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Midterm #2

Option 4:

Ever since December of 2019, the novel Coronavirus (SARS-Cov-2) has ravaged the world. As of this writing (May 18th, 2020), 4.8 million people have been infected, with 316,000 succumbing to their illness. It is no exaggeration to say that the world will never again be the same. Humanity is at a crossroad with this virus. Will this virus be the high water mark of our global civilization? Or will this be yet another obstacle to overcome, a triumph over a difficulty to be heralded throughout history? What will be the path that humanity takes? In an attempt to answer this question, I will first discuss my personal experiences with the Covid-19 crisis. Afterwards, I will attempt to historicize the Covid-19 outbreak by comparing it to similar crises in Spanish history. Finally, I speculate on how the Coronavirus will affect our lives in a post-Corona world.

There are two ways that Coronavirus has primarily affected me. I am quite lucky in that no one I know personally has been infected with Coronavirus, and I am eternally grateful for this. Economically, my family has escaped major harm that many other American families have experienced. Yet, there are still harms that Coronavirus has done to me that I will address here. Firstly, and this is one that I believe is common to many people throughout the world, my loneliness and mental health have been hard hit. Covid-19 has played a large role in my individual psyche, doing harm to my mental health. Being stuck in the same place with the same people, being deprived of any and all social interaction is enough to drive anyone mad. I am fortunate to have

great friends and family, and a vibrant and active church community to lean on, but even this seems like a temporary reprieve. I expected this time to be one where I could meet with friends and family, to have conversations over dinner and talk late into the night with those I love. It is a great irony, that in order to protect those I love from being afflicted with a devastating illness, I must be content to be apart from them. Yet, it makes me wonder how much more my mental health can take. While this may seem like a mild inconvenience, the next way Covid-19 has affected me is anything but. . As a person of Asian heritage, the Coronavirus affects me in a way that is fundamentally different from the vast majority of Americans. Ever since President Donald Trump called the virus “China Virus”, the mood in America soured. In a time where America strongly needed to become a united front in this war against the virus, it seemed that a second war had begun. This time the enemy were people who looked like me and my family. Living in Koreatown, I have been rather sheltered from the worst of the racist attacks, seeing as most of the people around me are Korean. However, it has not stopped other Asians from being victims of harassment. Earlier this year, in the suburb of La Crescenta (a location that has a substantial Asian population of nearly 28%)¹ there was a video that surfaced of a white man verbally accosting an Asian couple that was taking a walk with their child. He espoused the classic racist mantra of “go back to your country”, but if the only place an individual has ever called home is America where are they to go? This is just one of countless, heartbreaking incidents throughout America of racist attacks on innocent Asian-Americans. From a 39 year old woman in Brooklyn getting second degree burns from an acid attack, to a family of

¹ “La Crescenta-Montrose, California Population 2020,” La Crescenta-Montrose, California Population 2020 (Demographics, Maps, Graphs), accessed May 19, 2020, <https://worldpopulationreview.com/us-cities/la-crescenta-montrose-ca-population/>

three being stabbed because someone believed that they were Chinese intentionally spreading Covid-19, this is enough to bring tears to anyone's eyes.

This experience as being a member of a marginalized group is nothing new. Take for instance, the example of the native subjects of the Crown of Castile and the Jews of Castile. The native subjects and the Jews of Castile share a commonality. This commonality is something that resonates even to this day and it is that of being considered "other". The native subjects in the New World within the Spanish Empire were subject to terrible living conditions and social discrimination. While they themselves were afflicted with smallpox² (similar to our situation with coronavirus in that they had no immunity to the disease whatsoever to the disease), they were not spared the heavy handed prejudice that the Castilians harbored towards them. Professor Ruiz tells us of how the indigenous population "suffered from marginalization and oppression"³ the extent to which varied depending on individual social status, but nonetheless was quite prevalent. Additionally, the Jewish population of Castile parallels the experiences of the marginalized even in the modern era. Professor Ruiz tells us that the Jews were set apart and branded as an "other" in society. "Jews were set apart from Christians and branded with all-encompassing pejorative representations".⁴ He goes on to explicitly compare their experiences with the experiences of people throughout history, even to this day. "Western society has continually cast such aspersions to impugn minority groups or individuals."⁵ Indeed, this is seen even to this day. Asian Americans are subject to "all-encompassing pejorative representations" such as "being sneaky, corrupt, or stealing

² Ruiz, Week Two - Lecture Two

³ Ruiz, Teofilo F. Spanish Society, 13481700 (p. 106). Taylor and Francis. Kindle Edition.

⁴Ruiz Ibid 108

⁵ Ibid 109

jobs”.⁶ Comedian John Cho tells us in his opinion piece “Coronavirus reminds Asian Americans like me that our belonging is conditional” that the problem arises in “times of national stress” when these darker stereotypes float to the surface. He tells the story of Vincent Chin, an autoworker in Detroit who was of Chinese ancestry, who was beaten to death. He was blamed for the “Japanese takeover” of the auto industry.”⁷ We can see the many parallels of oppression that arise from history. The experiences of Asian-Americans during this time are not unique to us, but shared amongst many throughout time.

When the Covid-19 virus first reached American shores few of us expected the disease to fester and spread the way that it did. By the time this crisis reaches its conclusion, millions will have been infected and tens of thousands will have died. But one way or another, the coronavirus pandemic will one day become a thing of the past. We will then be left with the pieces that the legacy of corona has left behind. What will this legacy be? When the last remnants of Covid-19 have been wiped away, just how different will the world be? Politically, there might be an increase in government surveillance and a decrease in privacy. We have seen similar situations in recent American history. With the attacks on the World Trade Center on September 11th, 2001, the United States government increased security on its citizens through the Patriot Act in the name of “national security”. Even now we see governments around the world such as South Korea (which should be noted as a government that has widely been heralded as an exemplary model of successful

⁶John Cho, “John Cho: Coronavirus Reminds Asian Americans Belonging Is Conditional,” Los Angeles Times (Los Angeles Times, April 22, 2020), <https://www.latimes.com/opinion/story/2020-04-22/asian-american-discrimination-john-cho-coronavirus>

⁷Ibid

Coronavirus mitigation) curbing civil liberties. After an outbreak of MERS (Middle East Respiratory Syndrome, a kind of coronavirus) in 2015, South Korea “changed the law allowing the government to collect a patient’s data and security footage during an outbreak”.⁸ Of course, it is not certain that America will move in this direction, but there is precedent (i.e. the aforementioned Patriot Act after 9/11) for the curbing of civil liberties. Additionally, it seems difficult to imagine that the hatred and racist rhetoric that emerged as a result of Coronavirus will disappear. As the son of two Korean immigrants who were in Los Angeles during the LA Riots of 1992, I have heard many stories of how racial tensions can erupt and devastate an entire community. Dozens of Korean owned businesses were burned to the ground, an African-American girl was shot by a Korean store owner, and the scars of the racial conflict have still not healed, nearly 30 years later. If the hurts of that conflict contained within the city of Los Angeles have not healed, it is probable that the racial hurts will persist even after the virus has met its end.

The world will be forever changed by the coronavirus. Imagining the specifics of this change is mere conjecture at this point. The post-Covid age is one that is still murky as of this moment. Perhaps science and reason will prevail over spiteful rhetoric. Perhaps the world will sink further and further into depravity. However, I’d like not to end this bleak discussion on another bitter note. I’d like to share something that has brought me comfort during this time as a Christian. Christianity is a religion that fundamentally seeks to spread a message of love. It may be hard to do so, especially in the face of this frightening time. Not only is there a chance of getting physically ill due to the virus, but there are also those who are sick in heart, afflicted with the illness of hate. Yet,

⁸The Big Lesson from South Korea's Coronavirus Response, Youtube (Vox, 2020),

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BE-cA4UK07c>

now is not a time to shirk. Now is not a time to be passive. As of this moment, we may not be able to change our circumstances. We may not be able to cure Coronavirus ourselves. But we can change ourselves. As it is written in 1 John 4:18, “perfect love drives out all fear”. The phrase “hate is a virus” is currently circulating through the internet. If hate is a virus, let love be its vaccine.

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