

Kaelee Holmes
Professor Teofilo Ruiz; TA Emily Bolender
History 129A
18 May 2020

COVID-19

Throughout history, illnesses and plagues have characterized population growth and transformed society. Whether smallpox in the New World resulting from the Spanish conquest or the Black Plague in the Middle Ages, society has faced enormous challenges stemming from biological dangers. Now, in what still feels like a dream, society is being faced with yet another pandemic that threatens to change the world as we know it. The COVID-19 pandemic, started by a virus believed to have originated in Wuhan, China, has spread throughout the globe and has assuredly impacted everyone's life. The virus is incredibly contagious, mandating social distancing and shut downs of many local stores, businesses, and event centers. As a result of ineffectual leadership, lack of transparency, and resistance to social distancing, the virus has progressed to a point where stay at home orders have been extended, lives have been lost, and society as we know it will be forever changed.

Since I first heard of COVID-19 in January of this year, more has changed than I could have possibly imagined. On March 11, 2020, the stay at home order was enacted across the country. On March 12, 2020, I turned 21. While I am thankful that I managed to go to dinner with my friends, part of me feels as though I lost a time I will never be able to get back. Despite the guise of celebration, we were all more concerned about the future of our time together and how COVID-19 would continue to impact society. I have had countless friends experience this monumental birthday in quarantine, and, while there is no one correct way to celebrate, a 21st birthday is typically seen as the last big milestone in adulthood and freedom. The virus has taken this from so many, forcing us all to let a time in our lives slip past us without any real cause for

upset. It feels wrong to be upset, though. After all, people are dying. My younger sister turned 17 two weeks ago, in quarantine. A few of her friends drove by and dropped off a gift, and we all did our best at home to make her feel special. However, the isolation and general mood of the time creates a feeling that this is no time for celebration. It is strange experiencing monumental moments in a period where time seems frozen, almost as if we are watching it pass us by with little control over how we actually experience it. This uncertainty and lack of control, combined with feelings of loneliness and isolation, has drastically impacted my mental health during this time. In the past, I have struggled with anxiety and depression, struggles that were only exacerbated by the pandemic. Even with this, it feels wrong to feel sorry for myself or feel upset. After all, people are dying. Another huge loss for me came May 11, 2020, when my internship with Goldman Sachs was made completely virtual in addition to being shortened from nine weeks to five. After months of recruiting culminating with an internship offer in October of 2019, I could not have been happier with the opportunity to intern in my dream city, New York City, at my dream company. Now, that has been taken from me. While I am so incredibly thankful to still have my internship, as I know many who've had theirs cancelled, it still feels like a monumental loss. This is a summer and experience I will never get back. It feels wrong to be upset, though. After all, people are dying.

Another area of anxiety has been finances. My stepdad owns his own business, a ropes course, that typically works with groups of around 30 people on teambuilding exercises on an outdoor challenge course. Since the stay at home order was enacted, his bookings have almost completely stopped, as only certain groups are cleared to attend. Since my mom does not work, his business facing such limited activity has placed a strain on my family financially. It has been so hard to watch my stepdad struggle with the loss of business and, in a way, purpose. The lack

of regularity and routine has taken a toll on his mental health, as it has to hundreds of thousands of people who have lost their jobs, health care coverage, and are facing a myriad of other financial struggles. According to a report from the New York Times, 36 million Americans have lost their jobs in the past two months and the stimulus bill passed by Congress is hardly enough to aid in any meaningful way (nytimes.com). Additionally, college students listed as dependents on their parents' tax returns are excluded from the benefits. As a student heavily reliant upon financial aid and scholarships, this truly baffles me. Not only do I still have to pay my full rent at my apartment in Westwood, one of the highest rental markets, I am also excluded from any relief that would help mitigate the financial difficulties I have faced as a result of the shutdowns. I know I am not the only student facing this issue, and there are many more who are facing food insecurity, inadequate housing, and struggles with access to the technology required for remote learning. It feels wrong to be upset, though. After all, people are dying.

Perhaps my greatest loss, however, is regarding my time at UCLA. I struggle nearly every day with the reality that my college experience will likely never be the same. While I am thankful that I am not having my graduation taken from me at this time, my school year ended too suddenly. Without warning, the transition to online learning was implemented. While I understand there was no other option, the suddenness and shock factor are not reduced. Additionally, it is increasingly likely that fall quarter instruction will also be remote. This loss is almost incalculable. My senior year fall quarter, my last football season, USC rival game, and so much more has been taken away. To make matters worse, remote learning has reduced my engagement more than I could have imagined. I feel very little connection to my professors aside from the occasional email and even less engagement with my classmates. I cannot seem to fathom the reality that I will basically be self-teaching with little to no collaboration with my

professor or peers. I cannot even begin to express the sadness inherent in the realization that this learning environment will likely continue through the fall. It feels wrong to be upset, though. After all, people are dying. I worry that this will never end. What started as a movement to flatten the curve has somehow transitioned into a need to find a cure before reopening occurs. I worry society and the economy will never recover. The loss of connection and feelings of isolation are widespread, and, in combination with an abysmal job market, I worry about the mental health of society at large. This is simply not sustainable. What if a cure is never found? Are we to continue to stifle the economy and isolate people from others indefinitely? Even the recent three-month extension to the stay at home order seems shocking. Only last week Governor Newsom stated reopening would gradually start as we enter into Phase 2 of his plan. Yet, here we are, with yet another extension of this period of uncertainty, financial struggles, and declining mental health. COVID-19 has virtually extinguished any sense of normalcy and any efforts to plan for the future. It feels wrong to be upset, though. After all, people are dying.

Aside from the impact on my personal life and family, COVID-19 has impacted the world at large so immensely that I fear life will never be the same. The future seems bleak for many. After all, people are dying. Studies have shown the virus to be incredibly contagious and even first responders and medical professionals, despite taking the recommended safety precautions, have become infected. I cannot imagine the fear flowing through medical professionals on a daily basis as they risk their lives to care for those infected. This realization is what makes it so challenging to allow myself to feel disappointment at my personal losses and experiences because people truly are dying. I feel so much sadness for my friends with parents risking their lives on a daily basis. I truly cannot fathom how it feels for medical professionals to have to stay away from their high-risk family members in order to save others. My heart aches

for those in old folks' communities and homes and for those who pass alone. I truly cannot imagine anything worse than dying alone, afraid, and uncertain of the future of those you're leaving behind. I feel upset. After all, people are dying.

Despite all the challenges listed previously, it is maddening to consider that the current state of society could have been avoided had there been effective leadership and transparent communication concerning the severity of the situation. President Trump's inability to acknowledge the severity of the virus up until we went on a national shutdown shows how ineffectively he leads this country and creates the cause for questioning if all of this could have been avoided. Even now, as Dr. Fauci, White House coronavirus task force and director of the National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases, cautions reopening too quickly, President Trump continues to push for reopening to stabilize the economy (npr.org). As an economics major, I believe I tend to consider the economic fallout of a situation at the outset. However, while I now believe reopening is essential to staving off a nationwide depression, it cannot be understated that had this situation been effectively handled since the initial outbreak, I believe the current situation could have been either greatly mitigated or avoided altogether. One of the most shocking events of late is Trump's endorsement of an injection of disinfectant to fight the virus, a statement that was quickly corrected by medical experts who revealed, unsurprisingly, that injecting disinfectant is toxic to the body (bbc.com). Additionally, Trump touted the relevance of a malaria drug that he has a personal stake in as a potential cure for the virus. However, a study found that there were more deaths from those treated with the malaria medication, hydroxychloroquine, than others treated with standard care (bbc.com). I am concerned for the future of this country. As the 2020 election draws nearer, I fear that the outcome will be impacted solely by the COVID-19 outbreak as political issues fall to the

wayside. In a short-term sense, the virus will likely have a large impact on the next four years and the leadership in place. In the long-term, this election could have drastic impacts extending much longer than the next presidential term and will shape the future of generations to come. It feels wrong to worry about this, though. After all, people are dying.

The ineffective initial response to the COVID-19 outbreak has left this nation confronted with economic shutdowns and suffering unlike anything seen in the past decade. This will shape future generations, as social distancing procedures are implemented in all businesses. I wonder if these practices will ever be dismantled. What if we never find a cure? I genuinely believe the current state of survival is not sustainable in the long-term and I fear for the outcome if a solution is not brought forth soon. I worry for the future of the nation as the election draws near. I worry about my own future and those of my peers as we enter into an economy grappling with a potentially destructive depression. It feels wrong to worry about this, though. After all, people are dying. My only hope is that we emerge from this pandemic more grateful for the world around us and all the connections that were previously considered ordinary. May we never again take for granted a hug from a grandparent, a handshake after a new introduction, going out to dinner with friends, and so much more. I can only hope we learn to appreciate our loved ones and experience each moment to the fullest. In my own experience, the pandemic has made me realize how thankful I am for the amazing people in my life who have stayed in touch even though it's been difficult. Each week I look forward to my Wednesday night zoom sessions with my best friends. I love facetimeing my grandma to make sure she never feels alone. I'm thankful for the gift of an outdoor run or workout. Despite the difficulty, I am thankful to be reminded of how beautiful the world around me is and how amazing it is to have people to love that love me. It feels important to realize this. After all, people are dying.

Works Cited

- Cohen, Patricia, and Tiffany Hsu. "‘Rolling Shock’ as Job Losses Mount Even With Reopenings." *The New York Times*, The New York Times, 14 May 2020, www.nytimes.com/2020/05/14/business/economy/coronavirus-unemployment-claims.html.
- "Coronavirus: Outcry after Trump Suggests Injecting Disinfectant as Treatment." *BBC News*, BBC, 24 Apr. 2020, www.bbc.com/news/world-us-canada-52407177.
- Wise, Alana. "Trump Accuses Dr. Fauci Of Wanting To 'Play All Sides' On Reopening." *NPR*, NPR, 13 May 2020, www.npr.org/sections/coronavirus-live-updates/2020/05/13/855736912/trump-accuses-dr-fauci-of-wanting-to-play-all-sides-on-reopening.