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10/1/21

### Trivial Twenties

The roaring twenties is a time remembered as a period of economic prosperity and excess in Western society. There was dancing, alcohol, and the birth of jazz. Fast forward ten decades later it is the year 2020 and not even two months into the new era the world is preparing for a year and a half long lockdown due to a global pandemic. Toilet paper are out of stock globally, there is a face mask mandate, people are standing six feet apart from one another, and we are washing and sanitizing our hands religiously. On top of that there was significant political unrest. If the transition from teenager to young adult was not confusing enough, doing it during a major historical event can definitely bring up some challenges. When I turned twenty years old in 2020, I found myself at home doing zoom classes and the biggest social event of my week were my trips to the grocery store because I was afraid of getting my family members sick. The pause that society collectively experienced gave us time to reflective on where we were and where we want to go.

It is no secret that America has a mental health problem. An article published by University Business in 2019 states "Meanwhile, the percentage of students with previous diagnoses or treatments for depression increased from approximately 9% in 2009 to more than 20% in 2019." Many of my peers deal with anxiety and depression on top of managing their schoolwork and it seems that college officials are not taking this issue seriously. We are at the

age where many of the illusions, that were created by the adults in our lives, are falling apart and we see the world for how it really is. I am a first generation American and mental health issues are not taken seriously in immigrant families. There is an added pressure of being the first person to attend college from my family and I feel I don't have any room to make mistakes. This generation also has social media which can exacerbate the mental health crisis. Social media allows people to put up the highlights of their life, making comparisons inevitable. We are constantly feeling we are not enough. The pandemic challenged how the world has been operating. According to CNBC, "Freshman enrollment in college fell 13.1% in the fall of 2020, compared with a drop of just 1.4% in the fall of 2019, according to the NSCRC." College is a time for most young adults to be able to experiment and find ourselves. It is a crucial time for someone because it sets the foundation of what adult life would be. These are the last few years of being a teenager and before having real responsibilities. Classes being remote and on zoom eliminates a lot of the things that people go to college for. Additionally, many students felt that they would not want to pay full tuition to attend school online.

The shift to life virtually was odd in the beginning but soon became the "new normal". Many of the graduating class of 2019 were considering taking a gap year so that they can go back to school when things became more certain. The pandemic brought to light how there are many paths one can take in this life. The traditional way of doing things does not always mean it is the right thing or that it is meant for everyone. It brought out an innate trait of being human which is survival. We always must adapt and find an alternative way. There are also many positive aspects of social media that people relied on. Social media can connect people from all over the world that would not have been able to meet otherwise. Generation Z has created a world of its own through memes and slangs, that from the outside seem silly but it is a coping

mechanism for a generation that is in a wavering society. It cultivates creativity and many have also made a career for themselves online. Memes are a new language that is used to communicate more serious issues as well. It opens the conversation and allows more people to engage with the dialogue. In the article "Coronavirus Goes Viral: How Online Meme Culture Reflects Our Shared Experience Of A Global Pandemic", Emma Grey Ellis, staff writer at Wired specializing in internet culture and propaganda, feels that dark humor is used to lighten up the mood in a world of crisis because it creates community. In this digital age, I was able to find people online that share similar interests as I do and I'm also able to learn more about things that I like from others around my age. At the end of the day, social media is a very powerful tool that no other previous generation has had before. It is empowering for young people to feel that their voice matters and that they are a part of a larger cause. We should utilize this tool to the best of our advantage because it is only the beginning of it.

All in all, perhaps the pause on life is something that we, as a society, collectively needed. Through the difficulties we were able to figure out the direction we want to continue towards. It was not easy to remain optimistic, but it is important to learn from all the experiences we have in life and take what we can from them. Throughout my college education so far there were many moments where I felt lost and didn't know what I should do next. Upon reflecting I remembered all the things I valued and that made me feel fulfilled. I want to continue pursuing my college degree and get an internship by next summer. Moving forward I want to bring with me a sense of curiosity with everything that I do and be excited about life because it should be valued.

## Works Cited

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