

REFLECTIONS ON THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

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HIST 129A: Late Medieval and Early Modern Spain

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May 18th, 2020

Growing up, I never would have expected that I would be graduating from UCLA, yet, three months ago, I would have never expected to not be graduating from UCLA. The COVID-19 global pandemic has impacted nearly every aspect of my life and the lives of those around me. It has shifted our lives in regards to our social interactions, our economic struggles, and our common conversations. Our days have been restructured, and life itself has been constructed differently that has forced us to adapt to our new normal. Though I, like many others, have struggled with missed opportunities through this, I have carried a necessary appreciative perspective by comparing my situations to others because I know things could be a lot worse. This has become a common narrative for many people as we are forced to appreciate things we may have neglected to value before, and I think this will be one of the greatest impacts that the pandemic will leave on society. The COVID-19 global pandemic has snowballed into a drastic change to our day to day lives, and it will leave lasting changes across different parts of society.

As the pandemic began to get more serious in March, we were about to begin finals, and I remember hearing that my finals would be moved to online. I was thrilled because I thought it would be easier to do them online, and I thought I would be able to go home sooner. Looking back, I wish I had been able to take those finals in person, and that I would have had another chance to be in a classroom. Being a transfer senior, I have only been at UCLA for five quarters, and this spring quarter was what I was looking forward to most. The senior spring quarter that you hear about throughout college where the weather is nice, school is almost finished, and you get to participate in graduation traditions. I worked extremely hard to transfer here, and I never dreamed it would be a reality for me. I never dreamed that I could feel at home here at UCLA, and now that I finally do, it is hard to have it taken away. When I found out that both graduation

and spring quarter were being canceled, I was heartbroken. I had countless plans for this quarter of my cousin's wedding, a trip to go to my best friend's graduation from Boise State, and multiple weekends planned with my roommates. Hearing that everything was canceled hurt immediately, and deepened my gratitude for my previous memories at UCLA. Along with these cancellations, I have continued to search for post-graduation jobs, and have struggled to find one. Many internships that I applied for have been cancelled due to the pandemic, and I have seen firsthand the struggle that millions of people have had throughout this time. Through this pandemic, I had been struggling with my many cancellations, and I felt consistently down at the beginning. Although, as time has gone on, I have gained greater peace with the situation, and my appreciation for my situation increasingly grew as I knew I was extremely privileged to have a home and family to stay with.

I went home to the Bay Area at the very beginning of California's lockdown, and I had no idea I would be there for as long as I was. Luckily, I stayed with my parents, and we spent our time doing projects around the house. It was a great time to bond with them, and I am very grateful for all of the time I was able to spend with them. Through being forced to stay in my childhood home with just seeing my parents for multiple weeks, I was pushed to be truly more appreciative for my life. I think this is the case for many others, too. Through sheltering-in-place, any slight complaint I have had in my mind is automatically shot down right away because I think about how much worse my situation is. I think that is the mindset people should have, and they should aim to value what situation they are in rather than what you do not have is very important right now. As much as everyone would like to go back to normal life, the peace of patience and gratitude is a powerful mindset to keep in these times as we are forced to be grateful

for the simplest things. I hope this will be one of the major lasting impacts of the pandemic for society, and I hope individuals will carry a greater appreciation for the simple things in life. Through being stuck inside without regular contact with others, a deeper admiration for smaller, mundane aspects of life heightens, and I hope this continues in the future.

My family's response to the pandemic has mirrored much of the country's response. At the beginning, my mom was terrified of everything and everyone similar to much of the public hysteria. She was strict about everything we did, and she wanted us to stay inside as much as possible. As time went on, she became more lenient with things, and began gaining a new perspective of the situation. One thing that pushed her opinions to an entirely new place was a public interview done by a panel of scientists. They projected how they believed we can not make an immunity to COVID-19 if we stay inside, and they shared many other things that went against the initial thoughts of the pandemic. This interview made my mom rethink her initial intense fears and drastic measures of isolation, and with time she eventually went to the grocery store. She started going for social-distancing hikes with her best friends, and she held a new attitude towards isolation. I think her initial attitude strayed from intense fear and uncertainty, and this has been the case for masses of people. With time and new information, attitudes have completely shifted, like my moms, and we have learned a new normal. I think through being stuck in this situation for weeks on end, we have grown to deal with where we are, and we are beginning to tweak our present lives to make the most of them. I think that staying safe and respectful while still living life as normally as we can in this present situation is important for us as individuals and society as a whole. Though we should remain cautious, it is important to balance daily activities with isolation.

One thing I found interesting about the pandemic, is the difference of attitudes or precautions based on location. At home in my suburban, family-dominated town, everyone wore masks, the streets were empty, and people kept their distance. The neighborhoods were very quiet, and only towards the sixth week of being home is when I saw a more lively energy. In my hometown, people were very cautious and respectful even though there were only around forty cases in a population of over 80,000 people. Residents of my community continued to support small businesses, though, and we were encouraged by our community to get take-out foods from local restaurants to keep them alive. This has been a very frightening part of the pandemic to see small businesses struggle, and I think it is rewarding when you do support them as individuals. After staying home for six weeks, I drove back to Westwood to continue my quarantine for the next six weeks in my apartment before my lease ends. I think this transition and movement helped refresh me during the quarantine, and I am glad I came. Being in Los Angeles, things are very different. As I arrived in Westwood, I immediately felt a contrasting energy to home as I heard people blasting music, playing drinking games, and I saw people walking around without masks. I also went to my boyfriend's beach house in Laguna Beach for one night a few days ago, and I was shocked at the lack of concern for the quarantine there. As we drove around there, we saw only a handful of people, who were all elderly, wearing masks. Few people were keeping distance from each other, and many people filled the beaches. These differences in compliances to orders within California that I have witnessed have shown me first hand that separate locations and communities hold their own attitudes regarding social distancing. These experiences in addition to seeing how my friends in other states, like Arizona and Idaho where things are more relaxed with their distancing rules, have added to the idea that location depends on severity of

concern. My friend in Arizona is going to bars and my friend in Idaho was able to get her hair done, but things are drastically different here in California. It is very interesting to me to see where specifically different communities land on a spectrum of actions taken to be socially distant. I think multiple factors are included in these differences, including the number of cases, the size of the populations, and the political attitudes. Seeing the differences makes me think of larger contrasts between communities and locations. It is strange to think about how vastly different cities in the same state can be living so differently, or to think about how states close to each other are on such different spectrums of social living.

The most fascinating part of this pandemic to me is the size of the impact it has had on our present society and on our future. To think that we are living through something so monumental and large that has impacted the entire planet is hard to wrap my head around. As a history major, I appreciate the past more than others, and I find even the smallest details interesting. The size of how large this pandemic is, though, is outrageous to me. To think that every single person has been somehow affected by this global pandemic is fascinating. They always say we are constantly living through history, but this is the first time in my life where I truly feel like I am living through a huge part of our society's history that will be carried on forever. From the beginning of my education, I have learned about how impactful a pandemic is on society, like the Black Plague or the diseases brought by Colonizers to the Native Americans. Connecting it back to the history we have learned with regards to Spain, there are parallels to the power of smallpox to natives in New Spain. As the Spanish traveled into Mexico and the Caribbean, they drew natives in to work for them or to spread their faith, and the new, unfamiliar

diseases they were exposed to killed these natives in mass numbers¹. Diseases travel quickly and widely, and they have continued to leave an impact on societies throughout time. Regardless of our advancements in technology and modernity, we are at just as susceptible to deathly diseases, like those in Spanish history. This parallel between the vastly different societies proves the notion that history repeats itself, and I think it humbles our society. A pandemic can be powerful enough to slow down and stop a society as advanced as ours, and it places us in our point in the greater timeline of history.

As we move on to the third month of sheltering place for this global pandemic, I will continue to value the important things I have. I will continue to appreciate things in all aspects of life, and I will work hard in the future that is shaped differently due to COVID-19's impact on the economy, on politics, and society as a whole. Society will continue to move forward in a new direction that carries the intensive measures that we have needed to take throughout this pandemic. As much as I have struggled with this pandemic, it is interesting to be a part of such a powerful and impactful moment in a deeper history that will be remembered for centuries. I hope we move forward together with aspirations of healing and progress in all aspects of our global society.

¹ (Ruiz, Lecture April 27,2020).