

Shannon Meskin
Junior Year History Major
History 129A: Late Medieval and Early Modern Spain
Professor: Teofilo F. Ruiz
TA: Emily Bolender
May 18, 2020

The Coronavirus Pandemic of 2020

Introduction to SARS-CoV-2 (Coronavirus):

In December of 2019, China was introduced to an outbreak that had yet to change the lives of every individual. While the human race is familiar with the inevitable spreadings of infectious diseases, none, in recent times, have reached pandemic levels as the CoronaVirus.

The first cases of the Coronavirus was found in Wuhan, China, where there were mass reports of pneumonia cases whose cause was unknown and resulted in a sudden decrease in population. After investigations of what caused this highly contagious and dangerous illness, it was found that many cases were linked to the Huanan Seafood Wholesale Market. Therefore, this introduced the idea that this virus is related to animals. Soon after, it was discovered that the origin of the CoronaVirus outbreak was connected to the Coronavirus in bats, thus concluding that it was the consumption of contaminated bat soup that created this infection.

The world watched as China was battling an epidemic so severe that the government needed to take measures which led to a national lockdown of 1.4 billion people. Even with the procedures done to control the outbreak in China, it was too late for the rest of the world. Tourism, business trips, and basic traveling are factors which helped the Coronavirus go from a Chinese epidemic to a worldwide pandemic in no more than 2 months. Within the blink of an eye, it has become apparent that everyone, despite backgrounds, has an underlying commonality, which is fear for their health. I could never imagine my life, let alone the lives of every human in this world, simultaneously being put on pause due to severe health concerns. This highly contagious infection created a worldwide STOP in all aspects social and financial, and has severely affected so many lives, including mine and my family's. While the world is adjusting to the new norm of "social

distancing” due to this outbreak, severe worldwide pandemics are not alien to the history of our world and can be used as a reference to how viruses are now dealt with in modern times.

Viruses are spread from continent to continent through direct contact of one inhabitant to another. In terms of health, people are immune to what their bodies have known. This means that when a person enters foreign land, their immune systems, as well as the immune systems of the foreigners, are more susceptible to infections and diseases that they have not been exposed to before. It feels rather comforting to know that the pandemic we are facing today is not the first widespread outbreak to strike the globe. In times like this, it is always important to refer back to history to understand the ways in which the health care systems of the time managed such severe outbreaks and how societies changed because of them.

March 2020:

The Coronavirus pandemic broke out in Los Angeles by March of 2020, as I began my Spring quarter of my junior year. I had been enrolled in a course about the societal transformations of Spain and Portugal from the 1400s to 1800s. Between those eras of Spanish history covers the Columbian Exchange of the 1500s, a time in which European settlers explored foreign land and discovered what was known as the “New World.” Voyages from Spain, led by Christopher Columbus, introduced the Europeans to life and land outside of their own world, but at the cost of those who were already inhabiting those lands. Along with the trade of culture, food, agriculture, and population during the Columbian Exchange, came the inevitable exchange of Old World pathogens carried by Spaniards into the New World. When the Europeans settled in these foreign lands, they brought with them many viruses in which the natives were not immune to, the most deadly being *smallpox*. Since the native inhabitants of the New World had never been exposed to Old World diseases, they were defenseless in this war between people and disease.

Similar to today’s events of the Coronavirus pandemic, the smallpox outbreak spread like wildfire, creating mass depopulation of the Aztec people in Mexico, and soon after, reducing the population of the Native Americans by astronomical levels. In North and South America alone, almost the entire population of

Natives were wiped as a result of the nonimmunity to these Old World diseases. The Spaniards were more immune to the smallpox disease, as this was a sickness that European newborns commonly had. However, Spaniards were not immune to the sicknesses that the New World brought to them, which helped to wipe out a good amount of the Europeans as well. The smallpox outbreak was responsible for about three hundred to five hundred million deaths, a death toll that I do not believe the Coronavirus has the capacity to ever reach.

Luckily, our world today is tremendously more advanced than it was before and our government has protocols for how global catastrophes are handled in an efficient and effective manner so the world population does not need to suffer an immense and unexpected drop in percentage.

Relative to this sudden pandemic, the Coronavirus spread from continent to continent, from country to country, and from city to city all around the globe. Unlike the smallpox outbreak, not a single person in this world is immune to this disease, which made this “invisible enemy” so frightening. On March 19th, there was a news update announcing the *Stay At Home Order* as a strategy to control the amount of Coronavirus cases that have sprung all over America. This has never happened in history as far as I’ve seen. I sat in front of my TV, shocked that in just one announcement, everyone’s freedom to gather had been completely revoked. On that day, I knew that everything was going to change for me and my family in terms of habits, finances, and basic societal norms.

April 2020:

It is now the middle of April, and already so much has changed since the announcement of the *Stay At Home Order*. My family and I cease to enter from our front door as we usually do, but now we enter from the side door next to the washing machine where we immediately strip ourselves of our “outside clothes” and put it in the dryer to kill off any germs we may have picked up while being out. We Lysol our shoes as soon as we walk into our home and we do not walk in the house with them. I wash my phone now after learning from online Coronavirus safety seminars that phones pick up the most bacteria. The most tremendous change that occurred in my life was how sanitary my family and I became. Hiking trails closed down, beaches are forbidden

to enter, and local parks are now germ pools that I fear to walk near. We are required by law to wear face masks and gloves when going to the market, banks, or any public place. In fact, some businesses will not have you in their facility if you are not wearing the proper health gear.

In terms of economics and finances, as a college student who has just been laid off from work, I am now receiving unemployment benefits. To be quite honest, I am the most financially stable for myself than I had ever been. The American government has been taking measures to help families all over to sustain their lives and provide for their families. My mother is a stay at home mom and father has a small business that has gone bankrupt. Every single morning for as long as I could remember, my father would spend hours talking to banks and IRS workers, begging to give him more time to pay something off. It crushed my heart to hear him beg just so he could keep our beautiful home of 23 years and to ensure he can provide for our basic needs. Financial limitations have always been a setback for my family, however, the mandated stay at home order as a result of Coronavirus has finally given my father the freedom he deserves. A break from harsh realities and struggling to make ends meet, this time has finally given my father the opportunity to enjoy his life without having an abundance of stress.

This pandemic has been tough for many families, and I am afraid of the recession that the millenials of my time have yet to bare later on, but this is the most calm and comfortable I have ever seen my father. Sometimes, what keeps me calm is looking at the silver lining during times of tragedy and fear, and I believe this virus gave a bit of financial breathing room for my family. He no longer has draining phone calls every morning that diminish any confidence or pride he has in himself to ensure our financial stability and for once in my life, I see a glimmer of peace in my father.

I am really not kidding when I say that society changed so quickly. I haven't been to a social gathering since March 14th, nor have I hugged anyone besides my parents. I say this because I now realize the importance and beauty in hugging a friend. I come from a culture that shows a lot of affection, as we hug and kiss when we greet a friend or family member. Now that this fear has been instilled in us to distance ourselves

from our friends and family, it is uncommon to hug another person or step in their personal bubble. The worst part of all is that I can't hug my grandparents, given that it is the elderly whose immune systems are more susceptible to catching this highly contagious virus. It took one full month for my extremely active grandmother to understand why it was critical for her health to stay home, something she is not used to at all.

Nowadays, events take place via "zoom," a new video program that allows a group of people to speak together in a chat room. Weddings, birthdays, graduations, and all events that are extremely personal went from being events with families gathering together to congratulate their loved ones, to congratulating them through their car windows or computer screens. It took a few weeks to get used to this new societal norm of seeing one or two friends a week and taking walks rather than getting lunch or coffee, but this was something that had to be done to diminish the amount of cases that quickly rose in America.

While the origins of pandemics are of major historical significance, I believe the true significance is of the human responses to these deadly viruses. The spreading of the smallpox virus reached all time downfalls in the 1700s when an English doctor named Edward Jenner discovered a vaccine, which marked the world's first successful vaccine for smallpox. A question that I pondered is if the Spaniards had not settled into new lands, would the native people have remained sole governors of the land? Similarly to that, I wonder what life will be like in 20 years from now. The most significant difference in our modern day life is how much more advanced the world is in comparison to how it was during the smallpox outbreak of the 1500s. Because of how quickly the Coronavirus went from a Chinese epidemic to a worldwide pandemic, the pressure was on for all healthcare workers and medical scientists around the world to figure out how to reduce the amount of cases and create a safe vaccine that works for all immune systems.

It's been about 4 months since the Coronavirus has been introduced to our world, and there is only talk of a vaccine. However, the human race now has the advantage of utilizing our advanced technology and highly educated medical workers to combine their minds and efforts to create a safe and healthy vaccine. With how

hard and diligently our health care workers are working, I know a vaccine will come out much sooner than they did with smallpox.

May 2020:

I began this paper in March just to continue it in May and document how much change has occurred in the last two months. In April, we were told that the *Stay at Home Order* would be terminated by early May, but it is now the middle of May and the *Stay at Home Order* has been extended until the end of July. I predict that the *Stay at Home Order* will be active for the remainder of the 2020 year and even for the beginning of 2021. Schools have already decided that their fall semesters will be online instead of in person. Everyone needed to learn to get comfortable with the way life has become. I do see my friends more often than I did before, as we all have quarantined for over 2 weeks and feel more comfortable. I personally know about 8 people who caught this virus and overcame it successfully with no harm done to their families or themselves.

Drive by graduations and birthdays are the new “thing” these days, and to be quite honest, I forgot how to socialize. I no longer keep track of the days, I just wake up and do my routine: work out, have breakfast, watch my class lectures, have lunch, catch up in my class notes, have dinner, sleep, repeat. It sounds boring, however this virus has been a blessing in disguise. In the beginning of everything, I was so afraid for myself and my family and I truly believed that democracy was stripped from the American people. I feared that a New World Order would take place. Now I see my family so much more than I did before. I am financially stable thanks to the unemployment benefits that I am receiving. I am much more sanitary, and I am so much more healthy than I ever was before. The pollution rate in Los Angeles has reduced significantly, as the amount of cargo ships and traffic on the roads have declined over the last two months.

No one knows what the future holds during this strange era. However, I believe that like every worldwide disaster, this is just another road bump in our history that was inevitable. There will be an end. Once that end comes, the human race will flourish and we will have taken the steps to being even more advanced than we once were. It will be an honor for me to one day educate my children of this time and be able to tell my story as a millennial that

lived through and survived the “invisible enemy” that we know as the Coronavirus.



My Grandmother at Beverly Glen Park
May 1, 2020