

My Covid-19 Experience

Hello, I would like to start this essay by introducing myself. My name is Kevin Aleman, I'm a senior at the University of California Los Angeles. My purpose for writing this essay during this global pandemic is to provide a personal perspective of my experience throughout this historical event. I would like to begin by stating, this has been by far the most significant event of my life so far, as a 24 years old individual. I was too young to truly grasp the impact of the 2001 terrorist attacks in New York City, although I consider myself lucky to have witnessed the election of the first African-American President in our country, I do not believe those events compare with the global consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic. This is one of those events where there would a before and after on the practices we share as a society.

To begin, the first time I heard about the COVID-19 virus was towards the end of January 2020. I didn't care that much about it because I thought it was going to be a similar situation like the H1N1 and Ebola virus, where you had government officials making statements about the threat of this virus but nothing drastically changed besides from the learning of a new technique of how to properly sneeze into our elbows instead of our hands. Most of the news coverage was focused on the impact the virus had in the city of Wuhan, China. I must admit at the time I was going through some tough personal feelings with the passing of my Grandfather in January at the start of the Winter quarter at UCLA. It wasn't until late February when I became more worrisome about the severity of the Corona Virus. News about the quickness of the spread of the virus in Northern Italy began to circulate on American news shows. And then March came, and it completely changed the way things used to be, to say the least. During the second week of March, UCLA announced the transition from in-person classes to online classes, this transition took place during week 10 of the UCLA academic calendar year. However, at the time

I guess there was this sentiment that things would go back to normal in a short manner by the things that were being said at the time. March 10 was the date UCLA made the official announcement. However, the sequence of events that took place in the following days after this announcement completely changed the landscape of the world around me as I once knew it.

Next, sports are one of my favorite passions, I cannot imagine a world without them. But on the night of March 11, a nightmare scenario where sports were not part of my life became a reality. A Utah Jazz player by the name of Rudy Gobert tested positive for COVID-19, which caused the postponement of the NBA season. Soon after, all the other professional sports leagues announced the same decision. I know this might sound ridiculous and out of touch, but it wasn't until this moment where it hit me about the severity of this virus. On the same night, the actor Tom Hanks published a statement claiming he had contracted the coronavirus in Australia. From this moment on, the following ten days were a rollercoaster of emotions for me personally as the world around was changing so fast and there was nothing, I could do about it.

At the time, I was studying for my finals and getting ready to start my last semester as an undergraduate student at UCLA. I guess the two words that best described how I felt during this moment were uncertainty and anxiety. Uncertainty because I didn't know what to expect from this whole situation and anxiety because I had no control over what was transpiring in a short amount of time. I was working on an online final exam when I received an email from the UCLA chancellor Gen Block announcing the cancellation of the traditional graduation ceremony. In all honesty, I don't care that much about the ceremony itself, don't get me wrong, I think it is great that one's academic achievements are honored through this ceremony with friends and colleagues. Yet for me, enjoying the process of obtaining my degree was more valuable and rewarding. However, I was a little bummed out about the cancellation of the graduation because

I know how much it meant for my parents and family members that supported me over my academic journey. I actually think is incredible for me to be part of such a unique graduating class, yet another part of me longs for a traditional ceremony with friends and family.

One of my seminary professors at UCLA recommended writing our thoughts during the duration pandemic as a method to keep our minds distracted and for the preservation of historical evidence for future historians wanting to learn more about the 2020 global pandemic. On March 19 Mayor Garcetti of Los Angeles and California governor Gavin Newsom announced the implementation of the “Safer at Home” order. I have to be honest; I was petrified to go outside for the next three weeks. I tried to learn more about the virus, but it was difficult with the amount of misleading information on the Internet. There is a problem with “fake news” in our current state of affairs, it made me reflect on the power of information in society. In one of my History classes, we analyzed the consequences of the printing press as a medium that transformed the access of information to the echelons of intellectual society. I think we have a similar situation in our modern society that is highly driven by scientific facts and studies. This is not necessarily a bad quality to possess as a collective, but I think sometimes it drives us away from our compassionate human characteristics. When we start thinking about human life in terms of numbers and statistics, I think it is a wake-up call to reconsider our societal priorities.

I would be lying if I said I did not have any trouble going to sleep at night during these tumultuous times. Particularly when you keep hearing on the news that the elderly are more vulnerable to the exposure of the virus. Even though scientific studies made it clear that the majority of the people dying from COVID-19 were people above 80 years old with underlying health issues, the thought of losing any family member was terrifying. I came across a study made by Stanford University that suggested a reason why California did not suffer the same

casualties similar to places where outbreaks took place such New York, Italy and Spain, resulted in the notion that the California population had already built-in herd immunity. I don't know about the validity of the research, however, it proclaimed that there was a chance people in California had been exposed to the virus before the first confirmation of cases in the state of California. I began to overthink the whole situation because I remembered that in December, I visited my grandfather for the holidays and came down with the flu. I did not develop the symptoms of shortness of breath and dry coughing associated with COVID-19. However, I was very fatigued, and it took me two weeks to recover. My grandfather also had the flu a short time right after me. I had a joyous time celebrating the holiday festivities with my family. Yet, by the early days of January, my grandfather developed abdominal pain and was quickly hospitalized. My grandfather had been on dialysis for more than 3 years when this happened, so we were very concerned as a family. The doctor told us his catheter was infected with bacteria and required a surgical procedure to abstract the infected catheter and install a new one. He survived the procedure, but his health deteriorated in the following days and was put in an ICU. He passed away on January 10, 2020. Although I must admit there is no conclusive evidence that the cause of his death was the virus. I would be lying if I said that there is not a single day that goes by since I came across the Stanford study that I haven't thought about the possibility of me exposing him to the virus. I have not talked to anyone about my remorseful feelings because it might be just a case of me overthinking this whole situation, but I know that one day I'm going to have to. I think it is the only way for me to move on from this grieving period.

By the middle of April, I had completely adapted to our new living conditions. The word "social distance" has been ingrained in every member of our society at this point. In all honesty, I think it would be okay with me if we kept some of the social distancing rules. I understand that

everyone wants things to go back to normal, but I'm okay with sacrificing our liberties for the benefit of our society. I must admit our family has been lucky that our finances have not been impacted by the lockdown of our economy. Everyone in our household is considered an essential worker or has been allowed to work from home. A report came out stating that 30 million American workers have filed for unemployment benefits, this is a very high figure surpassing those of the great recession of 2008. As someone who is supposed to enter the workforce this year, this is horrifying. However, we have seen progress and we should be able to overcome this situation. I know for some people this whole predicament is not going to end until we discover a vaccine. I don't follow the news closely, but I always make sure to look into the daily reports by the California governor Gavin Newsom and Friday updates by Mayor Eric Garcetti and Dr. Barbara Ferrer. I tried to watch a briefing by President Trump, but his approach to the state of affairs angers me and just makes me want to turn off my TV. The only person I listen to from the federal health experts is Dr. Fauci. I cannot express my disdain for the leadership demonstrated by the leader of our country during this global pandemic. He began by downplaying the threat of the virus, then completely ignored the science to combat the virus and as of now clearly, his only interest is to politicize the situation for his benefit during an election year.

As a historian, this has been a fascinating time from an analytical view of our society. One of the most fascinating elements is the relationship of the government with its citizens. It had brought up questions about the capabilities of our government to control human behavior. By late April, protests against the limitations imposed by the government began to transpire. I don't know if this situation is unique to the United States where there is a huge debate about the infringement of civil liberties. Moral questions about prioritizing the survival of our economy over the cost of losing human lives have become a debate in our public discourse. I have begun

to question my mortality in this journey called life. I reflected on the role disease had in the destruction of great societies such as the Aztecs. I think sometimes we forget the power of nature.

At this particular moment, it is extremely difficult to contextualize the impact of COVID-19. One thing guaranteed from this historical event is that things would never be the same again as the once used to be. I would like to also share some of the positive aspects of a global pandemic. First, I think situations like the one we are living bring out the worst and the best of human interactions. As someone who has lived in Los Angeles for the majority of my life, I loved the less traffic the city experienced which caused less pollution in the air quality. I believe nature has benefited from a decline in actions that hurt our environment. This experience has also taught me to enjoy the little thing in life that we take for granted. I learned that adapting is the best form of survival, I cannot predict what the future but I'm certain whatever it would be, I would do my best to enjoy every single minute of it. I am a strong believer the human spirit is capable of creating positive change and I'm sure we will overcome this situation.