

Asian Americans are under attack during the pandemic

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Body

For Asian Americans, it is the best of times and the worst of times.

On one hand, there has never been a better time to be an Asian American. Asian American representation is at an all-time high, and it is no longer difficult to rattle off a slew of Asian American films, TV shows and cultural icons that have changed the public's perception of Asians for the better.

In a world where most of the United States' perception of the Asian identity was informed by dehumanizing caricatures, that development is a big deal.

On the other hand, racism and physical attacks against Asians have spread in tandem with the progression of the coronavirus. In recent months, the nation has seen a surge in xenophobic and racist incidents targeting Asian Americans. Examples of this trend exist in abundance.

In February, a woman of Chinese descent was attacked by a man in New York for wearing a mask. The man called the woman a "diseased bitch" and proceeded to beat her over the head with an umbrella.

In March, three Asian American family members, including a 2-year-old and a 6-year-old, were stabbed at a Sam's Club in Texas. An FBI report describing the incident stated that the suspect indicated that he attacked the family because he thought they were "Chinese and infecting people with the coronavirus."

In April, a Chinese American man was assaulted for not wearing a mask while walking his 10-year-old son to a bus stop in Queens, N.Y. His attacker yelled "you fucking Chinese" and then attacked the man in front of his son.

As one might expect, the situation hasn't gotten better in May. Racist and violent crimes against Asian Americans abound, and what is perhaps the most infuriating part of the trend is that no one seems to care. Instead, many Americans appear all too eager to join in and foment the flames of anti-Asian hatred.

Unfortunately, in the face of this bigotry, many feel helpless and unsure of how to proceed.

Sure, a couple of paragraphs about how the government should take action (they should) may peak public interest but, in reality, that likely will not accomplish much. President Donald Trump doesn't read the Daily Trojan, and he seems far more interested in fanning the aforementioned flames than extinguishing them, anyways.

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This lack of options leads back to an undervalued conclusion: The most significant action that can be collectively taken during this time is to settle down and take some time to learn a thing or two about Asian Americans. The grim fact of the matter is that most Americans do not know enough about Asian Americans to care about Asian Americans.

A Pew Research study is not necessary to confirm this. One only has to recall what they've been taught to realize that, most likely, they've been taught nothing about Asian Americans.

Americans cannot think back to high school history classes in which teachers taught students about the riots, lynchings and burnings that terrorized Chinese Americans during the 19th century because those classes never took place. Most Americans cannot reference books they've read about the role of American cinema in forming a prevailing perception of Asians as vile and disease-ridden because those books were never assigned.

The point of this article is not to launch into a tirade about how public education is sorely lacking Asian American studies curricula (though it is) but rather to bring light to the fact that America's lack of collective awareness creates an environment not only ripe for anti-Asian hate crimes, but also one where few people even know or care that these crimes are occurring.

It is unlikely that reading a book like Erika Lee's "The Making of Asian America" is going to cure anti-Asian racism. It is also improbable that racists would recognize the error of their ways simply by watching PBS's new five-part documentary series "Asian Americans." However, neither of these resources are a bad place to start.

Clearly, America has - and has always had - an anti-Asian problem. However, if Americans can't even begin to summon the empathy necessary to learn about the issue, it seems hopelessly unlikely that it can be solved anytime soon.

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