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History 129A

17 May 2020

Lessons Learned: Reflecting on the Covid-19 Pandemic

Glancing back to the year 1919, we reflect on some of the most significant events across the world. January 18th, 27 of the nation's delegates are meeting in Paris after World War I to discuss the terms for the freshly defeated Central Powers. May 23rd, Bill 626, is signed into law, marking the beginning of the Southern Branch of the University of California known later as UCLA. After more than 12 months, 500 million infections, and an estimated 50 million deaths, The Spanish flu comes to its long-awaited end. Today, 101 years later, we celebrate some of the most significant moments. We are reminded just how easy it can all be taken away. The Coronavirus Pandemic, also known as COVID-19, has already infected over 4.63 million people, resulting in an estimated 308,000 deaths (World Health Report 1). As the world reacts in a variety of ways, we as a nation hunker down, distance ourselves from friends and loved ones, and wait. We wait for a better day, one with a better understanding of this situation, a cure, and a sign that things will return to how they once were. Although my life is just one of the billions facing this issue. Our lives are linked to a much larger societal body and a reflection of other's actions.

It was around the middle of March, I was headed towards the end of the winter quarter. Entertaining the ideas of what my spring break would consist of; The beach, Camping, Dodger games, friends, and family. Knowing I was about to enter my last spring quarter before

graduating, I looked forward to the following experiences and opportunities to come. Although I had already heard Covid-19's global impact, I figured it would pass. Just as I did not pay close attention to the H1N1 scare in 2009 or the Ebola cases in 2014, I was operating on the presumption that I knew what tomorrow would hold. Then around week 10 of the winter quarter, I entered the Veteran Resource Center, where I have been working for the past year to begin my shift. As usual, I cleaned the office, prepared the morning coffee, checked emails, talked to my coworkers and fellow student veterans. We all spoke about the pressing pandemic issue, some more concerned than others. We watched as other universities reacted and pondered UCLA's response. Later that day, the staff was called in for a meeting where our Program Director shared the plan for UCLA to move to remote instruction until the second week of the spring quarter.

Although I was thankful for the decision to protect students, staff, and faculty, I began to question what this would mean for my academics and the job I depend on. These problems were the result of my circumstances. My concerns were self-absorbed as I only thought about the way this would impact my days to come. Days later, after receiving follow up emails. We learned about the continuation of remote instruction until the end of the spring quarter. Then the first half of the summer, the other half to soon follow. Now the talks of being online for the fall remind me of just how frivolous my concerns were. Although I am grateful for my health and the ability to continue my education. The gravity of the COVID-19 pandemic's effects has forever altered the course of families, communities, countries, and my own life. Although, I believe our leaders have done a great job developing strategies, given the uncertainty of the situation. Some of the policies and practices that have been imposed on the people for better or worse were necessary.

Although I feel we have ignored the repercussions of these actions, that will be felt for years to come.

Today, I continue to go to school, and I can work from the comfort of my home. I now walk to my desk to go to class, I engage with UCLA's military-connected students via virtual zoom calls. Although, transitioning into a remote setting required a new set of strategies to study and complete assignments. Also, calling for new methods of engaging with student veterans. Yet, despite all that is new, much of my life remains the same. Other than a few inconveniences like waking up early to get groceries or a lack of having things to do for enjoyment. I am fortunate to maintain much of my life as it was before. However, this is not the reality for most, and as my family faces the loss of work and income. The last few weeks of my academic journey have been fixated, pondering the realities of what's to come.

Unable to go to work or complete errands, my mother, who is a housekeeper and father who is disabled, requires help. My sisters and I have taken it upon ourselves to provide for our parents. My oldest sister and I, who still have income, provide enough financially. While my other sister, unable to work due to company closure, stays to help my parents at home. Because both my parents are older with pre-existing conditions, they require frequent doctor appointments. These recurring appointments, however, have been canceled due to the fear of the viruses spreading, causing considerable uncertainty. In a recent emergency visit from my mother, not only were we unable to be at her side to speak on her behalf and provide comfort. She was immediately released after testing negative for COVID-19, even though she had made the visit for a completely unrelated issue. I do understand the reasoning behind the methods as we aim to

lessen the medical strain. However, I can not help but consider the negative impact this pandemic will have on other troubles.

Growing up in Van Nuys, California, where the majority of the community rates below the Los Angeles county average level of income. In just the last few weeks, I have noticed a growing number of small business closures and heard the concern of others. As many consider how they will make enough money to cover their bills. Unfortunately, some of the recent closures have caused problems that many people will not recover from. Even if able to work, hours have been cut, and sales are slow. Since most of these families are of working classes, they depend on multiple forms of support that go beyond finances. Even those able to work can not do so since they now have to watch over children that were typically at school. Access to food, toiletries, and other basic essentials have also been limited. Now despite all the steps to control the virus, it seems other problems outside the realm of Covid-19 are exacerbated.

As a society, we continue to move towards and hope for a quick end to COVID-19's spread. Overlooking the fact that there might never be a total solution to such a problem. Given the number of variables required to account for all individuals. One can only speculate as to what the world will look like in the near and far future. As of today, most Americans seem to agree with the stay at home orders. Companies have adapted, and much of what is required to survive can be obtained through pick-up or delivery. However, across the US, more protests have begun questioning the stay at what we have been told to do. With the most optimistic vaccine estimate dated for the end of the year, which does not account for the distribution rate. There might be a need for another measure, especially as people feel the pressure from outside forces. By giving the companies and organizations ample time to incorporate protective measures within their

operating spaces. I can picture a world that is more overall aware. From the distance one is from another to a newly developed sneeze. The fear of the COVID-19 pandemic is sure to permeate the walls in our minds and environment for years to come.

Just as we look back at past events to understand at a deeper level who we are today. One day not too far away, we look back at the COVID-19 pandemic and remember history in the making. History provides us with an in-depth analysis of the human experience and a search of pretext for the actions that took place. As we look back to this year, hindsight will remain 20/20. We will pick apart the things we did wrong, what we missed, and who's to blame. History has always been interested in epidemics. The past provides a vast array of cases parallel with what we face today. Although it is vital to examine events under its respective historical context. Understanding the ways people react to something they do not understand may provide insight on things to expect when we respond to an unknown virus. The events of the Aztec people of Tenochtitlan may provide awareness as to the course of responding to the unknown killer.

After the Aztecs concluded their celebrations, convinced that the Spanish would not attempt to retake Tenochtitlan. They Established a new ruling order for what they believed would be a period of normalcy and prosperity. However, the Aztec's wishes would be short-lived and, a modern plague ravaged the city. Miguel Leons "The Broken Spears: the Aztec Account of the Conquest of Mexico" provides a quick look into the horrors the Aztec people were dealing with. Resembling what we know today as smallpox, this unknown virus began in the 13th month and is said to have lasted 70 days (Leon 125). With no way of understanding the complexity of an infection at the time. The plague spread all over the body of the career and the city. Leon

writes "the illness was so dreadful that no one could walk or move...if they did move their bodies, they screamed with pain" (125). Although not everyone experienced a similar fate.

With no way of knowing what was about to happen or how to react, even those said to have mild symptoms provide little help. By the time the danger of the virus was noticed, it had already developed a stronghold in the city. Making any possible attempt to slow the spread, impossible. There is no way to know what the Aztecs could have done, but by doing nothing, the Aztec people made a choice. They let the virus naturally occur, although a lot of people died or were forever scarred. The worst of it eventually passed, but several cases were reported for months to come (Leon 125). I understand the number of differences between today and what happened at Tenochtitlan can be presented as endless. Humans share a common characteristic that transcends both time and space. A lack of understanding and the search for its truth.

Reflecting on the last couple of weeks, I can not help but notice my complete ignorance of the events around me. I thought just because things are occurring in a different country, I have nothing to worry about. If it is for anything, I now realize the importance of paying attention to the developing world. Our personal and societal reactions are not always perfect. I can not imagine the difficulties when attempting to calculate the risk of returning to normal. Especially when lives are threatened, but one thing remains clear. Most plans are better than no plans. By doing nothing, just as the Aztec people did, we would have allowed the virus to set the temp. Despite the fact, today's policies are far from perfect and have the potential to hurt people in other ways. We deal with these drawbacks for the sake of the common good. With trust, that by doing so, we can one day return to the lives and people we care so much about.

Works Cited

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