

Second Written Assignment: Question 4

James P. Garcia

HIST129A

Professor Teofilo Ruiz

May 15, 2020

The 2020 spring quarter will mark the completion of my first year at UCLA as a transfer student and what should have been the completion of my undergraduate experience. In 2005 I dropped out of high school and worked in the real estate and insurance industries where I became aware of different types of social inequalities and systemic injustices. When the Great Recession of 2008-2009 occurred, it provoked a change in my career because of the Real Estate Market Crash. I earned my high school diploma in 2009 and enrolled in community college, but a series of health and financial struggles extended my community college experience through to 2018. In 2019 I was accepted to UCLA and decided to quit my full-time job to complete my history degree within one year, apply to graduate school, and return working fulltime while attending graduate school. As a non-traditional, Latinx high school dropout I felt proud of my accomplishments especially since the 2016 resurgence of overt racism. As a supporter of the Bernie Sanders movement I believed in the potential to fundamentally change the way society treated the most marginalized. The pandemic of 2020 combined with the Trump Presidency marked an international crisis that caused uncertainty and profound stress for what the future holds.

In mid-March of 2020 schools transitioned to online instruction across the nation, which was said to be temporary, although, each week that passes seems to be clear that what was considered normal in society will permanently be changed. The past three years has turned everything upside down, but the COVID-19 virus exponentially intensified the change in what is considered ordinary and familiar. From January 2020 to the time that I am writing this paper the pandemic has caused massive unemployment, economic and social instability, racial hostility, and general fear for the future. Numerous reports from independent journalist to government agencies are recording high unemployment rates around twenty percent, stats comparable to the

unemployment rates during Great Depression. Planning for the future before the pandemic was already filled with uncertainty due to the extreme deficits in leadership, the pandemic has compounded these uncertainties. Under the Trump presidency there is an active regression of American exceptionalism that is exposing the systemic racism and capitalist corruption. COVID-19 has only served to exacerbate these issues while bring intense focus on these matters. The initial response to the pandemic by the federal government called it a hoax, claiming that it was no worse than the common flu, and believed the virus would miraculously disappear. The federal government unbelievably denies the scientific expertise and advise from the leading science on the pandemic. The denial of science from the federal government has only served to worsen the spread and severity of the pandemic and by consequence has served to intensify the regression of the United States as a world leader. However, the United States is continuing to lead the world in the highest rate of infection and deaths.

The fallout of the pandemic is seen most clearly with the rate of unemployment. Millions of people are being laid off and while millions of jobs are being eliminated each day and there is no assistance on behalf of the federal government to the general populace. The initial one thousand and two hundred dollars distributed by the federal government as a relief package has been completely inadequate for the vast population that lives paycheck to paycheck. Rather, the federal government continues to bail out big businesses with trillions in assistance from taxpayer dollars, not to mention the substantial tax cuts to the wealthiest individuals that was passed before the pandemic under the Trump administration. This is one of the largest transfers of wealth in American history that will only serve to increase the wealth inequities and degradation of the American social structures. This wealth redistribution will have substantial and profound impacts on future generations of the poor and middle-class Americans. As big businesses absorb

vast amounts of taxpayer capital at the behest of the federal government, the one thousand and two-hundred-dollar payment that was given to ordinary working-class people does little to help those in need. For context, my own rent is one thousand six hundred and fifty dollars, not including utilities, nor other basic necessities. Steve Mnuchin, the former investment banker and current Secretary of the Treasury claimed in March of 2020 in an interview on Face the Nation that American families should make the one-time federal stimulus check last for a minimum of ten weeks. Stretch the relief check over ten weeks is an impossibility when individuals have no income due to the pandemic but will have expenses like the exorbitant rent rates. The obvious and extremely gross underestimation on behalf of the federal government demonstrates just how out of touch the federal government is with ordinary working class individuals. Furthermore, the pandemic has also exposed the systemic racial disparities caused in part by institutional discrimination toward minorities and people of color.

The outbreak of Covid-19 has compounded the social problems already being suffered by Blacks, Latinx, and Asian communities. Many of the social problems the pandemic has unequivocally exposed are tropes that occur throughout world history. The Spanish history covered in this course demonstrates how the social power dynamics of Spanish history of the fourteenth and sixteenth centuries is comparable with the contemporary United States in many aspects. Social stratification was rampant in Spanish history and inequality and inequity was deeply embedded in the fabric of Medieval Europe. Coinciding with the social stratification of Spain was religious intolerance, social scapegoating, class conflict, violence, and demagogic leadership. The United States during the pandemic has highlighted how the demagogues of today rely on social power relations that serve to intensify social conflict between the elite and the working class and minorities. Under the demagogic Trump Presidency, racism has been

increasingly publicly expressed while hate crimes and police brutality against minorities has also increased. In 2015 Trump began his Presidential campaign by calling Mexicans rapist and criminals. Once elected, Trump then used an executive order to enact the Islamic travel ban. Now during the pandemic Trump is racializing the virus referring to it as the Chinese virus. An upsurge in hate crimes against people of Asian descent have increased following the rhetoric of blaming immigrants and minorities for the cause and spread of the virus.

This demagoguery of Trump has many parallels with of the Spanish crown under King Ferdinand and Queen Isabella. Prior to the reign of Ferdinand and Isabella, the Spains were in chaos due to inept governance, corruption, and violence. Ferdinand and Isabella blamed Jews and Muslims for the many problems suffered in the Spanish kingdoms. The Edict of Expulsion of 1492 exemplified this sentiment as it expelled all Jews from the Iberian Peninsula. Furthermore, combined with the long history of anti-Islamic sentiment in the Spanish Kingdoms, the Spanish Crown used this demagoguery of scapegoating combined with the Christian religion as elements for Spanish unification. However, the context prior to the reign of Ferdinand and Isabella is important to understand the rationale for the Crown's actions. This compares remarkably to the anti-Islamic sentiment of America, the mass deportation and detainment of Latin American migrants, violence directed toward African Americans, Asians, and Latinx communities that has only intensified in the last three years under the Trump presidency. The context of Spain before the reign of Ferdinand and Isabella created an environment in which the Crown used demagoguery as a way to consolidate power. This context of the Spains was important in understanding the reign of Ferdinand and Isabella just like the context in America prior to the pandemic is also important to understand how minorities and the marginalized in

America. This dangerous social concoction has the framework future devastation like that seen in the Great Depression.

Nonetheless, the most effected group of people effected by the pandemic thus far have been the working class, immigrants, and minorities. The contemporary American tax breaks and bailouts for the wealthiest sector of America has only served to increasing the wealth gap and inequities, and perpetuated violence toward the most disadvantaged especially during the pandemic. Recent health reports are claiming racial and economic disparities in the rate of infection and death disproportionately show at least seventy percent of the initially infected and deaths were African Americans and Latinx. Additionally, Africans Americans and Latinx also constitute large section of workers that are considered to be essential. In the current epicenter for COVID-19 in the United States, New York reports racial disparities in the rates of policing and police violence toward minority neighborhoods during the pandemic. It is important to note that police brutality and over policing of minorities has only intensified during the pandemic compared to whites and white neighborhoods. Evidence that supports the racial contrast can be found in the murder of Ahmaud Abery where two white men hunted Abery as he routinely jogged through his own neighborhood was shot and killed by the two white men. The men claimed they were attempting to make a citizen's arrest as they believed Abery was a serial burglar. The two men were not arrested for over two months. The murder of Brionna Taylor is another example. Police officers in a drug raid broke into the home of Taylor at one in the morning dressed in plain street clothes, did not make any identifying announcement they were police or on a drug raid, shot Taylor numerous times. Adding to the injustices, the police department prior to the raid had already arrested the individual they were searching for, admitted they entered the wrong apartment complex with the wrong apartment number, a murderous

mistake. Compounding the injustice, the police department is charging Taylor's boyfriend with attempted murder of a police officer after boyfriend returned fire after the police opened fire thinking that they burglars trying to breaking into his home.

In contrast to the general treatment towards minorities and the disadvantaged by the social institutions is the treatment of whites during this pandemic, protests against the Safer at Home order have erupted in white demographics. In Michigan armed protest, some of which were holding nooses and signs with racial slurs aggressively yelling at officers inside of the Michigan state capitol, were allowed to aggressively protest with rifles and handguns intentionally trying to intimidate and threat state law makers. Law enforcement did not respond to the white protests calling for the lifting of the Safer at Home order. No arrest were made and the unruly protesters were allowed to continue with a second protest occurring in the same manner again on May 14. In Huntington Beach, CA a city that is a twenty-minute drive from my home white protestors gathered without precautions or concern for public safety. Protesters violated the requirement of wearing a mask in public and not social distancing while demanding that the state of California also lift the Safer at Home order. Numerous protests by white individuals' openly defied state-imposed restrictions designed to protect the general public against the virus with impunity. However, African Americans are unjustly murdered for nothing other than being black. The contrast in how institutions treat different demographics has only worsened in the pandemic and brought new scrutiny to racial discrimination and violence. The pandemic has only served to further reveal the racist reality of how the United States of America has two different sets of rules that divided along racial lines, one for whites and other for everyone else. The state of affairs not only in American is chaotic and troubling with the real prospect of a troubling future for humanity in general.