9

Racing the Pandemic

Anti-Asian Racism amid COVID-19

Christine R. Yano

How does race shape the experience of the current and ongoing global pandemic? How does the pandemic shape the experience of race—in politics and in everyday lives? How have histories of racialization and racism in the United States and elsewhere allowed for the targeting of Asian Americans? How might we develop effective strategies that counter xenophobic racisms surrounding COVID-19? And in an ideal world seeking meaningful change, how might critical empathy—that is, reaching out to others with hearts, minds, bodies, and actions—play a crucial role?[1]

These questions structure my approach to discussing anti-Asian racism amid the pandemic with the goal of developing strategies of action for the targets of such racism, as well as for others for whom race-based violence is anathema. The Black Lives Matter movement has compelled us to thoughts and actions at a time when systemic racism can no longer be ignored. What the movement reminds us of is the ongoing salience of race as a basis for institutionalized and interpersonal actions, as these shape overt macroaggressions as well as more covert microaggressions.

"China virus." "Wuhan virus." "Kung-flu." These labels, uttered by people at the highest political echelons of the United States during one of the worst public health disasters within most people's lifetimes, give permission for racial discrimination and violence, bringing anti-Asian racism into public light once again. Yellow Peril rears its ugly head—in earlier periods as a fear of Asians invading white worlds,

and here as an epidemiological fear of an Asian virus unleashed upon the world.[2] In the words of psychiatrist Ravi Chandra, these pandemic labels, especially uttered by those in power, "disinhibit" the public from racist emotions and expressions.[3] In using the term "disinhibit," Chandra implies that anti-Asian racism lurks historically and broadly just below the surface, suppressed in the name of more rational or humane discourse. Disinhibiting the American public from underlying racism is a response to the coronavirus that is fueled by the political virus already in place. In these conditions, anti-Asian racism has once again found fertile expression in American public life. As Chandra puts it, "underlying racist attitudes become exposed when they are given official sanction." This is the power of racist labels made official by politicos within the context of fear who are in search of a scapegoat: they tap into histories and patterns of emotion-based prejudice. Indeed, the racist labels for the pandemic have sparked anti-Asian verbal and physical harassment, including xenophobic admonitions to "Go back to your own country." This is the ultimate harassment to those from minority immigrant backgrounds, Asian or otherwise.

Although the United States is ultimately a land of indigenous peoples and immigrants from many countries, not all immigrants are equal in their access to membership in a newly adoptive country. Not only is access differently proffered, but so too is membership. What does citizenship look like at what kinds of levels, whether political or cultural or both? What kinds of citizenship can be made available to whom, and with what kinds of generational depths? This is where race comes into play, deciding who may or may not adapt, adopt, and not merely inhabit, but truly belong, without question, in a new home country. Race is particularly salient when the persons questioned have been born and raised in the United States and are fully fluent in English, fully educated within the American system, and fully conversant in the nuances of daily interaction. Under these conditions, race acts as the primary barrier to acceptance within the national fold.

"Go back to your own country." This forever-foreigner admonition problematizes the Asian American experience on a number of contrasting fronts. First, within an assimilationist frame of citizenship, the xenophobic comment assumes that the racialized Asian Other fundamentally lacks the ability to shed their "innate and intractable Asian self" and "become American." They are unassimilable. This frame assumes that the Asian Other retains indelible, racialized grooves of culture and history that cannot be altered, erased, smoothed over. And without altering those grooves, the Asian Other cannot fully and deeply learn or even adopt the language, culture, and history of American whiteness. In spite of generations of US citizenship and accomplishment, these Asian Others remain irrevocably Asian.

Second, the forever-foreigner critique assumes a monocultural United States. Whereas earlier generations of Asian immigrants might have wanted nothing more than to assimilate, to enthusiastically prove their belonging, and to fit into America's expectations, more recent generations may assert a different set of expectations. Those expectations assert difference as a welcome part of citizenship and, in fact, a strength of an immigrant nation. Those differences are not seen as shortcomings or barriers to be overcome, but as contributions to a polyglot nation.

Third, the forever-foreigner admonition may also be problematized in failing to recognize the porousness of America's boundaries. Not only do people of Asian ancestry constitute over 6 percent of the US population, but elements of Asia permeate the American consumer landscape, including food, video games, manga (comics), anime (cartoons), fashion, films, martial arts, and meditative practices. From *Crazy Rich Asians*[4] to *Pokémon*, Asia and Asianisms have become part of the American mainstream that go beyond fads or niche markets. The popularity of these various products shifts, of course, by time, region, class, gender, and subculture, but it would be difficult to walk through a shopping mall in the United States and find not a single trace of Asian or Asian-imaged products. The goods, if not the people and what their presence might mean, are attractive. In short, the admonition "Go back to your own country" forgets that the foreign (as in forever-foreigner) has become familiar—not for all, nor to the same extent and in the same way, nor with the same meanings. Clearly, the cultural boundaries between Asia and America are not so neatly drawn.

However, here is where some of the ironies lie in our highly racialized moment. Some of the same people who might shun Asian Americans or harass them amidst coronavirus fears may still find Hello Kitty endearing. Global capitalism has surprisingly little to say in response to Asian scapegoating, except perhaps in conjunction with patronizing Chinese restaurants or other overtly Asia-linked retail stores. Although I am not suggesting that a group of people necessarily has to be linked to a set of products or racialized images, the contrast between the virulent racism and the heady consumerism of Asian goods (at least outside of Asian enclaves) is worth noting. Part of this may lie in the boundedness of a harmless toy who poses no threat at all. If Asian Americans could be conveniently contained by cuteness (that is, infantilized, rendered harmless, painted innocent), then perhaps the harassments might stop—although for the wrong reasons. But within the context of the pandemic, Asia presents mixed metaphors and images that fuel fears more than create alliances.

Historical Backdrop of Anti-Asian Racism

The dilemma of the mixed metaphors and images amid a pandemic era lies in so readily tapping into histories of anti-Asian racisms. These histories have been well

detailed in works such as Erika Lee's comprehensive *The Making of Asian America: A History*[5] and Mae Ngai's *Impossible Subjects: Illegal Aliens and the Making of Modern America*.[6] Especially since the anti-Asian racism of the pandemic, these histories have also been detailed in the popular press, such as Adrian DeLeon's *PBS News Hour*: *The Conversation* essay entitled "The Long History of Racism against Asian Americans in the US."[7] They have been graphically presented in a multipart series, by award-winning documentarian and Professor of Asian American Studies at UCLA, Renee Tajima-Pena, titled *Asian Americans*,[8] which notably begins the story not with nineteenth-century immigration, as most histories do, but by jumping slightly ahead to the 1904 St. Louis World's Fair, which featured a young Filipino man as a mute display item. In doing so, Tajima-Pena's history embeds the story of Asian America within racialized hierarchies of US empire, framing Asians as objects of exoticized curiosity and scientific measurement. That objectified gaze expresses the ambivalence of Americans toward Asians, as simultaneously curiosities (even desirous ones), as well as objects of fear.

Here, let me provide merely the broad strokes of that ambivalence in order to contextualize anti-Asian racism in 2020. Initially flocking to the United States with the lure of the gold rush (1852), and subsequently recruited as laborers to build the Transcontinental Railroad on the West Coast (1863–1869) and sugar plantations in Hawaii (beginning in 1852), Chinese, primarily male, immigrants established a minority presence in the United States. Anti-Chinese resentment grew as part of a sense of threat that Chinese were taking jobs away from white workers. This resentment tapped into a more generalized Yellow Peril—that is, characterizations of first Chinese, then eventually other Asians, as a menace, stereotyped as dirty, disease-ridden, and untrustworthy. The menace of Yellow Peril suggested (as it still suggests) that Asians represent a contagion from the outside and are therefore a source of threatening chaos. (Note that this is exactly the kind of racist fear reactivated by labels such as "China virus" and "Kung flu" in 2020.) The resultant 1882 Chinese Exclusion Act became the first American law restricting immigration on the basis of nationality. While excluding Chinese, that Act, however, paved the way for other Asians to emigrate to the United States (e.g. Japanese beginning in 1885, Koreans beginning in 1903, Filipinos beginning in 1906). The eventual legislative acts limiting Asian immigration followed, culminating in the Immigration Act of 1924, including the Asian Exclusion Act. Although this law was subsequently overturned by the Immigration and Nationality Act of 1952 (also known as the McCarran-Walter Act), the justification for abolishing national quotas was economic and political, not humanitarian. The racism of American legislation was dramatically exemplified by the 1942 incarceration of Japanese and Japanese Americans in concentration camps with President Franklin Roosevelt's signing of Executive Order 9066. Even as other Asian immigrants sought to distance themselves from Japanese and Japanese Americans, their physical and

economic erasure through internment left an indelible mark upon Asian American history and psyche. It lay open the possibility that anti-Asian legislation may touch upon any and all groups according to the vagaries of historical circumstances.

What these legal structures scaffold are the emotion-fueled paralegal acts of Yellow Peril. These include lynchings in Los Angeles's Chinatown (1871), the burning of buildings and driving Chinese out of Tacoma, Washington (1885), the massacre of Chinese coal workers in Wyoming (1885), the storming of a working-class Filipino community and murder of one of them in Watsonville (1929). The courts did not punish the perpetrators of these acts, but instead condoned them through either the active participation of white politicians in the crimes or token light sentences. The association of Asians with disease and pestilence may have belied their cramped living quarters in places such as Chinatowns, but this also became a rationale for their purposeful destruction, such as the mass fumigation of San Francisco's Chinatown in response to the outbreak of smallpox in 1875 and the burning of Honolulu's Chinatown in response to the bubonic plague in 1900. These kinds of acts went beyond the notion of public health and safety by giving fear a racialized face and place, much as we are witnessing in 2020.

Race: The Power of Labels and Stereotypes

Those racial terms find expression in labels. "China virus" is one type of label that generates its own stigmatized boundary-making that has worked to the detriment of Asian American lives. However, labels can also be political assertions of self-identification. "Asian American" is one of these. For many peoples in the United States originally from Asian countries, the category of Asian American is not necessarily a category of their making or even usage. Some of these people are more likely to self-identify, for example, as Japanese, Chinese, Korean, Vietnamese, Laotian, Filipino, Indian, Pakistani, or with "American" appended to signify their country of citizenship and residence. However, the political turmoil of the 1960s gave rise to the pan-ethnic umbrella term "Asian American," coined by activist-scholars Yuji Ichioka and Emma Gee in conjunction with establishing the Asian American Political Alliance in 1968 and the founding of Asian American Studies at UCLA in 1969. From its origins, "Asian American" was not intended as a census group, but as a new self-defining political alliance between Asian ethnicities in the United States. This was also an alliance of Asians with other minority groups, such as Blacks and Latinos. Ichioka recalls the birthing of the label and political movement in a later interview: "There were so many Asians out there in the political demonstrations but we had no effectiveness. Everyone was lost in the larger rally. We figured that if we rallied behind our own banner, behind an Asian American banner, we would have an effect on the larger public. We could extend the influence beyond ourselves, to other Asian Americans."[9] In short, the term "Asian American" arose out of the oppositional political struggle of the 1960s.

So too did one of the persistent stereotypes of Asian Americans—that of the model minority. In contrast with the earlier fearmongering Yellow Peril stereotype, this one from the 1960s places Asian Americans on an assimilationist pedestal. The phrase "model minority" goes back to January 1966, when it was coined by sociologist William Peterson in an essay, "Success Story: Japanese American Style" published in the *New York Times Magazine*.[10] According to Peterson, a strong work ethic and family values made Japanese Americans—later extended to Chinese Americans—a "model minority." Written in the context of civil rights and the threat of Black Power activism, these Asian Americans provided an exemplary model of assimilationist citizenship.

What lies as the backdrop to the model minority stereotype is always the implicit "problem minority." Thus, both model minority and the implicit "problem minorities" frame the relational racialization of the groups. Designating one group as model minority asserts a tripartite structure: (1) the power-wielding majority that the model emulates; (2) the model minority, and (3) all other less-than-exemplary minorities. Claire Jean Kim explains, "Asian Americans have been racialized relative to and through interaction with Whites and Blacks. As such, the respective racialization trajectories of these groups are profoundly interrelated."[11] In this way, creating, conceptualizing, and performing race through shifting juxtapositions of various groups—that is, interrelated racializations—underpin minority status, model or otherwise.[12] As the activist provocateur Frank Chin famously said in 1974, "Whites love us [Asian Americans] because we're not black."[13]

That polarization, as well as relational positioning, has historical roots. Given the context of Black Lives Matter within this pandemic era, it is worth noting briefly that Black (qua African)-Asian relationships in the United States have been complex and at times oppositional—antagonistic versus cooperative, competing versus allied, complicit versus in solidarity—circumscribing their racialized minority statuses. To begin with, the social and labor histories of both groups intertwined, pivoting on racialized structures: the abolition of Black slavery ushered in an era of Asian indentured labor in the United States. Black activist Frederick Douglass vehemently opposed the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882 in his dream of a pluralist, pan-racial utopia in the United States.[14] Others shared his dream that went beyond a reborn American to a plurality of nations committed to social justice and fair representation. Over seventy years later, amidst a global, postwar rise of ethno-racial consciousness, the 1955 Bandung Conference in Indonesia forged a formal alliance between nonaligned nations in Asia and Africa. Another related alliance was taken up in the late 1960s and 1970s with the birth of the Asian American movement and its partnering with Blacks and other minorities in the United States. This kind of partnering of minorities builds upon

shared inequities. In a now-famous example, heavyweight boxer Muhammed Ali explained his refusal to fight in Vietnam in 1967 as part of an alliance of people of color: "My conscience won't let me go shoot my brother, or some darker people, or some poor hungry people in the mud for big powerful America."[15] Another iconic moment captured in a photograph: February 21, 1965, Malcolm X shot at Manhattan's Audubon Ballroom, cradled by Japanese American female activist Yuri Kochiyama as he lay dying.

Alliances, however, can be fragile. A few decades later, the 1992 Los Angeles riots over the police brutality against Black male Rodney King spilled over into interracial tensions between Blacks and Korean merchants, resulting in the destruction of Koreatown. Although much has been made of African-Asian antagonism and violence, this should be balanced by minorities uniting against police violence, as well as generational divides within the Korean community in attitudes toward Blacks. These generational divides pivot around immigrants and their descendants in shoring up their affiliations—with those in dominant positions (i.e., whites, taking an assimilationist, settler colonial position) versus those in a united struggle (i.e., people of color, taking a position of defiance, resistance). These include Asian Americans serving on the police force and engaging directly with brutality against Blacks (e.g., Hmong American Tou Thao and the George Floyd case in Minneapolis in 2020; Chinese American Peter Liang and the shooting of Akai Gurley in Brooklyn in 2014).

In the July 6–13, 2020, issue of *Time Magazine*, Vietnamese author and scholar Viet Thanh Nguyen entitles his major essay "The Model Minority Trap," suggesting that such a public pedestal becomes its own nightmare.[16] But what kind of nightmare is this and how might it contribute to the experience of anti-Asian racism? Since when and why does a model become a problem?

Some might question the validity of speaking critically about a stereotype that holds such positive values: middle-class, education, family, work ethic, achievement. What is wrong with that? In the face of Black Lives Matter, this may seem relatively trivial. And yet, I would argue that stereotypes perform their own kind of violence, whether physical, psychological, or emotional. They disable even as they enable, internalized within the quiet assimilation of racialized selves—or at least this is what the stereotype would have one believe. Within this context, to assimilate is to render oneself invisible. This holds true even as the anti-Asian racism of pandemic labels pulls the American public in the other direction, forcing upon Asian Americans a negative, hyperinflected Yellow Peril visibility. Critiquing the model minority stereotype does not pit one group against another but emphasizes the importance of rallying against the structural racism that harms us all.

Although it is easy enough to contrast the two stereotypes—Yellow Peril and model minority—Asian American Studies scholar Colleen Lye argues instead for recognizing their commonality, the way they are "best understood as two aspects of the same, long-running racial form, a form whose most salient feature . . . is the trope of economic efficiency."[17] In her analysis, Lye challenges us to recognize the embedded link between race and class. Nguyen agrees, citing a "crossbred system of white supremacy and capitalist exploitation . . . engaging in the most dangerous kind of identity politics, the nationalist American kind, which, from the origins of this country, has been white and propertied."[18]

The Perils of Being Yellow: Acting Out, Acting Up

The connections between anti-Asian racism and capitalism found a rallying cry in the 1982 beating death of Chinese American Vincent Chin. Occurring with the rise of the Japanese auto industry and the subsequent threat to US-related jobs, Chin's death represents a tragic case of racism amid economic tensions. In a strip club in Detroit, two white auto workers, Ronald Ebens and his stepson, Michael Nitz, got into an argument with a young Chinese American man, Vincent Chin, who they mistook for a Japanese. During the course of the heated exchange, the white men accused Chin of taking jobs from Americans in the auto industry. Eventually, Ebens and Nitz hunted down Chin and fatally beat him with a baseball bat. The two white assailants received only light sentences: $3,000 each and three years of probation with no jail time. It was not Chin's murder that made headlines and sparked protests by Asian Americans, but the light sentence of the admittedly guilty white perpetrators. This sensational case marked a turning point for many Asian Americans, galvanizing them into action, resulting in the founding of the American Citizens for Justice (or the Asian American Center for Justice) by journalist Helen Zia and lawyer Liza Chan.

The Vincent Chin case demonstrated the ongoing nature of anti-Asian racism, at the ready for particular economic, social, or physical threats to reignite its expression. Anti-Asian racism provides a convenient scapegoat for public fears. The coronavirus is one of them, especially with its labels pointing the way. For example, since the pandemic, Asian American nurses and doctors report the reluctance of some patients to be treated by them.[19] Asian American businesses report suffering a drop in sales, an economic downside shared by many during the pandemic, but here with the added factor of anti-Asian fears.[20] On an interpersonal level, the pandemic-fueled anti-Asian racism has resulted in numerous reports of microaggressions, shunning, verbal abuse, and physical attacks—many of which have been caught on cellphone videos and posted on social media.[21] This mediated presence of anti-Asian racism combines with face-to-face harassment to amplify the experience manifold. YouTube is filled with instances of anti-Asian violation

in public places, such as subways, parks, sidewalks, and stores. These reportings may be anecdotal and scattered, but they form an important mediated frame of Asian Americans pushing back, willing to publicly shame the perpetrators. Asian Americans and their allies have posted racialized attacks to heighten public awareness, to let that public shaming go viral.

Other avenues of reportage are attempting to institutionalize the practices of going viral. For example, such a rise in anti-Asian hate crimes has led to the creation of a website to track these attacks, Stop AAPI Hate. Launched by Russell Jeung, professor of Asian American Studies at San Francisco State University, and organized by the Asian Pacific Policy and Planning Council and Chinese for Affirmative Action, the website acts as a repository of reported incidents in English, Chinese, Korean, Thai, Japanese, Vietnamese, and Khmer.[22] In its first week (March 19–26, 2020), over 650 reported incidents ranged from verbal harassment to physical assault. From its inception in March 2020 through mid-July, the nonprofit Stop AAPI Hate has recorded over 2,300 incidents of anti-Asian racism. The Stop AAPI Hate website documents the forms and targets of reported attacks: verbal harassment (approximately 70 percent), shunning (approximately 22 percent), physical assaults (over 8 percent), civil rights violations (approximately 9 percent). Among those who report such abuse, over twice as many are women, with elderly people making up about 10 percent of respondents. These numbers, however, represent only a fraction of incidences, since they are all based on self-reportages. And given a cultural propensity among various Asian cultures, and perhaps especially among immigrant cultures, to blend in and not want to call attention to oneself, the reportage might be expectedly low. At the same time, Harvard University's Sociology Department has partnered with UNESCO in researching the impact of the pandemic on Asians, Asian Americans, and Pacific Islander populations in the United States, "focusing on multiple layers of harm—the virus itself and the intensification of racism and xenophobia that this demographic has endured in its wake."[23]

Asian American celebrities have gone public in voicing their opposition to such racism. On July 21, 2020, several prominent Asian American members of the Screen Actors Guild-American Federation of Television and Radio Artists (SAG-AFTRA), an American labor union representing approximately 160,000 members in the entertainment industry, released a public service announcement video decrying such racially targeted discrimination and hate crimes. With the hashtag #WashTheHate, the video's message stated:

> We're living at a time when humanity matters most. Even though we're physically apart, we must all come together as one. . . . It's a scary time, but we can't let fear turn into hate. Far too many people are using this crisis as an excuse to forget reason and embrace racism. . . . We must all stop the

> stigma. We must all stop the xenophobia. We must all stop the hate. . . So, let's make sure ending this behavior becomes one of our strengths. Stand up against racism when you see it. We are always stronger together.[24]

From a younger generation and in a different genre and celebrity, Korean American rap duo Year of the Ox has released their own protest, incorporating some of the viral images from YouTube postings of Asian American harassment. Appropriately entitled "Viral," the rappers describe some of their experiences and reflections upon racism:

> Think I'm dealing with racism worse cuz of the outbreak? No. We've been dealing with racism since birth without breaks. I still have faith in humankind but what do I know? Hatred's the most contagious and these days it's going viral. This morning I told my mama to watch her back cuz they're out to get us. Their plan of attack is like the Klan but without the get-up. Paranoid and ignorant is a dangerous combination. They want to blame someone so they aim it at all the Asians. . . . The state of danger is getting drastic. It's about survival. But hate and anger's been spreading faster and now it's viral.[25]

Clearly, both Asian American actors and rappers use their power to capture the limelight to give voice to the outrage against anti-Asian violence. Just as the coronavirus spreads virally, so too are anti-Asian racist actions growing at an alarming rate. Here as well, their critique in videos, public service announcements, and creative expressions are spreading, although not with quite the same velocity. This is an era of viruses and violence, in which voices of protest need to go viral, not out of celebrity pandering but out of necessity. In fact, this is exactly what the Black Lives Matter movement recognizes—the tragic circumstances in which unrelenting racist violence calls for nothing less than viral responses.

Strategizing: Toward Critical Empathy

What to do? How might we develop effective strategies that counter xenophobic racisms surrounding COVID-19? How to pave the way for those strategies to go viral? Let me first build a case for critical empathy by outlining preliminary steps that are part of the process. This is not a march so much as a dialectical dance.

Step 1: looking inward. We can start with the soul-searching of examining our own racialized attitudes and definitions, our own racisms—about other Asians, about other races. This holds true no matter how we self-identify—as Asian Americans, Asianists, or none of the above. These are the crucial lessons of the era. We recognize what poet Cathy Park Hong calls "minor feelings"—the believability of the minority position, steeped in essentialist shame, suspicion, and

abject melancholy.[26] We recognize the settler colonial position—that is, adopting the ways of colonizers that preserve existing hierarchies to the detriment of other minorities—where it exists among Asian Americans.[27] We can educate ourselves about our own histories and their contexts. We can examine our own assumptions of who we are, and perhaps more importantly, who we would like to be. How have minorities internalized other people's assumptions (possibilities and limitations) about themselves? How might minority groups imagine their own—and other minority groups'—best-case scenarios? What are the steps needed in order to live that scenario? How might we—Asians, Asian Americans, Asianists, allies—develop a deeper understanding about racism, inequity, and the way oppression works within our cultures, institutions, and, most critically, ourselves? This is hard work at all levels, from soul-searching to alliance-building. The work is difficult because there is so much about racialized identities that are deeply entrenched as core beliefs about who we (and others) are.

And yet this is the gift of the moment—forcing us to ask tough questions, to turn the mirror upon ourselves, as Asians, Asian Americans, Asianists, and allies. We can use these questions to de-victimize ourselves. The answers to those questions may be painful to ourselves and others as we confront the uncomfortable realities of past selves and beliefs. The good news is that recognizing these pasts is the first step, but certainly not the last.

Step 2: looking outward. We can demand that our leaders act and speak responsibly and not encourage racist behavior, regardless of the current pressures upon social, physical, and economic well-being. The responsibility, however, cannot be left only to leaders. Rather, we should find the leadership within ourselves to take up the mantle. All of us should consider education as essential—education about Asia, about racism, including its microaggressions, about histories that have brought people in juxtaposition with one another. We have to develop legacies in Asian Studies that lead through responsible, engaged scholarship. Asian Studies should be partnering with Asian American Studies to develop deeper and broader alliances in understanding the politics of diasporic lives. Social justice should have no disciplinary or institutional boundaries but should infuse our scholarly and personal lives at the macro- and micro-level. We have to develop multigenerational leadership within Asian American communities that is demographically inclusive and sensitive to cultural norms.

Step 3: moving toward critical empathy. And finally, it may not be so far-fetched to dream of the possibilities of critical empathy—that is, reaching out in order to listen well and respectfully to other people, even while reserving the right to disagree. Based in rational communication and emotional bonds, critical empathy takes community as a verb and an ongoing responsibility. Critical empathy gives important weight to both parts of the picture: critique (including

self-critique) and connection, looking inward and looking outward. Critical empathy frames intimacy as aspirational, as seeking shared goals, binding one to another, linking groups to groups, and doing so not out of obligation, but out of deep-seated respect. None of these are taken for granted. All of this requires work and commitment. Racialized scapegoating has no place in this picture. Critical empathy asks that we be willing to challenge our assumptions, to reapportion spaces of dignity for each other, and to invest in the contagion of these practices. Ultimately, critical empathy calls us to action, taking steps to change existing structures through our own engagement. When times are tough, such as these, we can only hope that these aspirations of critical empathy may go viral.

Notes

[1] See Todd DeStigter, "Public Displays of Affection: Political Community through Critical Empathy," *Research in the Teaching of English*, 33, no. 3 (1999): 235–244. National Council of Teachers of English. http://www.jstor.org/stable/40171438 (accessed July 25, 2020). See also Eric Leake, "Empathy as Research Methodology," in *Handbook of Research Methods in Health Social Sciences*, ed. P. Liamputtong, 237–252. (Springer: Singapore, 2019), https://doi.org/10.1007/978-981-10-5251-4_65 (accessed August 1, 2020).

[2] John Kuo Wei Tchen and Dylan Yeats, eds. *Yellow Peril!: An Archive of Anti-Asian Fear* (London, Verso: 2014).

[3] Ravi Chandra, "Calling COVID-19 a 'Chinese Virus' or 'Kung Flu' Is Racist." *Psychology Today*, March, 24, 2020, https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/the-pacific-heart/202003/calling-covid-19-chinese-virus-or-kung-flu-is-racist (accessed July 28, 2020).

[4] John Chu, director. *Crazy Rich Asians* [film], Warner Bros, 2018. Kevin Kwan. *Crazy Rich Asians* (New York: Doubleday, 2013).

[5] Erika Lee. *The Making of Asian America: A History* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2015).

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[7] Adrian DeLeon, "The Long History of Racism against Asian Americans in the U.S. The Conversation." *PBS News Hour,* April 9, 2020, https://www.pbs.org/newshour/nation/the-long-history-of-racism-against-asian-americans-in-the-u-s (accessed July 31, 2020).

[8] Renee Tajima-Pena, producer. *Asian Americans*. Corporation of Public Broadcasting series, 2020.

[9] Anna Purna Kambhampaty, "In 1968, These Activists Coined the Term 'Asian American'—And Helped Shape Decades of Advocacy," *Time Magazine*, May 22, 2020, https://time.com/5837805/asian-american-history/ (accessed July 20, 2020). Yen Le Espiritu. *Asian American Panethnicity: Bridging Institutions and Identities* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1992).

[10] William Peterson, "Success Story, Japanese-American Style," *The New York Times Magazine* January 9, 1966: 20–21, 23, 36, 38, 40–41, 43.

[11] Claire Jean Kim, "The Racial Triangulation of Asian Americans," *Politics and Society* 27, no. 1 (1999): 105–138.

[12] Kat Chow, "'Model Minority' Myth Again Used as a Racial Wedge Between Asians and Blacks," *National Public Radio*, April 19, 2017, https://www.npr.org/sections/codeswitch/2017/04/19/524571669/model-minority-myth-again-used-as-a-racial-wedge-between-asians-and-blacks (accessed July 29, 2020).

[13] Frank Chin, "Yardbird Publishing." In *Yardbird Reader*, Volume 3, eds. Frank Chin and Shawn Hsu Wong, iv-v. (Berkeley: Yardbird, 1974).

[14] David W. Blight, "Frederick Douglass's Vision for a Reborn America," *The Atlantic*, December 2019, https://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2019/12/frederick-douglass-david-blight-america/600802/ (accessed August 11, 2020).

[15] Deneen L. Brown, "'Shoot Them for What?' How Muhammad Ali Won His Greatest Fight," *The Washington Post*, June 15, 2018, https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/retropolis/wp/2018/06/15/shoot-them-for-what-how-muhammad-ali-won-his-greatest-fight/ (accessed August 11, 2020).

[16] Viet Thanh Nguyen, "The Model Minority Trap," *Time Magazine*, July 6–13, 2020: 50–66.

[17] Colleen Lye. *America's Asia: Racial Form and American Literature, 1893–1945*. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005).

[18] Nguyen, "The Model Minority Trap," 66.

[19] Jen Tracy, "Asian American Doctors and Nurses Are Fighting Racism and the Coronavirus," *The Washington Post*, May 19, 2020, https://www.washingtonpost.com/business/2020/05/19/asian-american-discrimination/ (accessed August 2, 2020).

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