

Protecting Asian Americans During Violent Times - March 4, 2021 Webinar Highlights

Event Description

The recent spate of violence against Asian Americans has garnered the attention of the nation and the White House. At this critical juncture, it is imperative to raise awareness and understanding of the situation and to respond appropriately to ensure the safety of those in Asian American communities. The 1990 Institute brought together highly respected leaders from the Asian and Black communities to lend perspective and present solutions on how to improve community public safety while underscoring the necessity for allyship among all our communities.

Panelists

- **Carl Chan:** President of the [Oakland Chinatown Chamber of Commerce](#)
- **Russell Jeung:** Chair and Professor in the Asian American Studies Department at San Francisco State University; Co-Founder of [Stop AAPI Hate](#)
- **Vincent Pan:** Co-Executive Director of [Chinese for Affirmative Action \(CAA\)](#)
- **Lateefah Simon:** President of the [Akonadi Foundation](#)
- **Momo Chang (Moderator):** Journalist, [Oakland Voices](#), Alumni Coordinator

Note: Cynthia Choi, Co-Executive Director of Chinese for Affirmative Action (CAA) and Co-Founder of Stop AAPI Hate, was originally scheduled to participate in our event. She was called to a [meeting with Asian leaders at the White House regarding anti-Asian hate](#). We are grateful that Vincent Pan, her Co-Executive Director at CAA, was available to join us and share his perspective.

Highlights

The Surge in Violence against Asian Americans:

- [Stop AAPI Hate](#) is a reporting center that has received 2,800+ reports of hate incidents against Asian Americans since March 2020. These include violations of civil rights in the workplace, online harassment, verbal harassment and shunning, and physical assaults. **The elderly, women and people under 20 have been the most frequent targets.**
- **What are the main reasons for the surge in attacks?**
 - The **political rhetoric** over the last year has given license to hate speech. Use of terms such as “Chinese virus” has led to more attacks on Asian Americans.
 - **Implicit biases** that have equated Asian Americans as disease carriers in the past have carried over to the present.
 - **The Yellow Peril: A racialized stereotype that Asians are a threat to the West** is exemplified by the 1882 Chinese Exclusion Act, Japanese internment during WWII, Islamophobia in 2001 following 9/11, and again invoked today.

- In times of **war, epidemics, and economic downturns, Asians are more seen as foreigners**. At other times, Asians are seen as insiders or white-adjacent (model minority myth).

Prevention and Intervention:

- At the national level, as China becomes stronger, **US government responses have translated into negative perceptions of Chinese American and all Asian Americans**. It is unfair to blame Asian Americans for the actions of China. To effect long-term change and reduce racial discrimination and improve public safety, **community leaders and government officials need to listen to each other, be aware of cultural differences, develop and employ innovative strategies, and enhance funding for support programs**.
- **At the local level, solutions need to be tailored to the specific places and outcomes**. In schools, teachers and administrators need to stop bullying and include an ethnic studies curriculum. For **private businesses**, consumers need to know their rights and how to report when being discriminated against. There is also a need for employment-based training and for supporting small businesses. At the **community level, investing solely in law enforcement strategies will not likely produce desired results. There need to be broader and more effective solutions**. Organizations are working on how to **employ and house the homeless, perform restorative justice, and mend our communities together**. In Chinatown, **volunteers are providing a more visible presence to promote safety. Responsible bystanders can stop and intervene. We need to have signage, lighting, and streets that are paved well – community safety that is comprehensive**. There is also a need for mental health facilities for those who seek them.
- **Asians have the highest income inequality of any other racial group. We need to deal with economic, food, and housing insecurity related to crime in dense urban areas**. Violence in low-income areas is receiving more attention because of Covid and economic distress. Asian Americans are facing the same insecurities as other groups but are receiving fewer resources.

On Allyship:

- This is a timely and inspiring moment where we're challenging each other to deal with our national sin of racism and an **opportunity to confront the very difficult conversations revolving around the real-life experience of intra-community violence**.
- **Poverty breeds violence, the otherness of one another breeds hate. We are literally neighbors everywhere across the US** – Blacks, Latinos, Asian Americans/Pacific Islanders, Indigenous people, and whites. **The abuse of any of our elders should never be tolerated**.
- **Each community experiences different forms of discrimination** involving deep and long-standing problems of poverty, disinvestment, and lack of opportunity – Asian American, Chinese immigrant, Black communities, etc. Community leaders are moving together in harmony to move the conversation forward. Those who are desperate for resources are resorting to violence. We can help direct them to resources that make a difference in systemic issues of intra-community violence and deep economic depression. **Multiculturalism is important but it's important to not lose our racial and ethnic pride to just merge together**.
- **All communities who continue to be "otherized" continue to be vulnerable**, including South Asians, Southeast Asians, and more recently Chinese Americans and those perceived to be Chinese

due to the relevance of China's increase in power. Racism and hate manifest in communities that have been historically marginalized. **Local solutions start with investing in community-based groups that have been most impacted and providing resources so everyone is safe and well.**

On Media Coverage:

- **A focus on hate crimes does a disservice and misdiagnoses some of the discrimination issues and can stoke racial animosity. Not all hate incidents are crimes and not all crimes are hate crimes.** Because these incidents are horrific there is a tendency to react emotionally. **Focusing on hate crimes narrows the issue so that solutions presented are not on the education and civil rights protections that we need. Viewers are traumatized, re-traumatized, and then desensitized** as seeing the violence over and over on the news becomes the norm.
- **National and local narratives have sometimes pitted communities against each other instead of focusing on solutions.** We are facing a drastic emergency in economic terms, in increased violence in homes and on streets. The joblessness rate among all people of color is in the double digits.
- **Asian American journalists have been strong in bringing the issue to the forefront** and in asking the better questions that get at root issues and long-term solutions. **Ethnic news** sources are extremely important for shining a light on local stories of BIPOC (Black, Indigenous, and People of Color) communities and organizations working together.

Moving forward:

- Asians are often culturally other-centered rather than self-focused and are quick to understand events, such as the current surge in violence, in terms of others. **We can center on ourselves at the moment and examine how racism has impacted us, how being seen as the perpetual foreigner is really deeply hurting us and killing our elders.** As we center on our own healing and share our inner experience and the pain of racism, others can understand and ally with us.
- **There is a need to explain the harmful stereotype of being seen as a perpetual foreigner and the phenomenon of yellow peril.** US foreign policy is sometimes based on the most powerful instead of establishing the dignity and human rights of people everywhere. **We need to push back against a US foreign policy based on dominance and imperialism or it can lead to racial problems in the US.**
- **Asian Americans feel in a state of siege due to fear of violence.** When people are threatened, they can go into fight mode (repeating cycles of violence), flight mode (staying inside), or freeze mode (ignoring the situation). There is another alternative: "flock" mode – **join the community, flock together with allies, address the situation together.**
- To break cycles, there is a need for **more education and ethnic studies for racial equity and racial healing, expanded civil rights protections in businesses, and restorative justice. A comprehensive approach doesn't simply focus on completely defunding the police.**
- Solutions that work all focus on the same things – dignity, respect, safety, health, well-being. **We need a diverse democracy with spaces where people of different backgrounds can come together to know one another, come up with common goals, and pursue them with shared power.**

What you can do:

- **Be a responsible bystander.**
- **Support and get involved in Asian American organizations** by donating, volunteering, or taking some responsibility to educate others who may not know what is happening in our communities.
- Find and fund alternatives to systems that have never truly worked. **Donate to and/or augment support programs for young people and other vulnerable community members.** Consider preventative resources for education, economic opportunities, mental health resources, housing, etc. Local communities and organizations can be funded so those in need have more opportunities.
- **Support and amplify minority-owned and small businesses** in vulnerable communities.
- **Receive training in de-escalation techniques** and how to spot trouble or help a person who is having a hard time. Train other Asian and non-Asian supporters. Consider walking as a volunteer in your local Chinatown, or distribute safety alerts and air horns to businesses in Oakland if you can.
- Continue to raise up issues that **acknowledge that other communities have been suffering too and that together there are solutions that can work.**
- **There is deep pain, but when communities come together, we can continue our lineage of a human and civil rights movement in this country.**

Thank you for joining us for our discussion. Please send your comments and suggestions for future programs to us at discussions@1990institute.org.

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