffering from appendicitis and that he would require an appendectomy to remove his infected appendix. He was also tested for Covid-19, but gladly the test results were negative. Like other families, I recognize that other health issues are occurring amidst the Covid-19 pandemic. Yet, making the decision to go to the hospital is off the table for many families as the possibility of becoming infected with the virus is much more possible. Covid-19 has not only disturbed the lives of individuals who become infected, but individuals who need medical care for other reasons as well. In addition to needing surgery, the concern over health insurance began to loom over us.

Particularly in the United States, healthcare comes with big costs that many people are unable to afford. On Monday April 13<sup>th</sup>, we learned that my father's appendix had burst, and that he was given antibiotics to kill bacteria that had spread in his bloodstream. Luckily, my father recovered and was released from the hospital on Thursday April 16<sup>th</sup>. He is currently awaiting on his surgery appointment while at the same time, speaking with city health program directors that give aid to low-income and undocumented people in Los Angeles. My family understood that the costs for my father's treatment would be expensive. We understood that his undocumented status would make it much more difficult to afford it, even if my family is fortunate enough to have a

stable source of income. But my father's undocumented status is one of the many flaws gone unresolved within American society, since such status prevents people from obtaining any help from the federal government and gives scarce options at the state and local level. Even for some U.S. citizens and permanent residents, healthcare is not a right, but a privilege affordable only to some people. For the moment, my father is currently waiting for his surgery, but luckily, he finds himself in a stable and healthy state. Covid-19 has revealed issues not only within the American healthcare system, but also within its education system by making the social division more visible in these times of need.

Education is not given equally to everyone, but Covid-19's forceful transition to remote learning has revealed many more inequalities within k-12 education. My sister's career as a Special Education Resource Teacher at Animo Ellen Ochoa Charter Middle School, a school located in East Los Angeles, enables her to work from home and receive her normal salary. However, for the students and the parents she provides her services too, remote learning has proven to be difficult since maneuvering through technology is not an everyday task for them. I have helped my sister record videos not necessarily in her lessons, but in step by step instruction videos in how to use a computer keyboard, email functions, and online-class websites that she later sends to parents via text. It is clear that educators are conducting more work than they are supposed to. In addition to helping her students with their special needs, my sister must also introduce parents to the basic functions of a computer. These parents, many of them immigrants, must spend most of their time working in order to provide for their kids. The transition to remote learning due to Covid-19 reveals that teachers like my sisters are not only educators, but individuals who supervise children of low-income households whose parents must spend most of their time at work. Moreover, work has also taken a toll on educators who must balance added work and their personal lives.

Generally, educators must conduct more work in order to be successful in teaching their students, but remote learning has added more work than before. As she continues her remote teaching, my sister must also conduct other tasks she was not assigned to before. Given that she teaches students with disabilities, my sister is required to conduct video calls with each student and parent to review their coursework progress, adding more work than general education teachers who are not required to complete this task. Special education students and general education students are already segregated for most of their classes, but I have seen my sister stressed given her workload exceeds that of her general education co-workers. Personal time and self-care are scarcely available to my sister and possibly other special education teachers too. Lack of resources for special education programs and teachers overall are reflected more than ever during this period. In addition to education, Covid-19 has affected certain individuals from receiving economic aid, groups of which I am part of.

Government involvement during the Covid-19 pandemic has helped some people, while disregarding others. The U.S. congress in response to the economic halt by Covid-19 passed the CARES Act; a law that gives financial aid to businesses, healthcare institutions, and individuals who have been affected by the pandemic. Yet, individuals who are undocumented, even if they filed taxes, were excluded from receiving a \$1,200 stimulus check given their unlawful presence and inability to produce a valid social security number. Although Covid-19 infects people regardless of social status, inequalities are seen within legislation meant to help people. Undocumented immigrants in the U.S. are a high-risk group since they must continue to work in order to provide for their families. Like my father, health insurance and financial aid are not options they can rely on, even if they pay their share of taxes without any return. In a time where unity becomes a weapon against a biological enemy like Covid-19, legislation like the CARES Act

serves as a reminder that not everyone is equal in the U.S. Like my father, I too am part of this exclusion in the economic aid.

The CARES Act provided aid to some students with financial struggles but excluded ineligible students. Colleges and universities received funding from the CARES Act, directing some of that money for students in financial need. However, undocumented students and those protected under DACA are ineligible. DACA, an immigration policy created under the Obama administration in 2012 defers deportation for individual who qualify, simultaneously providing a two-year renewable work authorization permit, and a valid social security number. Basically, DACA recipients have legal unlawful presence in which there is no path to citizenship. The exclusion of DACA students from receiving federal aid grants demonstrates the political turmoil in the U.S. As a DACA recipient myself, I was not surprised that such legislation excluded people like me especially given the anti-immigrant sentiments promoted by the Trump administration. However, I am very fortunate that some of my family members are still working and providing a stable income for the moment. The CARES Act does not hold up to its name, as many individuals who are disadvantaged are not cared for.

Social inequalities have been historically present in one way or another in nation-states. The global pandemic of Covid-19 has not necessarily revealed these inequalities in the U.S., but it has surely clarified their existence even more. People who require urgent medical care are unable to freely go to hospitals for treatment since their exposure to Covid-19 is more likely. For educators like my sister, remote learning clarifies the social divisions among her students, indicating such division lines are not so invisible. Moreover, public aid to some in the immigrant population is not available, demonstrating another problem that has been too long ignored. Yet, even with these barriers, Covid-19 has offered individuals a lens to see the issues clear and the ability to work

together to fix problems currently affecting our society. Native populations in the Americas may not have experienced the worries some of us worry about today. But their desires in life: peace and happiness, most likely correlate with our desires today. Global pandemics, even with their mortality, offer those who keep on living the opportunity to reflect and realize that we share more in common through our sufferings and joys than the differences that separate us.