

SYSTEMIC INEQUALITIES DURING COVID-19: A RESULT OF AMERICAN NEOLIBERAL SOCIETY GONE RIGHT

Mallika Vijayakumar

In his article *Disaster, Crisis, Revolution*, Eric Cazdyn notes the paradox of crises: they arise “when things go right, not when they go wrong” (649). Confronting a crisis’ corollaries is a ubiquitous struggle, but perhaps a more unsettling challenge according to Cazdyn, is recognizing our systems are built to foster crises, which strengthen and reproduce our systems’ ideologies (649). Although some have deemed the COVID-19 pandemic an “equalizer” (North), as stated in Anna North’s article “Every aspect of the coronavirus pandemic exposes America’s devastating inequalities,” it is conspicuous the virus is exposing and exacerbating the inequalities present in American neoliberal society. Thus, the racial and class inequalities COVID-19 has elevated are not a result of a system failing, but rather, a system succeeding: American neoliberal society working in the way it was designed. In this way, COVID-19 prompts America to recognize that their current socio-political model is unsustainable if they strive for equality.

Although COVID-19 has brought light to the racial disparities in American healthcare, Cazdyn’s argument helps us understand the American neoliberal healthcare system is structured to suppress marginalized communities, and therefore, COVID-19 strengthens the racist structures already present. Neoliberalism has redesigned healthcare as a commodity rather than a right, leading to decreased access to healthcare amongst Black Americans, whose health disparities are already rooted in the socioeconomic inequalities systemic racism enforces. Predisposed to poverty and underlying health conditions as a result of redlining and other neoliberal policies, Black Americans were destined to be disproportionately affected by COVID-19. North notes this impact on Black Americans in Michigan, who accounted for 40 percent of coronavirus deaths in April, despite comprising 14 percent of the population (North). In this way, the racial inequalities seen during COVID-19 are not a result of neoliberalism failing: an analysis of Cazdyn’s argument suggests neoliberalism was designed to suppress the Black American population, which COVID-19 has exposed and exacerbated.

One of the tenets of neoliberalism is that it benefits the wealthy and leaves the remaining population precarious: a class difference COVID-19 has highlighted and perpetuated. North notes COVID-19’s impact on low-wage and frontline workers: some who are losing their jobs, and others who are obligated to go to them. These populations are predominantly women of colour,

augmenting already high poverty rates for the Black community, and heightening their risk of contracting a virus they are already disproportionately affected by. The class gap becomes wider as executives of frontline businesses who thrive in a neoliberal economy further benefit, as the COVID-19 crisis works fluidly to avail the rich in a neoliberal society. While these executives are “probably in their vacation houses” (North), precarious populations continue to lack the financial mobility to relocate to safer locations. In this way, COVID-19 has exacerbated class differences, which is exactly what neoliberal American designed it to do.

COVID-19 is awakening us to America’s inequalities, but it was America’s succeeding neoliberal society that established them. The country has failed the people it purports to protect, but this failure is a result of succeeding neoliberal policies that suppress the masses, and elevate the privileged. COVID-19 serves as a catalyst that reveals the exigency of dismantling neoliberalism, a system in which equality is a facade, for only then can this crisis reshape American society into one where all have equal opportunity.

WORKS CITED

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