

A Pandemic Through Bad Memes

Over the past several months, I have had a number of thoughts about the pandemic—some conventional, some controversial, some helpful, and some harmful. Perhaps the most unique personal situation that I found myself in is that I am from the United States, but I have been stuck in Australia since February, and I will likely be stuck in Australia for at least another year at the time of writing. While there is a definite possibility that I would be able to go home to the US, I feel as if I have to make the difficult decision to stay so that I can be in Melbourne for university next year, assuming that it will open up again, as I want to continue my studies here for at least another year. So, as an international student, and perhaps more importantly as an American, I believe I have had a particularly unique experience of the pandemic in Australia. I am attempting to spice this reflection up with a number of memes that I have saved over the past year relating to the pandemic and subsequent lockdown. Memes go out of fashion rather quickly and are subjective to personal tastes, so bear with me.

me: yeah i guess i could
handle 3 weeks of quarantine
government:



I believe it was late March when Melbourne first decided to go into lockdown. At this point I don't even remember the specific parameters of the first lockdown besides seemingly everything "non-essential" closing, the university rushing to put everything online, and a lack of food and toilet paper in supermarkets. Another reason that this period was a bit of a daze for me

was that my girlfriend of two years and I decided to separate during this time for unrelated reasons, so my mind was (hopefully understandably) a bit elsewhere. Nevertheless, there was large spread panic, but I, perhaps oddly, didn't personally feel panicked about the virus nearly as much as I felt worried about the implications of shutdowns and mass hysteria in the public. This, I believe, is when I felt more like a foreigner than I have ever felt in my almost four years in Australia.

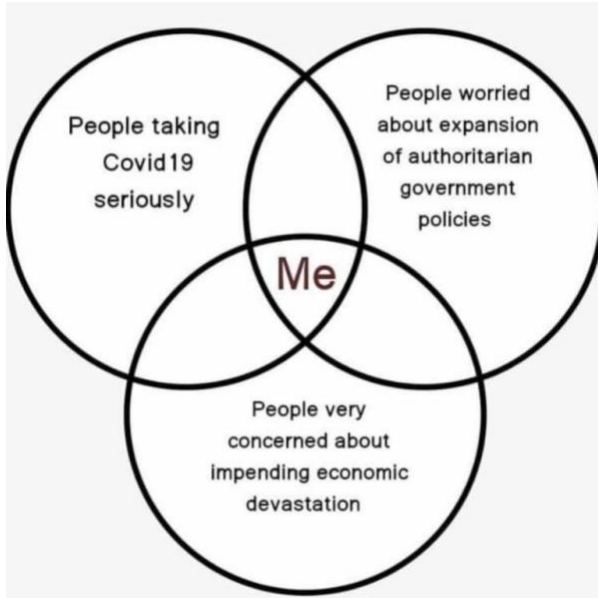
Australia and the United States are very similar countries, we share many cultural similarities, have a shared language, similar demographics, similar values, similar legal systems, business practices, colonial histories, etc. So, as an American, out of all the countries in the world, Australia would likely be the one that I, and many other Americans, would likely feel most comfortable. But, the pandemic displayed a *very* different reaction in Australia as opposed to the United States. Americans, as far as I heard, definitely had the understandable panic and "non-essential" closures that Australia had, but there was a definite difference in the public reaction. Disregarding a few outlying protesters that were heavily demonized by the Australian public, Australians very much fell in line. The government told them that this was a bad situation, and through the government's powers and communal following of governmental directives, it will be resolved in time. This, I strongly believe, would not work in the United States, and as infection rates suggest, Americans aren't willing to self-implement these practices. The United States, in many ways, is a rebel nation that often disregards authority and has little respect for government, most of us are taught this at a young age, and the philosophies are mythologized in our country's founding. Many Americans also highly value individualism and often prioritize individual freedoms over collective concerns. While the United States is a very diverse country and these social tendencies are surely not universal, I believe that I was broadly raised in this tradition. So, in a time when the Australian federal and state governments were introducing massive fines for perceived public safety violations, travel restrictions, introducing an app that could potentially track who you came in contact with, and discussions of a mandatory vaccine should it be made available, I felt completely ostracized by many of my friends, as I thought all of these suggestions

were frankly vile and ridiculous. I hesitate to make a sweeping declaration, but every Australian I know was largely in favor of these policies.

- people are freaking out. What do we do?
- release the chip



Unfortunately, I felt like I was being camped in with the conspiracy theorists—scared of Bill Gates, thinking the virus is not real, etc.—which is not something that I want to be associated with. I feel as if modern political discourse has a tendency, and often a need, to classify an individual as fitting into one extreme or another, and ignore nuanced arguments. Below are two memes (I suppose they qualify as memes) depicting some of my general thoughts. One is a Venn diagram depicting a balanced amount of concern for the various issues that this pandemic presents, and the other is a satirical article title taking a slippery slope approach to demonizing those that don't wish to immediately comply with every little public health decision that an individual can make. Only time can tell, but it will surely be interesting to see if the latter image becomes reality in any capacity.



ANTI-CHIPPERS ARE THE LATEST GROUP OF AWFUL PEOPLE WE NOW HAVE TO WORRY ABOUT

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By Gara Lee



They're paranoid, don't believe in science, many have white supremacist tendencies, and most importantly they want you to know that microchip implants are super duper scary. They're anti-chippers, and they've got literally dozens more braincells than your average anti-vaxer. So, what's their deal?

The coronavirus pandemic has the world's most brilliant minds scrambling to find treatments, vaccines, and how to improve public health going forward. One such savior is Bill Gates. You probably know him as the child-loving, Microsoft founder, and philanthropist. His proposal is to put a teeny tiny piece of silicone under everyone's skin to improve people's lives by reducing healthcare costs and keeping track of anyone deemed unhealthy by medical professionals. Now what could possibly be bad

While I still hold these concerns, naturally the anxiety they induced diminished over time, and my personal experience became very dull—a mundane, monotonous repetition that started to weigh heavily on my mental health. The frustrating part for me was that I did not, and still do not, have much of an excuse for this. I have enough money, enough food, I don't know anyone with the virus, I am very healthy, I should be kept busy with my university work, my family is all safe and unaffected by the virus back home, and my naturally introverted nature should be perfectly suited for lockdown. As for socializing, I still have friends close by and close friends as flat mates. Nevertheless, this is still a very frustrating, worrisome, and dull period of my life, but I know I am not alone in these feelings.

Weekends in quarantine be like



Hopefully, if I look back on this in the future, I will find the memes to be cringeworthy, my worries to be unfounded, and some sort of silver lining in this pandemic experience.