

Life During the COVID-19 Pandemic

Jennifer Garcia, Junior

Political Science Major, History Minor

T.A: Kaleb Adney

Professor Teofilo Ruiz

May 18th, 2020

Recently, the whole world has been severely impacted by the presence and power of the Coronavirus, or COVID-19. The world today is going through what generations before us went through: living and surviving through a devastating pandemic with no remedy in sight. In a short period of time, my life and the society around me changed drastically, which left me having to adapt quickly to the new way of life. With the precedence in history, however, I have accepted that while society isn't going to return to normal for a long time, there is a positive light at the end of this pandemic as the world will rebuild and fight this pandemic till the end.

As a California Resident, I witnessed the rapid spread of the virus from various news reports and social media posts. At first, the virus didn't seem like a threat as the disease seemed to be contained in the Eastern hemisphere of the world. However, over time, the virus turned more lethal as the number of fatalities grew and the virus spread globally. It seemed that history was beginning to repeat itself. In the past, Europe endured the Black Plague, whose lethality ended up destroying a large portion of the European population. Specifically in Spain, there was talk of the "grand mortandad", which were the many people killed because of the sickness (Ruiz, "Centuries of Crisis" 45). However, the effects of the plague continued even after the disease went away. In the Iberian Peninsula, there was a rise in violence against those non-Christian minorities (Ruiz, "Spanish Society" 18). Not only did the Jews suffer because of the plague, they also had to deal with discrimination from the Christians, showing how some groups are hit worse than others during an outbreak of a disease. While the plague killed many people, it didn't take out a whole population. Europeans brought smallpox into New Spain, which resulted in the near devastation of the native population as they didn't have a tolerance nor a remedy for the disease (Castillo, 261). History has illustrated how impactful diseases can be to the human population,

but I didn't know the extent to how powerful the presence of a disease could be until the changes were happening around me.

The outbreak of the virus first impacted my academics as the changes in society forced me to learn in a new fashion. The shutdown of UCLA happened in a span of one week. I remember taking the bus to campus on the first days of the week, but with some caution as I followed the news about the first cases of the virus in the United States. By the end of the week, UCLA would send an email to all students announcing the closure of campus and instruction would be moving online. I didn't know what to expect with online learning. It wasn't until the start of spring quarter that I realized how difficult online learning could be. With online instruction, there was no human interaction with other students and there were more distractions at home, which made learning more difficult than in-class learning. The major problem with online learning was the new difficulties with professors. One of my professors wasn't used to using technology, so our class videos weren't always up at the time he said. He also wasn't very responsive with any questions I emailed him, which didn't help me in his class. This new level of frustration with school didn't help my anxiety, so I had to learn new ways to deal with my frustrations about school. I made sure to take some time during the day to relax, get some exercise, and eat healthy snacks to help concentrate better. By altering my daily schedule to fit the new way of learning, it made things easier for me in regards to learning online. I have learned to embrace the new way of learning.

Beside the changes in my academics, I also have had to adjust to the social changes in society. When the first cases of the virus were discovered in Los Angeles, my mother grew worried for me due to the fact that I have asthma, which put me in the group of those most

vulnerable to the disease. For me, I wasn't worried much about myself, but for my grandparents and great-aunt, who suffered from health issues, like diabetes, and my father who also had asthma and heart problems. The seriousness of the pandemic only hit me when I began to have shortness of breath and a sore throat. Usually, I wouldn't think much about it, but with the presence of the virus, my anxiety took over as I had exposure from public areas like the grocery stores and laundromat. For two weeks, I stayed at home as a precaution. In the end, I got better, but it made me realize what the new normal in society is. There was now a fear that any sickness could be COVID-19 in disguise.

With this fear, I went from visiting and seeing my aunts, uncles, grandparents, and cousins every weekend to not seeing them at all for the sake of their health. While it pained me to not see my family as often as I was used to, I knew that it was necessary in the world we are now living in. Things also took a turn for the worst when people began to empty the grocery stores. Originally, I wasn't worried about stocking up on supplies. It was only when the news reported images of empty shelves and shortage of supplies that my mom and I realized we needed to get what we could. The new way of shopping changed to waking up at five in the morning and getting in line for the store to open at eight in order to get at least one package of toilet paper and a case of water. If we went to the store in the afternoon, we wouldn't find the things we needed. It didn't help that California was hit with heavy rain for weeks, leaving me to stand in line in the cold rain. I had to adapt with the changes that the pandemic caused among the population and I only hoped that the chaos would decrease over time, and thankfully it did. At this point in time, the stores aren't as chaotic anymore, but they still haven't returned back to normal completely.

With this pandemic, I am honored to have family members who continue to work in the health care sector that leaves them more vulnerable in catching the virus. My mother has worked as a medical assistant for a clinic in Burbank, CA for many years now and she works primarily with elderly patients. When the virus began popping up, I feared that one of her patients or her co-workers would test positive for the virus and my mom would become infected with the virus. Eventually, her clinic stopped seeing patients in person as a way to protect the medical workers and the patients from having contact with each other. Yet, even with the change, my mom still had a scare with COVID-19. A person who had visited the office tested positive for the virus, which led to everyone being tested to ensure no one was exposed. We had to wait a few days for the tests results, which felt longer than they actually were. Luckily, she tested negative. Through it all, she has continued to stay positive and strong, which makes me proud to have her as a mother. Besides my mother, my older cousin has continued to work in the health field as well. She works primarily with pregnant women and it wasn't until recently that she started to meet with patients through the phone. For her, she also has to worry about the exposure of the virus for the sake of her daughter, my niece who is barely one year old. Her clinic has also had virus scares over the past month, but luckily she has remained clear of the disease. During a time where many healthcare workers are becoming infected and dying from COVID-19, I feel appreciative that my family has been able to remain healthy and have continued to work for the sake of others.

Specifically, the COVID-19 outbreak has affected my family economically as many of them have been struggling to maintain themselves financially. Many of my family members work in sectors such as retail, schools, and restaurants. With the shutdown of the state, it meant

that many of them were out of jobs and they had to file for unemployment. My aunt, who worked as a janitor for LAUSD couldn't work anymore, leaving her to worry about paying her house mortgage. Luckily, she was eligible to receive the stimulus checks that the federal government created that are a form of aid for U.S citizens. The pandemic hurt my father the most as the only job he had was driving for Uber. It was around the time of the outbreak that he got sick, so he couldn't work without being considered a "threat" to everyone who rides with him. Without work, he fell behind on his rent payments, which only worsened his anxiety. With my parents divorced and the rest of his family in El Salvador, I was the only family he had to help him. He filed for unemployment, so that was the only source of income he had. I tried to help him by buying his groceries and other necessities he needed, so he didn't need to leave his house. However, as the pandemic worsened, he refused to let me leave home or let me visit him at his home as he feared I would contract the virus through exposure. I wanted to be able to help my father out, but I understood that he was only looking out for my well-being. He has been getting by so far, along with the rest of my family, which is something that I am thankful for.

I predict that the virus outbreak will have lasting effects for not only the United States, but globally as well as people continue to be cautious of another outbreak and work on rebuilding the world. One major thing that the virus impacted was the way people viewed people from Asia as the pandemic created racial tensions among the human population. In the San Fernando Valley, before the outbreak occurred, I wouldn't personally hear nor see any racial animosity towards Asians in public. My city was one where people from many different areas in the world were able to interact with each other and live as a diverse community. However, with the outbreak, I began to see more racial comments being thrown around that targeted Asians the

most. There were people claiming that they wouldn't be eating at Asian restaurants anymore because they feared that they would "contract the virus". Others would describe the virus as the "Chinese virus". It became prominent how the origins of the virus promoted racism, which only seemed to increase as the pandemic continued on. I believe that society will have to work towards mending these racial tensions in order to fully move on from the COVID-19 outbreak.

Besides the racial tensions, I believe that a long term effect of the virus pandemic is that everyone as a whole will continue to be more cautious in public because of the fear that the virus may come back again. As the number of hospitalizations and deaths drop, the governments are going to feel more comfortable in opening the nation back up. Yet, without a proper vaccine, the lingering worry of the pandemic rising again won't go away. People are going to still be cautious of going into public areas. Many businesses are going to continue with their extensive cleaning. For the grocery stores, specifically, the presence of glass dividers between the customers and cashiers are going to stay for a while as a way to continue to protect everyone. With scientists all around the world working hard on a vaccine, there is a hope that this pandemic will slow down soon, if not sooner than expected. Doctors and other healthcare workers have done great at helping as many people as they could and there have been multiple cases of recovery, which shows a promising future for everyone.