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XENOPHOBIA IN THE COVID-19 ERA

Joanne Jeya
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INTRODUCTION

COVID-19 has altered people's daily lives across the globe and heightened tensions in response to changing economic, social, and political conditions. In the United States, xenophobia has seemingly escalated in the COVID-19 era, particularly towards Asians and people of Asian descent. The assumed reasoning for this rise in anti-Asian sentiment is tied to the presumed origins of the Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome-Coronavirus-2 (SARS-CoV-2) virus, first detected in Wuhan, China, prompting some to initially call the disease the Wuhan or Chinese virus, among other racialized terms like the "Kung-flu." It remains to be seen if xenophobic acts have increased throughout the US and the virus's role in exacerbating such attitudes.

This thesis will examine the xenophobic experiences of Asian and Asian American students at Western Michigan University in the COVID-19 era by addressing four main research questions. First, has xenophobia towards people of Asian descent increased in the US? Second, is the increase due to COVID-19? Third, what forms has the xenophobia taken? Finally, how can xenophobia directed towards Asian students be combatted? This research tests the hypothesis that xenophobia towards individuals of Asian descent has increased and is directly linked to the COVID-19 pandemic.¹

To provide historical context on xenophobia in the COVID-19 period, I examine the literature on the Asian experience in the United States. For this study, I will focus on the experiences of East Asians – namely Chinese, Japanese, and Koreans. This process entails exploring the Yellow Peril, the model minority myth, and examples of xenophobia such as The Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882 and outright violence, such as the murder of Vincent Chin in Michigan in 1982. I then examine some contemporary forms of xenophobia and demonstrate that it is not a new phenomenon. Finally, I discuss COVID-19 and various

¹ Hereafter "Asian" will be used to refer to both Asian Americans and Asian international students.

pandemics globally and the negative effect they have had on various populations, especially the most vulnerable. I also examine and compare data from Stop AAPI (Asian American & Pacific Islander) Hate, California State University's Center for the Study of Hate and Extremism, the Pew Research Center, and an anonymous survey that I conducted at Western Michigan University to address my research questions about xenophobia in the COVID-19 era.

In light of the current racial climate in the COVID-19 pandemic, this research is significant to understand the impact of racial tensions. Ultimately, this thesis seeks to amplify the voices of ethnic minorities in the United States, namely Asians, and stimulate thought on how xenophobia can be examined and eradicated.

LITERATURE REVIEW

In this section, I review the literature on the Asian experience in the United States, xenophobia in the USA, and COVID-19 and other pandemics. It is essential to look back in time to understand xenophobia in the COVID-19 era, as "racial stereotypes necessitate being explored historically because race is a social and thus historical construction."²

The Asian Experience in the USA.

People of Asian descent have been seen as "other" by Western cultures for centuries. The roots of the "yellow peril" idea can be traced back to a time as early as the fifth century BCE, to the conflict between Greeks and Persians, or the thirteenth century CE when the Mongols conquered parts of eastern Europe and spread their influence far and wide.³ It must also be noted that America's apprehension of Asians was already present before the term "yellow peril" was conceived. The term "yellow peril" was coined by the German Kaiser Wilhelm II in 1895 from his warning "*Die Gelbe Gefahr*," which translates to "the yellow

² Michael Omi and Howard Winant, *Racial Formation in the United States: From the 1960s to the 1990s*, 2nd ed. (New York: Routledge, 1994).

³ Gary Okihiro, *Margins and Mainstreams: Asians in American History and Culture* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1994), 118.

threat."⁴ The yellow peril thesis of previous eras was revitalized and introduced into the West's political, social, and cultural life when the Kaiser used the term "yellow peril."⁵ We must first look at the origins of Asian immigrants to grasp the idea of the yellow peril in the United States. Chinese, Japanese, and South Asians were the largest groups of Asians to migrate to and throughout the Americas in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.⁶

Emigration from China to the United States began in the 1840s. Contrary to popular belief, many Chinese emigrants to the United States were not "coolies" or slave laborers. Instead, most of the immigrants were not peasants but from the lower classes who made the journey in hopes of improving their fortunes. For instance, the discovery of gold in California in 1848 attracted an influx of Chinese immigrants.⁷ Many were also merchants, and a small percentage were also professionals and artisans, while others were wage earners. The first Japanese emigrants came in 1868 and 1869 when laborers were recruited to work in Hawaii and California.⁸ Unlike the stereotypes and myths, those who emigrated voluntarily were not the poorest or most desperate; they usually could withstand risks and partake in new ventures.⁹ As for Koreans, a relatively small number emigrated to the US before the 1900s. In 1903, Korean laborers arrived in the US to work in Hawaiian sugar plantations. From there, some traveled to California in 1905.¹⁰ Like the Chinese, Japanese and Korean immigrants planned to return to their homelands, likely stimulating the perception of immigrants as perpetual foreigners.¹¹

⁴ Mary Yu Danico, "Yellow Peril," *Asian American Society: An Encyclopedia* (Thousand Oaks: SAGE Publications, 2014), 968.

⁵ Stanford M. Lyman, "The "Yellow Peril" Mystique: Origins and Vicissitudes of a Racist Discourse," *International Journal of Politics, Culture, and Society* 13, no. 4 (2000): 683-747.

⁶ Erika Lee, "The "Yellow Peril" and Asian Exclusion in the Americas," *Pacific Historical Review* 76, no. 4 (2007): 537-562.

⁷ Uma A. Segal, *A Framework for Immigration* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2002), 42-43.

⁸ Segal, *A Framework for Immigration*, 49.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 51.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 69.

¹¹ *Ibid.*

There have been waves of immigration to the United States from different Asian countries since the 1850s.¹² These immigrants practiced transnational migration and formed diasporic communities while retaining ties to their homelands.¹³ They were also victims of state-sanctioned violence, expulsion, incarceration, and the targets of the first national immigration laws that excluded migrants based on race.¹⁴

In the late 19th century, large-scale migration from China intersected with fears about American race, class, and gender relations, prompting a rise in anti-Chinese sentiments. Chinese workers were blamed for competing unfairly with White workers and were deemed inassimilable, inferior, and immoral.¹⁵ A root cause of anti-Chinese discrimination was resentment towards Chinese immigrants who saved their hard-earned money and sent it home to China.¹⁶ Economically, American leaders held that the Chinese's presence would undercut higher wages and other benefits that White working men and women would otherwise receive due to the cheap labor that Chinese workers provided.¹⁷ There were regional hotspots for this sentiment, particularly in the West Coast, such as California, where discriminatory taxes were enacted towards Chinese immigrants. For instance, in 1850, foreign-born miners were required to pay \$20 per month to obtain a license to mine for gold.¹⁸

The Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882 barred all Chinese laborers from entering the United States until 1943; it was a form of gatekeeping that greatly influenced subsequent immigration laws.¹⁹

¹² Segal, 39.

¹³ Lee, "The "Yellow Peril" and Asian Exclusion in the Americas," 538.

¹⁴ Lee, 538.

¹⁵ Ibid, 547.

¹⁶ Charles E. Orser, *The Archaeology of Race and Racialization in Historic America* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2007), 131.

¹⁷ Lyman, "The "Yellow Peril" Mystique," 690.

¹⁸ Mark Kanazawa, "Immigration, Exclusion, and Taxation: Anti-Chinese Legislation in Gold Rush California," *The Journal of Economic History* 65, no. 3 (2005): 779-805.

¹⁹ Erika Lee, "The Chinese Exclusion Example: Race, Immigration, and American Gatekeeping, 1882-1924," *Journal of American Ethnic History* 21, no. 3 (2002): 36-62; Lee, "The "Yellow Peril" and Asian Exclusion in the Americas," 543; Orser, *The Archaeology of Race and Racialization in Historic America*, 151.

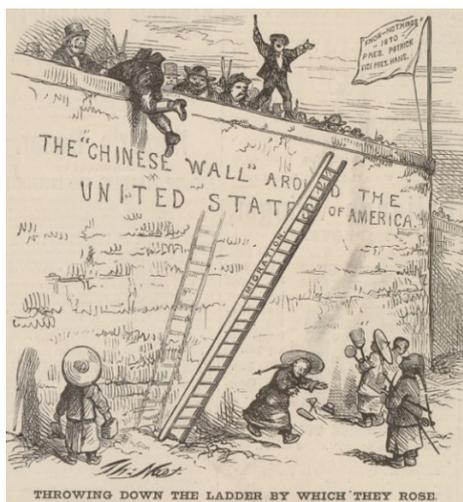


Figure 1: "Throwing Down the Ladder by Which They Rose." Political cartoons like this one expressed xenophobic attitudes of Nativist Whites towards the Chinese.²⁰

Drawings on broadsheets from the 19th century indicate that some US residents expressed hostility towards Chinese immigrants because they were not Christian and agreed to work for low wages. These posters also suggest that some Americans were willing to use physical violence and armed terrorism to fight the "Asian horde" (Figure 1).²¹ The yellow peril rhetoric significantly escalated after Japan defeated Russia in the Russo-Japanese War of 1905. It was the first time a White power was defeated by a non-White one, which sparked great fears of conquest in Europe and particularly in the United States.²² Even if China did not possess the military strength to invade, immigrants from China were seen as threatening to American institutions and culture.²³ Propaganda stoked fears that after they invaded, the Chinese would induce innocent Americans to smoke opium, undermine moral values through whoremongering and gambling, increase criminal activity, and threaten White women and children.

²⁰ Charles E. Orser, *The Archaeology of Race and Racialization in Historic America* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2007), 156, figure 5.6.

²¹ Orser, *The Archaeology of Race and Racialization in Historic America*, 156.

²² Okihiro, *Margins and Mainstreams*, 132.

²³ Lyman, "The "Yellow Peril" Mystique," 696.

In 1907, an immigration regulation barred Japanese and Koreans from entering the mainland United States from Hawaii.²⁴ In 1908, Japan and US negotiations culminated in the "Gentlemen's Agreements," a voluntary ban on Japanese laborers' immigration. Later, the Johnson-Reed Act, also known as the Immigration Act of 1924, revised in 1952, barred entry to those who were not "White" and denied the right to own land, attain citizenship, naturalize, and marry non-Asians to all Asians except Filipino nationals. The purpose of this Act was to keep the United States as racially and culturally homogenous as possible.²⁵

Decades later, the fear of and preparation to go to war with Japan led to the declaration of martial law in Hawaii on December 7, 1941, and the internment of roughly 1,400 Japanese people in Hawaii. On the mainland, fear of the yellow peril due to the attack on Pearl Harbor and decades of anti-Asian sentiments before World War II brought about the confiscation of land and property and detention of more than 110,000 Japanese in America's concentration camps in Arkansas, California, Colorado, Idaho, and elsewhere.²⁶

The yellow peril was not the only icon of White supremacy. It has its ambiguities and contradictions, which led to a complementary and benign image of Asians, known today as the "model minority."²⁷ Emerging in the 1960s, initially applied to people of Chinese and Japanese descent, the two largest Asian ethnic groups at the time.²⁸ This notion implied that all Asian Americans are highly skilled or high-income earners and contrasts Asian Americans with Blacks to uphold Asian Americans as a model to be emulated.²⁹ They were also viewed as perpetual foreigners – unwilling or unable to assimilate.

²⁴ Lee, "The "Yellow Peril" and Asian Exclusion in the Americas," 543.

²⁵ Nancy Ordover, "Johnson-Reed Act (1924)," in *Undocumented Immigrants in the United States: An Encyclopedia of Their Experience*, ed. Anna Ochoa O'Leary (Westport: ABC-CLIO, LLC, 2014), 405-07.

²⁶ Okihiro, *Margins and Mainstreams*, 136.

²⁷ Okihiro, 139.

²⁸ Chris Fuchs, "Behind the 'Model Minority' Myth: Why the 'Studious Asian' Stereotype Hurts," *NBC News*, August 22, 2017, <https://www.nbcnews.com/news/asian-america/behind-model-minority-myth-why-studious-asian-stereotype-hurts-n792926>.

²⁹ Fuchs, "Model Minority' Myth."

The December 26, 1966 issue of the *US News and World Report* wrote that "the nation's 300,000 Chinese-Americans, is winning wealth and respect by the dint of its own hard work," and "are moving ahead on their own – with no help from anyone else," amid the civil rights movement. The model minority myth reinforces White dominance and challenges the relationship of the majority over the minority.³⁰ Some cultural values associated with the model minority include the Asian work ethic, close family connections, self-help, religiosity, and endogamy.³¹

Some scholars argue that the model minority myth has its virtues and, historically, has promoted a positive image of Asian Americans.³² However, while the model minority myth diminishes the supposed threat of the yellow peril, if taken too far, the model minority can become the yellow peril.³³ Other scholars have highly critiqued this stereotype because of its negative implications, such as racial hostilities and violence alongside other political implications. Moreover, it does not reflect the lived realities of all Asian Americans.³⁴ In the 1980s, the exaggerated celebration of Asian American success created a misleading myth that failed to recognize that Asian Americans had, in fact, not achieved income equality with Whites in terms of personal incomes.³⁵ The monolithic model minority myth results in the invisibility of disadvantaged Asian ethnic groups, the exclusion of Asian Americans from policy debates, and the denial of federal resources.³⁶ It racializes Asian Americans as "aliens" or "foreigners" who are inferior to White Americans but superior to other minority groups. The view of Asian Americans as foreigners replicates the yellow peril idea that they do not

³⁰ Okihiro, *Margins and Mainstreams*, 140.

³¹ Okihiro, *Margins and Mainstreams*, 141.

³² *Ibid*, 142.

³³ *Ibid*.

³⁴ Yuko Kawai, "Stereotyping Asian Americans: The Dialectic of the Model Minority and the Yellow Peril," *The Howard Journal of Communications* 16, no. 2 (2005): 109-130.

³⁵ Ronald Takaki, *Strangers From a Different Shore* (Boston: Little, Brown, and Company, 1989), 475.

³⁶ Jennifer Lee, Karthick Ramakrishnan, and Janelle Wong, "Accurately Counting Asian Americans Is a Civil Rights Issue," *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 677, no. 1 (May 2018): 191–202.

assimilate into dominant culture norms, are economic competitors, and undermine the US as a nation due to their status as outsiders.³⁷

Precisely a century after the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882, Vincent Chin was murdered in Michigan in 1982. Uttering his last words, "It's not fair," Chin was beaten to death with a baseball bat by a Chrysler factory supervisor. Although Chin was Chinese American, he was blamed for the loss of American jobs as Japanese cars became popular in the US, upsetting the American monopoly in the market. There have been many hate incidences towards Asians before Vincent Chin, and there were many after him. However, many Asian American leaders emphasize Vincent Chin's death as it symbolizes the consequences of the fatal extreme of stereotypes and threats that Asian Americans face daily.³⁸ More recently, on March 16, 2021, a shooting took place at a spa in Atlanta in which six out of the eight victims were Asian women.³⁹ This incident is just another example of the many xenophobic acts that Asians have experienced in the United States.

Xenophobia

Asians have long experienced exclusionary policies, notably the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882 and other immigration regulations. Xenophobia is not a new phenomenon, and it is not only directed towards those of Asian descent. Xenophobia originates from the Greek words *Xenos* and *Phobos*, which translate to "stranger" and "fear" or "flight," respectively. "Xenophobia" literally means fear and hatred of foreigners and those perceived to be foreign.⁴⁰

³⁷ Claire Jean Kim, "The Racial Triangulation of Asian Americans," *Politics & Society*, 27(1) (1999): 105-138.

³⁸ Paul Weiss, *A Rising Tide of Hate and Violence against Asian Americans in New York During COVID-19: Impact, Causes, Solutions* (New York: Asian American Bar Association of New York, 2021).

³⁹ Derek Hawkins et al., "What We Know about the Victims of the Atlanta shootings," *The Washington Post*, March 20, 2021, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/nation/2021/03/20/atlanta-shooting-victims/>.

⁴⁰ Erika Lee, "America First, Immigrants Last: American Xenophobia Then and Now," *The Journal of the Gilded Age and Progressive Era* 19, no. 1 (2020): 3-18.

Xenophobia is both an ideology and enacted through practice; it is irrational fear, hostility, and hatred towards those perceived as "foreign" threats, such as immigrants and refugees.⁴¹ The primary basis for "foreignness" rests upon the intersectionality of classifications, including race, gender, ethnicity, skin color, nationality, religion, sexual orientation, and class.⁴² Xenophobic attitudes are expressed in various ways, legally, economically, institutionally. At the interpersonal level, they take the form of microaggressions. The term "racial microaggression" was coined by Chester Pierce in the 1970s to refer to subtle acts of discrimination in everyday life that people of color experience frequently. Microaggressions are brief and commonplace daily verbal, behavioral, and environmental mistreatment that communicate hostile, derogatory, or harmful slights and insults to the target person or group, whether intentional or otherwise.⁴³ At the interpersonal level, xenophobia can also escalate to severe cases of physical violence. Scholars have hypothesized that xenophobia is a "discriminatory potential" activated when ideologies such as ethnocentrism are connected to a sense of threat on personal or group levels.⁴⁴ Like racism, xenophobia employs relations of power to divide, control, and dominate subject populations.⁴⁵ One example of this is creating an exclusive nationalistic identity that defines who is American and, more importantly, who is not.⁴⁶

Although xenophobia can occur whenever ethnocultural groups come in contact, organized nativism or xenophobia occurred in waves in the century of immigration from 1820 to 1930. The distrust and fear of foreigners usually became apparent after a series of

⁴¹ Lee, "America First, Immigrants Last," 5.

⁴² Lee, "America First, Immigrants Last," 5.

⁴³ Derald Wing Sue, *Microaggressions in Everyday Life: Race, Gender, and Sexual Orientation*, (New Jersey: John Wiley & Sons, Inc., 2010), 5.

⁴⁴ Meredith W. Watts, "Political Xenophobia in the Transition from Socialism: Threat, Racism and Ideology among East German Youth," *Political Psychology*, 17(1) (1996): 97-126.

⁴⁵ Lee, "America First, Immigrants Last," 5.

⁴⁶ Lee, "America First, Immigrants Last," 5.

economic, political, and demographic changes.⁴⁷ Some 38 million newcomers arrived on the shore of the US during the century of immigration, prompting xenophobic responses.⁴⁸

Research has also shown that xenophobia is often associated with times of economic and political instability and stress.⁴⁹ Threatened native groups perceive that foreigners are competing for economic opportunities.⁵⁰ Frequently, negative perceptions of immigrants stem from fears of diminished economic resources, rapid demographic changes, and undermined political influence, especially during periods of internal and external instability.⁵¹

American xenophobia is exercised by limiting the power held by immigrants permitted to enter the United States, restricting and even eliminating foreign entry.⁵² During and after the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882, Japanese, Koreans, South Asians, and Filipinos were sentenced to the same exclusion and immigration restrictions.⁵³ Other ethnic groups were subject to social control as well. In the 19th century, the Irish faced spatial segregation in crowded, unsanitary, and unsafe locales. They were deemed one of the "less desirable races" and were consigned to low-paying jobs and dangerous living conditions.⁵⁴

Other efforts to restrict immigration, such as the Immigration Act of 1924, affected not only Asians but also Italians, Russians, Jews, Slavs, and other southern and eastern Europeans.⁵⁵ Similarly, the label "illegal alien" that was initially used to demonize Mexican immigrants is now applied to all Latinx people. The "radical Muslim terrorist" label is also

⁴⁷ Thomas J. Curran, *Xenophobia and Immigration, 1820-1930* (Twayne Publishers, 1975), 21.

⁴⁸ Curran, *Xenophobia and Immigration*, 22.

⁴⁹ Oksana Yakushko, "Xenophobia: Understanding the Roots and Consequences of Negative Attitudes Toward Immigrants," *The Counseling Psychologist* 37, no. 1 (2009): 36-66.

⁵⁰ Yakushko, "Xenophobia," 45.

⁵¹ Karl-Peter Fritzsche, "Conditions for Xenophobia in Eastern Germany (Formerly the GDR)," in *Nationalism, Ethnicity, and Identity: Cross National and Comparative Perspectives*, ed. Russell F. Farnen (Routledge, 1994), 277-284; Carola Suarez-Orozco and Marcelo Suarez-Orozco, *Transformations: Immigration, Family Life, and Achievement Motivation among Latino Adolescents* (Palo Alto, CA: Stanford University Press, 1995).

⁵² Curran, *Xenophobia and Immigration*, 22.

⁵³ Lee, "America First, Immigrants Last," 15.

⁵⁴ Orser, *The Archaeology of Race and Racialization in Historic America*, 112.

⁵⁵ Ordover, "Johnson-Reed Act (1924)," 405-07.

applied to all Muslims and Muslim-appearing people.⁵⁶ The US's racialization process was designed and executed within the national setting in which individuals collectively categorized as White maintained control and power over those classified as non-White.⁵⁷ It is essential to acknowledge that although immigrants or "aliens" in legal terminology are classified in one homogenous category, their experiences are likely to be widely divergent; nevertheless, they share the status of being marginalized.⁵⁸

Xenophobic attitudes do not only inform immigration policies, but they also produce significant effects on individuals who experience it. Psychological research shows that perceived discrimination among immigrants may lead to increased cultural confusion and isolation, diminished psychological adjustment, vulnerability to anxiety and related disorders, psychological distress, and diminished psychological functioning.⁵⁹

Asian American studies scholars differ on the rationality of xenophobia and racism. Some scholars argue that in contrast to most literature on anti-Asian sentiments, they do not believe the yellow peril idea to be irrational. Instead, they maintain that these ideas are "constructed with a purpose in mind and function to sustain the social order."⁶⁰ However, as a sociologist remarks, "that this belief might be rooted in some factual matters does not remove it from the realm of racial prejudice from which it came and to which it belongs."⁶¹

"Only by fully understanding the genealogy of xenophobia—along with its causes, expressions, and consequences—can we successfully challenge it."⁶² Throughout history, xenophobia has not gone unchallenged; there have been instances where immigrants and their allies have spoken out against xenophobia. For instance, in the court case *Yick Wo v.*

⁵⁶ Lee, "America First, Immigrants Last," 15.

⁵⁷ Orser, *The Archaeology of Race and Racialization in Historic America*, 125.

⁵⁸ Yakushko, "Xenophobia," 38.

⁵⁹ Yakushko, "Xenophobia," 50-51.

⁶⁰ Okiihiro, *Margins and Mainstreams*, 136-137.

⁶¹ Lyman, "The "Yellow Peril" Mystique," 718.

⁶² Lee, "America First, Immigrants Last," 15.

Hopkins, Yick Wo and Wo Lee filed a suit after refusing to pay a fine for operating a laundry business without a permit and being jailed by the city's sheriff. They argued that the fine and discriminatory enforcement violated their rights under the Equal Protection Clause of the Fourteenth Amendment and won the case.⁶³ During the debates over the Chinese Exclusion Act in 1882, Senator George Frisbie Hoar bravely denounced the policy. In 1896, Congressman John Fitzgerald voiced his complete opposition to a literacy bill restricting immigration on the House floor. Writers and playwrights such as Israel Zangwill and Mary Antin used their media to humanize immigrants and appeal to the American commitment to equality.⁶⁴

Pandemics: History of pandemics and othering of groups

As noted, xenophobia seems to increase under conditions of social stress and economic uncertainty. Pandemics are one example of stressful conditions as people's liberties are severely restricted, others get sick, and some die, while many lose a sense of control. The discovery of SARS-CoV-2 in Wuhan, a province in China, in December 2019 created the conditions of widespread panic as this infectious disease spread to all corners of the globe.⁶⁵ To contain the spread of the disease, populations were encouraged to quarantine and limit contact with others who could potentially be contagious. Most people who are infected experience mild symptoms, although COVID-19 may also cause severe illness and death. Those who have underlying medical illnesses or are older may experience more severe effects.⁶⁶ As of March 11, 2020, COVID-19 was officially declared a pandemic. A pandemic

⁶³ "Yick Wo v. Hopkins," Oyez, accessed May 11, 2021, <https://www.oyez.org/cases/1850-1900/118us356>.

⁶⁴ Lee, "America First, Immigrants Last," 15.

⁶⁵ Nasima Selim, "Letter from the (Un)Seen Virus: (post)Humanist Perspective in Corona Times," *Social Anthropology* 28, no. 2 (2020): 353-55.

⁶⁶ "Coronavirus," World Health Organization, accessed March 20, 2021, https://www.who.int/health-topics/coronavirus#tab=tab_1.

is defined as "an epidemic occurring worldwide or over a very wide area, crossing international boundaries, and usually affecting a large number of people."⁶⁷

As of April 18, 2021, there were 140,322,903 confirmed cases of COVID-19 globally, including 3,003,794 deaths, as reported to the World Health Organization. These figures are from 223 countries, areas, or territories with cases. A total of 751,452,536 vaccine doses have been administered worldwide.⁶⁸ As the disease and recommended responses to prevent its spread became politicized, COVID-19 cases surged in the US; the numbers in the US stand at 560,858 deaths and over 31 million cases, while 179,166,363 vaccine doses have been administered.⁶⁹ The pandemic has brought about new behaviors and public policies such as mask requirements. Due to mandates to prevent the spread of the virus, regulations to social distance and against large gatherings were put in place. These directives forced people to work from home and forego rites of passage such as funerals, weddings, and graduations.⁷⁰

COVID-19 has been characterized by widespread fear and anxiety, social disruption, and dramatic inequalities of suffering and death.⁷¹ The pandemic exposed social, cultural, and economic divisions within society, leaving vulnerable populations such as the disabled, homeless, elderly, and people of color disproportionately infected.⁷² Scholars are calling attention to the use of containment measures to prevent COVID-19 cases, COVID-19-related deaths, and hospital intensive care utilization. Even as they lessen the spread of the disease, these measures do not mitigate the unintended consequences of public health policies. Such consequences include the health, social, and economic costs of job loss, accumulated family

⁶⁷ Miquel Porta, "Pandemic," in *A Dictionary of Epidemiology*, 5th ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008).

⁶⁸ "WHO Coronavirus (COVID-19) Dashboard," World Health Organization, last modified March 23, 2021, <https://covid19.who.int/>.

⁶⁹ "WHO United States of America," World Health Organization, last modified April 18, 2021, <https://covid19.who.int/region/amro/country/us>.

⁷⁰ Michael Nassaney et al., "The Ethnoarchaeology of COVID-19: A Viral Snapshot," (Poster, Society for Historical Archaeology, 2021).

⁷¹ Eric Mykhalovskiy and Martin French, "COVID-19, Public Health, and the Politics of Prevention," *Sociology of Health & Illness* 42, no. 8 (2020): 4-15.

⁷² Michael Nassaney et al., "The Ethnoarchaeology of COVID-19: A Viral Snapshot."

debt, domestic partner violence, social isolation associated with containment measures, and other forms of interpersonal conflict.⁷³

Many vocal Americans protested mandates to wear a mask, socially distance, avoid large gatherings, lockdowns, and shelter in place orders in the US. Research shows that American individualism and its values of freedom hinder some people from complying with these measures.⁷⁴ Other existing evidence suggests that human values, and the extent to which fellow citizens share them, are likely essential factors for tackling the COVID-19 crisis. Individuals who are more compliant with COVID-19 behavioral guidelines attach higher importance to self-transcendence, such as responsibility, and social-focused values such as security. A sense of shared values leads to connectedness, which may be crucial in promoting collective efforts to contain the pandemic.⁷⁵

COVID-19 is not the first pandemic the world has seen. For instance, the Black Death spread through trade ports and consumed many parts of Europe from 1346 to 1353. It is estimated that roughly 25 million people in Europe died from the plague during the Black Death. The plague intensified anti-Semitism throughout Europe as Jews were blamed for its spread, causing entire Jewish communities to be killed by mobs or burned at the stake.⁷⁶ The influenza pandemic from 1918 to 1919, also known as the Spanish flu, was caused by an H1N1 virus with avian origin genes. A rough estimate of 500 million people, or one-third of the world's population, became infected with this virus. The number of deaths was estimated to be at least 50 million worldwide, with about 675,000 occurring in the United States.⁷⁷ Although this pandemic did not originate from Spain, the naming of this pandemic created

⁷³ Mykhalovskiy and French, "COVID-19, Public Health, and the Politics of Prevention," 7.

⁷⁴ Michael Nassaney et al., "The Ethnoarchaeology of COVID-19: A Viral Snapshot."

⁷⁵ Lukas J. Wolf et al., "The Importance of (Shared) Human Values for Containing the COVID-19 Pandemic," *British Journal of Social Psychology* 59, no. 3 (2020): 618-27.

⁷⁶ *Encyclopedia Britannica Online*, s.v. "Black Death," accessed March 20, 2021, <https://www.britannica.com/event/Black-Death>.

⁷⁷ "1918 Pandemic (H1N1 virus)," Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, last reviewed March 20, 2019, <https://www.cdc.gov/flu/pandemic-resources/1918-pandemic-h1n1.html>.

the false impression that the virus originated there and amplified the "us vs. them" mentality. A report on the pandemic in 1920 reveals the French authorities' position, maintaining that the virus came from Spain while Spanish authorities strongly asserted that the virus was spread from France.⁷⁸

Decades later, the 1968 pandemic, also known as the Asian flu or the Hong Kong flu, lasted until 1969. It was caused by an influenza A (H3N2) virus comprised of two genes from an avian influenza A virus. The virus was first noted in the United States in September 1968, and the estimated number of deaths globally was 1 million, of which 100,000 were in the United States.⁷⁹ The Spanish flu and the Hong Kong flu are among pandemics that are named after a specific group. It could be argued that the colloquial naming of these infectious diseases allows more powerful countries to assign blame to foreigners.⁸⁰ Thus, history shows us that the othering of outgroups during pandemics is not unusual.

The Asian experience in the US has long been characterized by restriction and exclusion. As we have seen from literature, xenophobia is not a new phenomenon, and it is heightened in times of instability. The COVID-19 pandemic is a time of such instability considering fears and concerns about the economy, careers, health, and wellbeing. Thus, I hypothesize that xenophobia towards individuals of Asian descent at Western Michigan University in Kalamazoo, Michigan, has indeed increased in the COVID-19 era. In this study, I test this idea using secondary data and a survey.

⁷⁸ Claire O'Neill, "The "Othering" of Disease: Xenophobia During Past Pandemics," The Wiley Network, accessed May 20, 2021, <https://www.wiley.com/network/featured-content/the-othering-of-disease-xenophobia-during-past-pandemics>.

⁷⁹ "1968 Pandemic (H3N2 virus)," Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, last reviewed January 2, 2019, <https://www.cdc.gov/flu/pandemic-resources/1968-pandemic.html>.

⁸⁰ Crystal Chang, Anthony Salerno, and Edbert B. Hsu, "Perspectives on Xenophobia during Epidemics and Implications for Emergency Management," *Journal of Emergency Management* 18(7) (2020): 23–29, <https://doi.org/10.5055/jem.2020.0521>.

METHODOLOGY

Based on the literature review, we have identified that xenophobia is exacerbated in times of economic, social, and political instability. However, it is not clear if all Asian populations have had similar experiences of the pandemic's repercussions. Specifically, has xenophobia affected university students, mainly Asian international students and Asian Americans at Western Michigan University (WMU), during the COVID-19 era? I chose this institution to conduct research because it is my home institution, and I believe it is essential to learn more about my peers' experiences.

This study's four main research questions are: 1) has xenophobia towards people of Asian descent increased in the US and at WMU? 2) is the increase due to societal conditions directly attributed to the impact of COVID-19? 3) what forms has it taken? And 4) how do we combat xenophobic oppression? To gather data to inform these questions and gain a national perspective on xenophobic incidents, I used data from Stop AAPI Hate, a nonprofit organization, California State University's Center for the Study of Hate and Extremism and the Pew Research Center. These institutions have been conducting ongoing research on the number of xenophobic incidents in the US since the outbreak of COVID-19. Information was also obtained from news articles highlighting hate crimes. These data provided a baseline for comparison with the survey data I obtain from WMU's campus. While examining these data, it is essential to bear in mind the different age groups, shelter-in-place mandates, and locations to understand xenophobia in the US better.

To assess the extent of xenophobia in Kalamazoo, Michigan, I collected primary data through anonymous online surveys (see Appendix A). The survey was disseminated through the Lee Honors College and International Student Services at WMU to reach a target audience of WMU students. The population consisted of WMU students over 18 years old who were currently residing in the US. The survey sought to collect information on

participants' experiences with xenophobic incidents before and after the occurrence of COVID-19 through multiple-choice and open-ended questions. I aimed to determine how people have responded to xenophobia, how the participants believe that xenophobia can be combatted, and how to help survivors and victims. Survey participants were also asked to specify if any xenophobic incidents detailed are first-hand experiences or it was someone else's experience. The questions used were adapted from Stop AAPI Hate's survey collecting similar research data to allow for data comparison. My survey was limited to students who are currently in the United States.

I sought patterns in the secondary data and compared them with my survey data to test the hypothesis that xenophobia has increased since COVID-19 began. I aimed to examine similarities and differences between ethnicity, sites of discrimination, and types of discrimination. I used Fisher's exact test to examine the statistical significance of these results due to the small sample size from the WMU survey. Another aspect that I looked at while evaluating the results is reporting rates among those who experienced xenophobic incidents. To supplement the secondary data with real-life stories, I highlight news articles that detail hate crimes towards Asians in the US during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Before presenting my results, I recognize that Asian Americans and Asian international students have very different experiences in the US. It is not my intention to undermine those different experiences. However, in light of COVID-19, Asian Americans and Asian international students are sometimes homogenized into one social category that ignores their different experiences and ethnicities, leading them to be the subjects of xenophobic incidents. These data will determine if there have been increases in xenophobic incidents since the outbreak of COVID-19 and expose how COVID-19 has impacted Asian Americans and international students' experiences. The goal is to shed light on these

experiences, help their voices be heard instead of silenced and ultimately identify strategies to combat these types of destructive behavior.

ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

This section will examine reports from Stop AAPI Hate, California State University's Center for the Study of Hate and Extremism, Pew Research Center, and an anonymous survey conducted at Western Michigan University. The Asian Pacific Planning and Policy Council (A3PCON), Chinese for Affirmative Action (CAA), and the Asian American Studies Department of San Francisco State University launched the Stop AAPI Hate reporting center on March 19, 2020, in response to the escalation in xenophobia and bigotry resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic. This center tracks and responds to hate, violence, harassment, discrimination, shunning, and child bullying against Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders in the United States. According to the Stop AAPI Hate National Report covering incidents from March 19, 2020, to February 28, 2021, the center received 3,795 incident reports from all 50 states and the District of Columbia.⁸¹

California State University's Center for the Study of Hate and Extremism is a nonpartisan research and policy center established before the COVID-19 pandemic. They found that anti-Asian hate crime reported to police in 16 of America's largest cities increased by 145% in 2020.⁸² The first spike in these incidents occurred in March and April 2020 when COVID cases and negative stereotyping of Asians related to the pandemic were rising. This rise in anti-Asian hate crime occurred amidst a 6% overall decline in hate crimes in America's largest cities.

⁸¹ Stop AAPI Hate, *210312 Stop AAPI Hate National Report*, March 2021, <https://secureservercdn.net/104.238.69.231/alw.90d.myftpupload.com/wp-content/uploads/2021/03/210312-Stop-AAPI-Hate-National-Report-.pdf>.

⁸² Center for the Study of Hate & Extremism, *FACT SHEET: Anti-Asian Prejudice March 2021*, March 2021, <https://www.csusb.edu/sites/default/files/FACT%20SHEET-%20Anti-Asian%20Hate%202020%20rev%203.21.21.pdf>.

The secondary data support the hypothesis that xenophobic expression towards Asian ethnicities has increased. In contrast to these results, which show that xenophobic expression towards Asian ethnicities has increased, my survey at WMU indicates the opposite. The survey conducted at WMU received 90 responses, but most were incomplete responses; the final sample size is 11. Overall, respondents reported 18 xenophobic incidents before January 1, 2020, and 11 incidents after January 1, 2020, showing a decline in xenophobic experiences.

Among a sample size of 3,795, Stop AAPI hate found that the Chinese are the largest ethnic group who report experiencing hate crime at 42.2%. Other respondents include Korean, Vietnamese, Filipino, Japanese, Taiwanese, Hmong, Thai, Lao descent, or simply identifying as Asian.⁸³ According to the students at Western Michigan University (WMU), with a sample size of 11, multi-ethnic students and Malaysian Chinese students are the most prominent groups affected at 27.3%, respectively. Other respondents identify as Chinese, Arab, Taiwanese, South Korean, and Filipino. Another noteworthy aspect of the results that Stop AAPI Hate collected is the fact that 68% of respondents identified as female.

Figure 2 details the frequency of hate incidents that occurred by location. While businesses were the primary site of discrimination in the data that Stop AAPI Hate received, the data from WMU show that most incidents took place at businesses, universities, and public streets or sidewalks.

⁸³ Stop AAPI Hate, *210312 Stop AAPI Hate National Report*, March 2021.

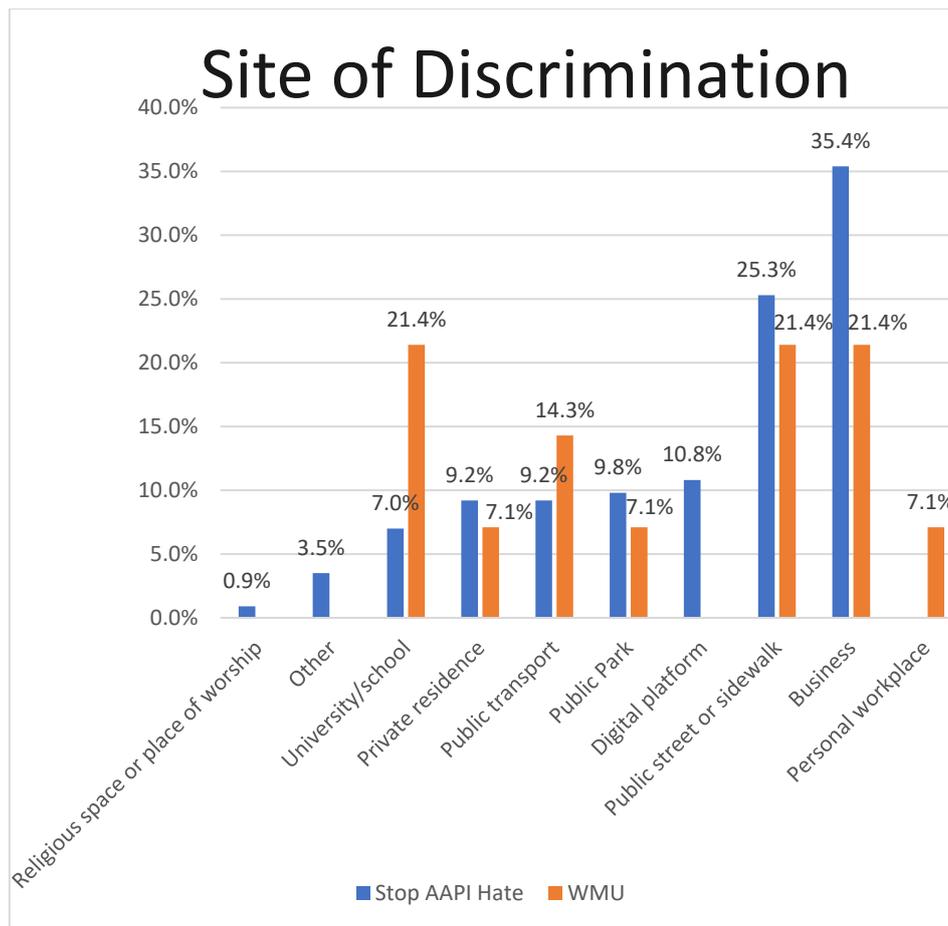


Figure 2: Site of Discrimination Comparison between Stop AAPI Hate and WMU survey data⁸⁴

My Fisher's exact test with Stop AAPI Hate's data for select locations

(university/school, private residence, public transport, public park, public street or sidewalk, and business) revealed that the results are not significant at $p < 0.05$. These significant sites reported were used in Fisher's exact test due to the comparability between Stop AAPI Hate's data and the WMU survey data.

Comparing the types of discrimination reported, verbal harassment, including name-calling, was the most reported type of incident in both sets of data, followed by shunning.

According to the Pew Research Center, three in ten Asian Americans (31%) reported experiencing racial slurs or racist jokes since the pandemic began.⁸⁵ As for Fisher's exact test

⁸⁴ Stop AAPI Hate, *210312 Stop AAPI Hate National Report*, March 2021.

⁸⁵ Neil G. Ruiz, Juliana Menasce Horowitz and Christine Tamir, "Many Black and Asian Americans Say They Have Experienced Discrimination Amid the COVID-19 Outbreak," Pew Research Center, last modified July 1,

for the types of discrimination, namely, shunning and other, the test revealed that the results are not significant at $p < 0.05$. The results for verbal harassment, however, were significant at $p < 0.05$.

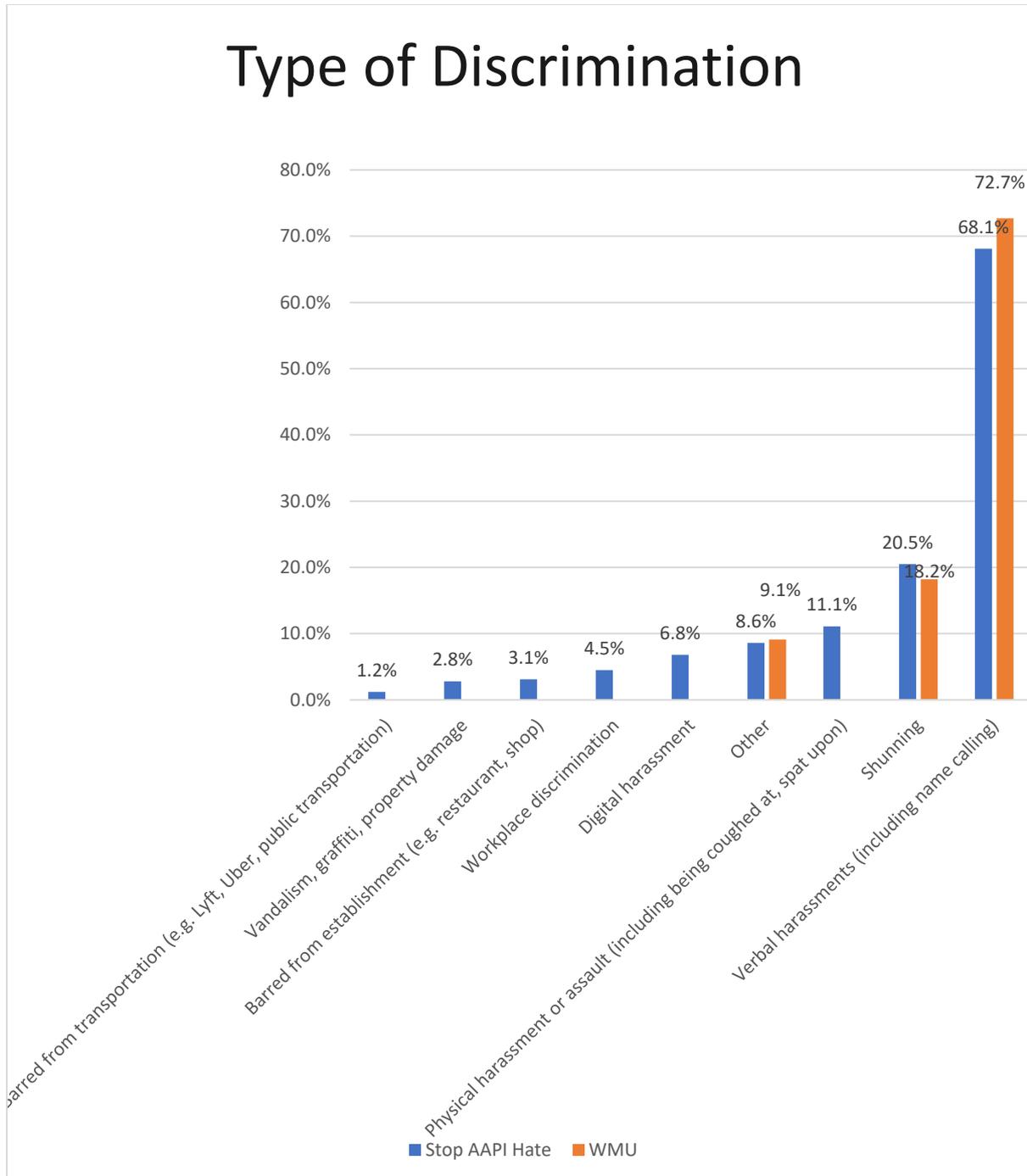


Figure 3: Type of Discrimination Comparison between Stop AAPI Hate and WMU survey data⁸⁶

2020, <https://www.pewresearch.org/social-trends/2020/07/01/many-black-and-asian-americans-say-they-have-experienced-discrimination-amid-the-covid-19-outbreak/>.

⁸⁶ Stop AAPI Hate, *210312 Stop AAPI Hate National Report*, March 2021.

Out of the 11 incidents reported in the WMU survey post-COVID-19, only one individual reported the experience to authorities, citing that the incident occurred at the university and they "felt uncomfortable and angry," which led them to report it to a supervisor.

This pandemic has also brought about some severe violent incidents, potentially racially motivated hate crimes, highlighted in various news articles as listed below. These incidents specifically targeted elderly Asian individuals in violent hate crimes.

- July 14, 2020: an 89-year-old Chinese American woman was slapped and set on fire by two men in Brooklyn⁸⁷
- January 28, 2021: 84-year-old Thai American man Vicha Ratanapakdee was fatally assaulted in San Francisco⁸⁸
- January 31, 2021: 91-year old-Oakland man was senselessly pushed to the ground, followed by two more victims, who suffered injuries⁸⁹
- February 3, 2021: 61-year-old Filipino man Noel Quintana was slashed across the face in the subway in Manhattan⁹⁰
- February 16, 2021: Two senior Asian women assaulted in separate subway attacks in New York City⁹¹
- March 16, 2021: the Atlanta spa shooting in which six out of the eight victims were Asian women⁹²
- March 17, 2021: elderly Chinese American woman attacked in San Francisco fought back against her attacker, who had also purportedly attacked another elderly Asian male just before this incident⁹³

Discussion

Based on the literature review, it is evident that xenophobia is not a new phenomenon, and Asians have been the targets of discrimination before the COVID-19 pandemic.

However, the recent surge in hate crimes towards Asians is increasingly receiving attention,

⁸⁷ ABC7NY, "Exclusive: 89-year-old Woman who was Attacked, Set on Fire in Brooklyn Speaks Out," July 24, 2020, <https://abc7ny.com/woman-set-on-fire-elderly-attack-89-year-old-attacked-bensonhurst-crime/6333749/>.

⁸⁸ Kyung Lah and Jason Kravarik, "Family of Thai Immigrant, 84, Says Fatal Attack 'Was Driven by Hate'," *CNN*, February 16, 2021, <https://www.cnn.com/2021/02/16/us/san-francisco-vicha-ratanapakdee-asian-american-attacks/index.html>.

⁸⁹ Dion Lim, "Shocking Video Shows 91-year-old man Senselessly Pushed to Ground in Oakland's Chinatown," *ABC7News*, February 4, 2021, <https://abc7news.com/man-pushed-to-ground-in-oakland-violence-chinatown-robberies/10311111/>.

⁹⁰ Wendy Grossman Kantor, "Filipino American Man Recounts Brutal Attack with Box Cutter on N.Y.C. Subway: 'Nobody Helped'," *People*, February 18, 2021, <https://people.com/crime/filipino-american-man-recounts-brutal-attack-with-box-cutter-on-n-y-c-subway-nobody-helped/>.

⁹¹ Khanh Tran, "2 Elderly Asian Women Punched in the Head in Separate Attacks on NYC Subway," *Next Shark*, February 16, 2021, <https://news.yahoo.com/2-elderly-asian-women-punched-235848778.html>.

⁹² Derek Hawkins et al., "What We Know about the Victims of the Atlanta Shootings," March 20, 2021.

⁹³ CBS News, "Elderly Asian woman attacked in San Francisco fights back, sends alleged attacker to hospital," March 18, 2021, <https://www.cbsnews.com/news/asian-woman-attacked-san-francisco-fights-back/>.

especially in the media. A hate crime is defined as "a crime, typically one involving violence, that is motivated by prejudice based on race, religion, sexual orientation, or other grounds."⁹⁴

Secondary data show that there has been an increase in anti-Asian sentiments and hate crime during the COVID-19 era. This uptick is likely correlated with the origins of patient zero from Wuhan, China. Stop AAPI Hate released a report in June 2020 analyzing anti-Chinese rhetoric tied to hate crimes against Asian Americans. Some 502 incidents out of 1,843 (27.2%) incident reports recorded that their assailants specifically mentioned the terms "China" or "Chinese" during discrimination incidents. Furthermore, news accounts about racism against Asian Americans that discussed anti-China rhetoric increased from one article in the week of March 8, 2020, to 35 articles in the week of April 19, 2020.⁹⁵ Among the 1,843 incidents that were noted, xenophobic comments regarding China were common. The comments took the form of virulent animosity towards Chinese Americans, scapegoating or blaming China for the spread of COVID-19, anti-immigrant nationalism demanding that immigrants "go back to China," parroting "Chinese virus," and orientalist and racist depictions of China and Chinese people as dirty and diseased. Former President Trump also referred to COVID-19 as the "Chinese virus" and "Kung-flu," normalizing anti-Asian xenophobia during the pandemic. A study examining anti-Asian sentiments on Twitter found a significantly greater increase in anti-Asian hashtags associated with #chinesevirus than #covid19 after Trump's tweet with the phrase "Chinese virus."⁹⁶

We are currently witnessing anti-Asian hate crimes such as the Atlanta spa shooting or the attacks against elderly Asian people, which are evidence of the harm that such

⁹⁴ *Oxford Languages*, s.v. "Hate crime," accessed March 20, 2021.

⁹⁵ Melissa Borja et al., *Anti-Chinese Rhetoric Tied to Racism against Asian Americans Stop AAPI Hate Report*, June 2020, https://secureservercdn.net/104.238.69.231/a1w.90d.myftpupload.com/wp-content/uploads/2020/10/Stop_AAPI_Hate_Anti-China_Rhetoric_Report_200617.pdf.

⁹⁶ Yulin Hswen et al., "Association of "#covid19" versus "#chinesevirus" with Anti-Asian Sentiments on Twitter: March 9–23, 2020," *American Journal of Public Health* 111 (2021): 956-964, <https://doi.org/10.2105/AJPH.2021.306154>.

xenophobic labels bring about. However, as the results show, Chinese individuals are not the only victims of xenophobic attitudes as perpetrators do not distinguish between the different ethnic groups that comprise Asia. Chinese individuals from diasporic communities such as Malaysia may be perceived to be from China, resulting in aggression towards them. Multi-ethnic individuals are also targeted, further confirming that people perceived to be Asian are affected.

Both Stop AAPI Hate and WMU data show that businesses are significant sites of discrimination. Respondents from WMU indicated that the university is also another site, perhaps unsurprising given that the participants are university students. Based on the type of discrimination, participants most often reported experiencing verbal harassment compared to other forms. However, this does not negate the fact that other types of discrimination do occur. It is also noteworthy that none of these acts of discrimination should be tolerated. However, 10 out of 11 respondents from WMU indicated that they did not report the incidents they faced to authorities. Their reasons for this course of action are that the incident was relatively harmless or minor, and they felt that there would be no consequences for the perpetrator. Stop AAPI Hate's report emphasizes that the numbers collected are only a fraction of the hate incidents that occur, as most remain unreported.⁹⁷ A WMU survey respondent stated that they felt as if they did not have the right to speak up as a foreigner, and even if they did, they were not sure if anyone would care to help. The lack of data increases the difficulty of gauging the extent of these xenophobic incidents, causing the issue to be taken lightly. Nevertheless, these figures showcase the vulnerability of Asians to discrimination and the types of discrimination that occur.

In addition, during the summer of 2020, I conducted a preliminary survey that informed this study which suggests that there was an increase in xenophobic incidents,

⁹⁷ Stop AAPI Hate, *210312 Stop AAPI Hate National Report*, March 2021.

although the current study does not reflect this. Among 51 participants in surveys and interviews in that study, 63% noted that they had experienced some form of xenophobia. Since the outbreak of Covid-19, a 6.25% increase in xenophobic incidents was recorded from the participants' experiences by comparing the frequency of pre-Covid-19 and Covid-19 era experiences.

The decrease in xenophobic incidents in the most recent WMU survey conducted in 2021 that contradicts national data could result from several factors. In March 2020, WMU shifted classes online and limited in-person gatherings such as campus events and classes through April 2021. This restriction encouraged many international and domestic students to return home. Social distancing measures also limit the contact between people outside of close networks such as family and friends, while most non-essential places of business were closed due to lockdowns. These restrictions lessen the likelihood of encountering xenophobic aggressors, although close friends and family can be perpetrators of discrimination and microaggressions. Since many international students have decided to return to their home countries, this may have affected the number of respondents to the survey as well. Furthermore, college campuses usually regulate behavior, and hate crimes on campus are not tolerated or as easily excusable as incidents in public spaces that allow for a greater sense of anonymity.

The demographics of the populations are also an important variable to consider. Based on the respondents' age groups to Stop AAPI hate, the national trend indicates the largest age group of respondents is between ages 26 to 35 (31%), which essentially excludes the sample size from WMU. According to news articles, targets of physical assaults in anti-Asian hate crimes are usually elderly, defenseless people, not included among the WMU student population. Most hate crime reports also come from states like California or New York, whereas Kalamazoo, Michigan, is a college town. Historical literature also informs us

that many early immigrants planted their roots in California, where they have been targets of xenophobia since the 19th century.

For future researchers to better understand this population in Kalamazoo, Michigan, several improvements could be made to this study. Changing the inclusion criteria to include students who were in the US at any point during the pandemic might yield a more significant number of respondents. Moreover, there are limitations to the amount of data that can be obtained from a survey. Thus, conducting interviews might be a better way to understand the participants. Sending the survey out through more channels, such as social media or through more departments in the university, is also helpful to reach more people in the targeted population. As a result of the pandemic, most university students have had to transition to remote learning, causing them to be using technology and the internet more frequently. The pandemic could have led to technology and survey fatigues that affected the number of survey participants. Another improvement that could be done is to standardize the time that is studied, perhaps annually. This is because the pre-COVID era was a long time, and the COVID-19 era is about a year. Standardizing the time could yield different results and allow for a better comparison of data to examine the number of xenophobic incidents in a year. Future research can also study the effect of WMU's messages about solidarity with the Asian community on students. For instance, President Montgomery sent an email out after the Atlanta massacre. It may be helpful to explore administrative responses to such events as well as diversity and inclusion events on campus.

The scholarship reviewed earlier alerts us that xenophobia is heightened in times of tension and change, such as during a pandemic characterized by social, cultural, and economic instability. The year 2020 was also one of political instability with the presidential election taking place. Increased xenophobia is born out of tension when people's health and careers are threatened. The lockdowns and continuously changing mandates also incite fear in

people who are afraid, tired, and experiencing a loss of control, leading them to blame something or someone else based on their beliefs about who is responsible for COVID-19.

Returning to the yellow peril and model minority myth, xenophobic and racist incidents underscore that Asians are perceived as perpetual foreigners and "other" despite their nationality. Aggressors who use "go back to China" rhetoric overlook the fact that many Asians are, in fact, American citizens. This pandemic has also exposed how quickly the perception of Asians as the model minority can shift to the yellow peril. The painful past of exclusionary legislation and other events is dismissed and overlooked in the United States' history.

As a result of xenophobia and hate crimes, the mental health of those, directly and indirectly, involved is affected, as the literature review highlights the psychological effects of xenophobia. Businesses also suffer economic harm as they are affected by prejudice, misinformation, and stereotypes. The damage done to these businesses comes in the form of looting or physical damage done to shops. For instance, Cam Vuong's Chinese restaurant in Canton was targeted by vandals. The pandemic has also taken a toll on Asian Americans who have experienced unemployment rate spikes by more than 450% from February to June 2020.⁹⁸ Furthermore, stereotypes that all Asians carry COVID-19 or are unhygienic harm businesses as well. As we have seen from news articles, innocent and defenseless people become victims of physical harm, even to the point of death. The Asian community grieves the victims that could be anyone's loved ones. Nearly four decades after Vincent Chin's death, we continue to witness the same effects of blame and xenophobia against members of the AAPI community.

⁹⁸ Amara Walker, "'Hopefully Our Dream is not Broken.' Asian American Businesses Hit Especially Hard during Pandemic," *CNN*, October 26, 2020, <https://www.cnn.com/2020/10/24/us/asian-americans-covid-racism-xenophobia-unemployment/index.html>.

SUMMARY, CONCLUSION, & RECOMMENDATIONS

Through this research, I have reviewed the literature on Asian experiences in the USA, xenophobia, and pandemics to understand xenophobia in the COVID-19 era better. Primary and secondary sources provide somewhat contradictory results. Primary data indicates a decline in xenophobic incidents from 18 before the pandemic to 11 after the pandemic. Analysis of the data demonstrated that verbal harassment and name-calling are the primary forms of discrimination that have been reported. However, this does not discount other forms of discrimination, including physical violence. In addition, the demographics of the population surveyed and various public mandates should be taken into account when considering these results. From various news sources, we see how vulnerable the elderly are, though the study in Kalamazoo does not include this population. The isolation of students from interactions during the lockdown and remote learning environment should also be taken into account when considering the results of this study.

The yellow peril and model minority myth are brought into focus as the pandemic exposes the harm of these perceptions and stereotypes. There is no immediate way or path to follow when combatting xenophobic oppression that has been continuously perpetuated throughout history. As Eric Nam states in a *Time* article, "if you're surprised by the anti-Asian violence in Atlanta, you haven't been listening."⁹⁹ History teaches us that xenophobia is not a new phenomenon, and neither is the act of challenging these attitudes. Solidarity and solutions are needed to challenge xenophobic ideas and actions. For instance, providing crisis intervention resources, including in-language mental health support and legal and immigration advice, can help alleviate the harm caused by xenophobic behaviors against the Asian community.

⁹⁹ Eric Nam, "If You're Surprised by the Anti-Asian Violence in Atlanta, You Haven't Been Listening. It's Time to Hear Our Voices," *Time*, March 22, 2021, <https://time.com/5948226/eric-nam-anti-asian-racism-atlanta/>.

Another possible solution would be to have politicians and leaders find better ways to understand and collect data on hate crimes. Contacting elected officials about bills and votes that affect the AAPI community could also benefit the community in the long run. In 2021, President Joe Biden issued a Memorandum Condemning and Combating Racism, Xenophobia, and Intolerance Against Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders in the United States. This Memorandum includes funding for AAPI survivors of domestic violence and sexual assault, establishing a COVID-19 Equity Task Force committee on addressing and ending xenophobia, and funding research to prevent and address bias and xenophobia against Asian American communities, among other actions.¹⁰⁰ The long-term effectiveness of this Memorandum will need to be studied in the future. However, in light of current events, this is an important step towards supporting the Asian community.

It is also crucial that Asian experiences are brought to light while acknowledging that each group is unique. For instance, people of Japanese descent were placed in internment camps, while Filipinos were deemed to be US nationals due to the role the US played in the Philippines. Unlike those experiences, Indians of South Asian descent were thought to be superior to the Chinese or Japanese because they had Indo-European or Aryan ancestry. Nevertheless, they too have been othered when it suited political purposes.¹⁰¹ Every individual is also different in terms of social and economic status. Asian Americans and Asian international students also have very different experiences, and both groups need to be supported in distinct ways. Asian American students have lived in the US and have different experiences with the dominant culture compared to international students. Nevertheless, both

¹⁰⁰ "Fact Sheet: President Biden Announces Additional Actions to Respond to Anti-Asian Violence, Xenophobia and Bias," The White House, March 30, 2021, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/statements-releases/2021/03/30/fact-sheet-president-biden-announces-additional-actions-to-respond-to-anti-asian-violence-xenophobia-and-bias/>.

¹⁰¹ "Thind V. United States (1923)," Immigration History, accessed May 10, 2021, <https://immigrationhistory.org/item/thind-v-united-states%E2%80%8B/>.

groups must be provided with sufficient resources and information to ensure their physical and mental safety.

There is no way to immediately end xenophobic oppression as we see that this prejudice and hatred runs through so many generations of history. It would take generations of unlearning these stereotypes and attitudes to combat xenophobic oppression. The following is also by no means a comprehensive or exhaustive list to counter xenophobia. However, one of the first steps to be taken is spreading awareness of the severity of xenophobia and hate crimes, as this research highlights. Another step is to humanize these experiences and amplify the voices of minorities instead of ignoring such incidents and excusing perpetrators. Raising awareness and having allies to advocate and stand up for the Asian community is also essential during this time. On social media, hashtags like #StopAAPIHate and #StopAsianHate have been trending in solidarity with the community and to bring attention to the uptick in hate crimes. Another aspect of spreading awareness is that the media should be held accountable for calling out xenophobia and anti-Asian hate crimes; media framing plays an essential role in how these xenophobic incidents are portrayed and conveyed to the public. We should also remain cognizant of the information circulated regarding the pandemic and beware of misinformation and stereotyping.

The Asian community does not only need solidarity and protests but also solutions. One of the reasons that many victims do not report is that they do not believe they will be heard and that there will be no consequences for the perpetrators. Other ways to actively support Asian communities during the COVID-19 pandemic include supporting small businesses like "mom-and-pop shops" and other restaurants struggling due to the pandemic, whose situations are worsened by assumptions about Asians carrying the virus.

According to a survey participant, having "an important figure to announce and validate the importance of this issue" could be a way to combat xenophobic oppression. This

response highlights the critical roles that leaders in society play in perpetuating and dismantling xenophobia. One participant also mentioned educating people from a young age, while another stressed the importance of anti-racism education. Bystander intervention is also a meaningful way to combat xenophobic actions. A survey respondent stated that recognizing xenophobia when it occurs, condemning hateful actions and words in the moment by speaking out against it, and standing up for those affected will be helpful.

As the struggle against xenophobic oppression and racism continues, we must humanize this struggle and look out for one another as individuals as well. A participant made a point that "support for victims should be accessible, transparent and attainable everywhere." We need to understand that there are 48 countries in Asia and the Asian community is not homogenous, and there are unique differences and experiences. The prejudice and violence that each group faces are also distinct. Diversity among Asians must be acknowledged in order to recognize the struggles of different groups. It is also important to note that foregrounding anti-Asian xenophobia does not invalidate the struggles of other minorities and racialized groups; it is simply calling out racism and xenophobia and working to create a more equitable global society.

Appendix A

WMU Online Survey

Western Michigan University Department of Anthropology

You are invited to participate in this research project titled "**Xenophobia in the COVID-19 Era**"

STUDY SUMMARY: This consent form is part of an informed consent process for a research study and it will provide information that will help you decide whether you want to take part in this study. Participation in this study is completely voluntary. You may choose to not answer any question or choose to stop participating at any time. The purpose of the research is to find out if xenophobia towards people of Asian descent has increased in the US. If you take part in the research, you will be asked to record xenophobic incidents you have experienced. Your replies will be completely anonymous, so do not put your name anywhere on the survey. Your time in the study will take about 11 minutes to complete the survey. Possible risk and costs to you for taking part in the study may be discomfort from answering sensitive questions and recalling unpleasant experiences, as well as time to complete the survey. There are no direct benefits to you for taking part in this study. Your alternative to taking part in the research study is not to take part in it.

Definition of xenophobia:

Dislike of or prejudice against people from other countries (Oxford Languages) *

*Xenophobic hate incidents may be based on the assumption that an individual is from another country.

You are welcome to record multiple responses or record only your worst xenophobic experience.

The de-identified (anonymous) information collected for this research may be used by or distributed to investigators for other research without obtaining informed consent from you.

Should you have any questions prior to or during the study, you can contact the Student Investigator Joanne Jeya at joanne.jeya@wmich.edu. You may also contact the Chair, Institutional Review Board at 269-387-8293 or the Vice President for Research at 269-387-8298.

This consent has been approved by the Western Michigan University Institutional Review Board (WMU IRB) on (study approval date).

Participating in this survey online indicates your consent for use of the answers you supply.

I am over the age of 18, am currently in the United States, and I agree to have my information become part of the Xenophobia in the COVID-19 Era research project.

- I agree > Proceeds to survey questions
- I do not agree > Proceeds to survey decline message

FORCED RESPONSE

(see Survey Decline message for "I do not agree" response)

Demographic Information

I am an...

- International Student
- Asian American

FORCED RESPONSE

Country of origin

REQUEST RESPONSE

Ethnicity

REQUEST RESPONSE

Xenophobic Incidents Prior to January 1, 2020 (Pre-COVID-19)

Is this a personal experience or someone else's experience?

- Personal
- Someone else's

FORCED RESPONSE

Where did this incident occur? (City, State)

REQUEST RESPONSE

In what type of environment did it occur? (Select all that apply)

- Business (non-essential)
- Business (essential; e.g. grocery store, gas station, hospital)
- Personal workplace
- Private residence
- Religious space or place of worship
- School or university
- Public street or sidewalk
- Public transport
- Public park
- Digital platform
- Other

REQUEST RESPONSE

Type of incident (Select all that apply)

- Digital harassment
- Verbal harassments (including name calling)
- Physical harassment or assault (including being coughed at, spat upon)
- Shunning
- Workplace discrimination
- Barred from establishment (e.g. restaurant, shop)
- Barred from transportation (e.g. Lyft, Uber, public transportation)
- Vandalism, graffiti, property damage
- Other

REQUEST RESPONSE

Has the incident been reported to local authorities?

- Yes, and there has been a response
- Yes, but there has not been a response
- No, but I plan to
- No and I do not plan to
- Other

REQUEST RESPONSE

Please explain your course of action from the previous question.

REQUEST RESPONSE

Has the incident been covered in the media or publicized elsewhere? (e.g. social media)

- Yes
- No

REQUEST RESPONSE

Please describe the incident as much as you are comfortable with.

REQUEST RESPONSE

Xenophobic Incidents After January 1, 2020 (During COVID-19 era)

Is this a personal experience or someone else's experience?

- Personal
- Someone else's

FORCED RESPONSE

When did the incident occur? Month

Year

REQUEST RESPONSE

Where did this incident occur? (City, State)

REQUEST RESPONSE

In what type of environment did it occur? (Select all that apply)

- Business (non-essential)
- Business (essential; e.g. grocery store, gas station, hospital)
- Personal workplace
- Private residence
- Religious space or place of worship
- School or university
- Public street or sidewalk
- Public transport
- Public park
- Digital platform
- Other

REQUEST RESPONSE

Type of incident (Select all that apply)

- Digital harassment
- Verbal harassments (including name calling)

- Physical harassment or assault (including being coughed at, spat upon)
- Shunning
- Workplace discrimination
- Barred from establishment (e.g. restaurant, shop)
- Barred from transportation (e.g. Lyft, Uber, public transportation)
- Vandalism, graffiti, property damage
- Other

REQUEST RESPONSE

Has the incident been reported to local authorities?

- Yes, and there has been a response
- Yes, but there has not been a response
- No, but I plan to
- No and I do not plan to
- Other

REQUEST RESPONSE

Please explain your course of action from the previous question.

REQUEST RESPONSE

Has the incident been covered in the media or publicized elsewhere? (e.g. social media)

- Yes
- No

REQUEST RESPONSE

Please describe the incident as much as you are comfortable with.

REQUEST RESPONSE

Additional Questions

Do you have an additional incident, that you or someone close to you has experiences, that you would like to add?

- Yes > Proceeds to same xenophobia incident questions
- No > Proceeds to survey end message

FORCE RESPONSE

Xenophobia Mitigation

How do you think xenophobic incidents can be reduced or how can we help victims of such incidents?

REQUEST RESPONSE

Survey end message

Thank you for participating in the Xenophobia in the COVID-19 Era project! If you have any questions about this project, please contact Joanne Jeya at joanne.jeya@wmich.edu.

Survey decline message

Thank you for your interested in the Xenophobia in the COVID-19 Era project.

Unfortunately, we are unable to accept responses from minors under 18 or from individuals who are currently outside of the United States.

For questions, please contact Joanne Jeya at joanne.jeya@wmich.edu.

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