The COVID-19 pandemic and racism

By Francisco Abendano
La Voz Staff Member

As reported by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), ethnic and racial minorities are at a higher risk of contracting COVID-19. CDC data suggests that Hispanics are 2.6 times more likely to contract COVID-19 and 4.7 times more likely to be hospitalized than their White, Non-Hispanic counterparts. Furthermore, African-Americans are 2.8 times more likely to get COVID-19 than White, Non-Hispanics and 4.6 times more likely to be hospitalized. Finally, both groups are more likely to die from the COVID-19 virus as well.

What are the reasons for this public health disparity? Does the COVID-19 virus discriminate? Furthermore, why has President Trump ignored this disparity? If the numbers were reversed and the white population was disproportionately impacted, would Trump be concerned? After all, Trump has implied that white populations are superior to people of color. This might explain his lack of concern.

On September 18, 2020 Trump praised a crowd of his supporters, who were mostly white, for having “good genes”. According to the Business Insider, Trump stated, “You have good genes. You know that, right? You have good genes. A lot of it is about the genes, isn’t it, don’t you believe? The racehorse theory. You think we’re so different? You have good genes in Minnesota”.

Trump’s racist rhetoric undermines the challenges racial minorities face in accessing health services, especially during this pandemic. By alluding to superior genes, Trump fails to recognize the real reasons underserved communities have been disproportionately impacted by the COVID-19 virus. According to the CDC, the major contributing factors to the high rate of infection among people of color are: discrimination, lack of health care access, type of occupation, education gaps, income gaps, and housing.

The number of COVID-19 cases in the U.S. has surpassed 13 million, and there have been over 260,000 deaths in the U.S.

This national health crisis demands a thorough scientific perspective and exemplary leadership. For the welfare of all Americans, let us hope that the Biden administration leads not with pseudoscience and racism but instead with scientific research and a sense of accountability.

As Trump’s presidency approaches its end, Biden must learn from his predecessor’s mistakes. Bold leadership is required.

Mi Mestizaje Corre como Mi Sangre

By Brenda Quezada
La Voz Staff Member

The new Mestiza Consciousness is breaking away from the lie, navigating healing through her flesh, her skin tone, her tongue, her psych for god’s sake.

La Mestiza challenges what it means to live in two different cultures, with her blood a mix of so many at once through the mestizaje of colonization de la India’s body, la Negra’s body... so ending the suffering of a violation to one's temple is her priority.

The new consciousness is fighting within her soul everyday to let out her inner warrior and use the part of her colonizer to code switch, to shield and protect from the intergenerational trauma, to love, to find peace within her soul to decolonize institutions for her people through the battle with her mental health.

This is where her Resilience lies. She is reaching into her soul day by day to rip out her heart because she wears in on her frente, she envisions a world of so many shades, bodies, races, sexualities, genders, reparations for la raza, reparations for her spirit.

She needs a world where people can heal through the tough work of mentally decolonizing each other but it starts with herself, to see the true POWER a BROWN intellect mirrors.

Because everyday she is ripped apart by the forces that don't want her here, the same forces that can drive her to the edge but the powers of her resilient ancestors within her keep her sane they walk with her. The Mestiza wants to end the the suffering of her inner warrior, to protect her people, to protect humanity, because we all we need to heal...

Photo credit: Brenda Quezada
How Virtual Learning is Affecting Minority Communities

By Victoria Razo
La Voz Staff Member

The further we progress into the pandemic the more we see the lasting effects of virtual learning on young students and with no foreseeable future of schools opening up we need to look at the communities being affected and figure out what can be done to help them.

According to a report from Common Sense Media there are 1,528,536 students in the state of California that lack adequate access to the internet and 60% of these students are Black, Latinx, and Native American. There are also 1,063,415 students that do not have proper devices at home for distance learning.

Although many school districts distributed and loaned out laptops to students for virtual learning there were some districts that put policies in place that resulted in difficulties and an imbalance of learning amongst students.

Estella Verdin, a parent from Fresno, CA stated that her children's school district at the start of the pandemic had a "one laptop per household policy" which was upsetting as she has three middle school children that all need to be able to do their work.

The district simply did not have enough computers to give out to every single student and was not able to acquire more until the fall semester.

All of these factors create disparities associated with class, race, and even geography. What use is a laptop to a student that does not have access to proper internet because of the rural area they live in, or even what use is virtual learning to a student whose school district does not have the funding to give proper materials to everyone.

It is incredibly clear how students are currently undergoing an imbalance of education as these tech hurdles are leading to students falling behind their peers.

Rosa Gonzalez, a parent from Madera, CA described it as "incredibly difficult" to keep track of her daughter's schooling due to having to be away for work for nearly 12 hours a day. All Ms Gonzalez has to keep track is the text messages she receives stating which periods her daughter misses and it is always due to not being able to enter class meetings because of internet issues.

Natalie Spievack and Megan Gallagher of the Urban Institute found that 35% of Latinx students do not have a laptop or internet in their household and that students of color face a multitude of distance learning challenges such as crowded households or being linguistically isolated. Disparities in education only increase as more of these challenges are seen in each home.

Language barriers were hard enough for students but now how is an ESOL (English to Speakers of Other Languages) student supposed to navigate the classroom and what are school districts actively doing to help their students of color?

Spokesperson Sonja Dosti of Central Unified School District said to Monica Velez of The Fresno Bee that the school district provided more than 13,000 chromebooks and 3,320 hotspots to students.

Providing basic materials is not enough, school districts need to be working on improving their ability to connect with students and their families and figuring out what resources and programs they need to help them.

The pandemic has already made it hard for Latinx families just from economic challenges.

The last thing students need is to be worried about being prevented from the education they deserve and yet we are continuing to see a digital divide in a time of virtual learning.

School districts cannot seem to figure out how to give everyone the proper tools and support they need to adequately participate in distance learning but also how can they if they do not have proper funding. Along with students being affected, teachers have been hurt by distance learning as well.

There are up to 400,000 teachers that lack proper access to the internet and therefore cannot teach. Some teachers have had to go to their old classrooms in order to have the proper access needed to continue teaching. Teachers have also had to come up with ways to work around tech hurdles and give assignments that require little internet access in an attempt to make the content and information more inclusive.

These are large issues and there is only so much that school districts, teachers, and the individual can do to try and help with remote learning, but there is a lack of funding in rural and minority communities.

There needs to be more invested into the education system to ensure that students do not have to face these imbalances in their learning and to make sure not a single person falls behind because of them.
Farmworkers Have Been Disproportionately Affected by Disastrous COVID-19 Response

By Zacarias Gonzalez III
La Voz Staff Member

California’s farmworkers were deemed “essential” by the Trump administration, but the way in which the federal government has handled the pandemic thus far has shown a blatant disregard for human life and has treated farmworkers as expendable labor. The medical consequences of this administration’s failures will likely be felt for years to come.

The Bob Woodward tapes revealed that Trump had known of the virus’s lethality since January, but skirted his duty as president. Even without taking into consideration Trump’s buffoonery prior to 2020, this administration’s response to both COVID-19 and California’s wildfires reveal a clear pattern of incompetence and a wanton disregard for the public’s health and safety.

In July, it was revealed that Jared Kushner—Trump’s son-in-law and unqualified head of the pandemic response team—intentionally withheld COVID-testing aid to Democratic-run states. This coincides with Trump’s partisan attack that the worst cases of COVID-19 were all in states “run by Democrats,” even though the data compiled by Johns Hopkins University on per-capita cases and deaths contradicts this baseless accusation.

The Trump administration’s confusing, contradictory, and unscientific response to COVID-19 has created an environment where the health and safety of the public has taken a back seat during the president’s bid for re-election and while he incessantly throws his post-election tantrum. While this puts all Americans at risk, one of the most devastating impacts has been felt by California’s farmworkers.

Overwhelmingly indigenous and Latina/o/x—and whose work is usually taken for granted—California’s farmworkers have been at a heightened risk of contracting COVID-19. This risk was only exacerbated during the summer heat and in the midst of California’s wildfires. Given the respiratory nature of the virus, smoke-related illness has been more dangerous to farmworkers than ever.

This September, Trump met with California Gov. Gavin Newsom to discuss the state’s wildfire situation. In an attempt to convey the seriousness of the environmental threat, California Secretary for Natural Resources, Wade Crowfoot, warned that it was imperative to take climate change seriously.

Trump idiotically responded, “it’ll start getting cooler, you just watch,” adding with a smirk that he did not believe even scientists understood the climate crisis, essentially denying the existence of climate change. Trump instead suggested—in direct opposition to the scientific consensus—that “forest management” should be the state’s primary focus.

In the midst of these fires, farmworkers have been left to work in conditions that are significantly more hazardous than usual, with either inadequate or no personal protective equipment. Some growers have even chased off volunteers that were trying to pass out N95 masks to farmworkers.

It is also important to note that even if the common N95 mask was readily available, anything short of a replaceable cartridge respirator would still be inadequate to protect from the prolonged smoke exposure that field workers endured.

According to the July 2020 findings by the California Institute for Rural Studies, farmworkers were up to three times more likely to contract COVID over those not working in agriculture. These findings were published before California’s historic wildfire season blanketed the entire West Coast in thick smoke and did not account for the compounding effects of the hazardous air quality.

A report published December 2, 2020 by researchers at UC, Berkeley revealed that between mid-July and the end of November COVID infections among farmworkers in Monterey County continue to be three times higher than the national average. They go on to state that those “who tested PCR positive were more likely to speak indigenous languages.” This gross failure to mitigate infection rates only reflects the racist historical patterns of viewing non-white communities as disposable and exploitable.

The astounding incompetence and willful ignorance of this administration apparently knows no bounds, and, sadly, it is the country’s most vulnerable that suffer the greatest consequences. These next several months will reveal whether the incoming Biden administration will be any different.
Nearly 50% of the student population is Latino or Hispanic, but only 14.2% of Fresno State’s faculty are Latino or Hispanic.

Latinx and Chicano professors work endlessly to ensure their students and community members have equal opportunities to attend and succeed in college.

Dr. Cristina Herrera, Chicano and Latin American Studies (CLAS) chair, is one of the handful of Chicana faculty members on campus.

“I may be the first Chicana professor my students meet,” Dr. Herrera says. “That’s a problem. Faculty should reflect the student body in more accurate ways.”

Despite the disproportionate ratio, Dr. Herrera emphasizes her duty to teach students critical skills to combat systematic structures of power through forms of academia they’ve been deprived of within the K-12 school system.

Professor Brenda Venezia, former Fresno State English and CLAS lecturer, empowers her students in higher education as a Dream Success Center writing advisor and occasionally collaborates with the Cross Cultural and Gender Center on developing programs such as Grad School 101 for Latinx Students.

Campus events like these helped build her network of allies and drive her passion towards organizing.

“I’ve learned to approach my roles in all spaces with more intention,” Venezia says. “I can harness the skills, privileges, and passions I have into work that matters.”

In light of their great work, the intersectional feminist Latinx scholars didn’t become radical women overnight.

Dr. Larissa Mercado-López, Women’s Studies associate professor and founder of the Latinxs in Academia Lecture Series, discovered her activist spirit while growing up in southern Texas.

Mercado-López suffered from internalizing Mexican inferiority in the face of colonization but found her way out through Chicana and feminist studies, compelling her to take action.

“Activism can be expressed in many ways,” Dr. Mercado-López says. “I find opportunities to resist oppression and raise consciousness in everything from my scholarship to my work with students to my parenting.”

Venezia agrees with Dr. Mercado-López as she constantly practices her values by asking questions, staying critical, addressing privileges, and understanding their students through compassion and empathy.

“In 2004, I was a first-generation college student with the habit of blending in to get along, but that kind of blending in began to feel cheap and useless—especially in our current political climate,” Venezia says. “Don’t let being ‘in progress’ stop you from getting started; you’re worth the investment your mentors and families and communities put into you.”

Dealing with cultural barriers, Venezia says she reached a critical consciousness very late in her life and felt endless guilt because of it.

Despite her internal battles, Venezia combatted these feelings by attending community and campus events and networking with community activists who had similar goals and values of feminism, including UndocuAlly trainings and the LGBTQ+ SafeZone events on campus.

This is a familiar experience to Herrera who says she never heard the word “feminist” growing up and did not learn the term until college.

“I started to become aware of how my sister and I were subjected to different standards in a way my brothers were not,” Herrera said. “But I had examples of strength and resilience all around me: my mother and grandmother have always been my models of feminism even if they didn’t necessarily use those terms for themselves.”

In support of intersectionality, Herrera sees feminism as an act of love to disrupt and undo systems of oppression rooted in hate against women, LGBTQ+ genetics, and the larger Mexican and Chicana community.

As one of the few Chicana faculty members on campus, Herrera, Mercado-López, and Venezia share many views and experiences in the efforts to uplift their students and communities.

“I hope my contributions like leading a team to create a children’s clothing closet and organizing a student parent resource fair are meaningful to students because they seek to bring visibility and support to traditionally undercounted and underserved student populations: student parents,” Mercado-López says. “This is an attempt to change the fabric of the academy by growing the number of women of color with PhDs.”

In the face of adversity, these Chicana and Latinx faculty members continuously apply values of equity, empathy, justice, and love at the forefront of their consciousness through practicing intersectional feminism for the greater good of their students, families, and communities.
Voter Suppression in US Presidential Election

By Victoria Monsivaiz
La Voz Staff Member

Early voter participation in this year’s 2020 presidential election surpassed the voting numbers from the 2016 election, but the minority voting group, of which includes the Latinx community, continues to grapple with voter suppression in the U.S.

Voter suppression is not an unfamiliar practice in our nation, it’s enforced by state legislatures through laws and restrictions claiming to prevent voter fraud and ensure the integrity of elections. According to the ACLU (American Civil Liberties Union) the goal of voter suppression efforts such as these is “to manipulate political outcomes, and the result is a severely compromised democracy that doesn’t reflect the will of the people.”

Some of these suppression efforts include: voter ID laws, voter registration restrictions, voter purges, felony disenfranchisement, and gerrymandering. All of which disproportionately affect young people, the elderly, people of color and people with disabilities.

According to Pew Research Center, 32 million Latinxs will be eligible to vote in the 2020 presidential election. Those are an additional 4.7 million eligible Latinx voters to the 27.3 million eligible Latinx voters from the 2016 elections. Thus, making Latinx the nation’s largest eligible minority voter group for the first time in a general election.

This puts into perspective how many eligible Latinx voters were at risk of voter suppression and being denied their right to vote.

With COVID-19 still at large and disproportionately affecting poor minority communities, access to mail ballots this election was more important than ever. Voting by mail helped to reduce the spread of the virus, and, as a result, protected the health and well-being of voters and those around them by mitigating potential spread.

According to NPR reporters Barbara Sprunt and Alana Wise prior to the election, Trump was not supporting access to mail ballots because he claimed that voting by mail would lead to a voting fraud scandal and wanted to ensure the integrity of the 2020 presidential election. However, it is evident that his repeated refusal to provide additional funding to the U.S. Postal Service was not to protect the integrity of the election, but instead was out of fear of losing the election. His refusal was not only an act of voter suppression but was potentially life threatening to people who rely on the Postal Service to receive prescription drugs, among other essential documents and items.

In addition, due to the disruptions caused by COVID-19, 46% of all ballots cast were by mail. Thus, mail-in ballots were a crucial means for disadvantaged minority communities, who continue to be disproportionately affected by this pandemic, to safely cast their ballots. Because for every vote counted, was another voice heard.

The Latinx vote was imperative to enact change towards dismantling systemic racism, ending White supremacy, and protecting democracy in this 2020 presidential election. The U.S. Census Bureau projects that Latinx will make up 29% of the U.S. population by 2060, for an estimation of about 119 million Latinx.

This emphasizes the enormous impact Latinx will have on forthcoming elections and why it is crucial we fight against voter suppression, so that every individual has an opportunity to be heard and take part in enacting change.