

Statement on Violence Against Elderly Asian Americans and Discrimination Against Asian Americans Due to the COVID-19 Pandemic

By Beverley Xie, HRIEC Youth Commissioner

Over the recent weeks, news stories of attacks on elderly Asian Americans have popped up on my Instagram feed. Mainstream media, however, glosses over those events, events that could've been prevented with widespread public awareness that the coronavirus has nothing to do with race. Someone's race does not equate to an invitation to be attacked. It devastates me that in the 21st century, people still choose to profile each other by race, a social construct. Science proves that people are 99.9% identical to each other. We are all brothers, sisters, friends, family, and individuals with a unique story. That alone deserves to be honored.

Throughout American history, anti-Asian sentiment has been normalized, celebrated, and even made into law. The Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882, put in place until 1943, was the first law in America that blocked a group of people from entrance to the US based on ethnicity. What caused its passage? Hostility against the Chinese. Despite their sacrifices in America: building railroads, opening restaurants, running laundries, and cooking for railroad workers, people despised them for their obedience toward employers. They were seen as a threat to white culture and white racial purity. Skits mocking the Chinese ran rampant in American entertainment. Comics condemning the Chinese appeared in newspapers. However, I have found that it is quite rare to find someone that has knowledge about the Chinese Exclusion Act.

If people don't know history, it repeats itself. The hostility present 2000 years ago reincarnated into the spike of violence against Asian-Americans today, who are blamed for the spread of the coronavirus. Asian-Americans have been upheld as the model minority, meek, humble, hardworking, and innocent until proven guilty. In the era of COVID-19, Asian-Americans are perceived as guilty of carrying COVID-19 until proven innocent.

Macro and micro aggressions against my community have been spiking since the beginning of quarantine on March 2020. I am not going to give specific data because I should not have to announce the number of people that are dead or scarred to make my point relevant. Lives shouldn't have to be sacrificed to bring mainstream attention to an issue. If the violence against Asian-American elders were not committed, would people be aware of the type of hate that Asian-American communities endure during the pandemic? Relating to this, if George Floyd didn't die, would there be celebrities and brands posting nonstop about Black Lives Matter?

I would like to acknowledge a few of the victims, understanding that there are many, many more. Some may not even be reported on the internet. In all cases, I extend my condolences to all the victims and their family and friends. I pray for justice to be served. Vicha Ratanapakdee, an 84-year-old Thai-American man who was fatally assaulted in San Francisco in an attack motivated by racism, was known in his community for his friendly personality. Noel Quintana, a Filipino-American man, bears the aftermath of being attacked with a box cutter on his face. This past

Tuesday, a 52-year-old Asian-American woman was pushed to the ground, hit her head, and got ten stitches as a result.

Lastly, it saddens me that people hold animosity toward one another in a time where unity is needed more than ever. Everyone is loved. Everyone deserves to be loved. Everyone deserves to be heard, including Asian Americans. For those that dismiss our suffering just because we are Asian and that we supposedly “have it easier than other people of color,” understand that everyone’s suffering is valid. In order to fight racism, we must understand that racism is not a competition but rather, an opportunity for cross-race alliances to be built. It is not racial group vs. racial group, but racism vs. morality and solidarity.

I look forward to the day where we truly come together, stepping over what divides us to uphold what unites us.