

Patrick Saunders

Professor Ruiz, TA Rebeca Martinez

History 129A

18 May 2020

Fourth Option

These are unprecedented times. It seems like this phrase is on everybody's lips nowadays. When talking to people about the COVID-19 crisis going on, "these are unprecedented times" will almost inevitably come up. Do not even get me started on how this phrase has infected commercials like a disease itself. I bring this up because despite what many seem to be spouting, these are not unprecedented times. Pandemics and deadly diseases are nothing new to humanity as a species; throughout history, civilizations have faced the onslaught of invisible infectious killers time and time again. A more accurate phrase to describe the current crisis is "these are unprecedented times for the modern day." The last worldwide pandemic which has a powerful impact on the world was the Spanish Flu, and that happened over 100 years ago. People have become unfamiliar with tragedy on this scale and they have jumped to the conclusion that this is the apocalypse. COVID-19 has had an enormous impact on societies everywhere and it is unclear how this disease will affect the future, however, this will not be the end of the world. Life will go on. It is interesting to note the similarities of this pandemic to a situation which took place in Spanish history and what we can learn from this comparison. The world has changed because of COVID-19 and it is profound how these changes have affected people on an individual level.

The situation of Spanish history I referred to is not the transferring of diseases from Spanish conquistadors to indigenous American peoples during the late 15th and 16th centuries. Nor is it the effect the Black Death had on Spain during the 14th century. Indeed, the situation in Spain that I find to be similar to COVID-19's effect on the world is not related to diseases or pandemics, but the period of chaos in Spain before the rise of the Catholic Monarchs. Before Isabella and Ferdinand took control over most of Spain in the late 1400's, people were not dying from infectious diseases or going into an uproar because they were supposed to wear masks. However, this was a time with major political instability, distrust in leaders, economic failure, and the rising tension of total social collapse. All around the world today, governments are unable to function properly because COVID-19 has caused leaders and representatives to disagree on how to combat the problem. Certain countries have had the political system completely broken down and rigged, allowing the wealthy to prey on the poor with no restraint. This is similar to the political instability in Spain with several different kingdoms feuding for power, or how the crown of Castille became weaker while the nobility became stronger. Both in the modern day and 15th century Spain, the common people do not have faith that their leaders will help us through the chaos. In Spain, many lost trust in King Henry IV because he bankrupted the crown and was generally inept in leading the kingdom of Castille. The economy has not been like it is today since the Great Depression, and the near future does not look too bright. However, this was a similar situation in Castille under Henry IV, when nobles did not pay taxes, mints made currency without regulation, and inflation was extreme. Compared to what is going on in the modern day, the Spanish social collapse seems mild. This is not to downplay the dissatisfaction of the lower classes during that time period or the call for restructuring, but it goes

to show the scale of the riots and displays of violence COVID-19 has brought out today. The chaos of 15th century Spain was immense, but there was a light at the end of the tunnel. Isabella and Ferdinand brought peace and unity to Spain, and raised its glory to heights never before seen. Perhaps this is what the modern day needs, leaders with the will and fortitude of the Catholic Monarchs to bring the world back on track.

To give a more personal account of how COVID-19 is affecting ordinary people, I will describe how the disease has impacted my family members and I will reflect on how that relates to the worldwide impacts. My grandmother is immunocompromised, meaning COVID-19 could be lethal if she becomes infected. She lives by herself in a small town in Illinois far away from the rest of the family. She has been doing the best she can while under self-quarantine, though she does say the boredom is growing unbearable. The worst hurt she has suffered from this tragedy is the cancellation of church services which has dramatically changed her lifestyle. Typically she goes to church every day, and in her entire life church services have never been cancelled before. However bleak the boredom and lack of mass may seem, it is still a wonderful thing that she has remained healthy during this troubling time. My oldest brother and his wife live in Dublin, Ireland and their experience with the pandemic has been interesting. I spoke to them in March and they thought COVID-19 was a hoax and that people were overreacting. They were in the United States for a wedding and when they went back to Ireland they were placed under mandatory house quarantine for two weeks. By the time the two weeks had ended, the rest of Ireland was put into a state of quarantine as well and my brother was begrudgingly forced to admit that the COVID-19 threat was real. The wedding that he and his wife were in the states for was my other brother's wedding. Shortly before the country was advised to start social

distancing and self-quarantining, my brother and his now wife tied the knot. Luckily the newly-weds have been very fortunate when it comes to jobs. My sister-in-law does not work from home, but must wear a mask to the office and try to stay six feet away from her coworkers. My brother works as a doughnut salesman and although the business has turned to drive-through only, he claims that the doughnut business has been booming. He says the line of cars will stretch down the road for several blocks and recently they had to hire security guards to keep order. Apparently there were incidents of road rage and people cutting in line for doughnuts. I think the reason the demand for them is so high is because people are stressed and unsure and doughnuts serve as a comfort food to help them through these times. My parents too have been very fortunate when it comes to jobs. People around the world have lost their jobs and their futures are uncertain and I deeply sympathize with them. My parents are truly lucky to be in the positions they are. My dad works as a building engineer and he is deemed an essential worker so his work has continued this entire time only with limited hours. My mom is a nurse and the demand for nurses has skyrocketed. She has left her normal hospital and instead taken up temporary nursing contracts with hospitals across the country. She has worked at Palo Alto, Houston, and New York City so far, and luckily she has not contracted COVID-19. All of my family should be thankful for what they have and that they are all healthy. There are many unfortunate scenarios that my family could be facing now, and my heart goes out to those who have suffered far worse.

COVID-19 has affected myself in several ways. The biggest impact on me was UCLA's change to online classes for Spring Quarter. At first, I thought this would make the classes easier and more engaging. Oh, how wrong I was. Attempting to stay motivated and focused during

class is a struggle on its own; without seeing the instructor in person, it is difficult to feel truly immersed with the material. The real challenge is balancing weekly class assignments and all the distractions that come with doing work from home. Days before classes were cancelled, I was promoted at my UCLA job, however I was unable to work a single shift in the new position because of COVID-19. Now I work as an online copy-editor, and trying to schedule this job around UCLA's online classes is extremely difficult. The worst pain brought about by COVID-19 was that recently before classes got cancelled, a friend and I were planning on going on our first date. Of course, this has been postponed indefinitely and this is just another thing that COVID-19 has taken away. I am melodramatic when it comes to the effects COVID-19 has had on me because in reality, I am quite lucky. Everything that has happened to me are minor inconveniences and I know it could be far worse. I am healthy and I am doing my best to stay safe. However, there is a large group of people who are doing their best to make nobody safe.

It seems that the greatest effect COVID-19 has had upon my community is to turn most of them into whining sociopaths who do not understand how viruses work. My town made it onto several news stations because of giant rallies protesting the wearing of masks and the idea of self-quarantining. They compared social distancing to facism and (without seeing the irony) some members of the protest disgustingly flew Nazi flags. All of this was done because the governor of California temporarily closed the beaches down. This kind of a reaction to closing down beaches is worse than childish, it is cruel. I was shocked that not only was this happening in America, but that this was happening two blocks away from me. I was outraged at the things they said and did, and was even more outraged with how many people were part of the protest. Hundreds of people, some waving guns in the air, and many acting as if it was all some sort of

game. None of them wore masks and I am sure COVID-19 spread through all of them. This type of behavior is part of a larger problem. I do not think this kind of action would have happened if political leaders did not condone it. With the encouragement of powerful politicians, these protestors believe that they are in the right and refuse to listen to factual information. It is because of the way in which the president reacted to COVID-19 that the United States has lost much credibility and it is the reason why people are dying all across the country. Something needs to be changed as soon as possible.

It may seem I do not have much hope in what the future holds, but really I feel the opposite. I believe the world will learn through the tragedy of COVID-19 and in time everybody will come to their senses. Thirty years from now people will look back at this time period and see how everybody went a little crazy for a short while. Despite the loss COVID-19 has brought, I do think it will serve as a stepping stone that will advance human progress in several ways. I hope medical practice evolves, political failures are fixed, and that humanity as a whole grows closer together because of COVID-19.