Dulce Aceves

End Of Summer Report

I knew from the beginning that I wanted to study the development of COVID-19 within Native American communities, but that all seemed too vague. I also didn’t want to present some sort of news report. As I updated myself on the development of COVID-19 in Native communities, I noticed patterns. The way COVID-19 was affecting them were related to issues of sovereignty, structural violences, genocidal practices, and Native resilience. Every tribe and Indian nation are different in their own unique ways, however, they all find commonalities on these four topics. I began reading about these and approaching the COVID crisis through these lenses. I focused primarily on the Cheyenne River Sioux Tribe for primarily two reasons; a) their sovereignty was being challenged by the state of South Dakota over the tribe’s checkpoints and I was receiving updates on this almost every other day, and b) I had the huge honor of interviewing a member of their tribal government. These two made me feel very engaged and committed to this tribe. I wanted to serve as a platform for their experiences and their truth. This was a goal of mine, but through it, I also recognized my own position of power and privilege.

Previous to FURSCA, I took Dr. Webb’s Global Health class and Dr. Harnish’s Northern Native America class. Being able to apply concepts that I had learned in those two classes in my research was interesting and somewhat surreal because these concepts were Structural Violence, social determinants of health, settler colonialism, white supremacy, environmental racism, among others. I looked back at my notes from those classes, and educated myself further on these concepts, as I saw the impacts of these plays before my eyes through the lens of my research while simultaneously living through a Civil Rights movement. I’ve never felt so privileged and humbled in my life. As I witnessed the horrors of Settler Colonialism on Native peoples, I found myself very anxious as I was fearful for the life and safety of the people in the Cheyenne River Sioux Tribe, and Native people in general, I was able to process this emotional labor that was so new to me through the reflexivity aspect of my research. This is something that I do feel I need more practice on because it requires mindfulness and honesty with the Self.

I wanted to be as holistic as possible. To me that’s part of what makes a good anthropologist. In my opinion, I did not meet this goal. Although I was able to be historically deep, and somewhat geographically broad, I believe I could have been a lot more intersectional in my research and analysis. I was only able to interview three people, all men. Two of them are currently in their twenties and the other was in his forties. Interviewing them was a pleasure and I learned plenty from them, however, the quality of my research was hindered as a result of this lack of diversity. I also wished I would have looked deeper into the environmental and neoliberal aspects of COVID’s impact on Native communities. I realize now that in choosing this topic, I had opened Pandora’s box, and six weeks worth of research was not enough time.

My FURSCA will serve as the backbone for my departamental theses. COVID-19 is still developing throughout this country and through it Native nations. Not only that but in the past couple of weeks, there has been a wave of monuments historical characters that were harmful to native and black communities, a push for brands and sports teams to be accountable for their racist symbolism and propaganda, the shutdown of DAPL, a Supreme Court ruling that most of eastern Oklahoma is Indian territory, Trump’s grotesque appearance at Mt. Rushmore after a demonstration of Native people against his arrival. Pandora’s Box feels more open than ever I am living through it. I can write my thesis on any of these topics, and I plan on doing so. I’ve learned so much, I’ve read so much, and those interviews, despite them being few, were life changing in the most humbling ways. I truly believe that I have started a journey of decolonizing my own way of thinking and being. I no longer see land, media, education, or myself and my family the same way, and although this has been emotionally taxing, it’s also been liberating.

It is also in my plans to further my education after Albion College. I will be an anthropologist and I plan on continuing to serve Native communities whether that is here in the United States, Canada, or somewhere in Latin America. My experience in FURSCA has let me dip my feet in the world that awaits me and I definitely feel more prepared to fully dive in. Especially now that uncertainty feels more real than ever, I am looking forward to living spontaneously, while using my privileges to learn from others, and help be part of social justice.