

### **Not your model minority: Asian students speak out**

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Student rally chant: Stop Asian Hate. End white violence. Stop Asian Hate. End white violence.

Robin Chenoweth: In this episode of Inspire, we pose the question, what will it take — at long last — to bring down hate in the United States — a country which, in premise, was built upon justice and liberty? It's a question being asked by many people these last few weeks, in university classes and on social media, both at Ohio State University and around the country, and at rallies like this one recently on the university's Oval.

Student rally: A Cambodian immigrant and his Chinese neighbor both woke up at 3:30 a.m. in Oakland, California, to see their cars were on fire. And they were the only two Asians living in the neighborhood. Earlier this week, a 58-year-old Chinese woman was robbed when sitting in her car after dropping her husband off for cancer treatment in San Francisco, California. And then there the eight lost to the Atlanta shooting, more Asian woman, many who are single-parent, immigrant mothers, the first in their family to work in the U.S.

Robin Chenoweth: In a year when anti-Asian hate has ramped up and political rhetoric has fanned flames during the coronavirus, there are many stories of violence. A Thai American woman stopped at a traffic light outside Cleveland was told by a man in a pickup truck to "Get out of my country" and "I'll kill you." A 2-year-old, a six-year-old and the family member with them were stabbed in a grocery store in Midland, Texas. These incidents were reported to police. Most are not. If you're wondering whether Ohio State students also have suffered abuse and discrimination, the answer is yes.

Robin Chenoweth: This is the Ohio State University Inspire Podcast, a production of the College of Education and Human Ecology. I'm Robin Chenoweth. Carol Delgrosso is our audio engineer. Anti-Asian hate, like so many aspects of racism, has interwoven layers. Here, we attempt to peel apart some of those to get a better understanding of racism against communities of Asian descent. For our purposes, we will use the term APIDA - Asian, Pacific Islander and Desi Americans. Desi refers broadly to south Asians, including people of Indian descent.

Ashley Yong: I remember the evening that Trump was inaugurated in 2016.

Robin Chenoweth: This is Swee Yang Ashley Yong, who goes by Ashley. She graduates this spring with a master's degree in higher education and student affairs and works in Ohio State's Multicultural Center.

Ashley Yong: I was walking to the residence hall that I was an RA at, and a few white men, college-age men in a car, as I was crossing the street, started making racial noises, like racial slurs, at me. And I remember feeling so in shock. And I don't know what came over me but I turned myself around and I poked my head in their window and I said, "Why did you just say that?" And these guys looked at me like, they were so shocked that I would ever dare to say something to them. That I would ever dare to confront them about things that they'd said.

Robin Chenoweth: Yong was born in the United States. Ho-chieh Lin, a doctoral student in STEM education originally from Taiwan, has been here for eight years. Recently, he was shopping at a

department store in Columbus. As he stood among displays of men's clothing, he heard an angry voice.

Ho-chieh Lin: I heard a guy talking loudly. What he says is, 'Why are there Asians everywhere in the States?' And I was kind of surprised when I heard that. And I was thinking, I'm not talking to anyone, why did someone near me said that?

Robin Chenoweth: Lin raised his head to see a white man looking at him. He did what anyone would do. He looked around to see if the man was talking to someone else. No one else was around.

Ho-chieh Lin: I will never forget the words he said, because I can still remember the threatening tone in his words. So I walked away from him, because I am not sure. Will he keep saying something bad or maybe do something physical to me?"

Robin Chenoweth: The March shootings of six Asian American women in Atlanta not long after were a gut punch to students like Lin and Yong. Lin used to encourage his wife to take walks around their neighborhood. Now, he asks her to walk only when he can go with her. And with good reason. More than two-thirds of 3,800 attacks on Asians and Asian Americans this year have been directed at women.

Ashley Yong was interviewing for a job as a violence prevention coordinator the day of the shootings. The irony was not lost on her. That day, she compartmentalized her emotions. But the next, police described the killer as having had "a bad day."

Ashley Yong: That is when it really, really hit me hard, because this is not the first and it won't be the last time that folks will be making excuses for people with dominant identities, specifically white men, that perpetrate acts of violence. And to see that that person is already immediately kind of being taken in in a way that other folks who perpetrate violence aren't, or excuses are being made for him was really difficult. I personally identify as a survivor of relationship and sexual violence, and it was really difficult to read about this idea that he had a sex addiction, right, and he wanted to eliminate any temptations to that sexual addiction. Because there was a really, really long history of the sexualization of Asian women in this country. And, again, as a survivor myself, that was extremely hard to hear. I was so shocked at how people were not recognizing the intersection between sexual violence and this form of racism.

Robin Chenoweth: And therein lies another one of those layers. Theodore Chao, associate professor of STEM education, spoke in late March at a rally outside the Ohio State House. He said the women in his family and APIDA community have long been dealing with racist behavior, specifically from white men.

Theodore Chao at rally: treating them like commodities, sexualizing them, exploiting them, treating them like goods that can be bought, sold, demeaned, fetishized, dehumanized and murdered like animals. These stories they told us again and again, are true. These stories that they've lived are true. We've been gaslighted our whole lives to act as if this violence against our, our woman is not real. We've been told that these are just small incidents. We've been told that because of Asian American success, of test scores, of getting into the right colleges or being able to buy houses in suburban areas have been redlined against our Black and brown family, that somehow this defined success, and we should ignore all the other ways, our sisters, our mothers and our daughters have been violently victimized, sexualized.

Robin Chenoweth: After the Atlanta shootings, Jessie Lee, a master's student in higher education and student affairs, who is Korean-American and grew up in a white community, found herself again trying to explain to white friends the intersection of misogyny and racism.

Jessie Lee: Seeing Asian women as exotic or seeing Asian women as submissive or fetishizing Asian women in general, all of these things are things that I've personally experienced in my dating life or in my relationship with my friends growing up, or just like you know trying to be a teenager in a white community, like my Asian features were talked about, just in a conversation like it was no big deal. And so that was being brought to light a lot and I was like, this is something that I've had to deal with for a while now, and I wasn't ready to like really dive into it with people who are only now starting to ask questions about it. Honestly, I was just frustrated. I was like, I've told you all this before. You've never made a big deal. You've been like, 'Oh, but they like you.' And only now are you coming to me with it being an issue.

Robin Chenoweth: It's a tragic commentary on American life that it takes someone dying before people realize that others are hurting and vulnerable. But the roots of anti-Asian bias go back 150 years, when American attitudes toward Asian, Pacific Islander and Desi Americans were set into place. It's time we take stock of those notions, says Marc Guerrero, associate professor of higher education and student affairs. A Filipino American, he studies how having multiple racial identities affects students.

Marc Guerrero: The history of Asian Americans or Asians in what we now know as the U.S. is often not known or not taught. I often tell people, you know, Filipinos were in this country in the 1500s. Nobody knows that.

Robin Chenoweth: Most Americans are fuzzy on the details of the Chinese Exclusion Act, if they know about it at all. In 1882, the law barred Chinese laborers, who performed the back-breaking labor building the American west, working on railroads, in factories and gold mines. That law and quotas barred most Chinese entry into the U.S. until the mid 1960s.

Marc Guerrero: Before that there was the Page Act. That was the first restrictive immigration law, it was tailored specifically to East Asian women, and specifically Chinese women.

Robin Chenoweth: The 1875 act sponsored by Horace Page, of California, was meant to "end the danger of cheap Chinese labor and immoral Chinese women." But only the ban on East Asian women — effectively all East Asian women — was heavily enforced.

Marc Guerrero: Scholars have been able to show it really was to prevent the procreation of Chinese people in the U.S. So, they wanted men for their labor, cheap labor, but they didn't want the women to come because they didn't want them to expand the population. So they kept the women out, and they tried to use stereotypes about the sexual promiscuity or the women being, prostitutes to sort of rationalize why they were being kept out, or why they were being excluded.

Robin Chenoweth: The law set a dangerous tone that still exists today. Those notions were compounded after multiple wars in Southeast Asia, East Asia and the Pacific, where extreme poverty and sometimes militaries forced women into the sex trade .... Some complied to keep from being killed or to keep from starving.

Marc Guerrero: There's just a continued line or thread of that stereotype that has resulted and been perpetuated. So when we think about the violence in Atlanta, and the targeting of Asian women, that history, is so, it's so ingrained in who we are — in our laws, in our past and the immigration — that we have to think about it sort of collectively. And that's where intersectionality comes in. It's not just about being Asian or a woman. It's about being both.

Robin Chenoweth: Peeling back another layer of the anti-Asian bias. Since the civil rights era, calling out the success of some Asian Americans became an easy way for some white Americans to avoid addressing racism. If APIDA groups were discriminated against, and still succeeded, some said, why can't Black Americans do the same? But that narrative ignores the fact that Black Americans have historically been denied access to education opportunities, the right to own land and receive bank loans, says Theodore Chao.

Theodore Chao: You don't want to admit that this American Dream myth is false, because you look at these histories of formerly enslaved and colonized people and how they have not achieved an American dream, besides being, you know, in North America for hundreds and hundreds of years. And it runs completely counter to the idea that if you work hard if you assimilate that you will be successful. And that that's a tension point.

Robin Chenoweth: Marc Guerrero.

Marc Guerrero: That is a manifestation of what we call the model minority myth, that is a tool to perpetuate white normativity. It was created in the 1960s as African Americans were fighting for civil rights. And they're loud, right, and they're fighting. And so, there were reporters and researchers looking at Japanese and Chinese Americans and saying, 'Hey like they're doing really well. Why can't you be like them, or, why can't you just be quiet and try to assimilate and blend in?' It has a history of pitting groups against each other.

Robin Chenoweth: Jessie Lee sees those tensions play out in her family when she tries to bring up topics like racial oppression and her involvement in the Black Lives Matter movement.

Jessie Lee: I've had really difficult conversations with my family about this. I think it's like a lot of this model minority myth thinking that's been really pervasive within our own community of like, we're trying our best, we're contributing to society. We just need to stop the Asian hate; this is like not at all related to like white supremacy. And so it's just been Yeah, a hard conversation to have, about the complexities of it all, which I think is hard for anybody to have conversations about, but ...

Robin Chenoweth: There's definitely some generational differences though

Jessie Lee: For sure, for sure, and I think like, for the most part a lot of people are wanting to kind of keep their heads down, not wanting to make a ruckus. And definitely, I see that within the older generation, especially with the members of my own family.

Robin Chenoweth: And younger Asian Americans are finding that keeping their heads down doesn't get you far if people are physically abusing and verbally harassing you or your grandparents on the street. And so APIDA students are coming together, and they're speaking up.

Aaron Wang: Something that's definitely been the most disheartening is just seeing all the violence that's been going on, especially towards older, like elderly people.

Robin Chenoweth: Aaron Wang is graduating with a degree in exercise science this spring, and headed to Emory University for graduate school.

Aaron Wang: In my culture we're definitely taught to revere and respect our elders, up to such a really, really high standard. So, seeing all this that's happening to our elders is just really heartbreaking. I think that our agenda should be to just protect our people and protect our culture as well.

Robin Chenoweth: In his four years at Ohio State, Wang joined several Asian student organizations.

Aaron Wang: Growing up in a majority white town, I did face a lot of like slurs and racial comments. So, coming into OSU I was a little bit more hypersensitive to these things. I had faced a lot but it was something that kind of was a pet peeve of mine. Any sort of like small comments or aggressions, I really put in effort to try to go against the stigma that we won't cause conflict if needed, and we won't speak up for ourselves, which has been a point that I've always tried to resonate with my friends and my community.

Robin Chenoweth: He recalls going off campus with friends to get slushies after playing basketball. A group of three white males — students — walked into the store.

Aaron Wang: I was in a group of like I think five or six Asian men, just minding our own business, kind of talking outside the UDF. And as they walked in, they said like, "Oh, what is this? Like is this Chinatown or something?" That really set off, I think, a lot of my friends as well as myself.

Robin Chenoweth: Wang identifies as Korean American and was born in Toledo. He and his friends gave the white students an earful.

Aaron Wang: I don't know why they thought that was an okay thing to do, or maybe they didn't really expect us to speak up because once we did, they kind of just ignored us and walked away. But I think instances like those are definitely more prevalent than people think just because Asian Americans don't really speak about these instances, until recently, which I think is, is a really good step forward.

Robin Chenoweth: These APIDA students say, first and foremost, the violence has to stop. But for that to happen, people need to stop looking at Asian and Pacific Islander Americans as the perpetual foreigner.

Ashley Yong: I want to acknowledge that I do have certain privileges as-an Asian American in this country based on how we are perceived by folks with dominant identities. Yet at the same time, it is really isolating to feel like you are constantly being looked at as an 'other.' When I travel out to smaller towns in Ohio and people stare a little bit longer at me than they would at my friends, for example, it's honestly something that I have come to accept because it's a survival mechanism. If I were constantly telling people, it's not okay to look at me like that or it's not okay to constantly treat me like an other — I mean racial battle fatigue is so real. And I truly don't have the energy on a day-to-day basis to constantly be correcting others. I know that folks with other racialized minorities identities experience that as well.

Robin Chenoweth: Marginalizing groups of people — labeling them as the other — is not exclusive to the United States. Think the Dalits, once crassly called the Untouchables, in India, or the Uighurs in China. As white Americans, we tend to see these examples while not recognizing our own racial castes that elevate whiteness. And that isn't exclusive to white folks either. It's human nature, but it can be overcome, says PhD student Ho-Chieh Lin.

Ho-Chieh Lin: Sometimes I'm also looking back on my own context. Is there supremacy in other ethnic groups? And I will say yes. In Taiwan. Most of the people, their ethnicity is Han. They are dominant group in the society. And sometimes we don't really understand the struggles the minority group will have. Some people will associate them with less educated people.

Robin Chenoweth: You're right, wherever people are, there's always a dominant group. Do you think you were as aware of that before you came to the United States as you are now?

Ho-Chieh Lin: I was not paying attention to this issue. But after I learned about it, I kind of reflect on my own experiences and try to see that, oh, if I belong to the dominant group then actually, we are having some advantages, that those minority didn't have. I taught in a school before. In my class there are children from families maybe their mother is originally from countries like Vietnam or Thailand. These children, they are not very articulate, in terms of speaking Chinese. We didn't do a good job to support their language literacy and also, we didn't know what kind of support they really need. So, this reflection only occurs when I come to a space and to learn about equity and social justice issues. I can finally understand that ~~is~~ there are so many issues that are implicit, and we just did not notice it.

Robin Chenoweth: A change in perspective can make us see the humanity in people different from ourselves. College is a great place to start. As more APIDA students buck model minority stereotypes, some friction might occur, says Ashley Yong.

Ashley Yong: We have students that are coming to experience Ohio State for the first time as the most diverse place they've ever been. We have students experiencing Ohio State as the least diverse place they've ever been. So when you bring together people who are international students from Hong Kong, and someone from a really rural area of Ohio, there's going to be potentially some clashes when it comes to understanding each other's life experiences. College is this kind of petri dish to see different organisms come together and interact in a really unique way that we might not see elsewhere.

Robin Chenoweth: What do APIDA students need from us? They are less worried for themselves, more worried about their parents and grandparents. They say they don't want their struggles to diminish those of fellow Black students, with whom they stand in solidarity, says Ashley Yong.

Ashley Yong: At the same time, we can also hold space for our APIDA folks, and the social justice within our community as well. There's this collective grieving and there's this collective trauma, among people of color right now, not just with a pandemic, but also with racial injustice in recognizing that white supremacy is so pervasive, and it truly cannot be eradicated without us caring for each other, specifically within minoritized communities.

Marc Guerrero: What can we do? And the university what control do we have, depending on where their family members might be, how can we support them? These are big questions. I don't have the answers to them, right? Except that we're hoping to be able to create a new culture, a new world by producing educated graduates that have a stronger understanding of who Asian Americans and Pacific Islander and Desi Americans are. What the struggles are, what the histories are cultural differences. That is our hope that we can lead to that. And it's also maybe educating the APIDA students themselves, to have a stronger sense of identity and pride in who they are.

Student Rally chant: Back up, back up, we want freedom, freedom. All these borders, bans and walls, we don't need 'em, need 'em.