

# The Impact of COVID-19 Pandemic and The BLM Movement on Asian Communities in the United States

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The COVID-19 has turned everyone upside-down to some degrees. However, different racial communities have been impacted by this pandemic to different extents.

As an Asian myself, I am really frustrated by the fact that Asian Americans are so marginalized in the United States. As far as my observations go, the Asian communities have been tremendously and uniquely impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic. China was the first victim of the COVID-19 virus. As a Chinese descendent, I still vividly remember the days when the virus hit hard on China and cases just started to be reported across the United States, followed by death, conspiracies, and travel bans. I remember waiting nervously behind the screen for the daily update on the number of cases in China and praying my extended families there, who are mostly front-line health-care workers, to stay safe from the virus. The Asian communities in the United States, no matter how well they fit into the mainstream society, are more or less connected to their Asian lineages, some by a sense of belonging, some have people they care about there [in China]. Watching the death numbers climbing in Asia discomfited all Asians in the United States, who were hopelessly trying to offer help to their fellows on the other side of the ocean but by no means.

I remember the play “The Normal Heart” by Larry Kramer that I read in my English 156 class on Literature and Medicine<sup>1</sup>. The play tells a story on the homosexual community in New York City in the 1980s, within which the AIDS was first spread out<sup>1</sup>. This immunodeficiency virus was first referred as GRID — gay-related immune deficiency. The play describes how a small group of gay community was trying to fight against this deadly disease and more importantly, the stereotypes on homosexuality from the society<sup>1</sup>. It has been true that diseases often unfortunately come along with stereotypes. The COVID pandemics had no exception this time and every person with a face of Asia in the United States felt the pressure, who might “come from China” and be a potential “carrier of the virus”. After the pandemic’s breakout in the United States, targeted violence on Asian Americans were constantly reported on the news, sometimes even towards the fragile senior persons. Verbal attacks on the Chinese and the Chinese government were countless. I still remember in late March 2020, “It’s from China”, “#ChineseVirus”, and some more cursive words were written down by chalk on UW-Madison’s campus streets<sup>2</sup>. Fears overwhelmed Madison’s Asian communities, who were frightened to be the next victims of targeted hate crimes. The president Donald Trump’s jingoistic policies against China, including embassy shutdown in Austin and cancellation of visas for certain Chinese students, further ignited hatred and xenophobia against Asians in the United States.

Asian Americans had a frustrating and complicated history in US, which lead to the question of who we really are in the US society. On my first semester here at UW-Madison, I immediately attended a course on Asian American study to address my identity crisis. From this

course, we examined the *Race, rights, and the Asian American experience* by Angelo Ancheta, who asked the question “Are you Black or are you White?” He pointed out that there are only two mainstream identities in the United States, namely, Black and White.

However, Asian Americans have experiences that are widely different from Black or White Americans. Thus, when the antagonism is limited between Black and White, Asian Americans often find themselves in a “racial limbo”, marginalized and unrecognized as full participants.

Asian communities consist of large numbers of first-generation immigrants and international students, who are even more frustrated due to their relative lack of knowledge on the historical racial conflicts in the United States and the culture differences between the East and the West.

The political voice of the Asian community is much weaker. [than other minority communities’]. But nevertheless, the Black Lives Matter movement has shown us African Americans’ strong sense of identity and the determination to eliminate the racial inequality. Asian Americans, who shared some common histories with African Americans in terms of political power, are reminded of the institutional racism that is deeply rooted in the United States. The marginalization of Asian Americans is calling us to solidify a unique identity, to recognize the stereotypes, and to act against discriminations.