

The United States now leads the world in confirmed cases of COVID-19, rising to the top of the chart at an unprecedented rate of viral transmission. The pandemic has instilled social and economic anxiety as it manifests hot spots of infection across the nation. The Pan Asian Council (PAC) recognizes that as fears and tensions rise around the global pandemic, so too does anti-Asian discrimination fester in our communities.¹ Dedicated to addressing and advocating for the diverse needs of the numerous Asian, Asian American, Pacific Islander, Native Hawaiian, Pacific Indigenous communities at the University of Iowa, we acknowledge that racist sentiments have directly affected our members. We condemn anti-Asian bigotry, recognizing that xenophobia often disguises itself as a sensible reaction to crisis.² We unequivocally reject: the racialization of the COVID-19 pandemic; the framing of COVID-19 as a wartime attack from foreign lands into our national borders; and the prescribing or associating of a nationality to the virus and disease, which only works to confirm that nationality *as* the viral disease.

As members of the rich intellectual tradition of the University of Iowa, we believe in the power of education to promote equity and empathy. Though we recognize that we are amidst a collective effort to adjust to the sudden and unprecedented changes brought forth by the novel coronavirus, we simultaneously urge us all to continuously educate ourselves on health and well-being practices, which must include deeper understandings of how scientific nomenclature can incite xenophobia, the roots of U.S. anti-Asian prejudice, how AAPI professionals are responding to COVID-19 in its immediacy, and the long-term stressors that many AAPIs uniquely face in this pandemic.

As a name, COVID-19 perfectly and intentionally describes its origin: the coronavirus disease of 2019. The World Health Organization named this viral disease purposefully to deter the kind of stigmatization that has occurred with other viruses that were named after countries, regions, or other demographic markers -- such as the Spanish flu,³ swine flu, or the Middle East Respiratory Syndrome -- which have had long lasting discriminatory effects.⁴ Calling COVID-19 the “Chinese virus,” the “Wuhan virus,” or “Kung flu” is both needless and harmful, as it only serves to sow distrust and misinformation.⁵ Numerous scholars have noted that language is not passive. When we use language, it is an action which is meant to convey what we think is significant, to

¹ [Margolin, J. \(2020, March 27\). FBI warns of potential surge in hate crimes toward Asian Americans amid coronavirus. ABC News. Retrieved 3-28-20.](#)

² [CSPAN \(2020, March 18\). Q: "Why do you keep calling this the Chinese Virus?" President Trump: "It comes from China...it's not racist." \[Tweet\]. Retrieved 3-28-20.](#)

³ [Kansas Historical Society. \(2012, June; Modified 2020, February\). Flu epidemic of 1918. *Kansapedia*. Retrieved 3-28-20.](#)

⁴ [World Health Organization. \(2015, May 8\). WHO issues best practices for naming new human infectious diseases. *WHO Media Centre*. Retrieved 3-28-20.](#)

⁵ Often the opposite is actually the truth: [Fox, Maggie. \(2018, December 5\). Migrants don't bring disease. Infact, they help fight it, report says. *NBC News*. Retrieved 4-1-20.](#)

build or reinforce certain identities, and to normalize certain practices, relationships, or systems that may not be inherently equitable.⁶ Rhetorically locating COVID-19 as a Chinese virus confers the notion that the virus should and can be contained to that geographic area, supporting both the faulty political strategy of national isolation (i.e. travel bans from China, Europe, and more) and the damning philosophical position of ethnonationalism.⁷

Connoting Asians with COVID-19 illuminates the long history in the U.S. of associating Asians/Asian Americans, and Chinese/Chinese Americans in particular, with disease, uncleanliness, and contamination.⁸ In the mid-19th century, during the time of the gold rush and the building of the transcontinental railroad, the idea of the Yellow Peril – which named the pervasive fear that the Asian Orient would overtake the West and everything it stood for – was deployed to quash the threat that Chinese immigrants in particular posed to the burgeoning economic infrastructure of the U.S. west coast. The Yellow Peril positioned Chinese and Asian immigrants as dirty and backward-thinking, who would steal jobs and resources away from deserving white Christian Americans. In addition to ubiquitous anti-Asian harassment, the Yellow Peril mindset made possible numerous policies and laws that actively oppressed Chinese and Asian immigrants.⁹ There is a longstanding tradition in the United States of identifying people of Asian descent as trespassers and perpetual foreigners in order to use them as scapegoats. As the history of the Yellow Peril teaches us, the consolidation of power through fearmongering is an old mechanism that hinges on differentiating an “us” and a “them.” History stands testament to how nomenclature has often been used as a tool of manipulation in vying for political control and power – and it reminds us to be vigilant against bigoted pseudonyms in the era of COVID-19.

The devastating marked increase in race-related hate crimes against AAPIs brings irony along with sadness: healthcare workers on the front lines -- such as nurses, medical attendants, lab

⁶ See [Mehan, H. \(1996\). The construction of an LD student: A case study in the politics of representation. In M. Silverstein & G. Urban \(eds.\). *Natural histories of discourses* \(pp. 345-363\). Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press.](#) Also, [Gee, J. P. \(2014\). *An introduction to discourse analysis: Theory and method* \(4th ed.\). New York, NY: Routledge.](#) is a useful introductory resource.

⁷ See Wendy Parmet’s reflection on isolationism and ethnonationalism in: [Yong, E. \(2020, March 25\). How the pandemic will end. *The Atlantic*. Retrieved 3-28-20.](#) On structural racism, see: [Natividad, Ivan. \(2020, February 12\). Coronavirus: fear of Asians rooted in long American history of prejudicial policies. *Berkeley News*. Retrieved 4-1-20.](#)

⁸See [Hussain, S. \(2020, February 3\). Fear of coronavirus fuels racist sentiment targeting Asians. *Los Angeles Times*. Retrieved 3-28-20.](#) and [Abbott, C. \(2020, March 17\). The ‘Chinese Flu’ is part of a long history of racializing disease. *CityLab*. Retrieved 3-28-20.](#) and [Markel, H., & Stern, A. M. \(2002\). The foreignness of germs: the persistent association of immigrants and disease in American society. *The Milbank Quarterly*, 80\(4\), 757–788.](#) and [Shah, N. \(2001\). *Contagious divides: Epidemics and race in San Francisco’s Chinatown*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press.](#)

⁹ [U.S. House of Representatives History, Art, & Archives \(n.d.\). *Exclusion and Empire, \(1898-1941\): First Arrivals, First Reactions*. Retrieved 3-28-20.](#)

technicians, physicians, and epidemiologists -- are disproportionately AAPI. While the total AAPI community comprises just 5.6% of the U.S population,¹⁰ 18.1% of all active physicians¹¹ and 8% of nurses¹² in the U.S. are Asian/American and Pacific Islander. AAPI medical workers should not have to deflect anti-Asian harassment while they risk themselves to save the United States.

We also remind our Hawkeye and farther away neighbors and friends that many of our AAPI community members have family and friends in China and other Asian countries that have been hard hit by the novel coronavirus. While most Americans have been seriously struggling with the anxiety, fear, and uncertainty brought by COVID-19 for a few weeks, numerous Asians and Asian Americans have been contending with these difficult stressors for many months as they watched and waited to see the fate of their loved ones in Asia.

In making this statement, we support and hope to amplify other statements already made by leaders at the University of Iowa, including: Provost Fuentes, Associate Dean Martinez in the Carver College of Medicine, and others who reaffirm our obligations as a community to enact values of equity, humanity, and empathy. There are many things that may currently be out of our control, but acting with an ethic of care rather than hostility and encouraging the communities we are a part of to do the same is something within our personal realms of influence.

There is already much groundwork laid for **resources to foster awareness** and knowledge of critically relevant issues given the contemporary socio-political climate:

- Asian Americanist scholars across the nation are collaboratively curating [Treating Yellow Peril: Resources to Address Coronavirus Racism](#)
- Official CDC site for updates on the novel coronavirus (<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/faq.html>)
- NPR [has done](#) a series of [short audio](#) pieces which [cover racism](#) amidst [coronavirus concerns](#).
- The Asian Pacific Planning & Policy Council (A3PCON) has a hate incident reporting form: <http://www.asianpacificpolicyandplanningcouncil.org/stop-aapi-hate/>
- Teaching Tolerance's page on responding to racist incidents: <https://www.tolerance.org/magazine/how-to-respond-to-coronavirus-racism>

¹⁰ [U.S. Dept. of Health and Human Services Office of Minority Health. \(2019, August 22\). Profile: Asian Americans. Retrieved 4-1-20.](#)

¹¹ [Association of American Medical Colleges. \(2018\). Diversity in medicine: Facts and figures in 2019. Retrieved 4-1-20.](#)

¹² Smiley, R. A., Lauer, P., Bienemy, C., Berg, J. G., Shireman, E., Reneau, K. A., & Alexander, M. (2018). The 2017 national nursing workforce survey. *Journal of Nursing Regulation*, 9(3), S1-S88.

- If you have been the subject of or witness to a bias incident or concern, we encourage you to report the incident to the University of Iowa's Campus Inclusion Team (CIT): <https://inclusionteam.uiowa.edu/>

In addition to sources through which to deepen understanding of AAPI communities and the deeply rooted history of anti-Asian sentiment and xenophobia, we would like to list several **resources available to the community to support your health and well-being** during this difficult time:

- University of Iowa Department of Public Safety, (319) 335-5022 (<https://police.uiowa.edu/>)
- Iowa City Police Department, (319) 356- 5275 (<https://www.icgov.org/city-government/departments-and-divisions/police>)
- City of Iowa City Human Rights Commission, (319) 335-5022 (<https://www.icgov.org/city-government/departments-and-divisions/equity-and-human-rights>)
- University Counseling Services (319) 335-7294 (<https://counseling.uiowa.edu/>)
 - UCS & UI Student Health have partnered to host a weekly support meeting (via Zoom) from 1:00-2:00pm CST every Wednesday (<https://uiowa.zoom.us/j/588050309>) *Max 12 participants/session
- The Office of the Dean of Students has a student emergency fund. More info and applications can be found here: <https://dos.uiowa.edu/assistance/student-support-initiatives/>
- National Alliance on Mental Illness-Johnson County (<https://namijc.org/crisis-info/>)
- CommUnity (formerly The Crisis Center), call toll free 855-325-4296 (<https://builtbycommunity.org/>)
 - www.iowacrisischat.org is a resource through CommUnity where you can receive free online emotional support and chat with trained volunteers.
- Office of Asian and Pacific Islander, Affairs, Iowa Department of Human Rights: <https://humanrights.iowa.gov/cas/capi>
- Iowa Asian Alliance: <https://www.iowaasianalliance.com/>
- The Women's Resource & Action Center (WRAC) has curated an expansive community resource list: <https://tinyurl.com/WRACCommunityResources>.
- Monsoon Asians & Pacific Islanders in Solidarity provides direct services and advocacy for members of the AAPI community experiencing gender-based violence: <https://monsooniowa.org/>

Finally, we want to hear from you! How can we make a space of support and resilience for the AAPI community, and what would you like to see from the Pan Asian Council? Please fill out this form: <https://bit.ly/321IO2Z>.

Signatures in Solidarity¹³: If you would like to publicly commit to rejecting racist acts and attitudes instigated by fears and misinformation about COVID-19 toward any community, we welcome you to fill out this form: <https://forms.gle/2tVnmJai0D2ZWbc38>
We will publish the names of people, academic departments, offices, or other campus units every few days as this form populates.

¹³ Public statements of solidarity can be powerful acts of community building, as this letter of support to the Chinese American community from the Jewish Council of Public Affairs shows: [Fromm, M. & Berstein, D. \(2020, February 21\). A Letter of Support to Our Friends in the Chinese American and Chinese Communities. Jewish Council for Public Affairs. Retrieved 3-28-20.](#)