

**Favio Inahuazo**

**Program:** Citizens Thinkers Writers at Yale University

**University:** University of Connecticut

**Texts:** W.E.B Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folk* and Albert Camus, *The Plague*

**Bio:** Favio Inahuazo has lived in New Haven all his life and graduated from Metropolitan Business Academy in 2020. He participated in Yale University's Citizens, Thinkers, Writers program. This fall, he will be attending University of Connecticut and major in Actuarial Science. In his free time, he enjoys playing volleyball and running.

**Profile:** Favio Inahuazo became aware of his family's precarious finances when he was a teenager, and though he knew it wasn't his place to worry about bills and expenses, he still did. In his application to the Teagle Fellowship, he disclosed how money became an important motivation in life, writing, "I've always told myself that going to college and securing a well-paying job was of the utmost priority. To pay no mind to relationships and to earn good grades." In his junior year of high school, however, his mindset changed drastically after reading Leo Tolstoy's novella, "The Death of Ivan Ilyich." As he read the tale of a man who prioritized social standing over happiness only to wonder on his deathbed if he truly lived right, Favio began to think about what he considered to be an authentic, good life.

This summer, Favio turned towards another text, *The Plague* by Albert Camus, to reflect upon the nature of pandemics and our emotional response to them. Since the start of the Covid-19 pandemic, Favio first felt: "fear, then contemplation, and finally boredom and vigilance," he writes. When cases first rose in the United States, he, like many others, relentlessly checked the news and social media, trying to glean as much information as possible. There was an atmosphere of panic and uncertainty, and Favio did what he could to protect himself and others from contracting the deadly disease. But as the pandemic continued for weeks and then months, Favio found himself in a state of limbo, he was no longer shocked but bored.

What was particularly surprising to Favio then, was reading Albert Camus narrating a very similar progression of emotions in *The Plague*. Just as with the current pandemic, the citizens of Oran initially entered into a state of fear; eventually, however, Favio noted how "everyone, no matter their wealth, age, or faith, come to the bleak realization that their life will revolve around the plague for some time." Indeed, what struck Favio as the most important similarity between *The Plague* and our current pandemic is "Camus' recognition that plagues create boredom, and that boredom can lead to complacency." He elaborated further:

"At first, Dr. Rieux expects plagues to be dramatic, epic struggles - 'Athens stricken, abandoned by its birds; Chinese towns full of people dying in silence'- but he soon learns that they are quite ordinary and in fact quite boring. Since everyone is accustomed to the plague, it becomes a daily part of life."

Despite these early similarities, as Camus' story unfolds, Favio noticed stark differences between Oran's and America's response to the plague, particularly regarding hierarchy and social inequality. In Camus' narrative, the citizens of Oran eventually understand that "the pestilence affect[s] everyone"—rich and poor—and consequently, they come together in collective response. As for Covid-19, while Favio acknowledged that "being rich doesn't make you any more resistant to Covid-19 than a poor person," he also asserted that wealth can serve as an advantage:

"Being rich gives you the ability to not go into work and potentially catch Covid-19...Being poor makes you face two problems: to not go into work and be worried that you cannot pay bills on time...? Or to go into work to pay bills but put your health at risk? The country isn't in this together, the poor are in it with the poor and the rich with the rich...Not everyone will get the same help if they are sick."

Favio recognized that in America, discussions of wealth and poverty are inextricably linked to race, and he used data from the Kaiser Family Foundation to reveal that the people who have worked through quarantine in the service industry are disproportionately Black and Hispanic. Here he identified a limit of Camus' writing, in only considering economic differences among his fictional characters, even though the real city of Oran was in French Algeria. While Camus ignored the Algerian underclass in Oran, Favio found that in America, that is no longer possible: "If the pandemic isn't good at fixing social inequality, it's certainly good at exposing it. And maybe exposing a problem is the first step towards fixing it even if it doesn't fix it itself."