



Photo by: MK Luff

THE BLAME GAME

How Political Rhetoric Inflames
Anti-Asian Scapegoating

STOP
AAPI
HATE

OCTOBER 2022

INTRODUCTION

In every chapter of U.S. history, immigrants and people of color unfairly suffered blame for our nation's economic problems and societal ills. Our nation's leaders have time and again played into existing narrative frames that consolidate political support and public opinion against a common "enemy." Scapegoating – the act of unfairly blaming a group for societal misfortunes¹ – is a political strategy that wins votes by causing animus and harm against marginalized communities.

Over the last 250 years, the target of scapegoating in the United States has moved from one community of color to another, resulting in devastating violence and exclusionary policies. Chinese laborers bore the blame for declining wages in the American West in the late 1800s, leading to at least 168 communities driving out their Chinese populations with threats, harassment, violence, and prohibitions on Chinese immigration in most cases until 1943.² During the Great Depression, the American government found fault with Mexican Americans for the country's economic troubles, leading to the deportation of an estimated 500,000 Mexican Americans – half of whom were U.S. citizens.³ And from enslavement until present day, Black people have been scapegoated for crimes of violence and poverty – leading to wrongful accusations, arrests, and police killings.⁴

With the rise of the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020, Asians and Asian Americans are once again a scapegoat. Our community is an easy target because of two pre-existing stereotypes about Asians and Asian Americans. First, the "yellow peril" and "dusky peril" myths depict Asia and Asians as a threat to the western world's existence.⁵ Second, the "perpetual foreigner" trope portrays Asians and Asian Americans as forever outsiders who do not belong in America.⁶ Political rhetoric on China's role in the spread of COVID-19, national security, or the American economy inflames this preexisting animus towards Asians and Asian Americans, and turns our community into scapegoats.

We call on politicians to end unnecessary fearmongering and rhetoric that inflames scapegoating and harm. We deserve leaders who engage in meaningful debate and uplift the needs, strengths, and contributions of Asians, Asian Americans, and other communities of color.

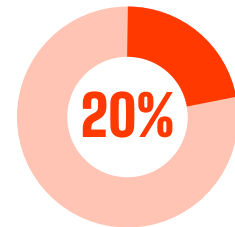
LANGUAGE USED IN HATE INCIDENTS MIRRORS INFLAMMATORY POLITICAL RHETORIC

Since March 19, 2020, Stop AAPI Hate has recorded 2,255 incidents with language that scapegoats Asians and Asian Americans – wrongfully blaming them for COVID-19, espionage on behalf of the Chinese Communist Party, or economic insecurity.⁷ These incidents represent one in five (20%) of the 11,467 hate incidents targeting Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders (AAPIs) submitted to our reporting system. This number is just the tip of the iceberg; a national survey estimated at least three million AAPIs experienced hate incidents between March 2021 and March 2022.⁸

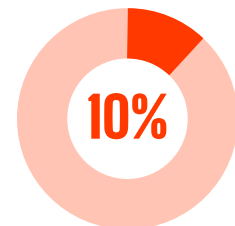
The harmful political rhetoric associating China with COVID-19 has contributed to this rise in incidents involving scapegoating language. Almost all scapegoating incidents in our dataset (2,161, or 96% of all scapegoating incidents) unfairly blame Asians and Asian Americans for the COVID-19 pandemic. COVID-19 is only the latest in a long history of scapegoating Asians and Asian Americans for public health reasons (also known as “medical scapegoating”).

Further, we see two scapegoating narratives emerging in our data. First, we found 95 incidents (4% of all scapegoating incidents) where Asians or Asian Americans are blamed for national security reasons, alleging that community members are spies on behalf of the Chinese Communist Party. Second, we identified 15 incidents (1% of all scapegoating incidents) where Asian Americans are blamed for being economic threats who take away jobs from “real” Americans. With the global pandemic beginning to recede, we caution that the number of incidents involving national security or economic scapegoating can quickly escalate alongside current political rhetoric. In this report, we note historical parallels where Asians and Asian Americans were previously scapegoated for national security and economic reasons, resulting in violence and racial profiling.

This report builds on our previous research. In a series of reports in 2020 and 2021, we identified anti-Chinese scapegoating occurring in about one in five incidents reported to Stop AAPI Hate.⁹ A separate report reviewed tweets by politicians leading up to the 2020 election, and found that about one in 10 tweets about Asian Americans included racist or stigmatizing language, such as scapegoating.¹⁰



One in five incidents involve language that scapegoats Asians and Asian Americans



In 2020, one in ten tweets by politicians about Asian Americans included racist or stigmatizing language

1. Public health scapegoating: politicians naming China as causing COVID-19 contributed to anti-Asian hate

Politicians named China as the cause of COVID-19

Throughout the past two-and-a-half years of the pandemic, politicians blamed China as the source of COVID-19. In the early months, the Trump administration used “Chinese virus” or variants of that terminology¹¹, even after the World Health Organization chose to name the virus “COVID-19” to avoid stigmatizing those connected to the geography where a virus emerges.¹²

In April 2020, the National Republican Senatorial Committee issued the “[Corona Big Book](#),” with talking points such as, “China did this. The Chinese Communist Party caused this pandemic.”¹³

And in June 2020, President Donald Trump began calling COVID-19 “kung flu” at campaign rallies.¹⁴

Two years later, politicians continue to blame China for COVID-19 in even more blunt terms. Shelley Luther, a candidate who ran for and lost the 2022 Republican primary for a Texas House seat, tweeted in January 2022, “China created a virus that killed hundreds of thousands of Americans.”¹⁵

In March 2022, Dr. Mehmet Oz, 2022 candidate for U.S. Senate in Pennsylvania tweeted, “CHINA GAVE US COVID.”¹⁶

Former President Trump continued to use the terminology “China Virus” to describe COVID-19 in a posting to his Truth Social platform in July 2022.¹⁷

“CHINA DID THIS. THE CHINESE COMMUNIST PARTY CAUSED THIS PANDEMIC.”

- National Republican Senatorial Committee

“CHINA CREATED A VIRUS THAT KILLED HUNDREDS OF THOUSANDS OF AMERICANS.”

- Shelley Luther, 2022 candidate for Texas state representative

“CHINA GAVE US COVID.”

- Dr. Mehmet Oz, 2022 candidate for U.S. Senate in Pennsylvania

Politicians naming China as the source of COVID-19 led to harm against Asians and Asian Americans

Politicians' usage in naming China responsible for COVID-19 has led to harm against Asian and Asian American communities. In the week after President Trump's first Tweet using "Chinese virus" on March 16, 2020, Twitter hashtags expressing anti-Asian sentiment increased by 174 times.¹⁸ And every tweet from President Trump that mentioned both "China" and "COVID" resulted in an 8% increase in anti-Asian hate incidents and tweets using the slur "c---k."¹⁹

As of 2022, 21% of Americans of all backgrounds believed that Asian Americans are at least partly responsible for COVID-19 — almost twice as many as those surveyed the previous year.²⁰ Similarly, 2,161 incidents (96% of all scapegoating incidents) in the Stop AAPI Hate dataset invoke language that blames Asian and Asian American community members for COVID-19, with some accompanied by threats of violence.



Source: Wikimedia



Source: Luis Jaura, Unsplash

“Stranger pointed at me and my friend and told us that we were the ones responsible for bringing COVID to the U.S.”

- Washington

“I was on the uptown 6 train between Grand Central and 23rd St. A man said to me, ‘Don’t stand so close. You brought COVID into this country... I will drag you, your c---k husband, and your kids off the train and kill you.’”

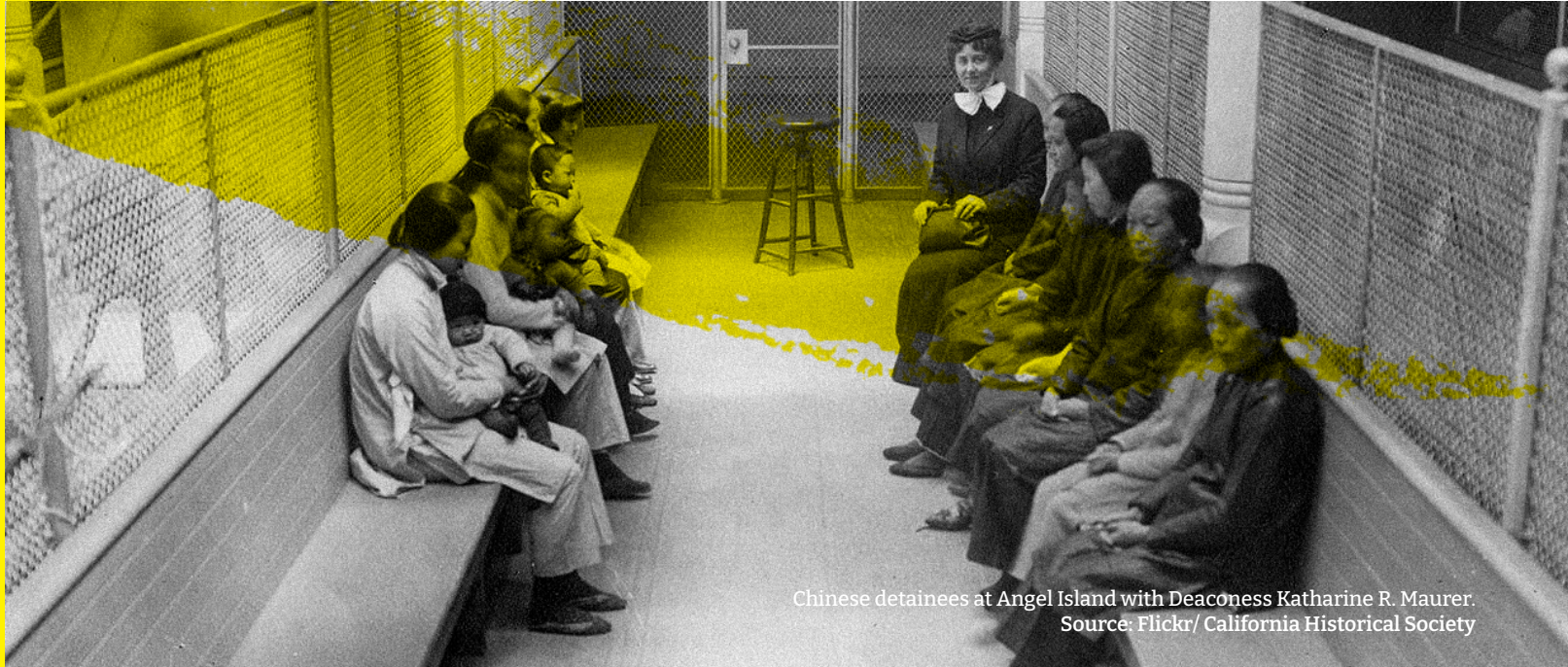
- New York

“I was told to kill myself multiple times for causing COVID and told to go back to ‘where I came from.’”

- Online

Asians and Asian Americans have long been public health scapegoats

Scapegoating for COVID-19 is not the first time that Asians and Asian Americans have been unfairly blamed for a health crisis. In the late 19th and early 20th centuries, Chinese populations in major American cities were scapegoated as carriers for smallpox, syphilis, bubonic plague, and other diseases, and became subject to race-driven quarantines and invasive inspections.²¹ In Honolulu, Hawaii, and Santa Ana, California, city officials started fires in their Chinatowns in the name of public health.²²



Chinese detainees at Angel Island with Deaconess Katharine R. Maurer.
Source: Flickr/ California Historical Society

From 1910 to 1940, immigrants from China, India, and other Asian countries faced public health scapegoating at Angel Island Immigration Station, the primary immigration processing center for immigrants from Asia. While Angel Island is best known for the extended detention of Chinese immigrants, the federal government also engaged in medical examinations that discouraged immigration from other countries. For example, Angel Island's chief medical officer required all Indian immigrants to be screened for hookworm. Those found to have hookworm were required to pay for treatment; the many who could not afford treatment were deported. While the policy was ostensibly to prevent the spread of disease, it was championed as a method to bar immigration from India. In 1910, a San Francisco newspaper celebrated the policy: "the hookworm is doing for California what Immigration Commissioner Hart North failed to do."²³

"THE HOOKWORM IS DOING FOR CALIFORNIA WHAT IMMIGRATION COMMISSIONER HART NORTH FAILED TO DO."

- A San Francisco newspaper

Decades after Chinese immigrants were blamed for smallpox and other diseases, public sentiment again targeted Asians and Asian Americans for SARS in 2003. In a national survey in April 2003, 14% of Americans reported avoiding Asian restaurants and stores as a result of SARS.²⁴ In May 2003, 10% of the 7,303 calls to the United States Center for Disease Control and Prevention expressed SARS-related fear, stigmatization, or discrimination of Asians and Asian Americans. For example, callers expressed fears of working with, living near, or going to school with Asian community members.²⁵ These concerns were disproportionate to SARS's real impact: only eight individuals in the United States were ever confirmed to have contracted SARS, and none of those cases resulted in death.²⁶

2. National security scapegoating: political allegations of Chinese government espionage mirrors language used in scapegoating of Asians and Asian Americans

Politicians use rhetoric alleging spying from the Chinese government

Over the past two years, several politicians have engaged in rhetoric that names the Chinese Communist Party as a national security threat for espionage. In June 2021, for example, Governor Ron DeSantis of Florida signed two state bills to address perceived espionage in businesses and higher education. He explained his reasoning through rhetoric that accuses China and the Chinese Communist Party of spying: “Make no mistake — China is a hostile foreign power, and every Governor has the responsibility to protect their education system, and every other entity within their purview, from the espionage and commercial theft undertaken by the Chinese Communist Party... China remains the biggest threat.”²⁷

In May 2022, U.S. Representative Jim Banks of Indiana connected the Chinese Communist Party narrative to our immigration system: “President Biden and Democrats in Congress are turning a blind eye to CCP spies abusing our visa system.”²⁸

In August 2022, U.S. Senator Marsha Blackburn of Tennessee echoed the narrative that the Chinese Communist Party is sending spies to our higher education systems and corporations: “The CCP is attempting to take over the USA across all industries — pushing spies into U.S. universities and buying U.S. farmland. We must crack down on Communist China and unravel our ties.”²⁹

“MAKE NO MISTAKE — CHINA IS A HOSTILE FOREIGN POWER, AND EVERY GOVERNOR HAS THE RESPONSIBILITY TO PROTECT THEIR EDUCATION SYSTEM, AND EVERY OTHER ENTITY WITHIN THEIR PURVIEW, FROM THE ESPIONAGE AND COMMERCIAL THEFT UNDERTAKEN BY THE CHINESE COMMUNIST PARTY... CHINA REMAINS THE BIGGEST THREAT.”

- Ron DeSantis, Governor, Florida

“PRESIDENT BIDEN AND DEMOCRATS IN CONGRESS ARE TURNING A BLIND EYE TO CCP SPIES ABUSING OUR VISA SYSTEM.”

- Jim Banks, U.S. Senator, Indiana

“THE CCP IS ATTEMPTING TO TAKE OVER THE USA ACROSS ALL INDUSTRIES — PUSHING SPIES INTO U.S. UNIVERSITIES AND BUYING U.S. FARMLAND. WE MUST CRACK DOWN ON COMMUNIST CHINA AND UNRAVEL OUR TIES.”

- Marsha Blackburn, U.S. Senator, Tennessee

Asians and Asian Americans experience hate incidents with similar rhetoric that accuse them of spying on behalf of the Chinese government

The Stop AAPI Hate dataset includes 95 incidents (4% of all scapegoating incidents) where perpetrators used similar rhetoric that accuses Asians or Asian Americans of spying on behalf of the Chinese government:

“Cashier at a retail store shared that she suspected that her neighbor who happens to be a postdoctoral Asian male engineer was secretly a ‘5G China Spy.’”

- California

“Sales Director stated on a group call that Chinese students are sneaky and will steal secrets.”

- California

Asian and Asian Americans have long been scapegoated as national security threats

While the number of incidents in the Stop AAPI Hate dataset associating Asian Americans with spying for the Chinese Communist Party is currently small, its emergence remains concerning. From the detainment of over 120,000 Japanese Americans³⁰ after the attack on Pearl Harbor to recent targeting of Chinese scientists,³¹ Asian and Asian Americans have experienced a long history of scapegoating for national security threats and perceived allegiance to foreign countries.

“My ‘friend’ and I were talking and I said I wanted to work in government or abroad in the future. She said that she knows that I would not be able to because I would have to pass a series of serious background checks, insinuating that she thought I was suspicious and untrustworthy to hold a government position just because of my race... She proceeded to interrogate me, unprovoked, about how my family files taxes, further showing that she does not trust me because I am Chinese. After this encounter, I felt as though I had been ‘outed’ as a spy, even though I have never done anything wrong.”

- Massachusetts

In the late 1990s, the federal government arrested Dr. Wen Ho Lee, a Taiwanese American scientist, and held him for 278 days in solitary confinement for unwarranted concerns of spying for China. At the end of the case, all but one count were dropped due to lack of evidence and the judge in the case took the unusual step to apologize to Dr. Lee for the government taking overly punitive measures in his case.³²

Following the 9/11 attacks, the country’s national security scapegoating target shifted to Muslim, South Asian, Hindu, Middle Eastern, Arab, and Sikh American communities. Just four days after 9/11, Balbir Singh Sodhi, a Sikh American, was murdered by a man who believed Sodhi to be Muslim and sought to “kill a Muslim” in retaliation for the Twin Towers attacks.³³ He was the first of hundreds of individuals who were Muslim or perceived to be Muslim to experience Islamophobic post-9/11 scapegoating.³⁴ Politicians inflamed this animus with rhetoric that painted individual Muslims or those believed to be Muslims as potential terrorists or disloyal to the United States.³⁵

Further, our political leaders codified post-9/11 scapegoating into public policy. For example, in 2002, the Bush administration launched the National Security Entry-Exit Registration System, which registered more than 80,000 men and boys over age 16 from 25 predominantly Arab and/or Muslim countries which the Department

of Homeland Security deemed “most likely to pose a terrorist threat to the United States.”³⁶ These individuals underwent fingerprinting and interrogations, and more than 13,000 underwent secret hearings that resulted in deportation. The program was highly ineffective, resulting in finding zero cases of terrorism.³⁷

These harmful narratives reemerged during the 2016 presidential campaign, where Trump ran on a platform scapegoating Muslims and other communities of color. His proposed policies, such as a “Muslim registry” and increased surveillance of mosques, wrongfully cast Muslims as potential terrorists.³⁸ Once elected, he codified his scapegoating rhetoric into policy with the signing of an executive order in 2017 to implement a “Muslim ban.” Trump’s Islamophobia inflamed anti-Muslim sentiment among his supporters: his tweets about Muslims resulted in an increase of anti-Muslim tweets across his Twitter followers and an ensuing spike in anti-Muslim hate crimes.³⁹

Trump later expanded the targets of national security scapegoating to include Chinese. In 2018, his administration launched the China Initiative, a federal initiative to investigate scientists of Chinese origin for alleged espionage on behalf of China.⁴⁰ In the following years, the U.S. Department of Justice investigated at least 150 scientists, 90% of whom were of Chinese origin.⁴¹ The subsequent surveillance and arrests destroyed careers, reputations, and livelihoods — and in most cases without cause.⁴² Gang Chen, a mechanical engineering professor at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, said of his wrongful prosecution and arrest, “You work hard, you have good output, you build a reputation... But in the end, you’re treated like a spy. That just breaks your heart. It breaks your confidence.”⁴³

“You work hard, you have good output, you build a reputation... But in the end, you’re treated like a spy. That just breaks your heart. It breaks your confidence.**”**

- Gang Chen,
Professor of Engineering, MIT



Source: Muzammil Soorma, Unsplash

In 2021, an independent investigation from *MIT Technology Review* declared the China Initiative “a mess” and observed that “The Department of Justice has no definition of what constitutes a China Initiative case.”⁴⁴ In 2022, the Biden administration announced an end to the China Initiative. While the program has ended in name, the Department of Justice continues to investigate “nation-state threats” of which “the government of China stands apart.”⁴⁵

3. Economic scapegoating: political rhetoric on China as economic competition mirrors language used in scapegoating of Asians and Asian Americans

Politicians use “economic threat” rhetoric to describe China

Both political parties engage in rhetoric that paints China as an economic threat to America’s existence. In Ohio, for example, the Republican and Democratic candidates for the U.S. Senate both leverage this narrative. Tim Ryan, a Democrat, presented China as the singular threat to the American economy and the country’s existence in his [“One Word” campaign ad](#): “China. It’s definitely China. It’s us vs. China... China is out-manufacturing us left and right. America could never be dependent on Communist China. We got to go all in.”⁴⁶

In February 2022, J.D. Vance, his Republican opponent, used even more inflammatory language, comparing America’s economic dependence on China to slavery: “When our farmers go bankrupt the Chinese who sell the fertilizer will happily buy up their land. This is the pathway to national slavery.”⁴⁷

Senator Tom Cotton of Arkansas further amps up this rhetoric, naming China as an existential economic threat not only to America but the entire world. In a 2021 *National Review* op-ed, he wrote, “The United States faces a new cold war, this time with China, that will determine the future of our nation and of the world. This cold war will turn much more on economic competition than did the first, with Soviet Russia.”⁴⁸

“THE UNITED STATES FACES A NEW COLD WAR, THIS TIME WITH CHINA, THAT WILL DETERMINE THE FUTURE OF OUR NATION AND OF THE WORLD. THIS COLD WAR WILL TURN MUCH MORE ON ECONOMIC COMPETITION THAN DID THE FIRST, WITH SOVIET RUSSIA.”

- Tom Cotton, U.S. Senator, Arkansas

“CHINA. IT’S DEFINITELY CHINA. IT’S US VS. CHINA... CHINA IS OUT-MANUFACTURING US LEFT AND RIGHT. AMERICA COULD NEVER BE DEPENDENT ON COMMUNIST CHINA. WE GOT TO GO ALL IN.”

- Tim Ryan, U.S. Representative and 2022 Democratic candidate for U.S. Senate, Ohio

“WHEN OUR FARMERS GO BANKRUPT THE CHINESE WHO SELL THE FERTILIZER WILL HAPPILY BUY UP THEIR LAND. THIS IS THE PATHWAY TO NATIONAL SLAVERY.”

- J.D. Vance, 2022 Republican candidate for U.S. Senate, Ohio

Asians and Asian Americans experience hate incidents with similar “economic threat” rhetoric

The Stop AAPI Hate dataset includes 15 incidents (1% of all scapegoating incidents) where perpetrators used similar “economic threat” rhetoric with which to blame Asians and Asian Americans. As with other scapegoating, many incidents include personally directed threats of harassment and violence.

“I was working at an Asian grocery store. Our store got a phone call from a stranger who threatened to rob us. That man said that Asians steal jobs and send all U.S. dollars back to China, so it is time to f-k our store up.”

- Midwest

“I was hired part-time by the Census Bureau as an enumerator. I was about to go to survey when a lady yelled at me and said, ‘Hey you, stop right there, don’t ever step into my property or else I will let my German shepherd run after you!’ I kept a professional manner by saying that I am from the Census but she started the verbal racist rants: ‘You stole jobs from Americans! You go back to your country!’”

- Virginia

“Getting cash from an ATM. Man came up behind me and yelled ‘Go back to China. Stop taking our jobs.’”

- Michigan



Source: Mirza Babic, Unsplash

Asians and Asian Americans have long been scapegoated as economic threats

While the number of incidents involving economic scapegoating are currently small, the emergence of this trend is concerning due to the long history of scapegoating Asians and Asian Americans as an economic threat.

In the 1980s and 1990s, Japan became the economic scapegoating target. As Japan rose to prominence as America's largest trading partner in the 1980s, Americans began to perceive it as a threat to the country's economic existence.⁴⁹ Politicians engaged in this narrative, often with aggressive racialized rhetoric. U.S. Representative John Dingell of Michigan described the major threat to the American auto industry as coming from "the little yellow people."⁵⁰ John Connally, a candidate for the 1980 presidential election, issued this warning to Japan during his campaign: "You had better be prepared to sit on the docks of Yokohama in your little Datsuns while you stare at your little TV sets and eat your mandarin oranges, because we've had all we're going to take!"⁵¹

"YOU HAD BETTER BE PREPARED TO SIT ON THE DOCKS OF YOKOHAMA IN YOUR LITTLE DATSUNS WHILE YOU STARE AT YOUR LITTLE TV SETS AND EAT YOUR MANDARIN ORANGES, BECAUSE WE'VE HAD ALL WE'RE GOING TO TAKE!"

- John Connally, 1980 candidate for U.S. President



Source: Wikimedia

Japan-bashing political rhetoric continued through the 1980s. In 1987, three members of Congress used a sledgehammer to smash a Toshiba stereo on the steps of the U.S. Capitol in protest of the nation's trade deficit with Japan.⁵²

Asian and Asian American communities bore the devastating impact of "Japan-bashing." The most egregious example was the murder of Vincent Chin in 1982. Two auto workers blaming Japan for the loss of American jobs believed Chin, who was Chinese American, to be Japanese. They accosted and chased him out of a bar, called him a "J-p," and beat him to death with a baseball bat. Neither of Chin's attackers served any time in prison for the attack and his murder.⁵³

Throughout the 1980s and into the early 1990s, Asians and Asian Americans continued to experience slurs, threats, and other harassment as a result of anti-Japan scapegoating. A 1992 *Washington Post* article reported a number of incidents in California: “Late last year, vandals scrawled graffiti saying ‘N-s Go Home’ and ‘Go Back to Asia’ on the Norwalk Japanese American Community Center and, in a separate incident, slashed car tires in the parking lot. A Japanese restaurant in Lompoc was firebombed, and other Japanese-American groups have received bomb threats. A girl scout selling cookies in front of a supermarket here recently was called a ‘J-p’ and told, ‘I only buy from Americans.’”⁵⁴

In 1992, the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights issued *Civil Rights Issues Facing Asian Americans in the 1990s*, a landmark report that found politicians were in part responsible for the hate and animus directed towards Asian Americans: “Political leaders contribute to the problem when they unthinkingly lash out at Japan as the cause of United States economic difficulties.”

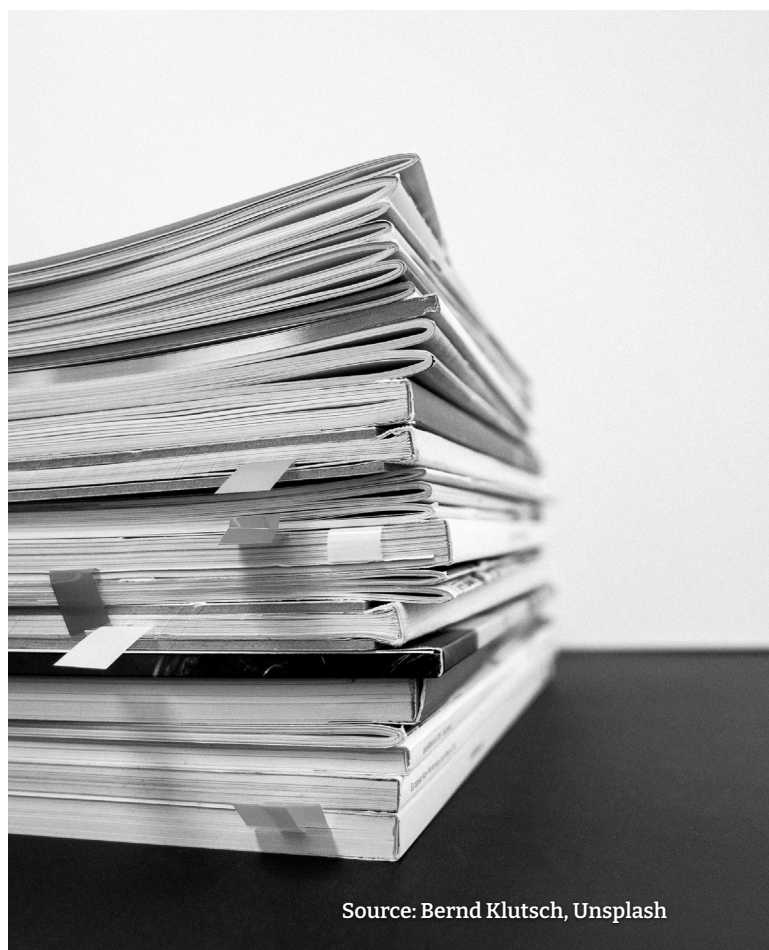
The report urged politicians to engage in responsible rhetoric in its recommendations: “Political leaders should refrain from activities and remarks that promote or play upon racial and ethnic bias, such as ‘Japan bashing.’ Accordingly, the political leadership of both national political parties should agree to refrain from ‘race-baiting’ tactics in upcoming election campaigns.”⁵⁵

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- U.S. Commission on Civil Rights, 1992

“LATE LAST YEAR, VANDALS SCRAWLED GRAFFITI SAYING ‘N-S GO HOME’ AND ‘GO BACK TO ASIA’ ON THE NORWALK JAPANESE AMERICAN COMMUNITY CENTER AND, IN A SEPARATE INCIDENT, SLASHED CAR TIRES IN THE PARKING LOT. A JAPANESE RESTAURANT IN LOMPOC WAS FIREBOMBED, AND OTHER JAPANESE-AMERICAN GROUPS HAVE RECEIVED BOMB THREATS. A GIRL SCOUT SELLING COOKIES IN FRONT OF A SUPERMARKET HERE RECENTLY WAS CALLED A ‘J-P’ AND TOLD, ‘I ONLY BUY FROM AMERICANS.’”

- Incidents reported by
The Washington Post, 1992



Source: Bernd Klutsch, Unsplash

Political rhetoric contributes to scapegoating across many Asian American communities

In 1982, Vincent Chin's attackers believed Chin, a Chinese American, to be Japanese and murdered him in an act of violence motivated by anti-Japanese bias. Today, Asian American community members who are not Chinese, particularly those who are East or Southeast Asian, are victims of hate motivated by anti-Chinese bias. In a 2022 Pew Research study, a Korean female focus group participant said, "The first [thing people think of me as] is just Chinese. 'You guys are just Chinese.' I'm not the only one who felt [this] after the COVID-19 outbreak. 'Whether you're Japanese, Korean, or Southeast Asian, you're just Chinese [to Americans]. I should avoid you.' I've felt this way before, but I think I've felt it a bit more after the COVID-19 outbreak."⁵⁶

The Stop AAPI Hate dataset shows that perpetrators engaging in anti-Chinese rhetoric will lump their hatred under the singular "Asian" label:

“Someone wrote online, ‘Out of all the people on the planet, Asian people piss me off the most. They are responsible for the pandemic, so they need to die for that.’”

- Online

As a result, the victims of hate motivated by anti-Chinese bias go beyond those of Chinese descent:

“Neighbor verbally attacked me outside my building and threatened to slap me. Said ‘You Asian people are the reason why COVID is here in the U.S.’”

- A Filipinx Community Member, California

“Elderly Japanese woman was shopping for bagels when a man body slammed her and muttered, ‘F--g Chinese.’”

- Northeast

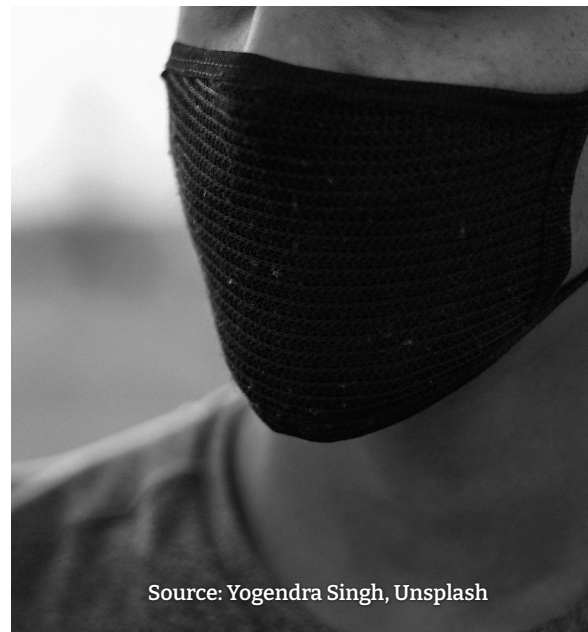
“I was walking my dog in the park when a man asked me how old I am. He said you can never tell age with Chinese people. I said I'm actually not Chinese (which I get a lot), and he responded I definitely am and that I have COVID. He told me to never take off my mask or else I'll give everyone COVID. When I tried to walk quickly away, he called me a 'f---g bitch' and threatened to cut off all my hair.”

- New York

In some cases, the hate escalates into violence. Early in the pandemic, a man knifed an immigrant and his three- and six-year-old sons at a big-box retail store. The attacker believed the family to be Chinese and blamed them for COVID-19.⁵⁷

“The first [thing people think of me as] is just Chinese. ‘You guys are just Chinese.’ I’m not the only one who felt [this] after the COVID-19 outbreak. ‘Whether you’re Japanese, Korean, or Southeast Asian, you’re just Chinese [to Americans]. I should avoid you.’ I’ve felt this way before, but I think I’ve felt it a bit more after the COVID-19 outbreak.”

- Focus Group Participant,
Pew Research study, 2022



Source: Yogendra Singh, Unsplash

CONCLUSION

America has a sordid and shameful history of scapegoating, with communities of color unfairly bearing the blame for the country's social and economic challenges. Within the context of a global pandemic and the economic prominence of China, the most recent targets include Asians and Asian Americans. The consequences have been devastating: Asian and Asian American communities are experiencing bullying, harassment, and even wrongful imprisonment and physical violence.

Nevertheless, we have the power to reduce the harm of political scapegoating. Moving into the 2022 U.S. midterm elections, political leaders, candidates, campaigns, and voters each have a role to play in keeping Asians and Asian Americans safe. We will send a clear and resonant message: that our shared vision of a multiracial democracy cannot succeed until Asian and Asian American experiences are heard, their voices are considered, and they are safe from harm.



RECOMMENDATIONS

We call on political leaders, governments, community members, and allies to name scapegoating when it happens; acknowledge and apologize for the harm; and take affirmative measures to interrupt this centuries-old cycle of blaming communities of color for societal ills.

Politicians, candidates, and organizers

1. Engage in responsible political debate. Engage in vigorous discourse on China that does not contribute to scapegoating.

Example: The Congressional Asian Pacific American Caucus (CAPAC) issued [guidance](#) to other elected officials on engaging in debate that does not preclude critiques of China while protecting the well-being of Asians and Asian Americans.⁵⁸

2. Hold political leaders accountable for irresponsible rhetoric. Name when politicians and candidates use rhetoric that intentionally or unintentionally inflames scapegoating.

Example: Missouri State Representative Shamed Dogan, publicly called on his Republican and state colleague Representative Brian Seitz to apologize for his use of the term “China virus” during a floor debate. Dogan observed that similar inflammatory rhetoric has been linked to a rise in anti-Asian hate.⁵⁹

3. Address the needs of Asian and Asian American constituents. Build ongoing trust and relationships with the wide diversity of Asian and Asian American communities. Listen and respond to feedback where rhetoric or policy may cause or reinforce scapegoating.

Example: A nationwide coalition of Asian and Asian American community-based organizations led by the Asian Law Caucus wrote a [letter](#) to the Speaker of the House to advocate for the removal of a proposed provision within the 2022 CHIPS Act that would lead to continued racial profiling of Chinese nationals.⁶⁰ Civil rights organizations along with CAPAC successfully took action to negotiate the removal of the problematic amendment.⁶¹

Federal, state, and local governments

1. Denounce scapegoating. Affirm support, care, and belonging for Asians and Asian Americans and other targeted communities with a public stance against scapegoating. Use Stop AAPI Hate's [model resolution language](#) as a starting point.

Example: Across America, at least 20 municipalities ranging from San Francisco, California to Oxford, Ohio have passed resolutions against scapegoating and racism related to COVID-19.⁶²

2. Acknowledge the government's current and historic role in scapegoating and ensuing violence. Where government is playing or has played a role in scapegoating, acknowledge it, end any scapegoating activities, and apologize for, address, and repair harm.

Example: In 2022, the city of Santa Ana, California, issued a resolution to apologize to Chinese immigrants and their descendants for the "fundamental injustice and discrimination ... on May 25, 1906, when city leaders decided to burn down Santa Ana's Chinatown in an act of racism and xenophobia."⁶³

3. Invest in Asian and Asian American-serving community-based organizations. Long-term solutions to scapegoating address the roots of the problem — changing the narratives rampant in history, media, and American life that cast Asians and Asian Americans as outsiders and threats. With deep community relationships, Asian and Asian American community-based organizations are well-positioned to drive this narrative change.

Example: In 2021, the states of California and New York passed historic budgets with dedicated funding to address the rise in anti-Asian hate. The bulk of this funding went to community-based organizations serving Asian and Asian American communities.

Asian and Asian American community members and allies

1. Vote. Address scapegoating and anti-Asian hate at the ballot box. When Asian Americans turn out to vote, they have the power to oppose politicians who cause harm and elect officials who listen to marginalized communities.

Example: A surge in Asian American voter turnout in Georgia contributed to Joe Biden winning the state in the 2020 election. Election eve polling showed that twice as many Asian Americans in Georgia preferred Joe Biden to Donald Trump, who they felt was “hostile” to them.⁶⁴ At least 53,000 new Asian American voters turned out in Georgia, a greater increase than any other ethnic group and more than four times Biden’s winning margin of less than 12,000 votes.⁶⁵

2. Use your voice. When a political candidate or elected official engages in inflammatory rhetoric or scapegoating activity, speak up and name those actions as damaging and undemocratic. Write your local newspaper, engage on social media, join forces with community-based organizations working on these issues, campaign for candidates from Asian and other communities of color tackling anti-Asian hate, or even run for office yourself.

Example: Dr. Anming Hu publicly opposed the nomination of Casey Arrowood, who baselessly prosecuted Hu under the China Initiative, for U.S. Attorney for the Eastern District of Tennessee. Arrowood’s prosecution led to Hu’s wrongful arrest, jail time, and the loss of his job.⁶⁶ In addition to going on the record that the nomination was “ridiculous,” Hu and several other Asian American community-based organizations have written directly to President Biden to oppose the nomination.⁶⁷

3. Report harassment and discrimination. In addition to reporting hate crimes to law enforcement and civil violations to civil rights agencies, share your stories of harassment, discrimination, and other hate incidents with Stop AAPI Hate through our confidential [reporting system](#). Collectively, the thousands of voices reporting together have launched a movement for change.

Example: As of March 31, 2022, community members have reported 11,467 hate incidents to Stop AAPI Hate’s reporting system. Stop AAPI Hate’s data has called nationwide attention to the rise in anti-Asian hate and scapegoating and led to advocacy for long-term solutions to hate – incorporating Asian American studies into K-12 curriculum, increasing civil rights protections, and reimagining approaches to community safety.⁶⁸



Source: Jason Leung, Unsplash

HISTORICAL TIMELINE KEY SCAPEGOATING EVENTS OF ASIAN AMERICAN COMMUNITIES

■ PUBLIC HEALTH SCAPEGOATING

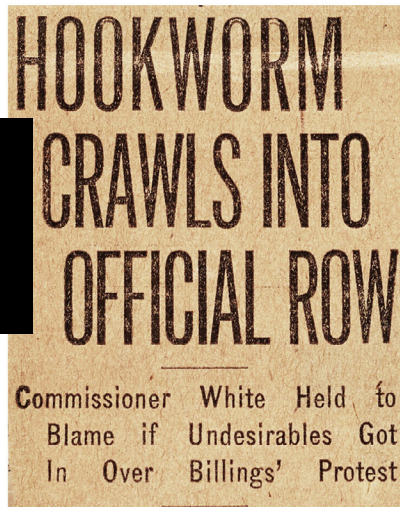
■ NATIONAL SECURITY SCAPEGOATING

■ ECONOMIC SCAPEGOATING



1882 President Chester A. Arthur signs the Chinese Exclusion Act, which bans Chinese immigration to the United States in most cases for 10 years. The law results from scapegoating of Chinese laborers, who are painted as responsible for declining wages. In 1892, the Geary Act extends the ban indefinitely, until it was repealed in 1943.⁷⁵

1910s Officials use the threat of hookworm to prevent Chinese and Indian immigrants from entering the U.S. at Angel Island.⁷⁰



1981 Fearful of competition from Vietnamese fishermen, white fishermen invite the Ku Klux Klan to destroy Vietnamese American fishing businesses and threaten their lives.⁷⁶

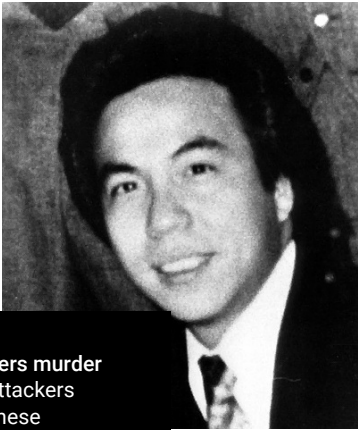
1999-2000 Wen Ho Lee serves 278 days in solitary confinement for "perceived allegiance" to China.⁷³

2003 SARS emerges. Asians and Asian Americans report disproportionate fear, stigmatization, and discrimination compared to the general public.⁷²



1900 Chuck Gin, a Chinese American, dies of bubonic plague. San Francisco authorities quarantine 25,000 Chinese people and closed non-white owned businesses.⁶⁹

1942 The federal government detained at least 120,000 Japanese Americans after the attack on Pearl Harbor.⁷¹



1982 Two autoworkers murder Vincent Chin. The attackers mistook Chin, a Chinese American, for being Japanese, and blamed Japan for "stealing" American jobs.⁷⁷

2001-2003 Thousands of Muslim, South Asian, Hindu, Middle Eastern, Arab, and Sikh Americans are targeted with false accusations of being terrorists in the months and years following 9/11.⁷⁴

ABOUT THE STOP AAPI HATE DATASET

We approach our dataset as information collected in partnership with communities, rather than on communities. We are committed to quality and transparency in our data collection, analysis, and reporting.

Data Collection

Individuals report an incident at the [Stop AAPI Hate website](#) through a Typeform interface. They may choose to report in English or in one of 15 Asian and Pacific Islander languages.

Data Cleaning

The responses are downloaded from Typeform in spreadsheet form. Hate incident reports in each language option are stored in their own spreadsheets. For combined analyses, first, we translate the in-language hate incident reports into English. We merge the translated reports with the hate reports already in English, and then we create anonymized data for collective data cleaning. Once the complete uncleaned data is created by merging multiple spreadsheets, the personally identifying information (i.e., first name, last name, and email) is removed from the data and each hate incident report receives a unique identifying number.

We carefully review data and remove duplicate cases, trolls, and cases that do not report anti-AAPI hate within the United States. We include cases in Guam and Puerto Rico. Duplicate cases are defined as submissions where there are multiple records of identical reports (i.e., two or more cases include the same answers for all questions and identical descriptions of the hate incident). Troll cases are submissions attacking the Stop AAPI Hate coalition and/or reporting racist and xenophobic “fake accounts” of hate incidents. We exclude hate incident reports from persons who do not self-identify as AAPI on their own experiences of racism and discrimination.

Data Coding

We qualitatively re-code selected categories to identify subcategory groupings in those categories. Additional categories were created from the information individuals voluntarily provided under “Other, please specify” and the full hate incident description. We do not make judgments about what constitute “harassment” or “discrimination.” Rather, we code incidents according to how individuals describe the type of discrimination they experienced. For more information, please see our living data cleaning [codebook](#) that documents our data practices with the Stop AAPI Hate incident dataset in full. We highly value feedback and suggestions for our data practices at community@stopaapihate.org.

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ABOUT STOP AAPI HATE

Our mission is to advance equity, justice, and power by dismantling systemic racism and building a multiracial movement to end hate against Asian American and Pacific Islander communities. The Stop AAPI Hate coalition was founded by AAPI Equity Alliance, Chinese for Affirmative Action, and San Francisco State University's Asian American Studies Department.



AAPI EQUITY
ALLIANCE

Formerly A3PCON - Asian Pacific Policy & Planning Council

[AAPI Equity Alliance](#) (formerly the Asian Pacific Policy & Planning Council, or A3PCON) is a coalition of more than 40 community-based organizations that serve and represent the 1.5 million Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders in the greater Los Angeles area, with a particular focus on low-income, immigrant, refugee, and other vulnerable populations. AAPI Equity Alliance is dedicated to improving the lives of Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders through civic engagement, capacity building, and policy advocacy.



CHINESE FOR AFFIRMATIVE ACTION

[Chinese for Affirmative Action](#) (CAA) was founded in 1969 to protect the civil and political rights of Chinese Americans and to advance multiracial democracy in the United States. Today, CAA is a progressive voice in and on behalf of the broader Asian American and Pacific Islander community. We advocate for systemic change that protects immigrant rights, promotes language diversity, and remedies racial and social injustice.



**ASIAN
AMERICAN
RESEARCH
INITIATIVE**

Based in San Francisco State University's Asian American Studies department, the Asian American Research Initiative (AARI) conducts community-based research and activities to empower our communities. You can learn more at asianamericanresearchinitiative.org.

About the Cover

This photograph captures work from "I Still Believe in Our City," a public art campaign across New York City's five boroughs in 2020-21 by multidisciplinary artist Amanda Phingbodhipakkiya. Created in partnership with the NYC Commission on Human Rights, the campaign boldly declared AAPI belonging and rebuked the violence and discrimination AAPI communities have faced and continue to face. Photography by MK Luff. Used with permission.

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