

Increasing Racial Discrimination Against Asians Exposes Overall Racist Nature of U.S. Society

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For years, Asian Americans have been labeled as "the model minority" by the mainstream society of the United States, but this labeling creates only an illusion that there is no racial discrimination against them. Incidents that occurred during the coronavirus pandemic, such as some U.S. politicians' unscrupulous racist remarks and the wave of harassment and attacks on Asian-Americans, further proved this point. Recently, shootings in Atlanta have set off a new wave of fear among Asian Americans. On March 16, 2021, the shootings at three spas in Atlanta, United States, resulted in the death of eight people, including six women of Asian origin. This tragedy is the consequence of the mounting anti-Asian hate in the United States.

In the United States, there was a continued rise in the anti-Asian incidents during the period when the coronavirus pandemic ran rampant in the country. According to a report published on Nov. 18, 2021 by the national coalition Stop Asian American and Pacific Islander Hate, from March 19, 2020 to Sept. 30, 2021, a total of 10,370 hate incidents against Asian American and Pacific Islander people were reported to the organization, and a majority of the incidents took place in spaces open to the public like public streets and businesses. Statistics released by the New York City Police Department on Dec. 8, 2021 showed that anti-Asian hate crimes in the city rose by 361 percent from that of 2020. Some media commented that the actual number of hate crimes against Asian Americans in New York was much higher than the number announced above because many victims did not make any police reports. According to the public opinion survey jointly conducted by The Economist weekly magazine and YouGov in March 2021, 70 percent of respondents believed that Asian Americans were seriously discriminated against in the United States, and suffered

more from racism than African Americans. Thomas Sowell, a U.S. scholar, writes in his *Ethnic America: A History*, "Color has obviously played a major role in determining the fate of many Americans." This irrefutable truth of American society has been confirmed again. The cold reality reflects that the United States still takes pride in recognizing itself as a White Anglo-Saxon Protestant country and that Asian Americans, African Americans, Hispanics and Native Americans are subject to discrimination and violations in various forms, and cannot fully enjoy their human rights.

1. Asian Americans Facing Rise in Racist Attacks Amid the Coronavirus Pandemic

The coronavirus pandemic, a serious public health crisis in the United States, has exposed various racial discrimination problems existing in the society. Black and Hispanic Americans are the direct victims of the pandemic, as their infection and mortality rates are much higher than those of the white population. Asian Americans, however, became the indirect victims,

because of veiled or explicit racist words and deeds toward them amid the pandemic. The Center for the Study of Hate and Extremism at California State University, San Bernardino (CSUSB) released a survey, showing that compared with 2019, hate crime cases in the United States decreased by 7 percent in 2020, but those against Asian Americans increased by 149 percent. In the first quarter of 2021, violent crimes against Asian Americans in the 15 large cities in the United States increased by 169 percent compared with the same period in 2020.

In the past two years, shocking racist attacks against Asian Americans have occurred frequently in the United States.

-- On March 14, 2020, inside a Texas supermarket, a man stabbed an Asian family in an attempt to kill them, including their children aged two and six.

-- On July 14, 2020, in New York City, an 89-year-old Chinese American woman was slapped in the face by

two male strangers on the street, and when she tried to escape, the two strangers set her clothes on fire from behind.

-- On January 28, 2021, an 84-year-old Thai man died from injuries after being viciously slammed onto the ground by a man in San Francisco.

-- On March 16, 2021, Robert Aaron Long, a 21-year-old white man, opened fire in three Asian Massage shops and spas in Atlanta with a gun, killing a total of 8 people, including 6 Asian women.

-- On August 30, 2021, an elderly Filipino woman was pushed down the stairs by a white man in Rego Park Subway Station in Queens, New York, resulting in her sustaining serious facial and physical injuries.

-- On November 17, 2021, three Chinese American high school students in Philadelphia were attacked when they took the subway home from school. The local police said,

"The victims were picked because they were Asian, obviously."

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The New York Times published an article on April 3, 2021, which was entitled "Swelling Anti-Asian Violence: Who Is Being Attacked Where." The article started by pointing out the following facts: "Over the last year, in an unrelenting series of episodes with clear racial animus, people of Asian descent have been pushed, beaten, kicked, spat on, and verbally abused. Homes and businesses have been vandalized." According to the different forms of racist attacks on Asian Americans, the article uses three categories to sort and group the cases it collects, namely: "Beaten, pepper-sprayed, spat on," "Called names and racial slurs," and "Homes and businesses vandalized." The cases under the first category involve the acts of spitting on Asian Americans or using pepper spray and physical violence against them, and those under the second category are mainly subject to racial slurs and derogatory language. The third

category groups are cases of malicious damage to the homes, shops, and other properties of Asian Americans, such as vandalizing and writing graffiti. This article that aims to reveal the Asian Americans' sufferings in the past year can hardly be called all-inclusive, but these exposed racist acts do arouse attention and protests from the U.S. society. Unfortunately, attacks against Asian Americans continue to occur, with vulnerable groups such as women and the elderly as the key targets.

2. Racism Against Asian Americans: Not Unique to the Coronavirus Pandemic

For a long time, racial discrimination against Asian Americans has not attracted enough attention in the United States. One reason is that the racial conflict between blacks and whites has been society's principal focus of attention, and the other reason is that the mainstream society always tends to cover up the suffering of Asian Americans in U.S. history. The Associated Press once observed that "Racism against

Asian Americans has long been an ugly thread in the U.S. history."

The suffering of Chinese Americans is just the epitome of the discrimination and persecution against Asian Americans. In the mid-19th century, as the then U.S. economy was in badly need of cheap laborers, Asian people started immigrating to the United States, but in the late 19th century, some politicians and media deliberately stigmatized Asian Americans as "Yellow Peril," and deluded the mainstream society into believing that they constituted "racial threat," "economic threat" and "health threat" to American whites, sparking off a surge of hatred toward Asian Americans in the United States and making them suffer from long-time prejudice, exclusion, and racial violence. In 1854, the U.S. Supreme Court ruled that Asian Americans were not and could not be citizens in a case, and such restrictions on Asian Americans' access to citizenship were not finally abolished until around the 1940s. The earliest record of organized violence against Asian Americans was in 1871, when a group of whites rushed into an Asian community

near Los Angeles' Chinatown, shooting and hanging 21 Chinese Americans to death, burning down the community, and driving the residents out of the city. The severe prejudice against Asian Americans eventually led to the prohibition of Asian immigrants in the United States: Chinese immigrants were restricted by the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882; Japanese immigrants began to be restricted from 1907 to 1908; and in 1924, all Asians were forbidden to immigrate to the United States. The scapegoating of Asian Americans in a public health incident is not something new in U.S. history. For example, during the smallpox outbreak in San Francisco in the 1870s, Chinese Americans were falsely called the "culprits."

The United States has never compensated for or reflected on the sufferings it has caused to Asian Americans, and even tries its best to cover up or blur relevant facts. As such, the deep-rooted malice toward Asian Americans in U.S. society can never be eliminated. In the United States, Asian Americans are portrayed as outsiders in racial conflicts; the mainstream society denies the history of

racial discrimination against Asian Americans and refuses to admit that there are racist attacks against Asian Americans at present. Erika Lee, a Chinese American historian, published her speech at the Congressional hearing on violence and discrimination against Asian American and Pacific Islander (AAPI) communities. She said, "As shocking as these incidents are, it is so vital to understand that they are not random acts perpetrated by deranged individuals. They are an expression of our country's long history of systemic racism targeting Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders." The UN Secretary-General António Guterres has also expressed his profound concern over the rise in violence against people of Asian descent across the United States. He said, "Thousands of incidents across the past year have perpetuated a centuries-long history of intolerance, stereotyping, scapegoating, exploitation and abuse."

The racial discrimination against Asian Americans that has continued to the present time is probably a built-in and natural product of American colonialism, and it also reflects a mindset of the United States: bullying the weak.

Asian Americans are in a weak position in U.S. society, which makes them vulnerable to racial attacks. Such weakness is mainly caused by the following reasons. The first one is the small population of Asian Americans in the United States. The total population of Asian Americans is about 24 million, accounting for about 6 percent of the total U.S. population, and being significantly outnumbered by whites, African Americans and Hispanics. The second reason is the huge internal differences among Asian Americans. Asian Americans include immigrants and their descendants from dozens of countries in East Asia, Southeast Asia and South Asia. These countries differed from one another in cultural traditions, economic status, political systems, religious customs, and languages, resulting in stark differences and disparities among Asian Americans. The third reason is that Asian Americans are never a cohesive group. Although they are perceived as Asian Americans by mainstream society, most of them think of the term as an imposed label. They simply do not agree that they belong to the same Asian ethnic group. Numerical inferiority, internal differences, and lack of coherence and political

involvement make it impossible for Asian Americans to unite in resisting racial discrimination against them. Such weakness makes them more vulnerable to racist attacks.

The identification of Asian Americans in the United States makes them the target of racist exclusion. The growing racial discrimination against Asian Americans may also be related to the upsurge of xenophobia in the United States, as its mainstream society has long defined Asian Americans as "outsiders," or sometimes, as "colonial others." This definition is based on two reasons. Firstly, the growth of the Asian American population is largely due to immigration rather than natural growth, which means a large number of Asian Americans are born outside the United States. Secondly, most Asian Americans keep a certain distance from the mainstream society and culture of the United States. Therefore, xenophobic expressions such as "get out of our country," "return to your own country," "get out of here," and "you don't belong here," are frequently heard during the racist attacks against Asian Americans. Racists in the United States even regard this false identification as a reasonable

support for launching racist attacks against Asian Americans, and their actions are widely recognized by U.S. society. Just as an Asian American actor named John Cho observed, "The rise in anti-Asian attacks (during the coronavirus pandemic) only reminds Asian Americans like me that our belonging is conditional. One moment we are Americans, the next we are all foreigners, who 'brought' the virus here."

3. Reasons Behind the Rising Anti-Asian Sentiment Amid the Coronavirus Pandemic

(1) Some U.S. politicians' racist coronavirus attacks on China

Some U.S. politicians' manipulation of public opinion during the coronavirus pandemic is the direct cause of the increasingly rampant racial discrimination against Asian Americans. Former U.S. President Donald Trump is good at utilizing racial issues to achieve his political goals. During his four-year term of office, he repeatedly made explicitly racist remarks, resulting in mounting

racial tensions in the United States. When the United States became the country hit most badly by the coronavirus due to the lack of adequate prevention and control measures, Trump, Pompeo and other U.S. politicians who were eager to shirk their responsibilities and ensure the success of the upcoming election, even attempted to make China the scapegoat by referring to the virus as "China virus" or other names that falsely accused China of being the pathogen's geographic origin, instead of using its internationally-recognized name. What they did led to a rise in racist sentiments toward Asian Americans of Chinese or other East Asian origins, making them suffer from various kinds of racist attacks featuring malicious defamation, denial of service, or brutal violence. Ms. E. Tendayi Achiume, the UN Special Rapporteur on contemporary forms of racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance once sharply pointed out that "politicians of relevant countries proactively refused to use the internationally-recognized name of the virus and deliberately replaced it with other names that linked this particular disease to a particular country or nation, which

was an irresponsible and disturbing expression that came from and would give rise to racism, xenophobia, stigmatization, and exclusion of certain groups, and violence against certain groups." Faced with the rising Anti-Asian sentiments, Jen Psaki, the White House press secretary, also admitted that there was "no question" that the Trump administration's "damaging rhetoric" led to "elevated threats against Asian Americans." Frustratingly, when Trump left office, the U.S. government continued the manipulation of the public opinion and the act of politicizing COVID-19 origins tracing, further stoking the Anti-Asian sentiments within the United States.

(2) The effects of white supremacy

The hatred and exclusion suffered by Asian Americans during the pandemic are not very different from the long-term racial discrimination suffered by other U.S. ethnic minorities such as African Americans and Hispanics. All these problems are ultimately rooted in white supremacy that is embodied in the racial structure and social atmosphere of the United States. As Asian

Americans have long been marginalized in the society, many Americans do not even realize or have the courage to admit the long-standing racial discrimination against them. The label "the model minority" has never helped Asian Americans to suffer less from the United States' systemic racism than other U.S. ethnic minorities do, and white supremacists have never shown more mercy toward "the model minority." Seventy-five percent of the attackers that have committed racial hate crimes against Asian Americans are white; hate crimes against Asians also occur most frequently in areas dominated by whites, and white politicians such as Trump and Pompeo are the ones who have first made Asian Americans the scapegoats for the pandemic. The mainstream society of the United States has long turned a deaf ear to Asian Americans' complaints of racism and discrimination. In September 2020, 164 Republican congressmen voted against the bill condemning discrimination against Asian Americans. Many vicious violent attacks against Asian Americans, such as setting a 90-year-old woman on fire, and stabbing a Chinese American man on the streets of Manhattan, were not filed as hate crimes. After the three

shootings that occurred in Atlanta on March 16, 2021, Jay Baker, the spokesman of the local police office openly denied that it was a hate crime and even defended the shooter by claiming that he was having a "bad day."

(3) "The model minority" label shackling Asian Americans

In the mid and late 1960s, when African-Americans struggled to achieve civil rights equal to those of whites, a number of stories describing the success of some Asian Americans such as Japanese and Chinese Americans were published in mainstream U.S. newspapers and magazines, as the U.S. political, academic and media circles planned to label Asian Americans as "the model minority." Objectively speaking, this label was effective in reducing the long-existing stigma toward Asian Americans and praising some Asian Americans' hard work and success. Nevertheless, many in-depth analyses also reveal that this label was just a ridiculous idea invented to strengthen the U.S. racial hierarchy and rationalize its racist discrimination. For the following

reasons, this seemingly glorious label actually shackled Asian Americans. To begin with, this label made the racial discrimination against Asian Americans sound far-fetched, and people started neglecting and even denying the discrimination against them. Along with the labeling, Asian Americans were stereotyped as well-educated with high incomes which deprived them of the right of enjoying favorable policies for U.S. ethnic minorities. Being labeled as a "successful minority," their economic difficulties are often overlooked. In fact, 13.5 percent of elderly Asian Americans currently live in poverty, and the proportion is much higher than the average poverty rate of the United States. Asian Americans also experience the longest average unemployment spell than other U.S. ethnic groups do, and they are obviously underrepresented in the leadership of politics, business, academia and law. Furthermore, "the model minority" label subdues the Asian Americans' resistance against racial discrimination. The U.S. mainstream media frequently describe Asian Americans as "independent, intelligent, diligent, obedient, and silent," and advocate that their cultural values are

consistent with the country's Protestant ethics. Such seemingly commendatory remarks have successfully won the recognition of a considerable number of Asian Americans, making them willing to act low-key according to the expected image and behavior mode. As such, they become more tolerant toward discriminative speeches and deeds and even feel ashamed of mentioning them. Last but not least, "the model minority" label deteriorates the relationships among U.S. ethnic minorities and shifts their attention from opposing white supremacy. The act of labeling Asian Americans as "the model minority" during the African-American Civil Rights Movement, which implied criticism toward African Americans, was a policy of "divide and rule" used to contain the Civil Rights Movement. It caused acute conflicts among the U.S. ethnic minorities, making Asian Americans a common target for scorn, ridicule, etc.

(4) The antagonism between Asian Americans and other U.S. ethnic minorities

Relevant research shows that although all U.S. ethnic minorities suffer racist attacks mainly from whites, Asian Americans are more vulnerable to attacks from other ethnic minorities than African Americans and Hispanics. Seventy-five percent of attackers who committed hate crimes against Asian Americans were whites, and the remaining 25 percent were people of other ethnic minorities. This fact, to some extent, reflects the complex racial relations and conflicts within the United States. For instance, deceived by some U.S. politicians' and media's lies about the coronavirus pandemic, some African Americans mistook Asian Americans as their enemy and attacked Asian Americans to vent their anger. Such anger is also a result of the long-lasting antagonism and misunderstanding between Asian Americans and African Americans, which were created by the U.S. mainstream society's labeling of Asian Americans as "the model minority," and the two groups' differences in cultural traditions and values, their competition for jobs and other social resources, and their previous conflicts. Although both of them are victims of racial injustice in the United States, distrust between them makes Asian

Americans more powerless to extricate themselves from the difficult position. In the end, it is worth noting that other U.S. ethnic groups clearly offered more support for the Black Lives Matter movement than they did for the Stop Asian Hate movement.

(5) Some U.S. politicians' actions that seriously undermine Sino-U.S. relations

In the U.S. history, the country's diplomatic relations with different countries could often determine its ways of treating its immigrants of different origins: the tension between the United States and a foreign country frequently led to discrimination and racist attacks against the immigrants from that foreign country. Such kinds of discrimination happened to German immigrants during World War I, Japanese immigrants during World War II, and immigrants from Muslim countries after the September 11 incident. The Sino-U.S. relations began to deteriorate even before the coronavirus outbreak, when the Trump administration adopted various policies to suppress China, made extreme remarks to criticize

China's political system and harm China's sovereignty, launched the so-called trade war or tech war against China and attempted to decouple China and the United States. Affected by that, Chinese Americans began to encounter an increasing amount of discriminatory treatment in the United States, and the most typical example was the censorship and persecution of Chinese American intellectuals. When the coronavirus pandemic went out of control in the United States, the Trump administration continued using racist remarks to attack China as a way of covering up its ineffective epidemic response. This further worsened the Sino-U.S. relations and left the entire Asian American group, especially Chinese Americans, vulnerable to rampant racial discrimination. At present, the Biden administration still views China as a major strategic competitor, which continues stoking the anti-Asian sentiment in the United States. It can be inferred that in the post-pandemic era, even if the racial discrimination against Asian Americans may subside, the racial attacks against Chinese Americans will continue to rise. This increases our worry

and requires our vigilance and the sustained attention of the international community.