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Paper 2
Question #4

On the last normal day before quarantine began, I attended my last in person class of my time at UCLA. Of course, I was not aware that this was the last normal day; to me it seemed like just another Tuesday. I sat through my art history lecture, chatted with my friend Kat after class, and walked home along my usual route back to my Westwood apartment. I was aware that the Coronavirus was quickly spreading across the world. I was aware that it had the capacity to affect the United States in a big way, but nothing seemed too wrong just yet. Nestled inside the little bubble of Westwood and UCLA's campus, I felt safe and content. I was constantly reassured that everything would be fine, as long as we washed our hands for a full twenty seconds and refrained from hanging out with anyone who was sick.

Looking back to a few months ago when this all began, I wish I had known that on that Tuesday I would attend class for the last time on the campus that had become so familiar to me. Had I known, I would have paid much more attention in lecture, taken more thorough notes, and spent some time saying a meaningful goodbye to one of my favorite professors. Even as I sat in my apartment, reading the fateful email that would dismiss us home for the quarter, I did not yet comprehend the severity of what was to come. I packed my things, waved goodbye to my roommates, and climbed in the car to head to my hometown for quarantine. It all happened in the blink of an eye. There was no time in between to say goodbye to my friends or wonder if I would

ever see them again. Later, I would consider what could have been, but in the moment I was quite terrified.

A few days after returning home, I called my Grandmother to check in on her. I asked if she had enough toilet paper; something I would never have even fathomed being concerned about a week prior. There were shortages of just about everything it seemed. When I asked her if she had ever experienced anything like this in her eighty years on this planet, she told me no. She explained that this was a first even for her. Slowly, I began to see panic unraveling around me. The news displayed videos of people fighting for resources in the supermarkets. My parents who were always calm, cool, and collected; suddenly were coming unhinged at the idea that this was completely out of their control. Trump dodged all the important questions in his daily briefings. For the first time in my life, I was truly afraid and saw no end in sight.

I have lived in Ventura County, California my whole life. My community has been through a lot in the past two years. We experienced a mass shooting at Borderline Bar and Grill and the Woolsey Fire back to back. With the onset of those two events, I saw my community band together faster and tighter than ever before. When the first cases of Coronavirus hit the county, I knew that the spirit would be much the same to what it had been with those aforementioned tragedies. People in my community are rallying together in different ways now. While they are unable to physically unite, they are able to perform helpful acts from afar. In all the darkness that has come out of COVID-19, I am constantly inspired the great people of my community and proud to call this place home. Despite being isolated, I remain filled with a feeling of connection and support from those around me. My county has also been lucky in the sense that at the present moment, we have only seen eighteen deaths from the virus. While, I

wish this number could be zero, I have gratitude for the fact that it is not as high as some of the surrounding areas.

Upon return to my hometown, I felt frustrated. I felt instantly trapped by the four walls around me. I wanted nothing more than to go see my friends. The way I had imagined coming home from school for the rest of the year was not exactly as it played out. Before terms like “social distancing” became so common, I was lead to believe that I would come home and spend all my extra time with my high school friends. Frankly, I was excited about this prospect. It had been so long since we had all been home at the same time. At that point, you could say, I was feeling a false sense of immunity to the virus; like it could not touch me or those I loved. Then, I learned that I would not be hanging out with my friends like I had planned. In fact, the only people I would be seeing would be my mother, father, and little sister. The first few weeks felt unbearable.

However, as time passed, I started to embrace this newfound free time. I started to lean into it with a positive attitude. I felt like a kid again with the time and space to create and play in my environment. This is not easy, but I believe you must make the most out of the situations you are dealt in life. For years, I have done yoga on and off at home and in studio. For some reason, despite loving the practice; I could never get myself to commit to it on a regular schedule. Finding yoga again made me feel like a whole new person and this time there was no excuse to not give myself that space to breath and exercise my body. Now, I have taken up a regular practice for the past few months from home and cannot imagine abandoning it. It has allowed me to re-center myself in times of anxiety about the state of the world and to remind myself to be grateful for my and my family’s health.

My goal was to make my environment as positive and happy as it could be even in a time where everything felt uncertain. I forced myself to look inward and consider what sort of transformations I could make. Now my regular routine consists of, reading, journaling, attending to my school work, cooking healthy meals, cleaning, and spending a lot of time out in nature where I can. Although, I have been able to make these positive changes in my life during stay at home orders, I like anyone can still get wrapped up in my fears about what is to come. When I start overwhelmed or see my mother getting anxious about the news, I ask myself: How can I spark joy in this moment? I do what I can.

The virus began in Wuhan, China. When it first started, I heard all sorts of rumors. Some people said it came from the consumption of a bat bought at a wet market. Some people claimed that was a myth entirely and that it arose elsewhere. There never really seemed to be a clear answer. What I do know is that as I watched the news, I saw more and more cases of anti-Asian violence. I recall a story of an Asian woman crying on her way through the supermarket aisles because she was so paralyzed by the fear that someone would physically attack her based on her race. This worried me. I have a lot of Asian friends, my boyfriend is Asian, and moreover I hated to see this complete lack of human decency especially during a time like this. I think that the world has turned the Coronavirus into sort of a blame game. Everyone seems to want to be able to point their finger at one nation for causing this to get as bad as it has. In reality, I think that we all play a role. I am sure each government around the globe has some regrets for what they could have done better and I am sure a lot of individuals wish they would have understood the severity of the virus sooner. The world has a lot of healing to do and now, more than ever, it is necessary to extend kindness and patience to everyone around us as much as we can.

Thinking about a post-Coronavirus world is difficult. Certainly, things will not be as we remember them. Perhaps, eventually we will see true normalcy, but for now everyone must adjust to the “new normal.” In the media, they talk a lot about the realities of the aftermath. The public may have to wear masks in for quite some time. The number of tables in restaurants will most likely become limited as to space out the seating. The work force may lean into the ability to allow employees to work from home more often than not. Students may have to become accustomed to an online classroom for extended periods of time. These changes are strange for us, they do not feel comfortable, but they are necessary. They are crucial for our world to keep on turning.

When considering the state of our world today in comparison to the things we have learned in class, I find the struggle of the New World natives to be the most poignant. First, we can see the condemnation of the “other.” Explorers visiting the New World viewed the natives as savages. They saw them as beastly. Dr. Chanca wrote in his letter back to Spain, “As soon as we saw this, we suspected that those islands were the Carib islands which are inhabited by people who eat human flesh” (Chanca, 26). The Spanish explorers characterized the Caribs as cannibals, because it was a way to instantly outcast them as the “other.” In our world today, we see this happen in a similar fashion with Asian Americans. Many people made claims that Asian Americans are a threat to the well-being and health of society. These are empty claims based on nothing more than the desire to make an “other” out of these people.

Additionally, the natives in the New World had been living in complete normalcy for centuries uninterrupted by outsiders. The arrival of Spanish explorers shook their world out of normalcy and placed them into a whole new set of problems. Similarly, the Coronavirus arrived in the world out of seemingly nowhere and delivered with it an unexpected new wave of issues

for world leaders and individual citizens to confront and get acquainted with. Perhaps, the most jarring comparison that can be made between our world today and that of the New World natives is the spread of Smallpox. The Castilians brought livestock with them to the New World which allowed for a quickly spreading epidemic of Smallpox to begin. The natives had never been exposed to such diseases and had not developed any sort of immunity. Thus, the arrival of the disease decimated their population and there was not much they could do to control the spread. With the arrival of Coronavirus, governments felt helpless and unprepared to deal with the extreme level of contagion. This similar sentiment of feeling out of control in the face of a fast-spreading disease was felt in the New World and in present time.

I have hope that eventually our world will return to what we remember and that it will all be for the better. There is most certainly a light at the end of the tunnel regardless of how far away it may seem. For now, I remain in a state of gratitude for my health, the roof over my head, access to necessary resources, and thankful for those putting their lives on the line for the good of humanity.