

BLACK VS. YELLOW: WHAT'S REALLY BEHIND THE ATTACKS ON ASIANS?

As a fifth-generation Chinese American professional speaker and author, I am acutely aware of the increasing number of physical attacks specifically aimed at Asians in the United States since the Coronavirus pandemic began including robberies or beatings for no reason at all. We know Asians are being targeted because of some of the words used by the perpetrators during the assaults such as, "Go back to where you came from", "China flu" or "Asians need to be put in their place". This has been backed-up by studies¹ that show that anti-Asian hate crimes have gone up by as much as 149% in the largest cities in the U.S.

We Asians are often targeted for physical assault and robberies because we are not only commonly stereotyped as affluent but also as passive according to studies by the U.S. Department of Justice. In addition, it is widely believed that we are less likely to report crimes because of a lack of English skills or general meekness.

In addition, Asian Americans are more likely to be victimized by members of other minority groups than by whites. Studies² show that 26% of perpetrators in hate crimes against Asians are non-white, compared to only 1% of those who do the same to blacks.

Asians have always been touted in front of other minorities, particularly blacks, as the "Model Minority". Implying that if African Americans only worked harder they could be just as successful as Asians which totally ignores the fact that while some of us are successful financially, as a group we also had a higher rate of poverty (9.7%) than Caucasians (9.0%) in 2019 according to the Kaiser Family Foundation. While blacks have faced systemic racism since the founding of our country Asians have also been subject to long-standing racism as well starting with the-Chinese laws of the 1800s.

Historically, minorities in America have had to compete with other groups who have also been discriminated against for scarce resources. When the Coronavirus pandemic started it was thought to have started in Wuhan, China and, as a result, then-President Donald Trump started calling it the "China Flu". This concerned us Asians because we were afraid that we would be blamed for the pandemic which has, unfortunately, proven true for many people.

Over the years, the biggest gulf between minorities has usually been between blacks and Asians. One of the reasons is that our communication styles tend to be polar opposites. This was brought out clearly during the 1992 Rodney King riots in Watts, California when African Americans looted and burned Korean stores that served their neighborhood. No one could understand why one minority group would target another so some members of the media interviewed some black residents who complained that they felt disrespected and humiliated by Korean shop owners. When asked to explain, many of those interviewed said that the store operators would not look them in the eye when conversing and wouldn't even touch them when giving them change, instead

putting it the counter. When the reporters asked the Koreans about this behavior the proprietors were aghast saying that they were trying to show the highest level of respect because it was traditional to avoid eye contact with customers in their culture and they were trying to avoid putting dirty money into their hands and, instead, put it one the counter so the purchaser could pick it up and put it in their pockets. Unfortunately, no one ever bothered to ask and just made assumptions about the other's cultural practices for decades.

So what can be done to bridge this cultural divide? The first things is for community leaders from all sides to meet to talk about their unique challenges and common problems. Then, they need to figure out how to work together to solve them.

Prejudice in general and attacks on one minority group by another is all about fear. Fear of the unknown. By meeting and getting to know each other better we can reduce and eliminate fear of those who we believe are different from ourselves.

Minorities in America have many common challenges and it will only be by working together can we solve them.

About the Author: Michael Soon Lee, Ph.D., has been speaking about diversity and inclusion for over three decades to companies like Coca-Cola, Chevron, General Motors and over a thousand others. He is the author of nine books including, "Cross-Cultural Selling for Dummies" and "Black Belt Negotiating". Dr. Lee can be reached at (800) 417-7325 and his website is: www.EthnoConnect.com

¹The Center for the Study of Hate and Extremism: California State University at San Bernardino.

²Hate Crimes Against Asian Americans by Zhang, Zhang & Benton. American Journal of Criminal Justice 01/07/21