

## **I am Not Your Model Minority**

Over the past few months, racism has bared its ugly claws upon the Asian American community revealing yet another brittle skeleton in America's closet. 19 year old Chinese American, Christian Hall, was murdered by Pennsylvania police, Noel Quintana, a Filipino man was mutilated on a subway in New York, an elderly Vietnamese woman was robbed in broad daylight, Vicha Ratanapakdee, an 84 year old Thai man was murdered in San Francisco, and Vincent Chin, a 91 year old Thai man was murdered on the streets of Oakland. Many more racially motivated attacks have occurred from coast to coast all in a span of a few weeks, and yet all I hear is intense and deafening nothings.

Silence.

Why do these horrific incidents go unheard? Why is there a severe lack of allyship? Why is there no news coverage? How many people in our community have to die for us to be seen? These are questions I asked myself as I read of the racist attacks unfolding the past few weeks.

As a first generation Vietnamese American student I have experienced the irony between how America perceives the Asian American and what our reality truly is. Growing up in a predominantly white neighborhood, attending a white school, in white society, I've had my share of racist experiences. My parents are Vietnamese immigrants and I witnessed the struggles they had to endure trying to build a better life in a country that denies your belonging. This is the reality I know- being called "chink" on the schoolyard. The reality I know is seeing your parents humiliated and talked to like children in public. The reality I know is seeing your grandma mocked on the 4th of July by a drunk white man. How ironic. When we were face to face with ignorance and aggression my family would lay their heads low, to avoid trouble... a learned habit of many Asian immigrants that experienced the trauma of a communist government. In the Asian community, silence equals no trouble, but silence also equals apathy. Nobody stood up for our community, not even our own.

America created the facade that Asians are the "model minority". We are convinced that unity is threaded in the fabric of this country and yet the "model minority" myth was designed to pit people of color against each other. The label suppresses our pain and erases the history of our suffering. Historically, Asian people built the railroad tracks that were the veins of this country, we served as indentured servants, and were thrown into internment camps post WWII, yet we exist only as an honorable mention in the modern history lesson. Anti-Asian sentiment and propaganda has existed since the moment we planted our roots in this country. We are one of the building blocks of America yet we are told, "Go back home, we don't want you here." This is our home. Our pain isn't visible, our community is ignored, our suffering is simply forgotten.

The pigment of our skin will never be white enough for resolve but not quite dark enough for outrage.

Racism against the Asian community lies right under our noses. The terrible practice of Blackface is rightfully deemed unacceptable, yet Yellowface is still marketable in mainstream media and pop culture. Our representation only matters when we are exotic billionaires or mocked in offensive nail salon jokes. We are depicted as either exorbitantly rich or a joke. Our men are emasculated and our women are fetishized. We are not caricatures, we are human.

Where do we go from here? We need a platform to finally speak out about our suffering and people need to listen to the experiences of Asian Americans. We need people to acknowledge the damage that has been done to our community; acknowledge the murder, hate, and evil that is deeply affecting the Asian community and poisoning this country. We need to hold all incidents of racism equally accountable; we cannot choose a select few who deserve justice while the others get left behind. We need to protect our Asian elders, dispel the myths and stereotypes and change the narrative of what we stand for. We must stand together as Black, LatinX, Asian, and Indigenous people; a united front, to conquer the American plague -- racism.

I leave my Asian American brothers and sisters with a poem:

#### Invisible

The color of my skin is invisible.  
Neither light nor dark, somewhere in between.  
When I yell, it escapes my lips in a murmur.  
When I cry, my tears roll into nothingness.  
My pain plummets into the abyss, growing smaller and smaller, until it is lost, unseen, unheard.  
When I bleed, is it red? Is my suffering real?  
When I am shot, bruised, face to the pavement, will people care?  
I am Asian.  
You can't take that away from me. I am sunborn. My skin reflects the glint of the sun.  
I am beauty, art, and culture. My hair is a mane, silky strands of black gold spun around my  
head, my crown.  
I deserve to be celebrated. I deserve to be seen. I am beautiful.  
I am *human*.

- Vince Dang

