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Global Cities and COVID–19: Stories of Resilience and Fragility in Los Angeles

Edward J.W. Park*

ABSTRACT

This paper examines the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on global cities. In particular, the paper revisits and updates the academic literature on global cities and focuses on the discussion of the resilience and fragility of global cities in light of an unprecedented global pandemic. By severely testing the strength and durability of the international flow of goods and people, the sweeping scale and intensity of the COVID-19 pandemic directly called into question the thick and complicated network of global cities that serve as modes for international trade and travel. The paper then draws on the impact of COVID-19 on Los Angeles to examine how the pandemic impacted the city's health, economy, and social fabric. The findings suggest that the international connections of Los Angeles became a source of initial vulnerability but eventual strength as the city managed the health and the economic impacts of the pandemic. However, more complicated stories emerge from immigrant and ethnic communities in Los Angeles. For this "Ethnic Los Angeles," COVID-19 came to the United States at a time of intense political polarization and severe economic inequality. This polarization and inequality have contributed to Ethnic Los Angeles bearing an unfair share of the burden from the pandemic.

Keywords: Global Cities, Los Angeles, COVID-19, resilient cities, fragile cities

DEFINING GLOBAL CITIES

Global Cities as a popular academic concept was revitalized in the 1970s. After three decades of postwar peace and the rebuilding of countries in Western Europe and East Asia, a small number of cities emerged as global centers of economic power. These cities monopolized multinational corporate (MNC) headquarters, advanced business services, and attracted innovative industries and highly skilled workforce (McCann & Acs 2011). While

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some scholars defined global cities rather narrowly through economic measures, others looked at more elusive elements to define global cities. These scholars paid much more attention to the historical importance and cultural influence—some of this demonstrated by the growing numbers of international tourists—to define global cities (Clark 2016).

During the 1980s, many urban scholars produced lists of global cities that combined economic and cultural metrics to debate their rankings (A.T. Kearney 2015; Mori Memorial Foundation 2021). While some saw dozens of global cities existent and emerging around the world, others identified precious few that combined the commanding heights of the global economy with the cultural cache of world-class museums and historical districts. Saskia Sassen (1991) authored the definitive book on the topic. In the book, she sought to bring empirical rigor to the debate by focusing more narrowly on economic factors that emphasized corporate headquarters, the size of the financial industry, the composition of workers, and real estate prices. After an exhaustive analysis, she found only three cities worthy of the title: New York, London, and Tokyo.

While Sassen's landmark book elevated the academic debate on global cities, it hardly ended the discussion. Just as the book was published, a growing number of cities around the world were riding the wave of trade and economic liberalization to unprecedented levels of growth and productivity. The European Common Market and the rise of the Four Asian Tigers brought Paris, Madrid, Amsterdam, Hong Kong, Singapore, and Seoul into the ranks of global cities. In addition, the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) added Los Angeles, Toronto, and Mexico City to the list. By 2000, the effects of the economic liberalization in the People's Republic of China and India into the World Trade Organization, the establishment of the European Union, and the growth of global trade in natural resources and agricultural products added dozens of cities ranging from Berlin to Beijing and Dubai to Sydney into the ranks of global cities (Mori Memorial Foundation 2021). With this ever-expanding list, many scholars felt that any effort to define global cities with a set of empirical attributes in such a dynamic environment would become obsolete and capricious (Baisotti 2022).

Since 2010, scholarly consensus has been to define global cities more analytically and inclusively. Under this approach, global cities are cities that view international—as opposed to regional—connections as the primary driver of their urban fortunes. These cities also have credible and overlapping networks beyond their national boundaries in the form of multinational corporations and institutions, busy ports of entry and trade, and substantial flows of international workers and visitors in service of a complex and cosmopolitan economy. In other words, global cities actively seek to bring together international circuits

of capital, labor, innovation, and leisure into a concentrated geographic space to unlock economic values (Florida 2004). For global cities, these global networks must be more than abstract ambitions or simply messages for marketing. They require the implementation of legal, administrative, and institutional frameworks for the productive movements of foreign people, investments, and institutions. This analytical understanding of global cities acknowledges multiple pathways and realities of global cities. Global cities need not be global financial centers or large urban conglomerations. Instead, cities that view international connections as the primary driver of their urban growth engine and possess legal frameworks and regulatory regimes to accommodate foreign talent and investments are global cities (Clark 2016). Framed this way, cities such as San Diego, Vancouver, Nagoya, and Busan that recently built impressive initiatives for international trade and commerce make intriguing cases as global cities (Seo, Cho & Skelton 2015).

GLOBAL CITIES, URBAN RESILIENCE, AND COVID-19

Within the scholarship of global cities, one of the most intensely debated topics has been that of urban resilience: a measure of how well a city can recover after an acute and unexpected crisis. This wide-ranging debate takes on the topic of crisis and resilience to discuss whether global cities are more durable or vulnerable to myriads of economic, political, social, and environmental challenges that face all societies. Implicated in this debate is the idea that global cities, by definition, are dependent on large-scale and predictable international movements of people and goods for maintaining ordinary life (Prior & Roth 2013). Over time, this debate has tended to focus on major events that periodically raise concerns over the fragility of global cities. For instance, the Asian Financial Crisis of 1997 began with the collapse of the Thai baht but quickly spread to much of Southeast Asia and South Korea, raising massive panic over global economic and financial interdependence. The wisdom of financial liberalization, movement of multinational corporations, and export-led economy—all cornerstones of global cities—came under intense political scrutiny (Dittmer 1999). Likewise, the September 11 Attacks in the United States (2001), and subsequent terrorist attacks in Bali (2002), Madrid (2004), and London (2005) among others, focused the concern on the global movement of Islamist terrorism and their ideology and financing, resulting in some state policies to implement migration bans and impose capital controls. The globalization of politically motivated violence joined the international network of criminal organizations and activities to elevate security as a crucial component of urban

resilience (Prior & Roth 2016).

The debate over global cities and urban resilience can be summarized into two camps. On the one hand, Enrico Zio (2007) and Michael Batty (2003) represent advocates for global cities and their thick and overlapping networks that can lead to both efficiency and resilience. Moreover, the authors argue that the economic productivity of global cities attracts varied human talent, generates financial resources, and possesses built facilities such as international airports that can be deployed rapidly and strategically in times of challenge and crisis. Indeed, multiple studies show that global cities fare natural disasters and economic shocks more rapidly and fully than their regional city counterparts, adding to economic inequality between global cities and the rest of the nation. The scholars and experts in this camp foreground the crucial role of managing the risk and vulnerability of global cities, and institutions ranging from the United Nations to policy think tanks have devoted considerable resources to ensure that global cities can actively identify and manage risks and pursue policy measures to ensure that international ties and connections add to their durability and resilience (Clark 2016).

On the other hand, a growing number of critics dismiss the idea that experts can effectively manage the sheer volume and the complexity of risks associated with global cities. Tim Prior and Florian Roth (2013) argue that the same complex set of networks that make global cities prosperous and resilient in ordinary times can often introduce novel risks and vulnerabilities in low-probability and high-impact crises. Additionally, connecting global cities around the world with their interdependencies can create systemic risks with contagion effects that can produce upstream and downstream vulnerabilities. Examples of both abound within the highly interdependent world of manufacturing when natural disasters in Bangkok or political protests in Seoul can halt the computer and auto industries throughout the world.

Writing about the benefits and the perils of global cities, Willem van Vliet (2002: 32) observed they are hubs for “multiple, interdependent flows of greater varieties of goods, services, people, capital, information, and diseases.” For van Vliet, his major concerns revolved around the systematic amplification inequality in globalization. He argued that while investors, highly skilled workers, and political elites monopolized the benefits of globalization, it’s the low-wage workers, the poor, and the politically marginalized who were burdened by globalization’s costs and externalities. For the progressive and cosmopolitan van Vliet, he called for active government intervention to ensure that the benefits of international connections can be shared across this dangerous divide. Indeed, addressing this inequality was the only way to make global cities resilient and durable.

Writing in 2002, van Vliet did not focus much attention on the dangers of global

pandemics. Instead, he wrote about diseases that thrived in the horrible living conditions and the failure of public health authorities in poor neighborhoods in global cities, using typhoid in Nairobi and the landslide at the infamous Payatas dumpsite that killed 232 people in Manila in 2000. However, van Vliet's quote that ended with diseases would become increasingly more prescient as a steady stream of communicable diseases beginning with SARS (Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome) in 2003 to MERS (Middle East Respiratory Syndrome) in 2012 that grabbed worldwide headlines. Of course, van Vliet's warning became a global nightmare in late 2019 and early 2020 as the COVID-19 Crisis gripped the world and forced one country after another to issue travel bans and lockdowns. In most countries, the epicenters of COVID-19 were their largest and most internationally connected cities with tourists and business travelers becoming unwitting vectors of the pandemic. The list of cities that were harshly impacted in the earliest stages of the pandemic included Wuhan, Milan, London, Madrid, Brussels, Seattle, and New York, all important global cities.

LOS ANGELES AS A GLOBAL CITY

Los Angeles provides a compelling case study on the impact of the COVID-19 Crisis on global cities. The seeds of Los Angeles as a global city were planted in the early-1900s with the expansion of the Port of Los Angeles in 1913. Along with the neighboring Port of Long Beach, these two ports ("Los Angeles Port Complex") made Los Angeles one of the largest centers of international trade by the 1940s. The port complex was essential for transforming Los Angeles and Southern California into an important center of agriculture and manufacturing and brought millions of people into the region, making Los Angeles the second most populous metropolitan area in the United States behind New York by 1980. Since then, the rise of Asian economies and the resulting shift in American trade from across the Atlantic to the Pacific have further increased its importance. In 2021, the Los Angeles port complex handled \$380 billion in trade goods, representing a staggering 37 percent and 22 percent of all imports and exports, respectively, to and from the United States (Port of Los Angeles 2022).

Around the world, Los Angeles has been best known for being the global center of the entertainment and aerospace industries: two disparate industries that nevertheless share important political and economic attributes. First, the entertainment and the aerospace industries are deeply implicated in the projection of America's "soft" and "hard" powers around the world. The entertainment industry also attracts out-sized media attention and

international tourism. Second, both industries are magnets for attracting talented workers around the world and produce powerful multiplier effects throughout the region in the way of contractors, ancillary business services, and start-ups. Third, both industries push scientific and technological innovation in core areas of the knowledge-based economy, strengthening the region's existing world-class network of universities, research centers, and cutting-edge companies from biotechnology to telecommunications (Scott 1994; Sandberg 2020; State of California 2022). The recent addition of headquarters and content divisions of companies such as Space X, Rocket Lab, Amazon Studios, Netflix, HBO, and Apple into the region demonstrate the continuing prominence of Los Angeles in these two industries.

More than trade and industry, the city's most powerful claim as a global city is its people. Since the passage of the Immigration Act of 1965 opened the door for the post-World War II wave of immigrants, Los Angeles has become the premier "Gateway City" in the United States. In 2020, immigrants made up 36 percent of the city's population and 43 percent of the workforce. In Los Angeles, the high number of recent immigrants and their children has resulted in ethnic communities scattered throughout the region. These ethnic communities range from large contiguous neighborhoods of tens of thousands of residents to compact retail districts of several blocks. In addition to ethnic communities associated with immigrants from Mexico, Central America, and Asia who make up the majority of the post-1965 immigration into the region, a long list of immigrants from Iran ("Tehrangeles"), Armenia ("Little Armenia"), Russia, Cuba, Ukraine, Israel, and Brazil have built ethnic neighborhoods and commercial enclaves. Collectively, social scientists have used the term "Ethnic Los Angeles" as an inclusive term to refer to this layer of rich ethnic diversity (Waldinger & Bozorgmehr 1996). At the end of 2019, with the vibrant global trade and international travel that broke records at the Los Angeles Port Complex and the Los Angeles International Airport (LAX), Los Angeles seemed to thrive as a global city.

LOS ANGELES AND COVID-19: STORIES OF RESILIENCE AND FRAGILITY

At the time of this writing (June 2022), the COVID-19 Crisis is still ongoing, and the pandemic has been full of surprises. As the first easily transmissible respiratory virus that has become a pandemic in our age of international jet travel, we have no precedence to understand, let alone predict, how this pandemic will unfold. Combined with the politicization of public health measures and mutations of the virus that evade immunity from

vaccines and prior infections, it is impossible to forecast the future direction of the pandemic. However, with the pandemic now surpassing the two-year mark, we now have an opportunity to revisit the issue of global cities and resilience from the vantage point of Los Angeles. While any attempt at a comprehensive understanding of how Los Angeles and other global cities fared in the COVID-19 is premature, three specifically chosen topics shed light on the resilience and fragility of Los Angeles and other similarly situated global cities.

First, as one of the most internationally connected cities, Los Angeles was among the first set of cities to experience the earliest sustained waves of COVID-19 community infection. When the Center for Disease Control (CDC) issued the very first anti-COVID-19 measure, it imposed health screening at JFK International (New York), San Francisco International, and the Los Angeles International airports. By April 2020, Los Angeles joined other American global cities including New York, Boston, Washington D.C., Chicago, Seattle, San Francisco, and Miami as the hot spots of the pandemic. During this early stage, many observed that COVID-19 was largely a pandemic of global cities where international tourists, business travelers, immigrants, and returning ex-pats seeded or served as vectors for transmission (Thebault, Meko & Alcantara 2021). After international travel restrictions were implemented, domestic travel restrictions targeted people entering and leaving hard-hit metropolitan areas such as New York, Boston, and Washington D.C. In April 2020, it looked like the time of reckoning came for global cities as the international movements of people that built them up would also become the cause of their downfall.

However, with the benefit of hindsight, it has now become much clearer that the initial set of hot spots was more than global cities. Along with global cities, winter resorts in the Austrian Alps to the Rocky Mountains of Colorado played a crucial role in spreading the virus in Western Europe and the wealthy enclaves of the United States. More importantly, as the latest research has clearly shown, the hospitalization and the death rates when controlled for population size have corresponded most closely with public health measures and rates of vaccination, not international movements of people. As of June 2022, there is indeed a much more robust statistical correlation between the number of COVID-19 deaths in American states with low rates of vaccination and less restrictive public health measures and no statistically significant correlation with states that have global cities (Jones 2022). California and Los Angeles are aligned with these patterns with lower rates of COVID-19 deaths than the national average. Additionally, as the pandemic generates voluminous data and studies, it has become increasingly clear that global cities are more likely to have a higher number of hospital beds, specialized medical care and equipment, and more robust public health infrastructure that allows them to mount a more effective and resilient response

to pandemics and overcome the initial wave of vulnerability that comes with greater international connectivity (Weber 2021).

Second, as the COVID-19 Crisis began to shut down economies across the world, many economists and policymakers predicted a severe slowdown in globalization. In the United States, faced with the acute shortage of personal protective equipment (PPE) and medical devices, political and corporate leaders called for “on-shoring” of manufacturing and “bringing the supply-chain home.” This call for reversing America’s long dependence on globalization—at least in manufacturing and in goods trade—became one of the very few issues that the Democratic and the Republican Parties could agree on. At the height of COVID-19, scholars and journalists alike wondered whether globalization, as we knew it in 2019, would end with this unprecedented pandemic. In Los Angeles, COVID-19 brought ominous developments to the regional economy. The bans on international travel in early- to mid-March 2020 decimated the lucrative tourism industry that catered to international visitors. The stay-at-home order issued by California on March 19, 2020, brought the entire economy to a stand-still as private and public employers figured out new ways of organizing work. The infamous traffic on the Southern California freeway system disappeared overnight and entertainment venues that define Los Angeles went dark. At these early stages of the pandemic, the global economy braced for declining demand and rising unemployment, and eventual recession, if not global economic depression (Bollyky & Nuzzo 2020; Nathan & Overman 2020).

The economic crisis that was imagined in April and May of 2020 did not materialize as expected. Buoyed by massive government intervention that consisted of public spending and direct financial aid to families and individuals, international goods trade boomed during the pandemic. Despite all the political misgivings on the part of both Donald Trump and Joe Biden administrations, both the trade volume and the trade deficit grew between the United States and the People’s Republic of China in 2020 and 2021. In Los Angeles, one of the biggest COVID-19 economic news was the inability of the Los Angeles Port Complex to offload the long line of container ships. In October 2021, over 80 container ships were anchored in the Pacific waiting over 20 days to unload their cargo. In addition to unprecedented demand for its port complex, Los Angeles designated certain industries and their workers as “essential” and allowed them to work face-to-face and in-person to keep certain sectors of the economy going. In addition to the list of sectors that the State of California designated as essential—health care, emergency services, food and agriculture, and the defense industry (including aerospace) among others were necessary to safeguard health, food supply, and basic goods—the County of Los Angeles added film and TV production

(State of California 2022, Sandberg 2020). While initially met with skepticism and ridicule, film and TV production in Los Angeles grew rapidly as demand for new content in online subscription services such as Netflix and Amazon Studios skyrocketed not just in the United States but around the world.

At the time of this writing, the global economy is struggling with high inflation caused by, in part, the fiscal policies in response to the COVID-19 Crisis and the current Russian invasion of Ukraine. While the entire economic story of COVID-19 is far from over, it is safe to say that global cities have weathered the economic challenges of the COVID-19 Crisis better than expected. In part, global cities have an outsized share of professional and creative jobs that lend themselves to working from home (Florida, Rodriguez & Storper 2022). Additionally, global cities have continuously made heavy investments in the latest communication infrastructure, including high-speed broadband connections and 5G networks, that allowed a much more smooth and effective transition to new modes of work (Budnitz & Tranos 2022). Los Angeles has been well-situated to take advantage of the federal government's stimulus spending that funneled large sums of money into defense spending and allowed the aerospace industry to thrive. Given the nature of the film and TV production industry that requires intimate in-person work, it is a testament to the high skills of health care professionals at work sites to implement protocols that keep the production going with minimal adverse health impact on workers on the set. Returning to the specific topic of economic resilience of global cities, Los Angeles has minimally shown that whatever economic liability that comes with close international ties and connections can be offset by strengths and resources—built and accumulated over decades—of the same.

Third, if the health and the economic impacts of COVID-19 on global cities have shown resilience in the face of daunting odds, the impact of the pandemic on the diverse immigrant and ethnic communities in Los Angeles has been decidedly more challenging and negative. In addition to public health measures and vaccination rates, one of the most powerful predictors of COVID-19 mortality has been poverty and race. While the mortality rate in the Los Angeles County is 294 per 100,000, this single number hides the dramatic inequality in death rates that range from 173 in neighborhoods with a poverty rate of less than 10 percent to a staggering 526 in areas with a poverty rate of greater than 30 percent, a rate higher than any other state in the country. The mortality rate across different racial groups tells a similar story of inequality with Whites, Asians, African Americans, and Latinos suffering death rates at 179, 196, 312, and 455 respectively.¹⁾What is clear from this data

1) County of Los Angeles, Department of Public Health. <http://publichealth.lacounty.gov/media/coronavirus/data/#graph-deathrate> Accessed 16 June 2022.

is that the COVID-19 pandemic was experienced differently within Ethnic Los Angeles which carried the greatest burden of poverty and occupational vulnerability that made them susceptible to illness and death from this pandemic. In addition to suffering from a lack of access to health care, the concentration of Latinos and African Americans in low wage but “essential work” in supermarkets, food and package delivery, food processing, transportation, and nursing homes deprived them of the option to work from home while exposing them to close personal contact with fellow workers and the public. At the workplace, a large percentage of these workers had little access to PPE and other safety measures as companies prioritized more skilled and higher-paid workers. Moreover, many of these workers endured long commutes in crowded public transit as they made their way into affluent parts of Los Angeles from low-income neighborhoods (Lin & Money 2022).

For Asian Americans, their high integration into the health care sector made them more vulnerable to COVID infections. This is especially true for Filipino American health workers who work on the frontline of the pandemic as emergency medical technicians (EMTs), skilled nurses and physicians in emergency room and intensive care units, and nurse practitioners in skilled nursing homes. While Filipino Americans make up only 4 percent of registered nurses, they constitute over 26 percent of nurses in the United States that died of COVID-19 and related complications (National Nurses United 2021). This staggering statistic received a great deal of national and international media attention and raised the awareness of the unique role Filipino Americans and Asian Americans play in the frontline of the American healthcare and elderly care system (Morton 2021). As the home to the largest concentration of Filipino Americans, Los Angeles has been heavily impacted.

As Asian Americans were disproportionately bearing the burden of providing healthcare from the early and uncertain stages of the COVID-19 Crisis, the racial politics surrounding the COVID-19 Crisis took an ominous turn. Even before the pandemic, then-president Donald Trump engaged in increasingly provocative and bellicose rhetoric against the People’s Republic of China over economic and trade issues, eventually imposing multiple rounds of trade tariffs and restrictions on Chinese goods and companies beginning on August 1, 2019. When these policies resulted in China’s retaliation and failed to reduce trade imbalances, Trump escalated his attack on China as one of his central campaign messages. As the COVID-19 Crisis unfolded in the presidential election year of 2020, Trump incessantly tied the pandemic with China, using language and imagery that many found offensive and racist but enthusiastically cheered on by his supporters (Rogers, Jakes & Swanson 2021).

Regardless of Trump’s intentions, ordinary Asian Americans around the nation

increasingly fell victim to incidents of verbal harassment and physical violence. The majority of these incidents took place in public spaces and businesses, and many were filmed on cell phone cameras with perpetrators charging Asian Americans of spreading COVID-19 and invoking other familiar tropes of anti-Asian racist and xenophobic sentiments. While incidents have been taking place all over the country and against all Asian American ethnic and age groups, empirical studies have shown that Asian American women and the elderly are particularly targeted for the most egregious attacks that have resulted in deaths and serious injuries. While previous anti-Asian hate crimes have taken place in communities that have relatively few Asian Americans, this round of anti-Asian hate crimes has also taken place in large Asian American communities in liberal cities such as New York, San Francisco Bay Area, and Los Angeles (Mays, Rubenstein & Ashford 2022).

The organization Stop AAPI Hate reports that from March 19, 2020, to December 31, 2021, a total of 10,905 hate incidents involving Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders. Among those incidents, 1,767 (16 percent) were physical assaults, 6,870 (63 percent) were face-to-face verbal assaults, and 1,254 (12 percent) arose to the level of civil rights violations that include workplace, housing, and employment discrimination as well as the refusal of service by businesses (Stop AAPI Hate 2021). Of the Asian American ethnic groups, Chinese Americans reported the highest share of incidents (43 percent), followed by Koreans (16.1 percent), Filipino (9 percent), Japanese (8 percent), and Vietnamese Americans (8 percent). Los Angeles mirrors these national trends with the growth of anti-Asian hate crimes documented by the Los Angeles County Commission on Human Relations increasing by 76 percent year-over-year from 2019 to 2020 (Cosgrove 2021). Apart from all the statistics, the most significant impact of these hate crimes incidents has been their chilling impact on Asian American elderly and others who live with the fear of harassment and violence. Stop AAPI Hate reports Asian American elderly who have been victims of anti-Asian violence and harassment suffer from high levels of stress and anxiety and are fearful of going outside. This has compounded the sense of isolation and loneliness for Asian American elderly in Los Angeles who are—as a group—more likely to be immigrants and poor and less likely to speak English. In ethnic communities such as Los Angeles Koreatown, Korean American elderly have been reluctant and afraid to access elderly care and other essential services.

In addition to these issues, the travel bans issued at the beginning of the COVID-19 Crisis in the United States and around the world divided immigrant families. For bi-national couples, the exemptions that allowed American citizens and permanent residents to return to the United States did not allow spouses or partners without such status to enter the United

States. In March 2020, Trump implemented Title 42 of the Public Health Services Act suspended the entry of individuals seeking asylum in the United States. This policy has effectively divided many Central American and Mexican families that have relied on the asylum process to reunite families (Pillai and Atiga 2022). In these ways, for Ethnic Los Angeles, the COVID-19 Crisis has been exacerbated by racial and immigration politics and by the pattern of existing social inequality as much as the virulence of the virus itself.

CONCLUSION

In cities and countries around the world, the COVID-19 Crisis had laid bare their sources of resilience and fragility. Through the course of the pandemic, COVID-19 rewarded those countries with high social cohesion and high trust in government and experts while punishing other countries riven with division and distrust. For global cities, their international connectedness placed them under the microscope as they became the epicenter of the emerging pandemic. Global cities looked fragile and building crowded cities that were so open and vulnerable to the outside world seemed foolish and reckless. However, as the pandemic continues to unfold over the past two years, it is abundantly clear that pandemics such as COVID-19 would inevitably reach all corners of the earth and that no regional city nor rural area would be spared from the pandemic. In the developed world, what made a place resilient to COVID-19 has turned out to be predictable and mundane: following public health guidelines, increasing the vaccination rate, and protecting vulnerable populations.

Los Angeles reflects these patterns. While the city became one of the first places in the United States to identify COVID-19 infections, the city's aggressive public health interventions and the high rates of compliance by the residents kept the number of infections and deaths relatively low. As the panic of COVID-19 eased with vaccines and more effective treatments, the city has relied on international ties to revitalize the economy, including earmarking billions of dollars of investments to expand the Los Angeles Port Complex and the Los Angeles International Airport (Port of Los Angeles 2022). In Los Angeles, the emerging consensus is that the city has fared better than anyone could have imagined during the panicked months of March and April 2020.

However, this neutral, if not positive, assessment fails to capture the impact of COVID-19 on the city's immigrant and ethnic communities. In Ethnic Los Angeles, COVID-19 has exacted a heavy toll in terms of lives lost, divided families, and the sense of security and belonging. These losses were especially felt among the most vulnerable members of Ethnic

Los Angeles: newly arrived immigrants, immigrants with limited English, low-wage workers, and the immigrant elderly who are afraid of random acts of violence as much as the COVID-19 virus. The fragility of Los Angeles, then, is not found in those outwardly facing attributes of a global city that connects it to far-off places. Instead, much of the human cost of COVID-19 in Los Angeles came from within as the pandemic preyed on existing divisions and inequalities.

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