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Asian American

planting seeds

What should we do at this moment of reassertion?

much we deserve to have a slice of a bloody pie.

Annie Yang
Class of 2020



By [Annie Yang](#)

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In 2014, Vijay Iyer delivered the keynote speech at a reunion of Yale Asian American alumni. Addressing a room of people who may as well have been Asian Americans from Duke, he contemplated on what it means to be “Asian American.” Iyer argued that “to succeed in America, is somehow, to be complicit with the idea of America—which means that at some level you’ve made peace with its rather ugly past.”

When I was in high school, I started taking pride in being and actively identifying as Asian American. It was a label that felt empowering to me, a term that could embody a history of resistance and activism.

In fact, the category “Asian American” was one born explicitly out of the struggle for racial justice, anti-imperialism and solidarity. In the late 1960s and early 1970s, Asian Americans, who had previously been called “Orientals” aligned themselves in pan-Asian, multiracial coalitions and radical movements like the Third World Liberation Front and Vietnam War protests.

But rarely does “Asian American” invoke such a commitment to solidarity and resistance today as it did in the 1960s. When I call myself an Asian American in 2020 have I made peace with America’s ugly past? Its horrible present?

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Whenever I fly, even domestically, I take my U.S. passport with me as identification. Whenever I brandish my passport at the airport to prove to everyone that I am the blade that is this nation.

The concept of "America", the [detention of migrants in concentration camps, behind barbed wire, during World War II, under the same](#)

What is America but the turning of the [Holocaust](#), but the [tortured prisoners at Guanatamo Bay](#), the accumulation of harm from eugenics, sexism and on and on?

Perhaps this is a reluctance to acknowledge that human rights? Is it democracy for every American, much less even for people of color?

How many times have we been told that America is the land of the free, in the shape of bombs and drugs, but [limited](#) to the freedom to work and live as we see fit?

The underbelly of our yearning for the idea of America. When I say I want acknowledgement and protection, and I invoke the power of the deadliest empire today held up by crushed bones and battered bodies. The question becomes, why should I—or we—want to seek refuge in Americanness?

Is the Asian American Dream to ingratiate ourselves to the status quo enough to one day take the reins of the war machine that killed nearly [20% of the North Korean population during the Korean War](#), that wiped [Hiroshima and Nagasaki off the map](#) to terrorize the rest of the world into submission, that rained [napalm bombs over civilians in Vietnam](#)?

When do we know that we've "made it" as Americans? When Harvard is full of [Asian Americans, reclaiming their "rightful" spots from Black and Latinx students](#)? When Asian cops like [Peter Liang](#) can kill Black people like Akai Gurley with impunity, just like white cops? When we are proximate enough to reap the benefits of white Americanness, benefits that have always come at the expense of Black, Indigenous and people of color?

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Perhaps a salient question for Asian people in America—and especially for Asian Americans who go to schools like Yale or Duke—to ask, when does the immigrant-refugee become the settler-gentrifier?

As an Asian person, it’s hard to ignore the [anti-Asian hate crimes](#) committed during this pandemic. These recent attacks on Asian Americans have been designated as a “crisis” in anti-Asian violence, and have made many (East) Asians aware of our vulnerabilty in a white supremacist society.

Yet, we East Asian Americans would do well to remember that our Southeast and South Asian American siblings have long been under siege, but the violence they suffer at the hands of America (whether that is [ICE deportations](#) or [post-9/11 Islamophobia](#)) is not considered a “crisis” of anti-Asian violence. We Asian Americans would also do well to remember that [Black people are disproportionately at higher risk to COVID-19 because of structural racism and deep anti-Blackness](#)—something we are also complicit in. These inequalities and injustices haven't gone away, even if East Asians are particularly visible right now.

This moment is also a perfect demonstration of how racism is always connected to imperialism. By labeling COVID-19 as the “Chinese virus,” insisting that [China is to blame for the pandemic](#) and demanding that they pay the price, American imperialism translates into racist hate crimes in America. Now is the moment to realize that we are and have always been

expendable to America, no matter how much we repudiate our homelands, no matter how much we buy into classism and anti-Blackness, no matter

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Annie Yang is a Trinity senior.

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