

Reflections on the COVID-19 Pandemic

My name is Daniella Masrour, and I am second-year Communications major at UCLA. I live in Los Angeles, California, and I am 19 years old.

COVID-19 has changed our world in a way that almost seems irreversible. In a matter of a few short months, humans across the globe have abandoned the norm and forced themselves to adapt to an unfamiliar lifestyle - one that the human species is not apt for. As I write these words, I find myself in utter disbelief that this is really happening. Globally, there have been over 4.2 million confirmed coronavirus cases, with almost 300,000 of those cases causing death (<https://www.worldometers.info/coronavirus/>). Although we all know that these numbers represent extremely large quantities, it is challenging to wrap our heads around what 300,000 deaths even means. Watching the news and reading statistics has desensitized numerical values to me. I struggle so much to comprehend how human lives, in a physical sense, are being so seriously affected when I cannot see the impact with my own eyes. COVID-19 is invisible, and even more so from the boundaries of our homes. I will begin this paper by discussing how COVID has impacted my personal life and then continue by pondering on what I believe the future holds, all while integrating historical references throughout my paper.

Although I am now entering my eighth week of staying at home, I have yet to fully grasp what this pandemic has meant for me and my family. To be honest, I try not to think about it. I have found that taking things day by day has eased my anxiety and allowed me to find happiness in the midst of this craziness. I am still learning how to celebrate small victories and allow myself to feel joy while I know so many people in the world are suffering. Still, thinking about this new reality is inevitable. There are so many different factors that play into what this virus has done to the world that I feel overwhelmed to even contemplate on how I am personally

affected. My primary response to the question of what the pandemic has meant for me is, in plain terms, that it sucks. It sucks that I had to leave my home at UCLA to self-isolate. It sucks that I cannot see my friends. It sucks that my two-month summer internship in Israel and study abroad program in Granada got cancelled. It sucks that people are dying from what seems like an invisible virus. It all sucks - plain and simple. The words “it sucks” have become the most widely-used words in my vocabulary.

At first, I felt selfish for feeling sorry for myself. I thought that I had no reason to feel sad since I was healthy and had a home. I have since learned that my feelings are valid, and that I can be grateful for what I have while being sad about how I have been affected. I am thankful for the mental health resources I have encountered, which above all have taught me that I cannot worry about things that are out of my control. I cannot single-handedly stop the spread of coronavirus. I cannot cure those who have been hospitalized nor bring back to life those who have passed. I cannot tell everyone that everything will be okay, because at times, I feel doubtful about this myself. But, there are things I can do to participate in the fight for relief. I can do my part and stay at home. I can raise money and donate to organizations that have made it their mission to provide relief for those affected by COVID-19. I can utilize technology to keep in touch with friends, stay on top of my schoolwork, find techniques for mindful meditation, and empower those in my life by teaching yoga classes over Zoom. I have been focusing on what I have control over rather than dwelling on the “it sucks” factor. While I do not have control over the pandemic, I do have control over my outlook. I can choose to be negative or to be positive, and I am figuring out new ways to choose positivity every day.

Maintaining a positive mindset has helped me and my family cope with the many “side effects” brought upon us by the pandemic. By side effects, I mean to refer to the non-health

related issues we feel weighing us down during this unprecedented time. My dad is in the catering and party planning business. With social distancing requirements in place for an unpredictable amount of time, it is unrealistic to imagine that he might be back in business any time soon. My dad has been using his down time to strategize new ways to expand his business and maintain a steady income for our family. I am thankful to live in a home where I not only feel constant love and support from both my parents, but also feel motivated by their willingness to go above and beyond in terms of keeping busy and staying positive.

Frankly, I do not know what the pandemic truly means for my community, the country, and the world. Although I wish I could say the world will go back to normal soon, I know that this is not the case. I know that it will take years of rebuilding the global economy, repopulating, and getting used to participating in life as we used to know it in order to recover. The native population of the Americas never truly repopulated after the smallpox epidemic brought by the Spaniards¹. The United States did not fully recover from the Great Depression until World War II, a decade later². I feel for the hard workers around the globe who have to make the tough decision of choosing between staying home and facing financial hardship or going to work and putting their health and lives at risk. This situation is so unique in that there is truly no right way to get through it.

Although everyone is in the same boat in terms of immunity to the virus (that is, everyone can get it, no matter their race, socioeconomic level, sex, etc.), this disaster has contributed to the unequal distribution of wealth throughout the entire world. While many are stuck living in extremely poor economic conditions, many others are experiencing their businesses profit from the pandemic. Because the United States was built on the concept of

¹ Ruiz, lecture 4/22/20.

² Eric Foner, *Give Me Liberty!: An American History*, 6th ed. (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2019), 929.

capitalism, it is inevitable to see the gap between rich and poor grow in times like these. We can see many parallels between our current society and that which was presented in *The Swindler*, which presents capitalism in a negative light. Francisco de Quevedo condemns capitalism by demonstrating the horrors that can arise from it, including greed for money and inequality³. Castilian society was dominated by the greedy nobility for a great part of Spanish history, resulting in tremendous disparity between high and low socioeconomic levels. Like in the modern covid-age, people lived with unimaginable wealth while others lived in poverty. This trend has been seen throughout the history of most of the world, from the massive gap between rich and poor before the French Revolution to the unequal distribution of money during the American Great Depression.

I cannot imagine how the world will go on post-covid. On a personal level, I wonder how I will feel being within six feet of strangers, or even loved ones who I did not see during the quarantine period. Will it be unsettling to stand close to people in shopping malls? Will I freak out upon being bumped into by a stranger in the supermarket? Will I be paranoid if someone coughs near me? These are all questions that I hope the answer to will be no, but in reality, I have no idea. From shaking someone's hand at an interview to dancing with strangers at a club, human life depends on social contact. I am so curious to know if our needs as humans will change, and if we will get used to this new concept of physical distancing. My generation, that is, those born in the late 1990s to the early 2000s, has been hit harder than any other in terms of our social lives. I am nineteen, turning twenty this July. These years are supposed to be the best years of my life. My peers and I should be experiencing our twenties by meeting new people, learning to be independent, and forming our own identities out in the real world. All of that is almost

³ Francisco de Quevedo, *The Swindler and Lazarillo de Tormes: Two Spanish Picaresque Novels* (London: Penguin Classics, 2003).

impossible to do when we are forced to stay at home. However, I feel hopeful that we will find creative ways to make the most of our twenties in these unique circumstances. As the generation of “Zoomers,” we have been grieving over our lost quarters and semesters through memes, we have created Facebook pages where we post profiles of our friends in hopes that they will attract a significant other, we have mastered virtual hangouts and happy hours, and we have left our mark by posting short videos of ourselves dancing on TikTok. It is nothing close to normal, but it has been working for us, keeping us sane.

I also want to express my gratitude for our leaders who have worked tirelessly to ensure our safety and well-being. As an Angeleno, I try to keep up-to-date with the advice and updates of Governor Newsom, Mayor Garcetti, and the Los Angeles public health officials. I am inspired by their grace in handling the situation, their ability to stay calm in the midst of so much chaos, and their consistency in delivering the truth. Although some may think the local and state governments of California are being overprotective, it brings me peace that they are taking such serious measures to help all of us get out of this pandemic as healthy and strong individuals. Unfortunately, the leadership of the federal government does not compare to that of our local governments. Our president shows ignorance by refusing to accept the gravity of this pandemic and giving citizens false hope. President Trump has worsened the current national state by providing misleading advice, placing blame on innocent people, and obsessing over reopening the country at a time when it is clearly not ready.

Not to mention, the divisions within the federal government have created a split in our nation that has resulted in overwhelming polarity. We can find parallels between history and the present by recognizing how Americans have turned the pandemic into an opportunity to hate fiercely. During World War I, supporters of intervening in the war praised Wilson for getting

involved, and those against intervening hated him⁴. Today, supporters of reopening the nation side with Trump, and supporters of keeping restrictions in place blame and hate Trump. Half the country sides with Dr. Fauci in keeping restrictions, and the other half hates Dr. Fauci for his lack of optimism. As in the case of Japanese internment after the attack on Pearl Harbor and anti-Semitism in the Holocaust, racists have become more feverous, attacking Asian-Americans, Jews, and more for supposedly being at fault. The list is never-ending -- our nation has become a battlefield. In the beginning of the pandemic, I felt reassured by the fact that this is different from a war in that the entire human population is one united front, fighting against the virus. I incorrectly thought the pandemic would bring people together rather than spread them further apart, since the only real enemy here is COVID.

Still, in my efforts to remain optimistic, I have found that humankind has been uniting in other ways. For example, I have bonded with my family and loved every minute of being together (even though we do not always share the same opinions). I have noticed that geographical proximity has become less important, making it feel as though I am even more connected to my family and friends that live in other parts of the world. We are all going through similar circumstances, and we are all just one call away, no matter where we are physically located.

COVID-19 is unlike anything I ever thought I would live to experience; it has demonstrated that nothing is impossible. This pandemic has served as a wake up call for all inhabitants of Earth. It has taught us that we should be kinder to our planet and to each other. It has humbled us, reminding us that we are not always as powerful as we think we may be. I know that we are not near the finish line just yet, but I am confident that we are resilient enough to get

⁴ Foner, 737.

there. I hope that we can learn to all come together and fight this virus as one strong front, whether it is through our collaboration in finding a vaccination or simply our love for one another.