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Leonard Pitts: Asian Americans need not prove their patriotism

By [Leonard Pitts](#)

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Leonard Pitts for his column(MARICE COHN BAND, MIAMI HERALD STAFF)

This is for every American of Asian heritage, but one in particular.

That would be Andrew Yang, the former Democratic candidate for president. Last week, with surely the best intentions, he gave Asian Americans the absolute worst advice imaginable. Indeed, advice so bad as to be painful.

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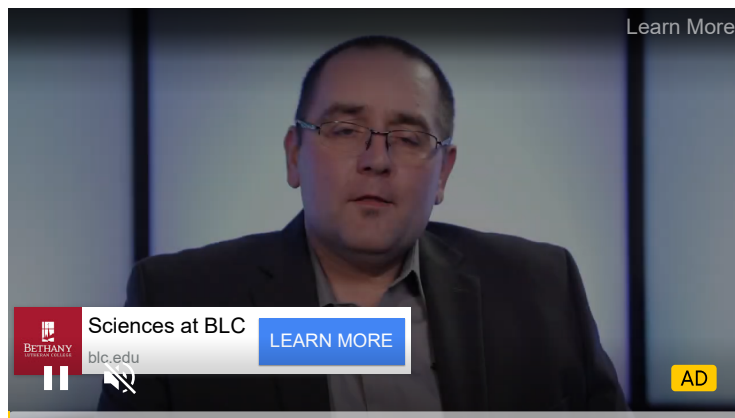
In an op-ed for the Washington Post, Yang recounted how he was shopping for groceries when a man fixed him with an accusatory stare. “For the first time in years,” wrote Yang, “I felt it. I felt self-conscious — even a bit ashamed — of being Asian.”

Such encounters have become sadly commonplace in the era of the coronavirus, which Donald Trump and other racists insist on calling the “Chinese virus” because it originated in the city of Wuhan in China. Predictably we’ve seen a spate of assaults against people of Asian heritage all over the United States: A woman in San Francisco was spat upon, a boy in Los Angeles sent to the emergency room, a woman in Manhattan kicked and punched on a subway platform.

Yang's advice to Asian Americans for dealing with all this? Prove yourselves.

“We Asian Americans,” he wrote, “need to embrace and show our American-ness in ways we never have before. We need to step up, help our neighbors, donate gear, vote, wear red white and blue, volunteer, fund aid organizations, and do everything in our power to accelerate the end of this crisis. We should show without a shadow of a doubt that we are Americans who will do our part for our country in this time of need.”

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It's hard to imagine advice more shallow, offensive or ignorant. Certainly, each of us should do all that he or she can to mitigate this crisis. But why should that be a special responsibility of Asians? Why should they be required to prove themselves to racist morons?

In effect, Yang asks Asian Americans to accept responsibility for solving a problem that is not theirs. Yes, the effect of that problem — people being spat upon and beaten — is a challenge for the Asian-American community and indeed, for all of us. But the problem itself — the racism — belongs to the racists.

Besides which, this idea that you can, by force of excellence and ostentatiousness of patriotism, jolly haters into liking you, simply doesn't work. If you doubt that, ask the generations of African Americans who built businesses, earned degrees, answered America's call to arms and yet are still, to this day, regarded as something lesser and other.

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For that matter, Asian Americans can look to their own history, to little Japanese boys playing baseball behind barbed wire while their big brothers bled out the last of life, defending democracy in places like the Vosges Mountains in France. There in the bitter cold rains of October in 1944, a Japanese-American regiment fought one of World War II's most ferocious battles, suffering more than 800 casualties to rescue the fabled "Lost Battalion" — 211 Texans. And yes, the math is telling.

If questions of patriotism could be resolved by sacrificing for your country, then surely any such questions about Asian Americans were answered forever in that blood-drenched soil. But those questions are a hardy weed. They bedeviled Iranian Americans during the hostage crisis and have dogged Muslims since 9/11. Now they emerge — again — against Asian Americans. Worse, an Asian American lends them credence.

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Column: Trump hates having too many voters because 'it doesn't work out well for Republicans'

Andrew Yang should know better. Americans of Asian heritage have no obligation to prove themselves to those who beat and spit upon them. It is not their job to fix bigots' hatred.

[Leonard Pitts: Asian Americans need not prove their patriotism](#)

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Leonard Pitts: Asian Americans need not prove their patriotism

No, it's the bigots' job to fix themselves.

Leonard Pitts is a columnist for The Miami Herald. Email him at lpitts@miamiherald.com.

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