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Racism Towards Asian-American Community During Covid-19

In 2021, people have witnessed numerous significant events that changed the world, from political clash between Former President Donald Trump and his rival, Joe Biden; to the outbreak of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. However, among those events, presumably, the most hazardous that left fatal consequences to all nations on most aspects, is the pandemic Covid-19. Due to Covid-19, an unimaginable scenario had taken place: patients mourning for care beds in hospitals, lack of medical treatments, insufficient public health services opened due to an overwhelming of Coronavirus cases; and lastly, the collapse of economy that led to an enormous increase in the rate of unemployment and homelessness. Not only does our regular lives change by Covid-19, but also our beliefs in society had been changed. In America, there are various opinions about the virus; demonstration had covered the public more than ever before. “My Body, My Choice”, or “Say No to Vaccination” are some profound examples that best reflected how people had different view on the virus. Above all aspects that the pandemic left a tremendous effect on, there existed a strong wave of racism towards Asian-American community, which blamed them for the cause of Covid-19, is being neglected by the majority. From March to May 2020 alone, over 800 Covid-19 related hate incidents were reported from 34 counties in the state of California, United States, according to BBC News, and overall, more than 1,800 reports of pandemic-fueled harassment or violence across U.S, research done by the Asian Pacific Policy and Planning Council. In this critical research paper, I’ll provide my analysis on the racism happened during the pandemic, by first reflecting on Asian-Americans’ experience who were suffering from severe harassment, then discuss what could be the main reasons that led to hatred behaviors of aggressors, what could be the consequences if the Asian-American community did not gain back the justice, and finally, encourage people to have an empathic view on others to defeat racism in this vulnerable time.

First, we need to have a deeper view into what Asian community is encountering with, by studying practical cases of Asian racism and reflected on their stories. The anti-Asian wave is increasing at an urgent rate. Racial slurs and hateful acts towards Asian community became more common, and sometimes, the violent attacks became more severe. In the article “ ‘They just see that you’re Asian and you are horrible’: How the pandemic is triggering racist attacks” by author Catherine Kim, published by *Vox News*, a 30-year-old woman, named Julie Kang, had reported to have experienced two racial incidents that took place on December and March, respectively. A man had walk up to her, in the middle of downtown San Diego, called her racial slurs, and a woman threatened her with a yell: “Go back to China or I’ll shoot you myself!”. “I haven’t been harassed for my race for years and years. It’s been a really long time so it felt like it came out of nowhere. This last one made me a little bit angrier because of how these people were making me feel. They were making me feel small. I felt unsafe, eve in my home community where I walk every single day”, Kang said. In the same article, another assault was taken as an example of the Asian-American people were suffering from harassment. Esther, from West Virginia, said she started to realize how people in her rural community reacting differently to her presence, which began with harmless acts such as rolling eyes, avoiding sharing public services, to more aggressive act. While Esther was at a Home Depot shopping, a man walked towards her and blocked her path. “It was this weird frozen in a moment of time where I was like, I could see your mind churning and I could see that you’re about to say something racist – if you’re going to say anything at all”, reported from Esther by writer Kim. The aggression of the man had left Esther shaken, “she said now she has to think twice before leaving the house alone”. From the experiences of some Asian individuals, we could image hundreds of other cases that had happened or about to occur in the future across the country. The case of Esther is a solid proof that racisms could come in any form, such as cold staring, keeping distance, or even aggressive acts that led to violence; nevertheless, no matter what forms of racism that Asian-Americans are facing, they are sharing a tremendous burden to their mental health. There remains the Asian-Americans out there, like Esther, who are worrying about their safety while going to the public, feeling vulnerable and unprotected if they had to encounter with other Americans, and their incidents were not concerned by the authorities. Addressing with the toxic consequences to mentality that racism had left in them would be much more difficult in this challenging time.   
  
 From the racial incidents of Esther and Julia that were mentioned in above paragraph, what could be the reasons behind the violent acts that led to the outburst of anti-Asian wave occurred in U.S? In this paragraph, I will analyze the issues from both historical and social contexts. First, looking at the historical context, Asian-Americans are experiencing the same hateful prejudice as the African-Americans. In 17th and 18th century, the act of trading slaves was considered vital to the development of the economy. The slaves were bought in the market and considered nothing more than properties by their owners. Throughout history, perhaps everyone knows the stark difference between the white elites and the black, from living conditions to civil rights. The Declaration of Independence had stated that everyone was born with certain unalienable rights, and among these are Life, Liberty, and the Pursuit of Happiness; however, the U.S Constitution had an intensive debate over slave issue, whether to keep them to further benefit the new society, or abolish them like what the British Empire did. In modern days, numerous cases of mass shooting happened, and recently the case of George Floyd and the protests for his justice had shocked the world. The story in racism had rooted in American society for a long time, and Asian-Americans are no exception. In their article “The long, ugly history of anti-Asian racism and violence in the U.S”, *the Washington Post* had listed several events that depicted Asian-Americans in the history. For example, the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882, which banned the Chinese immigration for 20 years, and the one that mostly related and similar to the current circumstance, the San Francisco plague outbreak, in which the whole Asian community was blamed for the outbreak of the disease, since a Chinese immigrant was contracted to it. In addition, the city’s Chinatown was surrounded by police, and Chinese residents were forbidden from leaving their places. From the historical background I mentioned above, I believed the cause of heavy racism lied in the prejudices that lasted for years. Racism had been an underlying but urgent issue that considered almost impossible to resolve. Since the images of the Asian community had been distorted by the old believes from the past, it could be possible to trigger them again in modern day. Second, looking at the social context, I believed social media could be one of the most effective factors that triggered the massive discrimination towards Asian community. Some experts referred anti-Asian xenophobia resulted from the term “the China Virus”, used by former President Donald Trump to blame the country for the pandemic. Russell Jeung, a co-founder of Stop AAPI Hate and a professor of Asian American Studies at San Francisco State University, told the Time, on the article “Hate Crimes Against Asian Americans Are on the Rise. Many Say More Policing Isn’t the Answer”: “There’s a clear correlation between President Trump’s incendiary comments, his insistence on using the term ‘Chinese viruses’ and the subsequent hate speech spread on social media and the hate violence directed towards us. It gives people license to attack us. The current spate of attacks on our elderly is part of how rhetoric has impacted the broader population”. In my point of view, I would agree with Jeung, as the citizens are profoundly affected by their leaders. It’s a fact that China and U.S are being placed in a complicated diplomatic relationship, where sanctions from both countries had severely hampered the social and economic development; however, it’s not a reason that President Donald Trump could use to justify for the outbreak of the virus. In this case, the Asian-Americans should not be blamed, and presumably, the act of discrimination also started from the stereotypes that Asians who came to America will be “perpetual foreigners”. The power of social media could easily manipulate people to fall for false information, and I assumed that further brutality would happen to Asian community, since under this challenging time, they are still considered the minorities and “not enough Americans”.

The prejudice of thinking immigrants who came to America could never be a perpetual American is old-fashioned and I think lots of Asian people, though they have made significant contribution to the country, remained suffering from suspicious look from others during the outbreak. However, there exists some remarkable citizens who had the courage to speak up for their rights, and in this paragraph, I will introduce the story of a 69-year-old Lee Wong and how he had condemned racial discrimination. Lee Wong is the Board of Trustees Chairman in West Chester Township, Ohio, and he had served for the U.S military for 20 years. Despite his life being a dedicated veteran, he was regarded not be an official American citizen. In addition, he was even mocked by a little boy who pulled his eyelids back after seeing him in the public. During the conference, perhaps no one would expect Wong to remove his shirt, showing the scar that he had taken during his wartime. He expressed his frustration towards people who questioned his patriotism, and he called out the uptick in violence and discrimination against Asian Americans. His impassioned speech, which was captured on a video, had attracted millions of viewers, and resonated at a time when hate crimes against Asian Americans became a regular occurrence in the United States. In his interview with the Hamilton Journal News, he emphasized that the Asian were too afraid to speak out and they had been put under intimidation whenever going out to public. He insisted that he had had enough endurance, and he no longer subside to walk around with shame. “I don’t have to live in fear”, he said at the meeting, and later, he added “Laster I read in the U.S Constitution, We the people, we are the same. We are equal, not all of this you are more superior, you are not”. In my opinion, Mr. Wong is a perfect example that proves a fact: whenever there is oppression, there exists resistance to it. He had united the voice of Asian American and called them to stand for their own rights, and I think this image of him should be further spread to public to raise people’s advocate against racism. Once again, the reason for racism and xenophobia started from the root of negative perception, that Asian-Americans would never be ‘American enough’. I agree with the argument made by two authors, Hannah Tessler and Grace Kao, in their journal “The Anxiety of Being Asian American: Hate Crimes and Negative Biases During the Covid-19 Pandemic”, published by US National Library of Medicine, that emphasized “racism and xenophobia are not a natural reaction to the threat of the virus, rather, we speculate that the historical legacies of whiteness and citizenship have produced these reactions”. This argument of the cause behind racism, analyzed by specialists like Hannah Tessler, has proved that in America, there exists underlying issues that have not yet been resolve; it’s waiting for the right time to emerge, and the consequence would be fatal, such as stark division of the whole country, between who fight for justice and who don’t.

Lastly, the consequences of racism could be fatal, and I will provide my analysis on some possible negative effects that might happen to a person or a whole community due to massive discrimination. The majority of Asian individuals who met with racial incidents were suffering from depression, or inferior complexity as they started doubting whether they were having the same equality as other Americans. The Asian community is also a part of the whole; their contribution to American society should not be minimized, and it’s not reasonable if someone blamed them for the cause of the virus. In my point of view, people came to America as they believed it’s a country of diversity, there’s something that makes America different from others, perhaps the democracy, the justice, the freedom, and the fortune that it brings back. It’s a wide belief that America is a country of opportunities, and everyone would share an equal chance to participate in something they would love to do. However, at the same time, in a society where lots of ideas and beliefs clashing onto each other, the conflicts may seem inevitable. I would encourage people to have an open and empathic view, look at the issue with a more balance judgement, and share positive support to each other to make this society better. The Asian racism during the pandemic is merely among thousands of problems that need to resolve in the future, but I believe the unity of people would help us overcome the difficulties.

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