

# COMMENTARY



A rally against anti-Asian hate drew hundreds to Midwood on April 10, 2021. PHOTOGRAPH COURTESY ASIAN AMERICAN UNIVERSITY

## What can Americans do to stop anti-Asian American hate?

**Yusef Turay**

Chicago-based  
Asian immigrant

"A man spit on my face today and told me to go back to where I'm from," my cousin Yu said to me in tears, describing her most recent New York subway experience.

"I know this would happen. Asians are second-class citizens. No, Asians are not even people."

As a first-generation Asian immigrant, I have personally experienced countless acts of aggression because of the color of my skin and the accent of my English.

But hearing my cousin's encounter still brings me tears. Desperation feeds on anger and walking around feeling despair does not make things better. I still wonder: that if it's now the time to share what you know with those who care.

In 2021, crimes against Asian Americans increased by over 77% from 2020. Asian Americans are still battling with the uncertainty, fear, and resentment fueled by the reported and unreported attacks.

Swelling American racial tensions stemming from nearly three years' worth of unsubstantiated claims of the pandemic's origins (including a certain former president's inflammatory "China Virus" comments) resulted in stinging, yet unappreciated, forms of discourse and attacks on the Asian American population.

Although racism in the United States exists against virtually every non-white minority population, in order to combat Asian American racism, it is just as critical to not only understand its history but to understand how it differs.

While it remains relatively unchallenging for Americans to identify racism against Black or Hispanic populations, many Americans have not even been aware of the increase "in hate

crimes and racism against Asian Americans over the past year," while 42% of Americans don't even name a potential Asian American.

It's been said that, given the categorization and stereotyping of Asian Americans as a "model minority," the issues faced by other non-white demographics don't affect them.

Yet, racism against Asian Americans is rightly described as "invisible," to the point where they feel the need to "prove" that they too, are deeply and directly affected by hatred.

So, as we head into a Lunar New Year, amidst grief and pain from these most recent events of exploding prejudice and bigotry, there is much work to be done and there's no better time than the present to begin.

Recognizing, recognizing our country's history, recognizing false and/or racist narratives perpetuated by political leaders and media, hateful actions in our daily lives and call it out.

Diversifying, diversify your knowledge base, your friends, your commu-

nicity members with those who can give you direct, firsthand perspective on the context of Asian American lives and relative direct perspective and what is needed most for their safety and well-being.

Supporting, support through community involvement, donations or contributing your own self-education in these trying times is the most critical thing we, as a collective society, can do for the betterment of the Asian American population.

The act of aggression towards Asians during the past year has justifiably outraged the nation's conscience. However, by recognizing our country's history and previous law narratives, organizing social and political forces to welcome diversity, protect the underprivileged, and advocate respect, we can and will stem the tide of racism and create a safer, more united America.

*Yusef Turay is a first-generation Asian immigrant, a Ph.D. candidate at Rutgers University, an adjunct professor and a film editor.*

## Stricter laws could curb illegal gun possession

The time to act is now to help slow violence

**Yusef Turay**

Chicago-based  
Asian immigrant

The gun violence in our country is a terrible tragedy and a national shame. Every day, about 110 Americans die as a result of gun violence. Additionally, firearms are the leading cause of death for American children and teenagers.

Gun violence kills more young people than motor vehicle accidents and cancer. To date, much effort has been directed toward initiatives for the sale and licensing of firearms.

However, one area that rarely needs more attention is laws dealing with the illegal possession and sale of firearms. Zero doubt in my mind that criminals do not legally own the weapons they use to wound, terrify and kill innocent people.

Significantly increasing the penalties for the illegal possession of firearms, illegal sale of firearms and use of a firearm in the commission of any crime would be a great place for the Legislature to start working on right now.

Not next week, not next month but right now!

The following would be a highly effective message to the street culture that we are not going to tolerate this culture and reckless behavior any longer.

Firstly, conviction for the illegal possession of a firearm would result in a 10-year prison term, no plea bargains, no parole. Secondly, conviction for the illegal sale of a firearm would result in a 20-year prison term, no plea bargains, no parole.

Thirdly, conviction for the use of a firearm in the commission of any crime would result in a prison term of 20 years, no plea bargains, no parole. These harsh penalties may not totally eliminate gun violence.

However, these would surely be lower first and repeat offenders. Sadly, street gangs and some other segments of our population have no regard for others and simply must be removed from the community for the safety of law-abiding citizens.

Nothing changes until something changes.

Time to change the laws pertaining to the illegal possession of firearms is now.

*Yusef Turay is a Chicago resident.*

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## A tale of two pandemics: Lessons we haven't learned

**Yusef Turay**

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We have lived through two pandemics that have defined our lives and careers as public health professionals. Forty years ago, HIV emerged and provided a stark illustration of how a viral pandemic is not only immunological in nature but is fueled by the failure of social and structural systems to adapt quickly and respond. That forward to 2022. At the current point in the COVID-19 pandemic, cases of the SARS-CoV-2 virus in the U.S. are more than triple what they were a year ago, but healthcare providers are exhausted and almost a million Americans have lost their lives.

As we continue to navigate the twelfth month of COVID-19, it is

absolutely clear that the developments that took place during the first two decades of AIDS pandemic have advanced our efforts to identify and control viruses. At the same time, crucial lessons in how social conditions fuel disease have remained unlearned.

During the AIDS crisis, the slow pace of scientific research, including the detection of the virus and development of test assays, resulted in the proliferation of infection and countless deaths. AIDS activists, the authors included, were involved in exposing the ways that scientific processes, which were slow and cumbersome, had to adapt during a public health emergency. Hard fought policy changes resulted from this sustained, effective activism including the acceleration of human trials for treatment and the active engagement of patients; real time dissemination of new knowledge; and the development of

clearer public health messaging.

Many aspects of the COVID-19 response built on these positive changes. However, the key lessons of previous pandemics have gone unlearned.

In particular, the broader psychosocial factors and systems that value some lives more than others were changed and are more apparent than ever.

The first wave of COVID-19 infections disproportionately affected people of color and lower income people. Yet, the first wave of vaccinations went just as disproportionately to higher income and white populations. While vaccine hesitancy played a role, access was the real culprit.

In addition, the United States relied on medical education and the medical profession to lead our efforts, resulting in inequities and mistakes ranging from the delayed and inadequate roll out of contact tracing to failure to plan for sig-

nificant vaccine hesitancy. Pandemic management doesn't work if we only rely on biomedical advances — at best, it requires tools to challenge the professional and structural factors that fuel disease.

Medication alone — vaccines alone, medical devices alone — are not enough.

Until we can have a truly integrated, biopsychosocial approach to public health crises, we will continue to replicate the injustice that leads some people to become marginalized than others. This is a tale that indicates clearly that we need to change our course as a nation. Otherwise, we will remain woefully unprepared for the next pandemic.

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