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The Effects of the “Chinese Virus” on the Asian American and Pacific Islander Community:
Hate Crimes, Discrimination, and Violence

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APS 650: Capstone Project

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Abstract

With the spread of the global health crisis that is COVID-19, hate crimes towards Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders (AAPIs) have skyrocketed in the U.S., largely due to the charged rhetoric and misperceptions perpetrated by the U.S. government that link COVID-19 to people of Asian descent. This project analyzes the history of discrimination towards AAPIs in the United States and its present-day context. Moreover, this analysis reveals the detrimental effects of verbal and physical assaults on the emotional and physical health of AAPIs and explores the possible solutions we can implement to decrease these crimes. Finally, I consider the implications of this phenomenon and explain that it is not just a national problem but a global one. A mixed-methods approach is utilized in order to create a holistic, balanced analytical framework. Qualitative data, including journal articles and research studies, show historical and contemporary iterations of Anti-Asian behavior. Interviews help to humanize the impact of this phenomenon on individuals, and quantitative data demonstrates the tangible impact of these crimes. My research finds that with the increase in hate crimes over the past two years, we in the AAPI community have had to change our daily routines and felt unsafe and paranoid just because of how we look. Anti-Asian hate has been ignored and buried deep in American history for too long, and COVID-19, despite its tragic consequences, allows us to unearth years of discourse and issues that must now be addressed.

Keywords: COVID-19, Anti-Asian, AAPI community, hate crimes, discrimination, education, government rhetoric, solutions to AAPI hate

Stories of Hate and Violence

Gui Ying Ma, 61, attacked on November 26 of 2021. She was sweeping the sidewalk in a neighborhood in Queens, New York. “Struck in the head with a large rock,” she suffered various lacerations and permanent damage to the right side of her brain. In the hospital, she was “connected to a ventilator and feeding tube, in a coma until early February.”¹ She seemed to be getting better and even emerging from her everlasting coma to wave to her husband. But then everything changed—she suddenly passed away due to the head trauma she had sustained.

Michelle Alyssa Go, 40, was pushed onto the subway tracks in Times Square in New York City on January 15th of 2022. A man shoved her from behind right into the incoming southbound R train.² A former San Francisco Bay Area native, she was ripped away from her family and friends too early.

Jesse, age and last name unknown, was stalked and attacked while walking home to Japantown in San Francisco on January 28th of 2022. He had just picked up his marriage license; out of the blue, he was hit in the ear by a man, knocked to the ground, and then punched in the eye. The next day, he suffered deep swelling and bruising to his left eye, and constant blurry vision. But that is not the only attack he has experienced. Back in 2019, “he was stabbed in an attempted robbery on his birthday” outside of the Safeway on Market Street.³

These are just a few examples of the hundreds of Asian hate crimes that have been plaguing our nation, and especially our Bay Area community. One attack after another, the Asian

¹ Derrick Bryson Taylor, “Woman of Asian Descent Is Latest to Die after an Attack in New York City,” *The New York Times* (March 1, 2022), <https://www.nytimes.com/2022/03/01/nyregion/guiying-ma-queens-new-york-attack.html>.

² Tracey Tully and Ashley Southall, “Woman Pushed onto Subway Tracks 'Never Saw' Her Attacker,” *The New York Times* (January 17, 2022), <https://www.nytimes.com/2022/01/16/nyregion/michelle-go-man-pushes-woman-subway.html>.

³ Dion Lim, “Exclusive: Asian Man Punched in Eye, Racially Abused in San Francisco,” ABC7 San Francisco (KGO-TV, January 30, 2022), <https://abc7news.com/asian-man-punched-assaulted-attacked-in-sf-stop-hate/11521593/>.

American Pacific Islander community has sustained so much hate and trauma. Anti-Asian behavior is on the rise since the COVID-19 pandemic, and very little is being done by our local, state, and federal government to stop it. These acts of hate, violence, and racism, stem from years of ignorant discourse, a lack of education, and discrimination. The AAPI community is incredibly diverse and contains groups of people from about 20 different nations, each with its own cultural and historical background. Asian Pacific Americans are the “fastest-growing major ethnic group in the United States,” and according to the Pew Research Center with data from the U.S. Census Bureau data, “more than 22 million Asians live in the U.S., and almost all trace their roots to specific countries or populations from East and Southeast Asia and the Indian subcontinent.”⁴ Various ethnic groups such as the Chinese, Filipino, Korean, Japanese, and so on make up the Asian Pacific American demographic in the states. These people immigrated here for a better life with the hopes of achieving the American dream. Though immigrants were able to build a life in the states, they have also faced many challenges—they have been falsely seen as a threat, constantly stereotyped, and faced widespread discrimination and hate crimes.

My research project examines the history of behavior against AAPIs and aims to create a better understanding of why there has been an increase in AAPI hate since the COVID-19 pandemic hit in March of 2020 with the virus that was believed to have originated and spread from Wuhan, China. Though my research will predominantly be focused on present-day data and the impacts of the pandemic, I will analyze the history of Asian hate, because these origins help us understand the prejudice that AAPIs face today. First, I unpack the history of Anti-Asian behavior, the Yellow Peril, and Model Minority myths, and how these have translated into the

⁴ Abby Budiman and Neil G. Ruiz, “Key Facts about Asian Origin Groups in the U.S.,” Pew Research Center, February 16, 2022. <https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2021/04/29/key-facts-about-asian-origin-groups-in-the-u-s/>.

rise of hate crimes during various time periods and throughout the COVID-19 pandemic. Second, I analyze the rise of anti-Asian contemporary discourse and assault, addressing the increased tension between the U.S. and China due to the problematic rhetoric of the Trump Administration that added fuel to the fire. Third, I examine the complicated physical and psychological effects on AAPIs and how anti-Asian hate is a global phenomenon. Finally, I suggest ways we can move forward as a community and nation.

To create a holistic, balanced framework, this study utilizes a mixed-method approach. Qualitative data, including journal articles and research studies, shows historical and contemporary iterations of Anti-Asian behavior. Interviews help humanize the impact of this phenomenon on individuals, and quantitative data demonstrates the negative effect of these crimes on people in the Bay Area. This current research is motivated by my connection to the AAPI community. As a first-generation college student and a child of immigrants from Taiwan and Malaysia, I cannot sit idly by and allow these attacks on my community to continue. Anti-Asian hate crimes have gotten out of hand, to the point where many people of Asian descent no longer feel safe leaving their homes. It has gotten to the point where we must take extra precautions while in public such as traveling in groups and bringing pepper spray and tasers for self-defense. Our community is being affected by tragedy after tragedy and our government continues to do nothing to address it. While I am choosing to mainly focus on Asian hate crimes in the San Francisco Bay Area, we must understand this impacts all of those in the AAPI community who have felt the threat of imminent danger and increased physical and emotional harm over the past several years. The realities of discrimination and hate cannot be avoided any longer; we must address them before further damage is done.

The Progression of Anti-Asian Discrimination

Anti-Asian attitudes, behaviors, and policies date back to as early as the 1800s. There was an influx of immigrants from Asian countries from the 1800s through the 1900s due to large labor demands in the United States. After the increase of anti-Asian racism and violence from Americans who claimed that Asian people were stealing their jobs, Congress passed the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882, the first immigration law that restricted immigration into the United States based purely on race. According to the National Archives, Chinese people who did want to immigrate had to seek approval from the Chinese government, thus making it extremely hard for them to enter the states until Congress repealed all exclusion acts in 1943.⁵

Another example of such legalized discrimination is the unjust imprisonment and internment of over 120,000 Japanese immigrants and American citizens. It was the first and only time in American history where an ethnic population was excluded by law and segregated based on false claims of their danger and disloyalty to the country. During World War II, they “were suspected of being potential enemy agents; and kept under surveillance.”⁶ All Japanese Americans were stripped of their businesses, homes, belongings, and so on during the early 1940s. After they were freed from the prison camps, many of their homes and businesses had been destroyed or vandalized. It was not until 1988 when President Reagan signed the Civil Liberties Act of 1988 into law, that the loss and suffering of those who were in prison and internment camps was rightfully acknowledged with an official apology and a 20,000 dollar

⁵ “Japanese-American Incarceration during World War II,” National Archives and Records Administration (National Archives and Records Administration), accessed February 25, 2022, <https://www.archives.gov/education/lessons/japanese-relocation#background>.

⁶ National Archives and Records Administration “Japanese-American Incarceration during World War II”

payment.⁷ Aiko Herzig-Yoshinaga was in her senior year at Los Angeles High School when suddenly, without warning, the Japanese bombed Pearl Harbor on December 7, 1941. In an interview with NPR news, she recalls the day that it happened; her principal pulled the Japanese students aside and told them that they had no hopes of getting their diplomas since their people had bombed Pearl Harbor. She describes the detention centers and later the barracks she and her family lived in while imprisoned in Manzanar, near Death Valley. Yoshinaga says that their apartments only had army metal beds with springs, and one small stove in the middle of the room. There was “no chest of drawers, no nothing, no curtains on the windows. It was the barest of the bare.” For years, Yoshinaga and her family lived in these horrible conditions, along with thousands of other Japanese Americans. Yoshinaga states, “We haven’t learned from all these lessons . . . It’s happened once, and unless you are careful it could happen again.”⁸ Japanese Americans were barely given a legitimate reason as to why they were forced into these camps and had to remain there all those years. This mistake by the U.S. government was not fully addressed, even with the passage of the Civil Liberties Act. This mere apology from the U.S. government and financial reward years later was not adequate to undo the years of wrongdoing and hatred that Japanese Americans had to face. It is crucial to understand that this mistake could happen again, especially if the history of discrimination, fear, and hatred towards the AAPI community is not addressed by our own present-day government.

Both the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882 and Japanese American incarceration demonstrate the mistreatment that some AAPIs have faced and can be partly explained through a

⁷ National Archives and Records Administration “Japanese-American Incarceration during World War II”

⁸ Lauren Migaki, “At 92, a Japanese-American Reflects on the Lessons of Internment Camps,” NPR (NPR, December 7, 2016), <https://www.npr.org/2016/12/07/504602293/at-92-a-japanese-american-reflects-on-the-hardships-of-internment-camps>.

concept called Yellow Peril. According to an article by Gonzaga University, “the idea of yellow peril has emerged and became popularized by Western societies in the late 19th and early 20th centuries” and the term indicates the stereotypical view that Western societies had of the yellow race and the irrational fear that they would take over the country.⁹ The article explains that, with the increase in Asian immigrants and decline in jobs, and conflicts between America and certain Asian nations in WWII, there was an increased hatred towards people of the “yellow race.” And Asian American citizens have often been targeted no matter their origin because the U.S. often grouped people of Asian descent, failing to see important distinctions between cultures.

The concept of Yellow Peril impacts more recent immigrants and manifests itself in new, different ways. According to the website, “Vietnamese American Fisherman,” this phenomenon directly affected the many Vietnamese refugees who settled in the Monterey Bay Area of California to start a new life after the Vietnam War. Many of these refugees became fishermen to support their families by catching and selling fish. Since they came to the US with very little money, they pooled their resources by sharing boats and each day's earnings, which allowed them to effectively work together as a community. Their teamwork and success led to an elevated sense of threat and increased perceptions of Asian Americans as others by dominant, mainstream culture is common to the Yellow Peril phenomenon. Not soon after, in November of 1990, gill and trammel nets were prohibited, making it hard for the Vietnamese fishermen to continue to rely on fishing to survive.¹⁰ The success of the Vietnamese fishermen threatened the American fishermen; their increased hatred towards those of “yellow race” stemmed from the fact that they could not stand to see Asian people being more successful than them.

⁹ Keisuke Kimura, “‘Yellow Perils,’ Revived: Exploring Racialized Asian/American Affect and Materiality Through Hate Discourse over the COVID-19 Pandemic” *Journal of Hate Studies* (Gonzaga Library Publishing, October 5, 2021), <http://doi.org/10.33972/jhs.194>.

¹⁰ “Vietnamese American Fishermen,” From the VC Vault, February 2, 2013, <https://fromthevcvault.wordpress.com/2013/02/12/asian-american-fishermen/>.

The Model Minority Myth

While the Yellow Peril phenomenon is detrimental, there are more recent concepts that are, in some ways, more insidious and appear to praise Asian Pacific Americans when, in fact, they have the complete opposite effect. The “model minority” group concept refers to an ethnic group that is successful, especially compared to other minority groups. And “in particular, the model minority designation is often applied to Asian Pacific Americans, who as a group, are often praised for apparent success among academic, economic, and cultural domains—successes typically offered in contrast to the perceived achievements of other racial groups.”¹¹ This model minority concept was made up to drive a wedge between various disadvantaged ethnic groups and undermines the experiences that Asian Pacific Americans have gone through both in the past and present. Since Asian Pacific Americans as a group are considered the model minority, people tend to think that they are better off than other minority groups and begin to ignore the experiences that AAPIs do face. Society ends up turning a blind eye to the incidents of hate that have been plaguing the Asian American community from hundreds of years ago. To explain the impact that this myth has made on the AAPI community, and specifically, young scholars, Dr. Guofang Li in a research and development journal argues the following:

. . . the model minority myth prevents teachers and counselors from seeing Asians as having various talents in non-academic areas and paying attention to their diverse needs. Moreover, the model minority stereotype negatively impacts Asian students, such as mental health issues, stress, depression, and anxiety, and harms their relationship with other ethnic groups. For example, the myth divides Asians from Black, Latinos, and the Indigenous people, making it hard to form alliances to fight against racism and discrimination.¹²

¹¹ “The Model Minority Myth,” *The Practice*, March 26, 2019, <https://thepractice.law.harvard.edu/article/the-model-minority-myth/>.

¹² Chuang Wang, Jian Wang, and Miranda Lin. “COVID-19 and Asian Phobia: Anti-Asian Racism and Model Minority Myth.” *New Waves - Educational Research & Development* 24 (July 2, 2021): i–vi.

The divide that the model minority myth has created between various ethnic groups in the late 19th and early 20th century has expanded far and wide and affected generation after generation. By portraying Asians as the model minority and focusing on their achievements on the surface level, the U.S. has also discounted the years of discrimination we have faced, the mental health issues we have experienced, and neglected the trauma and inequalities that have impacted us. In this way, “last year's model minority has become this year’s political scapegoat”¹³ with increased discrimination amplified by the pandemic; on top of many AAPI students having to worry for the wellbeing of their loved ones, they also have to face the wedge that the model minority myth has driven between various Asian ethnic groups. This has also put AAPIs in a position where people assume that they do not need any help and that they don't face any equity issues within academia, the workforce, and society. Denise Peck, executive advisor at Ascend Foundation states that even though some groups in the AAPI community have the highest educational degree and income in our country, “the lowest rung on the poverty ladder happens to be Asian, and that is a face that is widely ignored.”¹⁴ Since Asian American groups are grouped together, there is the assumption that all people who identify as Asian American will do well and do not face any adversity. The people who do not fit into this group end up being ignored. According to the U.S. Census Bureau, “members of 12 out of 19 Asian origin groups have poverty rates as high as or higher than the U.S. average; at a share of 25%, Mongolians have the highest poverty rates among

<https://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&AuthType=sso&db=eue&AN=154668966&site=eds-live&scope=site>.

¹³ Celia W. Dugger, “U.S. Study Says Asian-Americans Face Widespread Discrimination,” *The New York Times* (February 29, 1992),

<https://www.nytimes.com/1992/02/29/us/us-study-says-asian-americans-face-widespread-discrimination.html>.

¹⁴ Jennifer Liu, “How the Model Minority Myth Holds Asian Americans Back at Work-and What Companies Should Do,” CNBC (CNBC, May 3, 2021),

<https://www.cnbc.com/2021/05/03/how-the-model-minority-myth-holds-asian-americans-back-at-work.html>.

Asians in the U.S.”¹⁵ These disparities in the AAPI community are not often acknowledged by our policymakers, which causes the continued injustice that these marginalized groups have to face. Some of these groups face specific issues such as housing, employment, education, voting rights, and so on just because they are lumped together with other AAPI groups.

This myth not only drives a racial wedge between the AAPI community and other minority groups in the states but also divides the various ethnic groups within the AAPI community, putting everyone in a vulnerable position. Even though people of Asian descent face racism, this concept minimizes the struggle and trauma that we are facing, just because we are considered to be the “better minority.” Not only does this invalidate our feelings, but it also discounts the diversity of our experiences, creating a misleading and narrow-minded idea of who we are to the rest of society. This myth not only neglects the physical danger AAPI communities face from racism but also causes mental trauma that no individual should have to go through.

COVID-19: Viruses, History, and Their Social Impact

While the Yellow Peril and Model Minority stigmas have had an ongoing, continuous impact on the AAPI community, it is crucial to realize that a global pandemic has worsened these situations and increased hatred and violence towards AAPIs. COVID-19 was both a physical and ideological virus and was a catalyst for xenophobia and increased micro/macro-aggressions towards Asians. According to research done by UCSF, Former President Trump has referred to the coronavirus as the “Chinese Virus” on various social media platforms such as Twitter.¹⁶ And

¹⁵ CNBC, “How the Model Minority Myth Holds Asian Americans Back at Work-and What Companies Should Do”

¹⁶ “Trump's 'Chinese Virus' Tweet Linked to Rise of Anti-Asian Hashtags on Twitter,” Trump's 'Chinese Virus' Tweet Linked to Rise of Anti-Asian Hashtags on Twitter | UC San Francisco, February 22, 2022, <https://www.ucsf.edu/news/2021/03/420081/trumps-chinese-virus-tweet-linked-rise-anti-asian-hashtags-twitter>.

naming the virus increased the already existing tension between China and America and resulted in the growth of Anti-Asian behavior. Scott Kennedy, a Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS) China expert, said in an article for *The New York Times* that “The use of this term is not only corrosive vis-à-vis a global audience, including here at home, it is also fueling a narrative in China about a broader American hatred and fear of not just the Chinese Communist Party but of China and Chinese people in general.”¹⁷ Unfortunately, however, this phenomenon has been recurring for hundreds of years now.

For example, in the summer of 1899, a ship that sailed from Hong Kong to San Francisco had two cases of the Bubonic plague on board—this disease had been raging through Europe and Asia in the past centuries.¹⁸ Though there was no immediate outbreak and the passengers were quarantined. After nine months, on “March 6, 1900, a city health officer autopsied a deceased Chinese man and found organisms in the body” that resembled the plague; with more recent identifications of the plague in various regions, Anti-Chinese feeling increased in San Francisco.¹⁹ They tried to quarantine Chinatown, which the Chinese and business community objected to because they did not want people to know if the plague existed or else it would be bad for business. During this time, city officials made it clear that the Chinese were to blame for the spread and outbreak of the plague, especially since they were the carriers. And the effort to quarantine made Chinatown “the only neighborhood where residents couldn't come and go like everyone else,” taking away freedom from the Chinese people.²⁰

¹⁷ Katie Rogers, Lara Jakes, and Ana Swanson, “Trump Defends Using 'Chinese Virus' Label, Ignoring Growing Criticism,” *The New York Times* (March 18, 2020), <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/03/18/us/politics/china-virus.html>.

¹⁸ “A Science Odyssey: People and Discoveries: Bubonic Plague Hits San Francisco,” PBS (Public Broadcasting Service), accessed March 28, 2022, <https://www.pbs.org/wgbh/aso/databank/entries/dm00bu.html>.

¹⁹ PBS “A Science Odyssey: People and Discoveries: Bubonic Plague Hits San Francisco.”

²⁰ PBS, “A Science Odyssey: People and Discoveries: Bubonic Plague Hits San Francisco.”

The bubonic plague outbreak and COVID-19 were similar in the sense that U.S. city and government officials took advantage of the situation, and created a stigma of associating people of Asian descent with disease and illness, using them as scapegoats for an international viral outbreak that could not be contained. These two examples when put together side by side show that COVID-19 was not the first time the U.S. government has tried to make an Asian country a scapegoat and created Anti-Asian behavior and discrimination. This proves that Anti-Asian behavior is often initiated by government officials. They are placing blame, and “racially scapegoating” people to distract themselves from the immediate problem at hand, which is the lack of education on how to respond to these outbreaks on a national level.²¹

Additionally, despite the rising COVID-19 cases in early 2020, it took President Trump three months to make a “nationally televised address on March 11 and his March 13 declaration of national emergency.”²² And that was when the federal government finally began to fully engage in efforts to improve medical supplies, mass testing, and instruction on how to prevent the spread of COVID-19. A timeline shown by Brookings Institute states that the World Health Organization (WHO) had declared COVID-19 a global health emergency on January 30, 2020. But due to President Trump's ignorance, he continued to state that “We’re in great shape though. We have 12 cases — 11 cases, and many of them are in good shape now” and that the virus “is very well under control in our country,” in mid to late February.²³ Without heeding the warnings of WHO, the U.S. was unprepared for the infectious virus that was already affecting the health of

²¹ Janelle Bitker, “A Surge of Anti-Asian Violence Is Forcing Another Racial Reckoning in the Bay Area,” *San Francisco Chronicle*, December 14, 2021, <https://www.sfchronicle.com/news/article/There-s-been-a-surge-of-attacks-against-Asian-15969890.php>.

²² Philip A. Wallach and Justus Myers, “The Federal Government's Coronavirus Actions and Failures,” Brookings (Brookings, March 9, 2022), <https://www.brookings.edu/research/the-federal-governments-coronavirus-actions-and-failures-timeline-and-themes/>.

²³ Brookings, “The Federal Government's Coronavirus Actions and Failures”

its citizens. And it was not until mid-March where commercial tests were approved quickly and mass testing became widely available, that the media finally revealed that there was a large amount of confirmed COVID-19 cases throughout the United States. This reflects “in part that our testing capacity had begun to catch up with reality on the ground.”²⁴ Since the U.S. government was in denial and refused to prepare and face the incoming global pandemic in early 2020, it meant that many people were not aware and educated about what to do and what would happen if they or a loved one was infected with the COVID-19 virus.

The volatile situation created the need for a scapegoat, and certain leaders took advantage of the situation. Because of the careless use of government rhetoric such as the “Chinese virus” and “Kung flu” as well as the increased Anti-China sentiment that was enforced when China became the scapegoat for the worldwide pandemic, many people of Asian descent have and continue to experience hate and are forced to live with the consequences. Once again, all Asian ethnic groups are now being lumped together, no matter what their ethnicity, and they are being blamed for the COVID-19 pandemic. That is because there is misinformation spread about the AAPI community and origin of COVID-19 by our federal government, a lack of preparedness to fight the pandemic in our nation, and years of history swept under the rug. Instead of taking accountability for all the violence and hate after all these years, our government has turned to blame and political scapegoating. History is repeating itself once again, with the spread of COVID-19 cases and deaths, and there has been an increased fear of Asian people once again, similar to the Bubonic plague.

By politically scapegoating China, the numbers of anti-Asian incidents rise, both nationally and locally, leading to more public discourse and consequences for the AAPI community. According to *The Guardian*, there has been an increase in reports of hate crimes

²⁴ Brookings, “The Federal Government's Coronavirus Actions and Failures”

against the AAPI community in the city of San Francisco. Data from the SF police department showed that Asian-biased crimes “jumped from nine in 2020 to 60 in 2021, a 567% increase, in the city of 875,000 people.”²⁵ Furthermore, SFPD warns that these numbers may not be 100% accurate as many hate crime incidents are underreported.²⁶ Additionally, according to data from the New York Police Department, “anti-Asian crimes saw the largest increase in actual incidents, going from 30 in 2020 to 133 last year, for a 343 percent spike.”²⁷ Data from two of the U.S.’s main cities show that anti-Asian crimes have risen since the pandemic started in 2020 and are still on the rise. These are just two examples of the many in the U.S. proving that anti-Asian behavior has skyrocketed due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Though the previous administration had not done anything to combat the rise of anti-Asian behavior, the current administration headed by President Joe Biden has come forward to address these issues to a certain degree as crimes continue to persist. In March of 2021, President Biden announced new actions that would be taken in response to the increase in anti-Asian violence in a briefing for anti-Asian violence, xenophobia, and bias. During his first two months in office, President announced the following:

. . . it is the official policy of this Administration to condemn anti-Asian bias and violence; visited AAPI leader in Atlanta to denounce anti-Asian violence and gender-based violence with the Vice President; called on Congress to pass the COVID-19 Hate Crimes Act introduced by Senator Hirono and Congresswoman Meng; and created a

²⁵ “SF Police Data Shows 567% Increase in Reports of Hate Crimes against Asian Americans,” *The Guardian* (Guardian News and Media, January 26, 2022), <https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2022/jan/26/san-francisco-increase-hate-crime-anti-asian-aapi>.

²⁶ The Guardian, “SF Police Data Shows 567% Increase in Reports of Hate Crimes against Asian Americans.”

²⁷ Craig McCarthy and Mark Lungariello, “NYC Hate-Crime Complaints Skyrocket, with Anti-Asian Attacks up 343%,” *New York Post* (January 21, 2022), <https://nypost.com/2022/01/21/nyc-hate-crime-complaints-skyrocket-anti-asian-attacks-triple/>.

historically diverse Administration in which 15 percent of all appointees identify as Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders.²⁸

Additionally, he reinstated a White House Initiative on AAPIs, allocated funding for AAPI survivors of domestic violence or sexual harassment, and also established a COVID-19 Equity Task Force. It is clear that the Biden Administration is working towards decreasing racism and discrimination within our country. By pushing legislation to be passed in Congress, as well as increasing AAPI representation in our federal government, the Biden Administration is taking the necessary steps to create a more just and equal society.

While Asian hate and violence have existed in our society for years, these events have often been swept under the rug and not addressed in the media or our educational systems. If only our classes had taught students about concepts like the Model Minority, Yellow Peril, or even the discrimination that AAPI have faced in their countries which caused them to immigrate, then maybe our students would understand that the life of an AAPI is not as easy as it seems. These educational concepts are often not accepted or taught in our education system with the exception of university-level Asian Pacific American Studies, Ethnic Studies, and Critical Diversity Studies curricula. In fact, an example of the backlash against such courses can be seen in the debate over critical race theory, which is rejected in many schools across our nation. Critical race theory “is a way of thinking about America’s history through the lens of racism. Scholars developed it during the 1970s and 1980s in response to what they viewed as a lack of racial progress following the civil rights legislation of the 1960s.”²⁹ This theory argues that the

²⁸ “Fact Sheet: President Biden Announces Additional Actions to Respond to Anti-Asian Violence, Xenophobia and Bias,” The White House (The United States Government, March 30, 2021), <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/statements-releases/2021/03/30/fact-sheet-president-biden-announces-additional-actions-to-respond-to-anti-asian-violence-xenophobia-and-bias/>.

²⁹ The Associated Press, “What Is Critical Race Theory? Is It Really Taught in Schools?,” al, June 24, 2021,

U.S. was founded on the theft of land and labor and that the federal law did not treat people equally based on race. According to an *Education Week* analysis, “since January 2021, 42 states have introduced bills or taken other steps that would restrict teaching critical race theory or limit how teachers can discuss racism and sexism.”³⁰ There is a lot of hesitancy around bringing a theory like this into our education system because people are afraid to talk about it, and our governments are worried about the conversations that would surface, undermining our idealized, positive view of America, which is conveyed through much of the education that we receive in our formative years.

In addition to the lack of education about our country's racist past, there have also been negative perceptions of Asian Pacific American groups, and our lack of representation in the education system is truly one of the main issues we face today. Christine Sleeter, a professor at the College of Professional Studies at California State University of Monterey Bay, engaged in important research about what and who is missing from California’s history and social studies lessons. After her review, she realized that “of the nearly 100 Americans recommended to be studied, 77 percent were white, 18 percent were African American, 4 percent were Native American, and 1 percent were Latino. None were Asian American.”³¹ As we see from these disturbing statistics, the traditional American education system continues to teach our country’s children through a Eurocentric lens, overlooking the challenges that the AAPI community has faced. We are not taught about the violence and discrimination which led our ancestors and

<https://www.al.com/news/2021/06/what-is-critical-race-theory-is-it-really-taught-in-schools.html>

³⁰ Sarah Schwartz, “Map: Where Critical Race Theory Is under Attack,” *Education Week* (May 10, 2022),

<https://www.edweek.org/policy-politics/map-where-critical-race-theory-is-under-attack/2021/06>.

³¹ Pacific Standard Staff, “Why Are Asian Americans Missing from Our Textbooks?,” *Pacific Standard* (Pacific Standard, March 16, 2017),

<https://psmag.com/news/why-are-asian-americans-missing-from-our-textbooks>.

families to flee from their countries to the U.S., and we are not informed about the stories that do matter. And when Asian Pacific Americans are mentioned in textbooks, it is often linked to an issue that portrays them in a negative light— from stereotypes about power hungry communist Asian leaders and countries to the false threat of immigrants stealing jobs from Americans. The constant negative portrayal of Asian Americans in textbooks, in turn, leads to discrimination and prejudice.

Our education system needs to be altered so that future generations of students do not continue receiving biased education when they should be taught factually correct and complete knowledge. Schools need to begin to understand that the way our children's minds are shaped during their early years is crucial to our nation's future. Without a fair, inclusive, and truthful education, we will continue to move down a path of hatred, violence, and discrimination. In light of the recent pandemic causing physical and psychological trauma to the AAPI community, we can no longer look the other way. This is an issue that must be addressed and stopped through raising awareness; education is the first best step.

Impact on the AAPI Community: How Do We Move Forward?

So what about the impact of the pandemic and anti-Asian hate on us? What are the implications for our community?

As City Attorney David Chiu states, “Anti-Asian hate incidents have been driven by race, no doubt about it,” we have not seen a spike like this in other communities which indicates that it is a race based issue that must be addressed.³² This racially driven issue will only get worse if it is ignored, and AAPI will continue to be portrayed as weak, fragile, or even unable to advocate for themselves. For us to see and understand the significant impact that the increase in AAPI hate

³² David Chiu (City Attorney) in discussion with the author, April 2022.

crimes have had on our community, I conducted several interviews with people in the Bay Area of various occupations, age, ethnic groups, and so on. It is important to learn about the experiences of the people around us so that we are directly informed and sensitive to the issues within our community at any given moment. The interviewees help us understand what is exactly happening in the daily lives of Asian people, the issues that they face, and what they think could be possible solutions.

Trang Ha is a Bay Area native and graduating senior at the University of San Francisco; as Vietnamese Americans, Trang and her family celebrate Lunar New Year's annually. But the past couple of years have been different for them; spirits aren't as high and there is more anxiety around their families' safety. With the rise in hate crimes she feels more paranoid and extra worried, especially about her parents' wellbeing. On New Year's Day in 2021, Trang and her parents decided to go shopping at a mall in Hayward. Her mom decided to go back to the parking lot to move their car closer to the entrance, but as she was about to move the car, an African American male broke into the passenger window with a gun and stole her purse with all her valuables inside. Trang recalls getting a frantic phone call from her mom after it happened and rushing to ensure that her mom was okay. Thankfully, her mom was not physically harmed but she actually "genuinely believed that she was targeted from the beginning and knew that something was off but she couldn't put her finger on it" and that this whole ordeal has "changed her perspective on the human race as a whole."³³ This experience was traumatizing for Trang and her family; they are now extremely careful when they leave the house and try to minimize going out after dark. They were not even able to celebrate Lunar New Year's in peace, and the rise in hate crimes has put a damper on their celebrations as they are now more concerned for their safety and unable to focus on the festivities.

³³ Trang Ha (USFCA student) in discussion with the author, April 2022

Some, like Forrest Liu, use incidents of racism as a force that propels them to make social change. Forrest is a Bay Area native, Dear Community treasurer, and TogetherSF Community Program Manager. Growing up in San Francisco, he was often bullied for being a “nerd” and was constantly emasculated by his classmates because he did not fit society's expectations of what a boy should be. He vividly recalls a time in his childhood when there was a robbery of a person of color near his home, that person was mentally and physically harmed, which filled his family with intense fear. He remembers his dad being genuinely scared for the first time, and that his family no longer felt safe in their neighborhood, especially because his mom would often commute to work on her own. A combination of his childhood experiences with bullying and seeing Anti-Asian behavior and crimes have shaped Forrest into the person he is now. Being often bullied as a kid, Forrest finally understood that “nice guys finish last,”³⁴ and had to learn how to stand up for himself. He has a strong urge to advocate for the AAPI community here in San Francisco and become a protector for himself and the people he cares about. Forrest has been able to harness his passion in advocating for change into his full-time job at TogetherSF, he works to revitalize the San Francisco community, running and conducting outreach for events to bring the AAPI community together in learning more about politics and community engagement.

Anti-Asian behavior and discrimination can be experienced in different ways, some more violent than others, but these experiences are equally traumatizing to one’s mental health. Unfortunately, the ongoing Asian hate that was never addressed and the current increase in violence has been detrimental to the mental and physical health of Asians of all ethnicities. As shown above, many Asian Pacific Americans have felt the need to change their daily routines, such as not leaving the house after dark, sticking in pairs or groups, and most importantly,

³⁴ Forrest Liu (TogetherSF Community Program Manager) in discussion with the author, April 2022

experiencing paranoia just because of their identity. Jade Tu, Vice President of Dear Community and lifelong SF resident voiced that “I am more paranoid than I was before, growing up in the sunset there has always been crimes and theft, but now I am a thousand more times paranoid just because I am Asian.”³⁵ She also mentions that she constantly worries for her family and friends and that she knows being paranoid is not good but “this is what happened and is the result of the past year.”³⁶ Many AAPI now have to think twice about going somewhere or feel the need to look twice over their shoulder when they are out on the streets, which is something that no one should ever have to go through, especially not in a place that they should be able to call their home.

During my interviews, I also had a chance to ask each individual what they think would be possible solutions to decrease AAPI hate in San Francisco and even nationally. Being able to hear the thoughts and experiences of the people in the San Francisco Bay Area, shows that these acts of violence do affect every person in this community. From speaking with all four interviewees, I have compiled four solutions that I would like to highlight and propose. First, we should increase policing in areas with high demographics of minorities. To prevent crimes, police must be alert and aware of the issue at hand. SFPD must make the changes necessary to keep its citizens safe. Second, an increase in funding to the SF public school district would be beneficial to support after-school programs and care. That way, we make sure that our students are given the resources they need to grow and excel. The more time we spend on our students, the more we can educate them with the correct knowledge, therefore decreasing the risk of them committing a crime or doing something bad in the future. Third, we need to find a way to fund mental support programs. The mentally ill need to receive the healthcare and education they need

³⁵ Jade Tu (Dear Community VP) in discussion with the author, April 2022.

³⁶ Tu, interview.

so that they can build a better life for themselves rather than resort to committing any crimes. Fourth and finally, it is our responsibility to elect the best public officials, and those in office have the responsibility to protect people of all ethnicities, religions, and so on. Additionally, organizations and coalitions such as Stop AAPI Hate were formed to conduct research, create resources for the community, and educate the nation on the rise of AAPI hate. Cynthia Choi, San Francisco social activist and co-founder of Stop AAPI Hate, is currently working towards understanding “the nature of hate, who was being affected, and where this was occurring.”³⁷ Stop AAPI Hate is a space where people can report an incident, volunteer, or donate to the cause, learn about the history of Asian hate and violence, and search for health and social resources for people in need. It is a strong movement, educating people one by one, and advocating for the mission of advancing equity and justice. They aim to work with all people to end structural racism that various communities of color face as well. By working with different communities and spreading awareness, social change can emerge.

AAPI hate must be taken seriously and that has to start within the community, but most importantly the government, because they have the social influence and power. Though these are some possible solutions to start the long and arduous healing process that the AAPI community must go through, we must begin now. If we continuously overlook discrimination, crimes, and violence without saying anything, we will not get anywhere. We must advocate for our basic human rights as citizens of America to debunk myths, break stereotypes, and spread accurate portrayals of the AAPI community.

Global Discrimination: What Can We Do And Where Are We Headed?

³⁷ Alix Strauss, “She’s Combating a Wave of Anti-Asian Hate,” *The New York Times* (March 7, 2022), <https://www.nytimes.com/2022/03/07/us/cynthia-choi-stop-aapi-hate.html>.

Asian hate and discrimination is not only occurring in the United States but is also happening in other countries all over the world. Jonathan Mok, 23, verbally and physically attacked February 2020 on Oxford street in the UK. He was walking home after having dinner in central London when he was confronted by a group of white males and an additional teenager. Mok was punched, kicked, and verbally degraded. There were witness accounts who heard his attackers yell ““you are diseased don’t come near me.” Mok's life had to be put on hold while he took the time to recover from surgery, taking a big toll on him and his family.³⁸ Alice Amsel, musician, artist, and writer based in Sydney Australia, recalls the time she had spit scrubbed out of her hair by a pharmacist in February 2020. She wrote that “The spit had belonged to a woman with an impressive mullet who [Alice] had noticed was staring [her] down before she finally launched the lawless loogie.”³⁹ Alice was going about her daily life, buying meds for her complex PTSD in a shopping centre. Beyond that random act of hate, Alice explains that she has been taunted for being Asian from the very beginning of her childhood. She has been called “ching chong” or had to face her classmates yelling “Asian invasion” at her during school.⁴⁰ The verbal abuse that Alice and her family have been facing during their time in Australia is devastating, and the trauma is something that cannot be forgotten or erased. Jonathan and Alice are just two small cases among the millions of Asian hate crimes that happen all over the world.

These examples show that Asian hate is a global phenomenon. People of Asian descent have

³⁸ “Coronavirus: Boy Sentenced for Racist Street Attack,” BBC News (BBC, January 27, 2021), <https://www.bbc.com/news/uk-england-london-54048546>.

³⁹ ABC News, “Is It Because I'm Asian?': The Uncomfortable Question I Can't Get out of My Mind,” ABC News (ABC News, June 2, 2021), <https://www.abc.net.au/news/2021-06-03/racism-asian-australians-korea-covid-stereotypes/100181468>.

⁴⁰ ABC News, “Is It Because I'm Asian?': The Uncomfortable Question I Can't Get out of My Mind,” ABC News (ABC News, June 2, 2021), <https://www.abc.net.au/news/2021-06-03/racism-asian-australians-korea-covid-stereotypes/100181468>.

been facing discrimination, violence, and inequity for years and years in different countries. They are plagued with stereotypes and assumptions from society that are never addressed, never being able to fit in a country that they immigrated to just because of their skin color, language, and culture.

While this research focuses on the racism felt by the AAPI community in the states, especially in the Bay Area ever since the COVID-19 pandemic, the origin and global history of ethnic group discrimination and violence date way back in time. It is a topic that is not often explored, but by starting conversations on these issues, we can begin to educate ourselves on the origin of racial discrimination and violence. However, we must understand that we have to start from our communities and societies, to address the social discourse and lack of education that has been ongoing for many years, and start to fight for improvement and change from there.

For those of us in the Bay Area, for those of us in America, and those of us in other countries, we must continue to unpack the complex phenomena of Asian hate. We must not only propose but begin to implement solutions that allow us to grow and heal as a society despite all the pain and tragedy that AAPIs have endured. The COVID-19 pandemic and aggressive anti-Asian rhetoric expressed by our nation's former President Trump has reinforced the pre-existing behavior and bias against Asian Americans, creating more hostility and conflict. This high-priority issue needs to be addressed. Only when we begin to accept and understand these existing behaviors and identify their root causes and devastating effects, can we then identify possible ways forward. By facing the gaps and problems in our education, holding our government leaders accountable, and helping out our fellow community members, we can begin to change the negative mindsets and actions against AAPIs all over the country. We must stand up for ourselves in our classrooms and rewrite our textbooks, advocate for our constitutional

rights, and increase representation in our government and various industries. In doing so, we can right these wrongs and bring our community safety and justice.

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