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COVID-19

The Coronavirus was first identified by Chinese authorities on December 31, 2019 in the province of Wuhan. As the new year came and January passed, the cases were in the range of the thousands and many were infected within China and there were cases in several other countries. A few cases were reported in the United States and many Americans including myself did not bat an eye. It was reported that the virus is only dangerous to the elderly and those with underlying health problems. Being in the prime of my youth, I felt invincible and thought that the virus would come and go like Ebola did a few years ago with only a minor impact in some countries. In February, flights to China were cancelled and the first US fatality was confirmed. It was at this point that I felt the virus was much bigger than what most of my peers and I thought. This was made clear when in early March COVID-19 was classified as a pandemic and classes at UCLA were cancelled.

It was very disorientating having classes abruptly cut off on the eve of finals week. Questions began to arise of how some of our tests would be administered, if we would be able to live on campus, etc. I lived in an off-campus apartment with two other roommates. I was in my Japanese history seminar when it was announced that classes would be cancelled until the second week of the spring quarter. As I left my class, I immediately called my parents and told them of the situation. I informed them to come pick me up as soon as possible from my apartment. I packed up all my essential belongings and was soon driven to my family home by my mother not knowing that would be the last day I would spend in my apartment with my roommates. I went

back home to my house in Glendale and am still currently residing here after it was announced that all of the Spring quarter would be conducted online. I could only imagine the confusion and frustration many of my peers and friends who lived out of state or even overseas had to face.

I was fortunate in that my finals all consisted of essays and nothing too technical was needed to complete them. A few of my friends who were taking math classes informed me that their finals were cancelled outright and the grades they got was what they had earned up to that point. When spring break came around it was quite odd staying home with absolutely nothing to do. Lockdown was not strictly enforced and we could still go outside to purchase groceries and food, but my parents had already done that so I had no valid reason to leave my house. I mostly spent time on my phone, reading books, watching films on my computer, or sunbathing outside in my backyard. I can only imagine how tough it would be for those staying inside apartments all day long especially with an increased risk of getting exposed due to the close proximity with other tenants. I only went out once with friends to spend some time together and talk in person at one of their homes. We did not shake hands or get too close to each other. Social dynamics were changing, the way we used to normally interact pre-pandemic was not in play anymore and everyone felt it. Meanwhile everyday one would hear more depressing news of the rising number of deaths and the stricter lockdowns being implemented. On social media one saw heartbreaking stories of people speaking of the deaths caused by COVID-19 in their family and urging others to socially distance. It was such videos that made me wonder how many lives could have been saved if our countries acted earlier. I could not believe my eyes when just last week thousands of Americans were protesting stay-at-home orders at Huntington Beach and in other states across the country. I don't know what they were trying to achieve. They were exposing themselves and

their loved ones to getting the virus just so they can open the beaches? It was clearly absurd and if lockdown is lifted as of right now then it would be a complete disaster.

In regards to my family, both my parents and my sister all work from home now. I too take all of my classes online. My parents are both jewelers and own a store in Downtown Los Angeles. While business has slowed down they still are getting orders from their online website so thankfully my parents can provide for our household without applying for unemployment benefits like the millions of other Americans who are.¹ My father also received a stimulus package for small businesses which was a great help financially. Most of my friends who work are now unemployed and a few even got laid off. Thankfully, my sister works for a marketing agency and most of what she does can be done from home on her computer. The only downside for the entire family is the amount of distractions caused by working and studying from home. There is always something that can break our focus and concentration and that is the main downside from the situation.

It was late in April however that the virus made a major impact on our family. My father's uncle recently moved into an apartment in the area we live in. My father went to help him move in along with his cousin. At the time, his cousin was infected with COVID-19 but no one knew because he had no symptoms. About a week later it was revealed that my father's cousin and uncle both had COVID-19. The first thing my father did was to immediately get tested and self-quarantine. No one in my household got close to him and we were all deeply worried. We refrained from any physical contact with my father until his tests got back and fortunately he tested negative. His cousin has recovered and his uncle is currently recovering in the hospital.

¹ Long, Heather. "Jobless Rate Soared to 14.7% in April as U.S. Shed 20.5 Million Jobs amid Coronavirus Pandemic." The Washington Post. WP Company, May 8, 2020.

Others have not been as lucky as I have. That same week my father got tested, my sister's co-worker had her father pass away from COVID-19 in New York and they did not even let her see her father as he was dying or attend the funeral. She had to watch from her car as her father was buried. I could only imagine how tough it had to be for her not being able to say goodbye to him one last time. What did people do to deserve such a fate? The world can be cruel at times and we had all been living fairly comfortable lives until the pandemic began. This can be a major shock for some people, especially for those who have not experienced a loss of a loved one.

It is very important to put the current crisis in a historical context. This is not the first time a devastating plague has ravaged the world. One of the books I was reading during spring break was *Plague: A Short Introduction* published by Oxford University Press. After completing the book, I realized just how devastating previous plagues especially the bubonic plague were. COVID-19 is mainly a virus that targets the respiratory system. The bubonic plague was transferred by fleas to humans and the symptoms were much worse than COVID-19. One's skin would decompose, lymph nodes would form all around the body, and the person infected would vomit out blood. We should be thankful that COVID-19 is not as painful to those it infects as previous plagues such as the Black Death were. It is interesting to identify some of the parallels between Spain, a region which I am currently studying for the class which I am writing this paper for, experiencing the Black Death in the 14th century and the world facing COVID-19 today. Much of the economy came to a full stop in the Iberian kingdoms as it has today in many countries with the stock market in decline and predictions by several state organizations of the future economic contractions countries are going to face. Alfonso XI even died from the plague which brings back images of major politicians around the world such as prime minister Boris

Johnson getting infected by COVID-19 but fortunately surviving.² The coronavirus, like the Black Death, does not discriminate in who it targets.³ In addition, we should be grateful in that there are no cities or towns being completely wiped out by the virus as was the case with many Castilian towns during the time of the Black Death.⁴ Hopefully this current pandemic does not continue for centuries and kill large swaths of the population as the Black Death did in Europe.⁵ There is a similarity however when one looks at the sources or lack thereof from 1350 to 1360 implying that life had come to a complete halt.⁶ This seems to be the case in most parts of the world today. Images from some Chinese cities seem as if they were abandoned long ago with absolutely no one out on the street due to very strict stay-at-home orders put in place by the Chinese government. Another similarity is the drop in material transactions in northern Castile at the time and the economic stagnation the world is currently facing.⁷ The point being made here is that the COVID-19 pandemic and its effects are not new to the world and mankind has experienced it before on a much more devastating scale. We should take some comfort in that humanity prevailed through trials similar to the ones that we face today. Granted the virus is spread much more quickly due to globalization and the interconnectedness of the world at large, but our health care systems are much more advanced than they were in the past. The rate of death is also much lower than the Black Death which was much more deadly to people of all ages.

At the time the Black Death struck the Iberian peninsula, violence against Jews and Muslims increased since they were made out to be the scapegoats by the Christian community.⁸

² Ruiz, Teofilo F. *Spanish Society 1348-1700*. (Taylor & Francis, 2017), 18.

³ Ruiz SS, 188.

⁴ Ruiz, Teofilo F. *Spain's Centuries of Crisis: 1300-1474* (John Wiley, 2011), 28.

⁵ Ruiz SCC, 43.

⁶ Ruiz SCC, 45.

⁷ Ruiz SCC, 46.

⁸ Ruiz SS, 19.

In America, with the labeling of COVID-19 by President Trump and others as a Chinese virus, there has been a rise in racism against Asian Americans. Although they are not being outright killed, the same xenophobic attitudes held by Spanish Christians are prevalent amongst some Americans.⁹ As for the future of the United States and the world, I hold a pessimistic view. Similar to the opinions voiced by one of my favorite contemporary authors, Michel Houellebecq, I believe things will only get worse.¹⁰ The current estimates of a vaccine are projected to be released next year the earliest. This leads me to believe that the upcoming fall quarter at UCLA will also be conducted online along with winter. In addition, researchers from Harvard University recently stated that social distancing measures might have to be in place until the year of 2022.¹¹ The only reason we are seeing a drop in the amount of cases is because of social distancing and stay-at-home orders. If lockdown is lifted as the protestors were demanding then I predict there will be a great spike in cases. In terms of the economy, I think the amount of unemployed Americans will slowly increase and more stimulus packages will be sent out to those in need. The economy of the United States and many other nations will take a great hit by this pandemic since so many people are out of work and many businesses are closing. As many others have already stated, the economic impact will be much larger than the deaths caused by the virus itself. Tough times are ahead for all of us but it is important to keep in mind that humans in the past had to face much worse trials and tribulations yet they overcame them and came out stronger on the other side. We are not dying of hunger or engaged in endemic warfare

⁹ Loffman, Matt. "Asian Americans Describe 'Gut Punch' of Racist Attacks during Coronavirus Pandemic." PBS. Public Broadcasting Service, April 7, 2020.

¹⁰ France 24. "World Will Be Same but Worse after 'Banal' Virus, Says Houellebecq." France 24. France 24, May 4, 2020.

¹¹ Kissler, Stephen M., Christine Tedijanto, Edward Goldstein, Yonatan H. Grad, and Marc Lipsitch. "Projecting the Transmission Dynamics of SARS-CoV-2 through the Postpandemic Period." Science. American Association for the Advancement of Science, April 14, 2020.

like the Iberian kingdoms were in the 14th century.¹² Mankind is in a much better situation overall today than it ever has been in the past. It is important to realize that we will prevail no matter how worse it gets.

¹² Ruiz SCC, 44.