

It's sad to say that the attack barely took me by surprise. My family was part of the post-war Korean diaspora that settled in Atlanta. My cousins work in spas. I know the specific brand of race and gender-based violence that Asian women face. There was a sinister truth rearing its head through this tragedy.

I agonized as the world fought over whether it was a hate crime, as onlookers spun up narratives from the fact that "only" 6 of 8 victims were Asian. Debates flared up over the primary motivation—racism or sexism or neither at all? Years later, the noise continues:

"How do you know it was racialized?"

"Your chances of being attacked are slim."

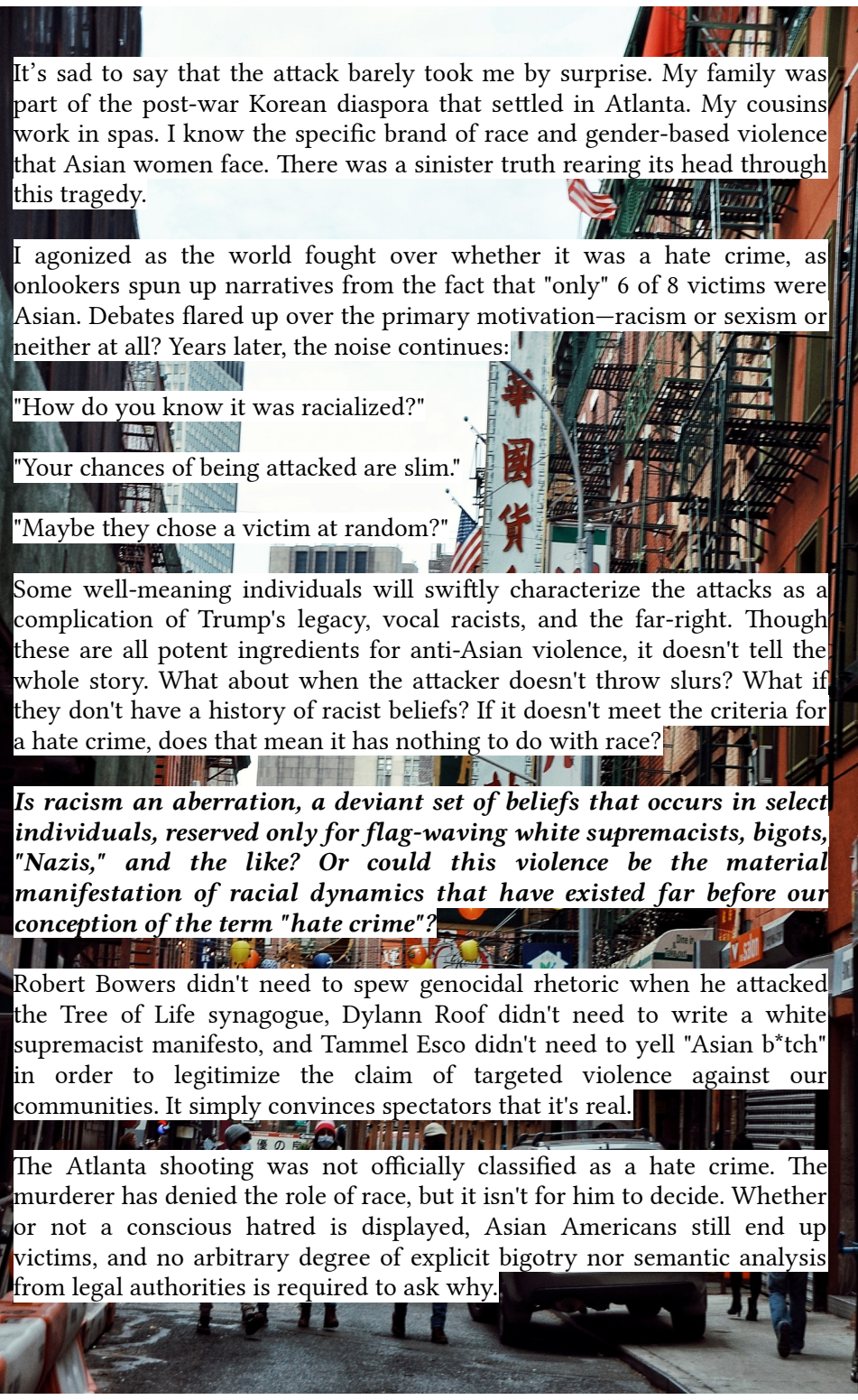
"Maybe they chose a victim at random?"

Some well-meaning individuals will swiftly characterize the attacks as a complication of Trump's legacy, vocal racists, and the far-right. Though these are all potent ingredients for anti-Asian violence, it doesn't tell the whole story. What about when the attacker doesn't throw slurs? What if they don't have a history of racist beliefs? If it doesn't meet the criteria for a hate crime, does that mean it has nothing to do with race?

Is racism an aberration, a deviant set of beliefs that occurs in select individuals, reserved only for flag-waving white supremacists, bigots, "Nazis," and the like? Or could this violence be the material manifestation of racial dynamics that have existed far before our conception of the term "hate crime"?

Robert Bowers didn't need to spew genocidal rhetoric when he attacked the Tree of Life synagogue, Dylann Roof didn't need to write a white supremacist manifesto, and Tammel Esco didn't need to yell "Asian b*tch" in order to legitimize the claim of targeted violence against our communities. It simply convinces spectators that it's real.

The Atlanta shooting was not officially classified as a hate crime. The murderer has denied the role of race, but it isn't for him to decide. Whether or not a conscious hatred is displayed, Asian Americans still end up victims, and no arbitrary degree of explicit bigotry nor semantic analysis from legal authorities is required to ask why.



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Over the course of the COVID-19 pandemic, Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders have been harassed, stabbed, slashed, kicked, shot, and murdered. In San Francisco, we see Asian American elders being thrown to the ground and robbed. In New York, the NYPD reported a 1,900% increase in hate crimes targeting Asian Americans. From Bawi Cung and his 3-year-old and 6-year-old son, to 75-year-old Pak Ho, the pandemic has heightened violence against Asian Americans that has claimed the lives of some, traumatized many, and fueled racism in this nation.

I've seen a lot of posts saying that Trump caused this. But the reality is that it goes beyond Trump. The Atlanta Spa Shootings has shown the dangerous veracity of xenophobia and racist rhetoric. It has shown us the dangers of stereotypes, sexism, and generalizations, as well as the dangers of indifference and blind zealotry. From the 1980 murder of Vincent Chin, to the 2015 assault of Sureshbhai Patel, AAPI are also no strangers to racial violence or police brutality. It is critical that people remember the racism and prejudice against AAPI that has been problematic even before the pandemic.

We must continue to amplify one another's voices and continue to show support for those who have spoken, as well as encourage others to raise their voices. It's not enough to just be a bystander. Our histories deserve to be heard—because this is not just an issue of Trump, but rather part of an evolving story.

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An Issue Beyond Trump

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STOP ASIAN HATE



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