

## I. History

Growing up, I had learned about American slavery and the Holocaust. Tragic manmade events that had targeted a group of innocent people and traumatized their descendents for generations, haunting their memories and families like a ghost. I felt great sadness for the victims and great anguish for humanity but the greatest grief came when I learned about the history of Asian Americans, the history of my people. It was not until high school that I learned that Asian Americans had been a part of America's history since the 1800s. I had assumed up until then that Asian Americans were foreigners and immigrants who had moved here recently, as was the story of my family, but I soon learned Asians had always been a part of America. With the California Gold Rush the Chinese came for better lives but were too late so they built the railroad. Cheap labor, dangerous conditions and no credit for the work they did. Other Asian Americans arrived, the Japanese, Indian, Korean and more. But the country's attitude towards Asian Americans was hostile. With the Chinese Exclusion Act, Asians became the first undocumented immigrants. Asian Americans were met with violence, lynchings, segregation in schools and their businesses destroyed. And in World War II with the bombing of Pearl Harbor, Japanese Americans, even the ones with no ties to Japan and were born American, were put into internment camps and forced to sell their homes and businesses. Not to mention the fact that Dr. Seuss, famous storyteller and author was a racist man. He hated Asian Americans and drew them crudely in propaganda, drawing my people as sinister and corrupt. This is the history I didn't grow up learning. The Holocaust and slavery are horrific and stain humanity, but I had failed to learn about the tragic history of my own people. I felt hurt and looked for who to blame. A school

system that's curriculum excluded my race? A country who hides my history but in ignorance or in shame? My history was hidden from me and it has become mine to claim.

## II. Inclusion

Asian Americans have become more represented. I feel great joy seeing Asian American celebrities become popular, people who look like me in movies, and books that include my identity. This inclusiveness is praised and celebrated, as it should, marking a new era that listens to the stories of my people and recognizes our culture and community. But like a mother praising her child for saying its first words, praise is given for accomplishing something that one had been unable to do before. Growing up, I had rarely seen a television show that featured an Asian character unless it was a show from Asia. I never went to the store and saw a doll that mirrored my appearance or a celebrity that spoke my native language. Dress up games never gave an Asian girl as a starter option and reality tv shows never seemed to think Asians were interesting enough to be included. No models that had my complexion, no magazines that had my eyes. To be a minority didn't just mean my people were a minority in the country's demographics, we were a minority in every aspect of life. To take decades to finally represent us is absurd, but everyday we fight to make our stories and people heard.

## III. Blame

My people became the blame for a disease, something that no human, nonetheless an entire race, has control over. Like a reflection, our country has mirrored the hatred of its past. Asian Americans are again considered to be the "yellow peril" and seen as a threat to the

country. Innocent elderly and citizens violently abused and attacked when trying to live their daily lives. Screamed at and harassed. And the horror of having your business destroyed by fear and by hate is only the repetition of history. Like a nightmare long forgotten, or a phobia you thought you had conquered long ago, my people live in terror. With a pandemic, we all fear to go outside. But for my community and people we fear a deadlier disease. A disease that spreads panic and thoughts of violent confrontations. A disease that exists not only in the physical world but also online. This disease brought about a social media post that depicted a horrendously animated Asian woman in a bikini surrounded by bats and COVID-19 depictions. A post that included an Asian woman with large teeth and small eyes, kissing a bat. A hurtful post that thousands reported and shamed yet took over two days to be removed and constant claims that it didn't violate any laws. All caused by a disease that came about when the country chose to place its blame on my people. The strain of this disease continues to grow and mutate. What other disease is more terrifying than the one that is called hate.

#### IV. Community

Darkness cannot exist without light. One of the most redeeming and beautiful aspects of humanity is our ability to support others in times of need. I had recently learned about the story of Yuri Kochiyama, a Japanese American woman who had fought for Japanese internment reparations. Not only did she fight for Asian Americans, but she had been a supporter of civil rights for African Americans. She fought for black rights alongside her friend Malcolm X and was even by his side at the time of his death. I came to understand that minorities are more similar than different and that the suffering of one minority is the suffering of my own.

Undocumented immigrants from Mexico and Latin America are separated from their families and fight to prove their right to live in this country, and not long ago my people were the first undocumented immigrants. The lynchings of my people and segregation from schools is understood by the African American community and the fear of going outside due to hate is understood by the LGBTQ. Muslim Americans understand what it's like to be seen as a threat to the country and feared, for not long ago they suffered the blame for 9/11. Like a tree, we have all been here for decades and made roots in this country. We may be different branches, that move in different directions but we are part of the same community. To work together and support each other makes us stronger, for one branch can be a weapon but many can create an indestructible fire. We are part of a larger oppressed, minority community that all understand, that to live in this country, is to fight to live on this land.