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Reflections on COVID-19

There is no question that this pandemic turned the lives of everyone upside down. It's as if society has come to a halt. It is difficult to decide where to start, I have chosen to start with my earliest recollections of change. Reactions there are many, personally mine at first was of complete terror. Many of my peers thought that it was not that serious they said things such as "it's just like the swine flu or ebola it will be contained" what they did not anticipate was the incompetence of this administration and their mishandeling that would lead to such catastrophic numbers for the United States. I kept up with all the news, right after the first email from Gene Block about students being tested for the virus. Thinking about its proximity to me terrified me, and I was astonished at how long it took the chancelors to decide that finishing winter quarter online would be the best option. After this most of my memories are a blur. I know what occurs chronologically but I'm not capable of giving exact days or even weeks.

After finals I was still required to go to work at O'Reilly auto parts in Santa Monica. This terrified me because at this point the number of confirmed cases were rising. My manager also took it lightly "even if you get it you'll survive it you're young" which in my opinion is ridiculous it's as if he was telling me "you have a chance of dying but probably not" at this point I had informed myself I watched a documentary about pandemics and it references the catastrophic repercussions the Spanish influenza of 1918 had on the entire world. That damage occurred when travel was not that accessible like it is today. That combined with a report by University of California San Francisco that they anticipated 70% of the population to contract it

within 6 months, that we would not have herd immunity until after that point. That combined with the projected over 100,000 deaths frightened me. That combined with knowing that L.A. has a population of over 4 million made me incredibly anxious. As soon as I finished working that weekend I packed my essentials and left Los Angeles. I asked my boyfriend if I could stay with him and he agreed. This move from such a large city to Chowchilla California, a town with only one main road and a population less than 20,000, comforted me. I did feel some guilt at the chance that I had been exposed before traveling and that I possibly aided in the spread.

Fortunately I have not and everyone around me is still healthy and alive. I have since been let go from my job because I was at the bottom of the totem pole, I have fortunately been granted unemployment so I am not being a financial burden to those around me.

As a result of this pandemic class and social disparity has become more apparent. While many middle- and upper-class Americans can work from home there are minorities who are put at risk daily because they are essential workers. My parents are essential workers and both have not been able to “social distance.” My mother works in a gas station and my father is a mechanic. Both jobs require them to be in contact with the population. They both have been lucky enough to stay employed even though it puts them at risk. They are immigrants, my mother has TPS and my father is a legal permanent resident. Fortunately they are both here legally and are able to access aid. For example my mother received a CARES check, even though she used the entirety to pay off a debt of 1,500 to a family friend who lent her the money in order to pay rent in January. Even with this “aid” their socio economic status has made it so that they are barely staying afloat in the pandemic. My father whose income already fluctuates because it relies on people using his services, has become even more scarce. I would call to check in and he said he

was making 150 a week in march. This is what it is like to live under the poverty line in the U.S. you are barely making ends meet and no matter how much you work it's incredibly difficult to save. COVID-19 has heightened anxiety, and stress for this population.

My partner's mother who has gracefully welcomed me into her home speaks of this. She is currently a school teacher and her income is still reliable. In the face of all of this economic uncertainty she is preparing herself in case she loses her job. Especially since historically the first area that receives budget cuts during a recession is education. She is a former farm worker and she mentioned that she is mentally preparing herself to work in the blueberry harvest this summer. The rest of her family are still farm workers here in the Central Valley of California. The experience of living here and hearing their stories has humbled me immensely. I felt that I had experienced poverty and disadvantages (which I definitely have) but farm worker poverty is a different level of poverty. Not only this but the level of exploitative conditions they work in because the majority is undocumented leads to a terrible quality of life. I've become even more grateful for many of the things I once took for granted. Like buying the food I wanted without looking at the price, and sometimes forgetting about a certain produce that I bought and having it rot. Things like that do not happen in this home every cent is accounted for and every purchase is well thought out because there is nothing to spare. COVID-19 has put the livelihood of these communities in danger.

The virus has had a tremendous impact on the economy and working class people's lives. One of the biggest concerns besides everyone's health is the economy. Even though many people of Latina/o background have remained employed during this pandemic because they work in essential industries, a majority of the Latina/o that work in the service industry have become

unemployed. These are the housekeepers, nannies, cooks, dishwashers, etc. of America. Unemployment for Latina/o's is at 43% as the largest minority population this is not only detrimental to the economy of the United States but also to economies throughout Latin America. Almost every immigrant household has someone who they send remittances to when unemployment for the Latina/o population is so detrimental this will have dire consequences throughout Latin America, especially the countries that are worse off. The common American population will not care about this and in fact will make the argument that we need to focus on "America first" and the reality is not that simple. I make the argument for an intersectional approach which is essential to understanding why common Americans should care about this. The racial demographic for essential workers is a undocumented minority population, our economy is a consumer society there is no question. The production jobs are all in "underdeveloped countries" when in reality it is American economic imperialism that has kept these countries historically "underdeveloped."

I bring this up because as an ethnically Salvadoran and Mexican woman I look at remittance numbers. In Mexico remittances account for 2.2% of the GDP and in El Salvador it accounts for 17.1%. In the case of Mexico NAFTA made it reliant on the American economy, for El Salvador CAFTA made it reliant as well. For El Salvador they don't even have their own currency anymore it has become "dollarized" meaning they use American currency. Historically U.S. companies have made it so that these countries rely heavily on the U.S. economy, companies like United Fruit for example.

I'm including this in my paper because looking back at this moment I want us to remember that the decisions of the U.S. not only affect its citizens but also the entirety of the

Americas and even the world., more intensely than the general population realizes. Remittances to El Salvador fell 40% in April; this is only the beginning. I predict that there will be devastation and many people will go hungry, and that there will even be a new migration exodus to the U.S. we will see new caravans on their way to our southern border from Central America. The undocumented population is one of the groups that suffer the most in the United States. They are also a workforce that is absolutely necessary in the U.S. in order for society to keep functioning.

Lastly I want to speak on the negligence of the Trump administration and how it continuously puts the American population's health at risk. Firstly it did not take the threat of COVID-19 seriously. Trump cut the funding for the pandemic response team that the Obama administration put in place after H1N1. On top of this Trump did not order enough tests for the population. Even now in the month of May we are under testing as of today May 18, 2020 there are 1.5million confirmed cases in the United States 289K recovered, and 90,694 dead this is a humanitarian crisis. When Hernan Cortez conquered new Spain it had catastrophic effects on the population. It even aided him in his conquest, smallpox took the lives of many indigenous leaders including Montezuma's successor (Ruiz, 308). It was devastating to the indigeous population and the effects were felt throughout the Americas. Most American citizens for some reason don't think that over 90,000 deaths in 3 months is worrisome but I do. Possibly people are not looking at the numbers or assume that the seasonal flu takes more lives. The saddening reality of all of this is that we have the technology to help save lives but due to this administration and the privatization of healthcare we were not prepared.

Living through this pandemic has only strengthened my opinions of how flawed the government and economic system is. We need social reforms, we need to be able to withstand the economic fallout of a pandemic. This situation can be a lesson and a moment of great change if we survive it. I say this because the people who need social reforms the most are currently dying at faster rates than anglo middle class americans. Studies are showing that Black and Latina/o people are dying at much faster rates than everyone else. This is because they either can not afford to stay home or because of preexisting conditions. Many low class people do not have the ability to pay for health insurance and everyone that is unemployed has lost their insurance as well.

We need universal health care and make pharmaceuticals, health supplies/equipment production government owned and regulated as well. There are arguments that people make about the innovative benefits of private companies, while this is may be true what use is there for this innovation if the public cannot be cured with the advances in technology. This has been the case with ventilators that the government contracted a private company to develop, it would have made fighting this pandemic easier. The cost of production is a little over 3,000 dollars, instead of producing the promised 10,000 ventilators they instead focused on producing for profits selling them for a little over 17,000 in Europe.

These are the obvious flaws in the system wall street is literally putting profits over people and most people don't bat an eye. The only piece of legislation that I believe that can pass if everyone pressured the Senate is universal healthcare. After this pandemic if this does not happen it will be a result of pure incompetence by our government and representatives. For once I hope that the well-being of our population is prioritized over profits something that does not

happen often in society. These have been my thoughts and reflections on COVID-19, to all who read this stay safe, social distance, you are all in my thoughts, here's to surviving another turning point in history.