

Seybert: don't be racist during COVID-19 pandemic

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Body

As nearly everyone in Iowa may know, we are currently in the midst of one of the scariest and most uncertain times to date. People are getting sick with a disease that we barely understand, let alone know how to contain. Others are being laid off, kicked out of housing and facing legitimate illness if they do not self-quarantine. There have been similar global outbreaks before, such as the H1N1 pandemic of 2009; yet somehow, COVID-19 seems novel in its intensity. Life as we know it has been flipped on its head, and no one knows how long it could last.

To try to make sense of the mounting uncertainty, people seem to be scrambling to find someone to blame. Finding someone to blame theoretically allows people to understand the cause of something and therefore eliminate the problem; it is human nature. However, some are taking this sentiment too far. Instead of simply following protocol (e.g. quarantining and social-distancing) and hoping for a speedy end to this pandemic, people around the world have begun to blame Asian and Asian-American people (specifically Chinese or Chinese-American people) for the COVID-19 outbreak. This is both blatantly racist and completely out of line. To blame this dangerous pandemic on Asians or Asian-Americans is not only damaging, but also aids in the perpetuation of racial prejudice, stereotypes and discrimination. Not only that, but there is no basis for the blatant racism.

According to the Center for Disease Control and Prevention, COVID-19 originated in Wuhan, China, in December of 2019 due to potentially unsanitary market conditions. However, even though the virus started in China, the Chinese government sprang into action. Much like many states within the United States today, Chinese provinces implemented a lockdown. Worldometer reports that by doing so, China was able to bring their active cases down from 81,093 total to around 5,120. This is a 93.7% decrease. China's quick-thinking and problem-solving strategies allowed them to drastically decrease the number of active cases.

The United States, on the other hand, has been aware of the pandemic since January 21, when the first case was reported on American soil. While the World Health Organization insists that American leaders knew about COVID-19 back then, statewide shelter-in-place orders did not begin until mid-March. The United States is estimated by Worldometer as having 43,672 total cases and 42,832 active cases. This is a mere 2% decrease. Even with two full months between the first US case and today, we have been nearly unable to slow the spread of COVID-19 within our country. Meanwhile, China has all but eradicated their active cases.

The statistics show that there is absolutely no basis for the hate that Asians and Asian-American people are getting in the wake of this virus. It is okay to say that the Chinese government potentially did not do enough to prevent the spread of COVID-19. After all, if it had not been so rapidly spread, we would not be on the verge of a shelter-in-

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place. However, it is absolutely not okay to blame all Asians or Asian-Americans. They had as much part in the rise of COVID-19 as you or I.

It is also not okay to call the pandemic "The Chinese Virus" or any variant of such. Doing so perpetuates the idea that this virus is the fault of the Chinese people, which is not the case. Some argue that this moniker is perfectly acceptable, as there have been other outbreaks with region-specific names. Take the "Spanish Flu" of 1918, for example. Evan Andrews of the History channel states that people insisted on calling the outbreak the "Spanish Flu" because they believed it had originated in Spain. Instead, it was due to a media misunderstanding; the Allied and Central Powers suppressed news of the virus to focus on wartime efforts, which left Spain as the only European country to report daily on the outbreak. As a result, people began assuming that Spain was ground zero for the pandemic. In reality, the first known case was reported in Kansas. Yet because no one else was reporting on the virus, it became known as the "Spanish Flu," which caused people to start avoiding Spaniards and Spanish-American people. Even though it was factually incorrect, the name incited prejudice and discrimination. If COVID-19 is referred to as "The Chinese Virus," it will no doubt happen again.

COVID-19 sucks. It sucks for everyone - doctors, students, teachers, nurses, grocery store employees - but that does not give anyone the right to discriminate against Asian or Asian-American people for it. Fear is not an excuse for racism and racism will only tear us apart. United we stand but divided we fall and it is more important now than ever that we remain in it together. We will get through this, but only if we work together to ensure the ability to do so.

About the Writer

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