

NEWS: Recent Increase in Anti-Asian Violence

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Due to the pandemic, there has been a tremendous increase in violence and discrimination towards Asians and Asian Americans. The rise in attacks correlates with Former President Donald Trump's tweet on March 16, 2020 when he called the Coronavirus the "Chinesevirus." In the week following his tweet, there was an evident increase in anti-Asian hashtags and targeted violence. However, this is not an individualized issue as the issue is rooted deeply in the prejudiced and racially-biased history of the United States itself.

"The history of racism against Asians in the US dates back to the 1800's [when] single men [were recruited] from China for cheap labor...working in terrible conditions, making poor wages. As the economy worsened, they were eventually seen as a threat to [the jobs and livelihood] of White men. We saw even then in the late 1800's these explosions of anti-Asian violence...eventually [leading] to the passage of the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882...Violence toward Asian Americans occurs in cycles...[as] Asian people are often welcomed in this country as long as we are seen as useful to the larger American project," said Doris Chang, Associate Professor at New York University and a clinical psychologist who studies racism's impact on the Asian American and Pacific Islander (AAPI) community.

Flashforward to the present, anti-Asian attacks and blatant discrimination continue to exist, but organizations have responded by building community-based efforts for Asian American safety and protesting against the policing and immigration detention of Asian Americans.

In 2020 and 2021, there were countless violent assaults against the Asian and Asian American community. The nonprofit social organization Stop Asian American/Pacific Islander

(AAPI) Hate tracks incidents of discrimination, hate and xenophobia against Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders in the United States, and they received reports of 3,393 incidents in 2020 alone and 503 incidents in 2021 so far.

“The number of hate incidents reported to our center represent only a fraction of the number of hate incidents that actually occur, but it does show how vulnerable Asian Americans are to discrimination, and the types of discrimination they face,” said Stop AAPI Hate in their national report.

Recently, the attacks have escalated in extremity. For example, on April 5, 2020, a 39-year-old Asian American woman in Brooklyn, New York was taking out her trash when a man doused her body with a chemical before fleeing. She was rushed to the hospital and suffered second-degree burns on her face, neck, back and hands. It must be noted that the victim and the assailant had no prior interactions with each other.

Another example can be seen close to home - in Atlanta, Georgia. On March 16, 2021, a series of mass shootings occurred at three different spas or massage parlors. Eight were killed - Xiaojie Tan, Delaina Ashley Yaun Gonzalez, Hyun Jung Grant, Yong Ae Yue, Suncha Kim, Soon Chung Park, Paul Andre Michels and Daoyou Feng - six of them being Asian women. One was injured - Elcias Hernandez-Ortiz - and the ages of these victims range from 30 to 74. Robert Aaron Long - a 21-year-old white man - is responsible for the devastating shooting and told investigators that he was not racially motivated but rather to get rid of temptation around him. However, a local news outlet reported that Long exclaimed, “I want to kill all Asians!” as he shot at victims. In response to this tragedy, Captain Jay Baker from the Cherokee County Sheriff’s Office stated that “[the day of the shooting] was a really bad day for [the shooter].” There was great backlash in that they even called upon his resignation for not only defending the assaulter,

but also undermining the tragedy that took place. Baker was later removed from the case after social media posts went viral showing him promoting a T-shirt with racist and controversial language related to China and the Coronavirus.

However, there were more anti-Asian attacks immediately following this shooting. The next day, in San Francisco, a 39-year-old white man attacked an 83-year-old Vietnamese man and a 75-year-old woman named Xiao Zhen Xie. In retaliation, she picked up a stick and fought back, sending the attacker to the hospital handcuffed to a gurney; Xie also went to the hospital for treatment for two black eyes as well as post-traumatic stress disorder from the unprovoked attack. Following this, in New York City, five other attacks were reported over the weekend.

On March 29, 2021, right outside an apartment building in Midtown Manhattan, a 65-year-old woman was kicked to the ground and stomped on by a man who made anti-Asian remarks. A surveillance video showed an unidentified man attacking the woman, but what is more shocking is that staff members at the entrance of the building who witnessed the attack did not intervene but rather shut the door. The victim was hospitalized due to serious injuries, and the company was widely criticized for their workers' failure to intervene which led to their suspension.

Politicians and police forces in cities with large Asian populations have condemned these assaults and violent crimes and have called for increased policing and hate crime legislation to protect the community. However, these announcements have been denounced by many Asian and Asian American advocacy organizations and community organizers. They argue that law enforcement - including police and immigration authorities - have not kept their community or residents safe but rather act as perpetrators of racially motivated and xenophobic violence. In fact, in the week following the Atlanta shootings, marches, protests and other forms of civil

disobedience were held across the United States where they not only called for an end to anti-Asian violence but also rejected calls for greater policing.

Many organizations formed and gained widespread attention in response to the nationwide issue. Besides Stop AAPI Hate, many other organizations work to address issues on all levels with the hopes that it will lead to structural change. The Asian Americans Advancing Justice (AAAJ) is a nonprofit organization that works to advance the civil and human rights of Asian Americans while advocating for better policies for them as well. Another organization is the Red Canary Song that gained lots of attention following the Atlanta spa shootings. As the only grassroots collective of Asian and migrant sex workers organizing in the United States, they organize migrant workers who have been affected by policing and immigration issues. Additionally, the Asian Mental Health Project, an organization that provides resources to all Asian people seeking mental healthcare, has services including crisis helplines and therapy-related outreach.

Conclusively, the recent increase in anti-Asian violence and assault cannot go unnoticed in that they occur too frequently and are actively targeting minorities in the country. This issue is not only affecting Asian Americans but the entire population as the United States promotes a widely diverse nation; therefore, the racist and xenophobic mindsets in the United States must be addressed and made aware to all. These racist mindsets do not form overnight and have been present in the United States for centuries. These blatant anti-Asian attacks cause fear in these communities as they feel unsafe and targeted. The United States promotes diversity in their citizens, yet the nation's minorities are living in fear.