

Sieun Megan Na

Junior, History Major

Professor Ruiz

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Essay 2: Reflection on COVID-19

March 11, 2020 was a day that I will never forget. First, it was my birthday but I couldn't even plan birthday party in advance because it was finals week. So, I was studying for exams and was writing essays at Young Research Library with my friends, not even thinking about my birthday. My friends and I knew COVID-19 was getting serious, so we were talking about whether UCLA was going to cancel finals or not. We also talked about plans for what we would do after finals. Right after the shocking announcement regarding the cancellation of in-person finals, my friends and I stopped studying because we couldn't focus on writing essays and studying for exams. I called all of my friends, and we went to the restaurant right away to celebrate my birthday and canceled finals. Honestly, I didn't take pandemic seriously at that time because we believed COVID-19 was just another contagious disease like flu. However, my life has changed completely after March 11. I was living in the dorms, and since I didn't want to study in my dorm during finals week, I decided to stay with my family for a week, thinking I would return after finals week right before the Spring quarter. Sadly, I could not return to the dorm, and I have been at my house since that day because the pandemic became serious, which resulted in canceling my housing contract and moving out from the dorm. More significantly, COVID-19 has affected not only me but also society, the country, and the entire world.

During these few months of the pandemic, the most direct influence of COVID-19 on people's day-to-day lives has been the social impact. Social distancing and 'Stay-at-home' regulations that most of the countries in the world have adopted changed people's daily lives. Some of the examples include: the transition of in-person classes to online classes and the ban of social gatherings. First, schools, including K-12 and higher education, canceled in-person classes

as many health professionals expected that the pandemic wouldn't be relieved any time soon. UCLA canceled in-person lectures and finals for the Winter quarter in March and decided to offer online classes for Spring and Summer quarters as well. Currently, I am taking online classes for Spring quarter, and I will also be taking all classes online in Summer. The transition to online classes has also affected my housing. I already signed the lease of an apartment in Westwood with my friends, yet I may need to cancel the contract if UCLA continues to offer online instruction for Fall 2020. For now, it is likely to happen; however, everything is currently uncertain, so I am waiting for the official announcement. In addition to the change of instruction methods for college, significant changes in social and cultural life have occurred. For instance, people are not able to meet their friends and families unless in a case of emergency. Also, public events, such as job fairs and music concerts, are prohibited. I was planning to attend a job fair that was supposed to be held in May, but the event was canceled. Instead, the organizer decided to hold a virtual fair. It is great that the event will still be held, but being virtual makes me question if I will be able to gain the same experience as in a physical, in-person job fair in which I would actively interact with employers. As a result, the social impact of COVID-19 is intense and significant because people no longer plan events and activities the way they would before the pandemic.

Another significant impact of COVID-19 is the economic impact. First of all, in order to prevent rapid spread of the disease, California decided to close all businesses except few essential businesses, such as markets, restaurants, hospitals, construction companies, transportation, and emergency services. All of a sudden, many businesses in various industries were not able to operate normally due to the order of the state government. The order affected

thousands of businesses, especially restaurants and retailers. For example, pickup orders for restaurants are allowed, but dine-in is prohibited, so a lot of restaurants which mainly provided dine-in service lost customers and faced sudden decrease in profits. Some of my friends lost their part-time jobs or are working fewer hours than usual because employers changed business hours. Some of those friends who used to live in Westwood but could no longer pay the rent had to go back to their home and stay with their families. Not only my friends, but also some of my parents' friends who run different companies had to file bankruptcy or had to close their businesses for a while because they could not pay the rent for the office or employees. Not only restaurants but also many retail companies closed the stores. For example, shopping malls in Los Angeles were closed by the city, so thousands of workers and business owners lost their jobs. As a result, the pandemic influenced many workers' and employers' daily lives, and it will be difficult for them to go back to the normal, ordinary lives they enjoyed before the pandemic because it is unclear when the California state government will allow businesses to reopen. Considering the frequent extension of California's 'stay-at-home' order, it is hard to expect economic growth in near future. Therefore, these economic hardships of the country due to the pandemic clearly show that the pandemic not only affected many individuals financially but also the entire economy of the nation.

The last significant impact of COVID-19 is on politics. Recently, articles about the U.S. government's stimulus check were all over the internet. People were curious how and when they would get the check of \$1,200, and they waited until the government officially announced the details of the initiative and actual plans. Unfortunately, I filed tax returns as a dependent, so I wasn't eligible for the stimulus check, but my parents did receive the checks, and my friends

who are independent tax filers also received the checks. The urgency of the pandemic encouraged governments to find ways to help their people, yet as I was classified as ineligible, some people were also ineligible to receive the check even though they filed tax returns. So, it questioned me whether the initiative did actually help ‘all’ people during the pandemic. Not only the United States, but also some countries in the world decided to give stimulus check or emergency funds to their people. For example, in South Korea, the government gave emergency relief funds to eligible people. While I was out of country, so I was not eligible to receive the funds but my friends and relatives living in Korea received the funds and were able to use them freely.

The recent pandemic situation, reactions, and responses are closely related to epidemics in Spanish history. There are some examples of epidemics and their consequences which are similar to the impacts of the recent pandemic. One example is the smallpox in the Americas, which spread rapidly to the Native people who were not immune to such new disease. As people are not immune to COVID-19 today, the Natives of the Americas did not have any vaccines or any type of cure, so thousands of people died. Also, as the Natives were marginalized and excluded during the pandemic, some people in the era of COVID-19 today are also marginalized and suffer from the lack of support: not receiving emergency relief funds and not receiving appropriate medical treatments, for example. Moreover, another example in history is the “political, demographic, and widespread epidemics that plagued the Spanish realms” between the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries, which resulted the economic decline and destruction of social order.¹ Similarly, as previously mentioned, COVID-19 has impacted the

¹ Teofilo F. Ruiz, *Spanish Society, 1348-1700*, 2nd ed. (New York: Routledge, 2017), 27.

world economy. While the social order has not been completely destroyed, it is still true that corona virus has made the society more chaotic than before.

It is clear that people cannot compete with nature, and the recent pandemic and its consequences remind people that human beings do not own the Earth, but rather are 'allowed' to live on the Earth, like a tenant. Moreover, my personal experiences and others' experiences in the era of COVID-19 show that one contagious disease can affect many people's normal, ordinary life, and the impacts are huge enough to influence the entire world. More importantly, the unexpected consequences of the pandemic disturbs the social order and the society itself, and some of the unpleasant examples of the impacts are: people stock up some essential products when it is not necessary, people suffer from the death of loved ones, people feel depression because of stress, and people have to endure sudden financial hardships. As a result, in this chaotic era, these various situations remind people the importance of strong government and organized social structure.

In order not to repeat the failures and become a good example for future, there are some important things to remember. First, it is significant to maintain a good, honest relationship between the government and civilians. For example, most people in California have followed social distancing orders because they understand that the government had a reason to announce such orders, and they believe in the decision of the state government. Furthermore, people and the government need to learn from the past. For example, in Spanish history, the main failures in controlling the epidemic was the failure of the leadership and lack of prevention system. Even in the 21st century, people still die of COVID-19 because of limited prevention system, such as insufficient healthcare system and lack of support for the healthcare professionals. Ultimately,

some day, the current situations that everyone in the world is going through will be one part of history. Future generations will learn from us in order to prevent another possible disaster. While there are many individuals enduring and suffering from unexpected, unpleasant situations, eventually people will be able to overcome.