

On March 19th, 2020, the Los Angeles city council announced the Safer at Home order, an order announcing that all Los Angeles county residents should only leave the home for essential reasons and that all social interactions should remain at a distance of six feet or greater. With the state of the world at the time, it seemed an appropriate measure to be taken that would "flatten the curve" and allow this pandemic to blow over quickly. However, at the time it could not be seen that we would still be in full-blown quarantine two months later. Coronavirus disease or COVID-19 is a respiratory virus that causes flu-like symptoms in those that have been unfortunate enough to contract it. As of May 12th, 2020, globally there have been 4.23 million confirmed cases of which 1.48 million have recovered and 290,000 have died. With a mortality rate of 1.3%, COVID is one of the most alarming global viral pandemics we've seen since the outbreak of HIV/AIDS in the 1980s. However, beyond the symptoms the virus causes itself, the virus has taken a catastrophic toll on the internal infrastructure of our society itself. Businesses are failing, massive layoffs have been enacted, and our country is collectively hurting as a whole. According to the Washington Post, at the time that I write this, the country currently stands at an unemployment rate of 14.7%, the highest rate since the Great Depression, and that during April over 20.5 million people lost their jobs¹. This shows how detrimental the lockdown has been to our country's economy and how difficult it will be for us to recover over the coming years following the pandemic.

The virus has had a unique way of affecting every level of our society's system, from micro to macro, everyone has been affected in one way or another. From a micro level, the virus has affected my plans for the future and put a halt to mine and those around me. At the

¹ Heather Long, Andrew Van Dam. "U.S. Unemployment Rate Soars to 14.7 Percent, the Worst since the Depression Era." *The Washington Post*, WP Company, 8 May 2020, www.washingtonpost.com/business/2020/05/08/april-2020-jobs-report/.

announcement of the Safer at Home order, I was a senior graduating from the University of California, Los Angeles ending my last winter quarter hopeful for the closure I believed that spring would provide. My first thoughts settled on the despair I felt that I had vacation plans to go to Bali for spring break, Las Vegas for memorial day weekend, and Coachella in April, a last hoorah that I was hoping would allow me to peacefully transition into a career and the next step of my life. However, the virus stripped me of these luxuries and as time continued, I realized that these losses were nothing compared to those of others. This made me feel selfish and made me realize that I should be more empathetic to the struggles of others.

As a graduating senior, I was incredibly lucky to have begun my job hunt in early January. After 10 weeks and over 15 different interviews, I secured an offer in late February at a high-end recruiting company. At the time, I wasn't truly able to comprehend from a timing perspective how lucky I was. After the shutdown of most businesses and as a result of the virus, our economy is undergoing a recession that has put the job market at a standstill. Thankfully I am one of the few people who has not had their job offer revoked. However, at the moment it's almost impossible to find work anywhere, many of my friends have had offers revoked or are unable to find any companies that are hiring in these uncertain times. Even heavily qualified candidates such as my extremely talented girlfriend who has had successful internships at huge companies such as the Discovery Channel and Dim Mak records is struggling to find a position. The LinkedIn stream is flooded with countless posts discussing layoffs and requests to employers who are currently still hiring. For a graduating senior, the world is uncertain and scary and at the moment there is no light at the end of the tunnel signaling an end to this chaos.

From an economic standpoint, it's important to note the effects that this type of pandemic has on the population and how those are handling it. To evaluate this, we have to look at how economic

uncertainty and the stress that's accumulated from elongated quarantine accumulate. For me, it has been extremely stressful trying to finish strong my last quarter at UCLA. I had the motivation to draw strength from and push through the senioritis however it's been difficult to find the passion at home and keep up with my assignments. It feels extremely unsatisfying to finish my college career like this and because of this, I don't feel like I am in a great mindset to fully reach my potential within my classes. There is a significant cross-over effect that occurs on the individual's mental psyche when they are not able to destress in the ways they usually do. All types of areas are closed that I would usually enjoy to take my mind off the monotony of everyday life. Beaches, bars, national parks, mountains everything that I take enjoyment from is off limits right now and I feel like I have no way to get away and take the time to work on my mental health. Not to mention we are cut off from most of our friends and families, places where people usually draw on strength from support groups. Thankfully, we are in a time and age where we can communicate fluidly through our phones and laptops. However, something that I've noticed through quarantine and social isolation is that technological communication is void of the intimacy that face-to-face human connection provides. It doesn't provide the same warmth, connection, and feeling of safety. This type of communication has made me feel detached from the outside world and has distanced me from some of the relationships I use to gain support from. Luckily, I have been able to have my amazing girlfriend stay with me and I am very close with my family allowing me to use this time to reconnect and use them for support after being away at school for the past few years. However, this relationship works both ways and I know that social isolation has been hard on a lot of people with unstable family lives. I have heard countless stories from people who used their lives at school to get away from their families that have now been forced to live at home causing lots of stress and placing people at risk for

increased rates of anxiety, depression, and substance abuse. These types of situations demonstrate some of the impacts and hardships that the virus has had at a micro-level and how we have all been uniquely affected by this outbreak.

At the macro-level of our system's society, it is interesting to take a look at how our country handles these types of situations. The problem at the beginning was that we were aware of the virus for months before it hit the United States, yet we didn't start scrambling until it was already here and the World Health Organization (WHO) declared it a global pandemic on March 11, 2020. This shows how unprepared our government is for these types of outbreaks and the lack of communication when these types of problems arise. It's also interesting to note how fast these types of viruses spread in our interconnected network of countries. COVID-19 was on the radar of the WHO by January 1st, 2020 and if we compare this to a similar pandemic from the past, such as the outbreak of smallpox, it took 12 centuries for smallpox to spread from China/Korea to every corner of the globe²; we achieved this in 2 months. This type of comparison demonstrates how quickly these types of diseases can spread, and how we need to reevaluate our prevention measures to stop a potentially worse illness from spreading in the future.

In order to look at the long-term effects this will have on our society and how to move past this we have to draw on knowledge from the past and how nations have handled pandemics. After being brought to America by the Europeans in the 15th century, smallpox ravaged the population of Native Americans who had no natural immunity to the disease. This disease destroyed their communities and without the knowledge about how germs are spread led to dense waves of epidemics sweeping these people. These people didn't have the practices we know

² "History of Smallpox." Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, *Centers for Disease Control and Prevention*, 30 Aug. 2016, www.cdc.gov/smallpox/history/history.html.

about today such as quarantining or washing their hands, and as such were much more susceptible to infection. As advances in medicine progressed, we learned how to manage these types of diseases and were much quicker in finding a cure. For instance, the Spanish Flu in 1918, with a mortality rate of 2.5% was so deadly that it depressed the average lifespan of people in the United States by 10 years. To combat this the government handed out rations to civilians and implemented restrictive measures on social contact. This allowed them to slow the spread of the virus and focus on finding a vaccine for the people³. Quarantining in the past allowed us to combat a disease with a higher mortality rate and is also the way that we will be able to slow the rate of transmission of the disease today.

If we look at the implications this has for the immediate future, I believe that we won't see the return of a lot of close contact environments for a long time. Festivals, sporting events, amusement parks, airports, all will have a difficult time rebounding from this type of incident and when they do come back will have serious regulations instilled in order to continue at capacity. For example, Shanghai Disney opened its doors on May 11th, 2020 with a series of coronavirus preventions, such as limiting the capacity of the park to 24,000 people daily and temperature checks for ticket holders upon arrival⁴. This is an example of the precautionary measures that will be enacted at larger community gatherings such as these. I also believe there will be a lot of skepticism regarding traveling and people will be a lot more cautious, leading to a decline in a lot of countries whose economies rely on the tourism industry. I also believe that this will have a massive effect on cultural values towards the Chinese as this skepticism will be mainly targeted towards the point of origin of the disease. Lastly, I believe that following the

³ *The 1918 Influenza Pandemic*, virus.stanford.edu/uda/.

⁴ Barnes, Brooks. "Shanghai Disneyland Reopens With Strict Safety Procedures." *The New York Times*, The New York Times, 11 May 2020, www.nytimes.com/2020/05/11/business/shanghai-disneyland-reopens.html.

disease there will be a rework of the healthcare system in America. If we look at the effects of the disease from a systematic perspective, healthcare workers are extremely burnt out and we have had to triage cases of coronavirus to file those we believe worth saving and those who are not, a tactic commonly used in wartime situations. This demonstrates the fragility of our healthcare system and how unprepared we are if something even worse were to come along.

One thing I have decided that after this pandemic blows over is that I will not take anything for granted anymore. The ability to go outside, see your loved ones, or enjoy the small things in life that we haven't been able to do for the past few months. Not having access to do the things you did in your everyday life demonstrates how important these things are to you and what you truly value in life. The way that we move past this is looking out for each other, listening to the mandates provided by our government, and banding together as a community. If we do these things, I believe that the way that our nation handles the recovery from the travesties that have occurred will fully demonstrate the grit of our people and highlight the resilience of the American way.