

Anti-Asian Racism & COVID-19

This slide deck was developed to help educate people about anti-Asian racism that has emerged in the wake of the COVID-19 global pandemic. I have focused on racism in the US, but anti-Asian racism is a global phenomenon. Feel free to share widely and to add your own slides.

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Racism Defined

- Racism is a system where one racial group dominates/has power over others—the [Dismantling Racism](#) site [has a useful definition](#)
- Racism is institutional – it is power plus prejudice
- Racism is not the same as talking about race
- Racism in the US has taken the form of
 - [Trans-Atlantic slave trade](#) and the enslavement of people from African nations
 - [American Indian dispossession of land](#) and colonization
 - The WWII [incarceration of Japanese Americans](#)
 - Targeting [Latinx populations at US southern borders](#)
 - Housing, Marriage, Educational discrimination whereby [entire populations, races, are kept out of housing markets](#), are [unable to freely marry](#), and [don't have access to educational institutions](#).

Anti-Asian Racism: A **very** brief history

- Anti-Asian racism has existed from the time the first wave of Chinese immigrants came to the US in the 19th C first in search of gold and then when they were recruited to build the Transcontinental Railroad
- Chinese were vilified and demonized in the US, accused of eating vermin (rats) and engaging in pagan religious practices (Confucianism). Generally they were associated with filth and disease, often because they were forced to live in overcrowded quarters (what became Chinatowns in industrial/poor neighborhoods), where disease ran rampant and proper hygiene unobtainable
- Anti-Chinese sentiment grew in the US in the 19th C with accusations that Chinese laborers were stealing jobs from white working men

Yellow Peril

- Anti-Chinese sentiment became part of the Yellow Peril language
- [Yellow Peril](#) refers to a general fear, mistrust, and hatred of, first, Chinese in the US, and then these negative sentiments were transferred to other Asian-ethnic immigrant groups: Japanese, Korean, and Indian
- [Yellow Peril](#) sentiment fueled many anti-Asian US initiatives, such as the [1882 Chinese Exclusion Act](#), the [Gentleman's Agreement](#), and the [Cable Act](#)
- The most important thing to note is that [Yellow Peril sentiment](#) reduces Asians to always being foreign, never considered American

Asians becoming Americans

- Historically anti-Chinese sentiment became anti-Asian racism once the ethnic particularities of being Chinese in the US were flattened into the racial category of “*Oriental*” (past) now, ASIAN
 - [Note: NO ONE uses the term “Oriental” anymore—it is akin to calling African Americans “Negro” —don’t do it]
- Asians in the US eventually became Asian Americans, officially once racist restrictions against immigration and naturalization were lifted but also culturally and socially as the US nation became more accepting of non-European people being considered American
- However, a sizable number of people in the US still regard Asian Americans as foreign rather than as US citizens—which contributes to anti-Asian racism

Vincent Chin & 9/11 backlash

- Two instances that show how Asian Americans continue to be seen as “foreign” rather than as US citizens and fully American:
- [Vincent Chin](#)—a Chinese American engineer who was brutally murdered by two white men who accused him of stealing their jobs during the Detroit auto industry slump
- [The on-going harassment and demonization of South Asian Americans, Muslim Americans, and Arab Americans in the wake of 9/11](#) – many of the people in the aforementioned groups have described [harassment and racism](#) that have led to fear, stigmatization, and [murder](#)

Why saying “Chinese Virus” is racist

- The World Health Organization (WHO) has been clear in explaining [why the official name for the novel coronavirus is COVID-19](#). They want [to avoid the stigmatization that has happened in the past](#) when diseases have been affiliated with geographic regions or ethnicities
- Though the virus may have first originated in Wuhan, China, it has become a global pandemic. And as the WHO and [many other organizations](#) have noted, to mis-name the virus and call it by its point of origin [engages in racist practices of blaming a region and by extension a group of people with this disease](#).

Why saying “Chinese Virus” is racist

- When [government officials](#) and private citizens insist on calling it “Chinese Virus” because the 1918 flu pandemic was referred to as the “Spanish Flu” this reinforces the problem with using “Chinese Virus” since [the 1918 flu pandemic did not originate in Spain](#), so the logic does not hold up
- And when people say [it is not racist](#) to say that the virus originated in China, that would be true if we lived in a world in which systemic racism was not still an issue and [anti-Asian racism](#) did not still persist.
- Using the phrase “Chinese Virus” [is done deliberately](#) to blame a country and people who others continue to associate with disease and filth and where [Chinese Americans and Asian Americans by extension are still seen as foreign](#).

Incidents of Anti-Asian harassment/racism

- Since the spread of COVID-19, [anti-Chinese](#) and [anti-Asian harassment, globally](#), has been on the rise
- In the US, [incidents of anti-Asian racism](#) has resulted in the following:
 - Asian Americans are [sharing stories](#) of [harassment](#), [prejudice](#), and [racism](#)
 - The [NY state attorney general](#) has created a [special hotline](#) for people to report [anti-Asian harassment](#)
 - [Asian American scholars](#) have created [a website for people to report incidents of anti-Asian harassment](#)
 - [Mainstream news outlets](#) are reporting on [anti-Asian harassment connected with COVID-19](#)

How to be an anti-racist ally

- Anyone can be an [anti-racist ally](#): you simply need to [both speak and act as an anti-racist](#) and promote and [work towards anti-racism](#)
- The first step is educating yourself about the [history of racism in the US](#) – and this education is on-going and constant
- The next step is practicing [how to talk about issues of race and racism](#) in your communities – don't just be a bystander, speak out. Remember: [not acting racist is not the same as being anti-racist](#)
- How you can address anti-Asian racism NOW is to [correct people who are calling COVID-19 “Chinese Virus”](#) and explain how it is connected to a [longer history of racism against Asian Americans](#)
- You can, for example, share this power point slide with them and encourage people to report anti-Asian harassment [on this site](#)

AAAS Statement about anti-Asian harassment and COVID-19 [released early March 2020]

- The [Centers for Disease Control](#) recently announced that the Novel Coronavirus/COVID-19 may spread in the United States. As people take precautions to manage their health (the two biggest precautions are [frequent handwashing and staying home if you are sick](#)), the Association for Asian American Studies (AAAS) wants to also acknowledge the [rise of anti-Asian \(especially anti-Chinese\) harassment](#) that many Asian Americans (particularly those who look East Asian) are experiencing. As an organization dedicated to the study of Asian Americans, we want to be very clear that xenophobia has no place in our communities or workplaces and that harassment of Asians due to fears of the coronavirus are not only unwarranted but sadly part of a [longer history of stereotypes associating Asians, especially Chinese, with disease](#). We stand firm in rejecting anti-Asian bigotry in the guise of people expressing fear of Novel Coronavirus/COVID-19. We also urge people to find resources that will [educate them about how to manage their health](#) as well as why their prejudices/biases in assuming all Asians have the virus are rooted in a [history of Yellow Peril rhetoric](#), xenophobia, ableism, and anti-Asian racism. Please encourage your colleagues and friends to explore [this open-source syllabus](#) that addresses anti-Asian bias associated with the coronavirus. And please remember: frequent handwashing, not anti-Asian stereotypes/harassment, is your best means of preventing the spread of coronavirus.

Further reading

- Anderson, Carol. [*White Rage: the Unspoken Truth of Our Racial Divide*](#). Bloomsbury 2016.
- Hsu, Madeline. [*Asian American History: A Very Short Introduction*](#). 2nd ed. Oxford University Press, 2016.
- Kendi, Ibram X. [*How to Be an Anti-Racist*](#). Penguin 2019.
- Lee, Erika. [*The Making of Asian America: A History*](#). Simon & Schuster 2015.
- Lopez, Ian Haney. [*White By Law: the Legal Construction of Race*](#). 10th Anniversary edition. NYU Press 2006.
- Maeda, Daryl. [*Chains of Babylon: the Rise of Asian America*](#). University of Minnesota Press 2009.
- Ngai, Mae. [*Impossible Subjects: Illegal Aliens and the Making of Modern America*](#). Princeton University Press 2014.
- Omi, Michael and Howard Winant. [*Racial Formation in the United States*](#). Routledge 2014.