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### Life With the Coronavirus

Before the coronavirus pandemic, the year 2020 came with much anticipation and excitement as we rang in, not only the new year but an entirely new decade. Seeing the clock strike midnight on New Year's Eve felt different compared to previous years. It was a big change to let go of the 2010s as I had grown all the way from fifth grade, through middle school and high school, and into my third year of college at UCLA. The coming of the new decade felt like I was transitioning out of my fun, easygoing childhood years and into the life of a young adult in the real world with the growing responsibility of taking care of myself both socially and financially. However, as the coronavirus, or COVID-19, began to infect people across the globe at a rapid pace by mid-March, it was clear that life was going to play out quite differently than anyone had anticipated from that point forward. It has now been roughly two months since stay-at-home orders were issued here in California and in states all across the country in response to the coronavirus. I began my journey through this pandemic by finishing the Winter Quarter at UCLA, then spending a few weeks at home in the Bay Area with my parents, and then coming back to live in my apartment in Westwood for the majority of this period. It has been a strange and tumultuous two months as the virus has put an obvious damper on how we all expected life to be going and continues to affect how we choose to spend our time. The responsibilities that come with living in a virus-stricken world have been difficult to accept at times, but they have

also helped me become more cognizant of my duties as a human being to society which has helped guide me in becoming the person that I sought to be entering the 2020s.

For the entirety of American society, March of 2020 was probably one of the most unpredictable and uncertain months to ever have occurred. The first few days of the month were life and business as usual as no serious concern about the virus had become prevalent in America despite other countries like China and Italy being hit very hard. But once March hit double-digits, everything began to change at a rapid pace. It may seem rather out of touch but I honestly first became very aware of the severity of the coronavirus in the U.S. once professional sports were suspended in early March in response to the virus. As a big-time sports fanatic, this came as a major shock as nothing ever seemed to stop sports from happening in America for an extended period of time and certainly not during one of the most exciting times of the sports calendar just around the corner. The NBA was the first league to suspend play and the most shocking as they were nearing the highly anticipated playoffs highlighted by MVP frontrunners LeBron James of the Los Angeles Lakers and Giannis Antetokounmpo of the Milwaukee Bucks. Seeing something of this magnitude be suspended indefinitely served as a wake-up call for myself and many others and, from there, the normalities of life began to change at a rapid pace and soon began to directly affect my life as well.

In the beginning of March, everyone at UCLA was simply preparing for finals and planning for spring break as well as the summer. Accordingly, my roommates and I were planning on throwing an end of the quarter party before Finals Week at our apartment on the corner of Strathmore and Gayley that was Friday the 13th themed given the date of the event. We sent out a Facebook invite earlier that week and a lot changed in the time. That week, there was

growing buzz that UCLA could switch to remote learning following decisions to do so by other colleges around the country. Initially, students were upset with how the university did not immediately follow this trend comparing the lack of action to the handling of the wildfires that burned near campus and cancelled some classes due to poor air quality. I must note here it really felt like most students were NOT concerned with the effects of the coronavirus and only wanted to switch to online classes with the belief that doing so would make exams easier and were simply jealous of those who had classes online already. However, on Tuesday March 10th, UCLA did announce that they would be moving to an online format effectively immediately that would initially only last two weeks into Spring Quarter. This quickly caused unprecedented changes to classes as final exams were forced to be put into some sort of online format instead of the usual in-class way. Every day following March 10th felt like a whirlwind as there was so much uncertainty surrounding what the future would hold yet our party was still set for that Friday. Me and my three other roommates discussed whether or not throwing a party would be the smart thing to do given the coronavirus and ultimately decided to still do it to try and uplift everyone's spirits as the morale everywhere was so low. We had roughly forty people come through our place on that rainy Friday the 13th which sounds really bad in hindsight but in all honesty, I am still very happy we went forward with it because I am still not sure if there will ever be another in my time here.

After finishing my finals for Winter Quarter, I had a flight from LAX to Oakland to go back home for Spring Break as I had no plans to travel anywhere myself. My flight was on the 18th and my parents were coming to pick me up from the airport that afternoon after briefing me on being very careful at the airport in the days prior. Once I landed and found them at the

terminal it was strange because there was no initial hug or anything from them in fear of the virus and instead there was lots of hand sanitizer. Once we got home, however, my parents opened up and things were essentially normal with them which definitely made me feel better. After a few days at home of only leaving to walk our dog and run errands, I suddenly got a migraine-like headache and began to feel ill. Obviously, given the state of the world my parents and I were concerned it could be COVID-19 especially after I also began to develop a fever. My mom called our doctor's office as they had a hotline for potential patients instead in-person visits as a result of the virus itself. After being on hold for nearly the entire day, we were finally connected to a doctor in the late evening and I was able to ask what my symptoms meant. He told me I only had a sinus infection from my flight which was not a surprise by any means but a relief for both myself and my parents. It took me a few days to fully recover but I did so rather swiftly and those concerns about coronavirus were completely alleviated and allowed me to comfortably shelter-in-place with my parents and my dog for the time I was back home.

One of the main reasons I was originally very excited for Spring Quarter 2020 was that my 21st birthday on April 3rd was going to fall on the Friday of Week 1. I was looking forward to spending that day with my friends doing all the wild, stereotypical 21st birthday things that young people do. But, given the state of things, I remained at home with just my parents on that Friday and celebrated with them instead by doing some work in the yard. They helped me make the most of the day by cooking one of my favorite meals and then sharing a beer with them for the first time in my life. I honestly do not think that I would trade that day for what could have happened with my friends if the coronavirus never existed. A couple days later, I left home on Sunday, April 5th with my girlfriend, who is also from the Bay Area, and we drove back to

Westwood for the rest of the Spring Quarter. From there we lived together for weeks simply doing our schoolwork and going out to get food and buy groceries on every now and then with our face masks on. Slowly, both our roommates have begun to return as well as life begins to become more normal but we will still spend our time on things like TikTok and Mario Kart instead of going out like we want to. The idea of a return to normalcy from the unprecedented changes and turmoil since the coronavirus arrived in the U.S. seems impossible at this point as it has become very clear that this a generational type of event.

Until now, life during a major deadly disease is something that hardly anyone alive today can say they have experienced, especially in the United States. However, just because they have not occurred in recent memory does not mean that they have never occurred. Diseases and plagues have had an immense impact on life throughout history, wiping out millions of people on various different occasions. The COVID-19 pandemic pales in comparison to the sheer loss of life in cases such as smallpox pandemic which ravaged the world for millennia which includes wiping out nearly the entire Native American population after the arrival of Europeans.<sup>1</sup> It was not until the 20th century that smallpox was completely eradicated with the introduction of a vaccine but that comes with the advances in modern medicine that have been made to that point in time. While the coronavirus has not existed for more than a year and it still has a global death toll over 300,000 according to Johns Hopkins University and it is still bizarre that an infectious disease is able to do so much damage in places where healthcare is some of the best in the world. The fact that we live in a world with such advancements in modern medicine makes me hopeful that life will quickly be able to move on from this crisis but the fact that the coronavirus has

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<sup>1</sup> Ruiz, Teofilo F. *Lecture 9*, History 129A (UCLA, 27 April 2020)

remained so prevalent through these modern times administers a sense of doubt and fear that the end still may not be near.

For any person, living through the coronavirus is uncertain and scary at times, but as a political science and history major, it is honestly quite fascinating to be alive during this major historical event. So often our work is limited to discussing past events and reflecting on their meaning to tell stories, but actually having my own personal account of the event that is transpiring before us is a reminder that history is not just the events of the past— it is always happening and happening to everyone. My story during this time is nothing special or, thankfully, anything traumatic but it is a real experience nonetheless that I will probably tell my children about one day. The year 2020 will forever be defined by the coronavirus pandemic and the story is still not yet over. At this very moment, the coronavirus remains at the forefront of all aspects of life since becoming a major issue in the United States in early March with still no definitive end in sight. My hope is that this pandemic and the changes that have been made to life will open the eyes of people everywhere to the issues of inequality and disparity that have persisted throughout the world and that our recovery will focus on not merely making society normal again but making it better. 2020 is far different than I imagined it would be on New Year's Day but these trying times have helped me understand how much we really are in this together and I hope that attitude is the theme of our recovery process.