

[MUSIC PLAYING]

KENNETH OYE: So welcome to the MIT Center for International Studies Starr Forum on Anti-Asian Violence. Just wanted to begin on a slight personal note before we turn to official welcomes and our speakers. The topic that we're talking about today is something that I think almost everyone has run into, almost irrespective of race, problems of violence, being beaten.

But the upsurge in anti-Asian violence over the last year has been profoundly disturbing. And every time that we turn around, there's another event, be it Atlanta, or be it the terrible events in New York just a couple of days ago. And instead of simply getting mad about it, or being fearful, I think it's important for us to reflect on what's going on, to be informed on what's going on.

And the motivation for today's program is to have a sustained discussion on the causes of what's going on, a little bit of the history, and also what we can do about it. And the program that we have today actually is intended to address those points.

We're going to begin with Melissa Nobles, the Dean of the School of Humanities, Arts, and Social Sciences at MIT. And deans are asked to give welcoming addresses or comments in so many events that it's almost an occupational hazard. In this instance, I'm very glad that Melissa will be able to join, in part because these are topics that she has devoted her professional life to and her personal life to. And she'll begin with a welcome, of course, but also some framing remarks for the panel that we're going to be doing today.

The panel itself will begin with Paul Watanabe, a Professor of Political Science and Director of the Institute for Asian-American Studies at UMass. And he's going to provide a take on the history and place contemporary developments in context, move through some of the numbers, but also do the framing in terms of the fact this is not a recent problem. What we're talking about is something that has happened before.

Kathy Moon will be moving from the general a little bit more towards the particular, some of the events in Atlanta. But we've asked Kathy to frame what's going on, to talk specifically about that odd combination of misogyny and racism and xenophobia that we see blending in various ways with the events that have saddened us so much in the past few weeks. Kathy is a Professor at Wellesley College. Paul is at UMass-Boston.

So just when you're getting tired of too many academics, we're going to turn to Tram. And Tram is a state legislator and a lawyer who has worked for years in the community. Tram has also introduced anti-hate crime legislation to strengthen the laws in the Commonwealth of Massachusetts. And she'll be talking both about her views on what's going on personally, but also what she's doing and others are doing, Attorney General Healey and others, to strengthen anti-hate crime legislation.

So with those introductions and thanks to our sponsors, thanks to staff for putting this on, and thanks to all of you for coming, I'm going to turn to Melissa and ask her for, let's call it the dean's benediction, that certainly [INAUDIBLE], but also for her thoughts about what's going on now. Melissa Nobles, thank you so much for joining us.

**MELISSA
NOBLES:**

Thank you. Thank you so much, Ken. And thanks to everyone and welcome to this very important Starr Forum.

As Ken said, as dean I am often asked to introduce important events here on campus. In fact, just last June, I was asked to introduce and to participate in another Starr Forum. That one was on the killing of George Floyd, police violence, and the rise of the Black Lives Matter movement. And alas, just nine months later, I've been asked to come and to welcome, which I'm pleased to do, and to provide some opening remarks about violence against Asian-Americans.

So in preparing for today, I read in last Sunday's *Sunday Globe* a really interesting article describing how Asian-American families are beginning to have to engage in "The Talk" about how to protect themselves against violence. And the idea of "The Talk," for those who aren't familiar with that term, is connected to how African-Americans prepare themselves to deal with encounters, especially but not exclusively, with the police. So I offer three brief thoughts about the information that "The Talk" is intended to convey and hope that it provides some insights into both its necessity and also the obscenity that we need to give it.

So the first piece of advice is point number one, which is usually do not do anything that would frighten anyone or make them feel threatened. That sounds easy enough except when you're being is what is being deemed frightening or threatening. To Black Americans, there is the specter of hyper aggression, of being out of place, or somehow up to no good.

For Asian-Americans, in large part thanks now to the most recent rhetoric by our former president, Asian-Americans are being deemed as disease carriers, or the more longstanding view as somehow perpetual foreigners, others who are unknowable, not grandmothers, not grandfathers, not aunties, not sisters, not mothers. For both groups, the notion that you are deemed outside of and perhaps even undeserving of human regard.

Advice point number two is be compliant, which sounds a lot like point number one with a slight twist. That is because being compliant is never enough. Because what is really desired is submission and demonstrated subjugation. For Black Americans, for example, you can seemingly not show that you are compliant enough until you are saying, I can't breathe. For Asian-Americans, compliance means not speaking out, continuing to be the model minority.

Point number 3 is keep your wits. And this goes to another side of this. Point number 3 is keep your wits about you, in certain ways. Because the point in the end is to live to see another day.

The stakes, too often in these encounters, is life itself. You tell your family members that you love them. You tell them that you see them in all of their humanity and that you value them fully. You also remind them that what is happening is not right. And you say to them, even in the midst of all of it, to never, ever lose sight of their own humanity or their capacity to see the humanity in everyone else.

I'm really looking forward to today's conversation. And with that, I'll pass it on to our great speakers.

KENNETH OYE: Melissa, thank you so much for your remarks. I also want to let the audience know that I've been poking Melissa to do more than the welcome and introductory remarks, to offer her commentary throughout the program. And we'll see if we can cajole her into playing that role.

So we're going to turn now to Paul Watanabe. And Paul, again, is a professor at UMass-Boston. You've read the bio sketch. And Paul is sort the go to person on these topics, certainly in the Boston area.

And I'm just going to turn it over to him to provide us with the historical context, a little bit on the numbers that we see. Paul, thank you, again, for joining the event.

**PAUL
WATANABE:** Thank you very much, Ken. And thank you for all the people who helped put this wonderful forum together. Let me say that Melissa sort of stole my thunder. I was thinking this version of "The Talk" is really what we're engaging in here.

And in some ways, when Ken asked me to do this, I thought, wow, this is going to be, in some ways, easy. Because I've been giving some version of this talk for 40 years. And that is, it's some version of this essentially. When there's some outrage against Asian-Americans, I pull out this talk.

And it could be the Vincent Chin murder. It could be Wen Ho Lee. Or it could have been South Asian treatment after 9/11. Or it could be about the response to the COVID-19 pandemic. Or it could be Atlanta.

In some ways, the responses are all the same. And they do reflect some of the realities. And the realities are pretty simple. And they're ones that Melissa has already highlighted for us.

The idea of Asian-American invisibility and ignorance about them and the notion of perpetual otherness, these are the themes. And these are the historical themes. And I think, in some respects, it's not much more complicated than that.

And so I'm going to really try to get some sense about how these themes play out and what their consequences are. And in the mid-19th century, when Asian-Americans started to arrive in fairly large numbers in California, for example, but never, ever a significant part of the overall population of the country, the number of Asian-Americans was about 300 times less than it is today in the United States. Today there are about 20 million people in the United States who trace their heritage in some ways towards Asia.

There are about 500,000 in Massachusetts alone and 70,000 in Boston. They are now the fastest growing racial group within the United States. But growing in leaps and bounds, over tenfold increase since 1960, doubling each decade, almost, since then, or immediately after then.

And they're fed largely by one source, and that's immigration. Immigrants from Asia are now the largest number of new arrivals to the United States. And they will soon become the largest foreign-born population within the country. And indeed, in Massachusetts, over 60% of the adult population is foreign born. This is truly a population that is essentially an immigrant population and a population that the original ties are beyond the United States, even today.

Amongst this group there is huge diversity. And that's why this diversity is something that we have to understand. There are 19 Asian ethnic groups with more than 1,000 people in Massachusetts alone. The smallest of these groups are the Bhutanese, would have about 1,000. And the largest are the Chinese, with about 170,000 people, Chinese-Americans, in Massachusetts alone.

And there's great socioeconomic diversity as well, in income and poverty rates and educational attainment. They are not an undifferentiated monolithic minority by any means. And this is part of the notion about, as though they're all the same. But they're not. There's huge differentiation in terms of educational attainment, and poverty, and income, and so forth amongst those 19 major ethnic groups.

And while there may be this notion that all Asian-Americans are fresh off the boat, the fact of the matter is that they have been on these shores for over 200 years. And in Boston's Chinatown alone, the one down by South Station, there has been a Chinatown for almost 150 years. And it's one of the few surviving, really functioning Chinatowns, as a Chinatown not only with the gates and so forth, but actually Chinese people living within it.

It's an authentic Chinatown to some degree. And it's been in that same location almost 150 years. So we're not new. We have not recently arrived. Longevity is part of our experience.

But despite these numbers, despite this longevity, Asian-Americans have largely been invisible. They've been hidden in plain sight. They have been seen, but not seen.

I think for example, perhaps, in our history books, the one time we think about Asian-Americans is the building of the Transcontinental Railroad, which was completed in 1869. And the famous picture that is in almost every history book depicts that moment when the two trains come together in Promontory Point, Utah. The trains from the East and the West meeting together at that place, which is North of where I grew up in Utah, in fact.

And the trains come together. And the driving of what's called the Golden Spike, the last spike in the tie. And the celebration that took place at that point. You see these people in this picture, a famous picture, celebrating that, where the two trains come together.

Well, it's interesting. If you look at that picture, and I have, and I've done it almost with a microscope, the fact of the matter is there's not a single Chinese person in that picture. And you say, well, so what?

Well, the fact of the matter is, in terms of building that railroad, the people who actually built it were not Leland Stanford, who paid for it, but the people who actually built it, the labor, in coming from East to West, the easiest part, were principally Irish labor. And those who built it, the most treacherous part, from West to East across the Sierra Nevada Mountains and across the deserts of Nevada, were Chinese laborers. Almost 80% to 90% of the labor were Chinese laborers.

They're the ones who actually built the railroad. And yet, at this moment at which we commemorate who actually built it, there's not a single Chinese person in it. I thought somebody might do a Where's Waldo sort of thing and try to sneak in the picture. But I don't think so.

And someone pointed out to me, they said, well, professor, this was not the picture taken right at the moment. This was taken a little later in the day when they tried to recreate. And I thought, that's even worse.

Because here is a chance where they could try to get it right. And they still left the Chinese out of the picture. See the Chinese were invisible during that episode.

That's why, by the way, Corky Lee who just recently passed away, the chronicler of the Asian-American movement, he's a photographer who you saw at every event anywhere in the country almost involving Asian-Americans over the last 50 years or so, who passed away because of COVID-19 in New York just a few months ago. He made a point at the anniversary of the driving of the Golden Spike two years ago to go exactly at that point, where the two trains are depicted there, they're sort of there at the Golden Spike monument. And he got hundreds of descendants of the Chinese railroad workers and brought them to Promontory Point, Utah, and took a picture and had only Chinese in the picture.

That was his picture. That was his way of trying to say, we're no longer invisible. We're going to recapture the moment. And it's a wonderful moment.

You know, Oscar Hanlon, who's a Harvard professor, he wrote the book, what was called the book on immigration, and it was called *The Uprooted, The Epic Account of The Great Migrations That Made The American People*. This was the standard text on immigration history.

But in the standard text, there is not a single word about people who came across the Pacific and went to Angel Island. He focused only on those who came across the Atlantic and came to the New York harbor. Not a single word about those who came across that other ocean.

That's why a University of California at Berkeley professor named Ron Takaki said he was going to write the story. He was going to correct the story. And he wrote a book.

And he called it *Strangers From A Different Shore*. And notice the title, *Strangers From A Different Shore*. He was going to talk about those people who came across that other ocean because of the way in which they were visible from the standard immigration histories.

[BELLS RINGING]

And let me just make this one point, which is really critical to this. What are the consequences of invisibility? Well, the consequences of invisibility is that a group is often marginalized.

It is subject to prejudices, vulnerable, it's stereotypes. It is, in some way, shaped by the dominant society. It is racialized, to use the terms of Omi and Winnant.

And Asian-Americans have been racialized in various ways. Sort of one extreme is the model minority idea, which I'm not going to get into today. But it's an idea that really says less about Asian-Americans and says more about disciplining Blacks and other groups.

But the other one is the one that, again, Melissa talked about, the notion of perpetual foreignness, of outsider racialization, as Angelo [INAUDIBLE] called it. And this idea of perpetual foreignness is first to exclude Asian-Americans and secondly, to discipline Asian-Americans. That's the key. It's to discipline Asian-Americans.

And it has all kinds of slights in the way, in where did you really come from, and all these sorts of slights that Asian-Americans are used to. But it has real historical manifestations. From the time the country was created, we created a class of people, and they're principally originally Blacks and Asian-Americans, who are immigrants to this country. Where we talk about this country as being the land of immigrants, but we told these groups of people that you cannot, even if you're immigrants, become citizens.

And we told this to Black immigrants and we told this to Asian-American immigrants, they created this category called aliens ineligible for citizenship. And even after Blacks, after the Civil War, were able to get their citizenship restored, Asian-Americans continued to be a group that were aliens ineligible for citizenship. In fact, the experience of Asian-Americans on the shore has been for a much longer period of time in the United States they have not been able to become citizens than the period of time they have been able to become citizens. It's within my lifetime that Japanese-Americans like myself, who are immigrants, could become citizens. So we have lived under a situation-- under much longer we've been ineligible for citizenship than we've been eligible for.

And of course, it's led to exclusion. It's led to the World War II incarceration of Japanese-Americans, the treatment of South Asians after 9/11. It's contributed to COVID [INAUDIBLE] responses, the so-called China or the Wuhan virus, using the language of President Trump.

And why is this so pernicious? Why is outside racialization so pernicious? Because it combines two important forces, nativism and racism. The United States in 1882, for the first time, when we told a group of people you cannot come here because of your race, we invented the notion of undocumented immigrants in 1882, when we told people of Chinese descent you cannot come here because of your race or where you're coming from.

We said to these people, maybe it was like it today. Maybe people are saying, well, we just have too many immigrants. It's nothing against you Chinese people.

Well, in Chinese, in 1882, was the highest year of Chinese immigration to the United States. 39,000 Chinese came in 1882. And maybe you say, well, maybe that's just too many. But more Americans trace their ancestry to one country more than any other and that country is Germany.

And I went and looked at the date. And it turns out that 1882 was the peak year of German immigration to the United States up to that point. And German immigration in 1882 was 250,620.

So maybe it was more than simply the quantity. Maybe it was the complexion, literally. Maybe there was racism behind the decision to close immigration to the Chinese and not allow them to come any longer.

And then there, of course, was this racist, sexist dimension, in addition to the nativism and the racism. And Professor Moon is going to talk about that in terms of [INAUDIBLE] and the Atlanta shootings two weeks ago, and so forth. But let me sort of end my comments by asking this question.

What should we be doing about this? And what does this mean for Asian-Americans like myself and for others who are trying to fight for racial justice in the United States? Almost 120 years ago, WEB Du Bois said that the problem in the 20th century is the problem of the color line.

Here in 2021, as we approach majority non-white nation in 2043, as we're going to be a majority non-white nation in 2043, how will we respond to this problem? Well, the color line, I think sadly, has been reaffirmed nearly a year ago with the murder of George Floyd in the latest season of our discontent. From Minneapolis, to Louisville, to Kenosha, to El Paso, to Squirrel Hill, to Oak Creek, to Brooklyn, to Belmont, Massachusetts, to Atlanta, what Martin Luther King called "the shameful condition of America" has been fully on display.

In terms of the COVID pandemic, Asian-Americans have been blamed and bullied for the so-called "China virus." But even worse, they have been beaten to death. They have been slashed with a knife. They have been shot with high-powered weapons. And even today, another report of an elderly woman attacked and news reports of a new phenomenon, a "slap an Asian" challenge in California has emerged within the last few days.

Racism assuredly is alive, racial hierarchy's intact, and inequities persist and even grow. Asian-Americans have important roles to play in confronting the racial divides. And to our Latino brothers and sisters, I say, we Asian-Americans can say we know. We have been the undesirable strangers at the border. First to exclude us in 1882, and then to create aliens ineligible for citizenship afterwards. [INAUDIBLE].

To our undocumented brothers and sisters, we [INAUDIBLE] was first coined to talk about us. We have had paper sons. My father was an undocumented immigrant. Over one million of Asian-Americans today are out of status. And we have been targeted for deportation, like Cambodians, youth, and young adults here in the United States.

To our Muslim and Arab brothers and sisters, we know. We have been called the "yellow peril." We have been called agents of foreign influence. We have been called responsible for collective guilt, like my family that was thrown into America's concentration camps for looking like the enemy.

And then, in some ways, the explanation for how we had to endure that was this idea of [JAPANESE], it can't be helped. That was the explanation for why we had to put up with what happened in a practical way. We have been blamed and bullied for the "China virus," so we know.

And to our Black brothers and sisters, let me say this. In Ferguson, Missouri, many residents and members of the police department wear badges. And those badges say "I am Darren Wilson."

Now Darren Wilson was the police officer who shot the young 18-year-old Malcolm Brown. And they wanted to show solidarity with Darren Wilson, the person who murdered Michael Brown.

Well, to our Black brothers and sisters, indeed, for all of us, the beginning of understanding and the hopes of eradicating persistent racism and debilitating inequities is when all of us, yellow, Black, red, brown, and white proclaim in solidarity that I am Michael Brown. I am George Floyd.

I am Trayvon Martin. I am Breonna Taylor. I am Heather Heyer. I am Vincent Chin. I am Sun Cha Kim.

I am not an illegal. I am not a terrorist. I am not a "yellow peril." I am not a "virus." I am not "the other." I am, we are all somebody.

And we are sick and tired of aggression micro or macro, with being slapped, spat upon, or shot. And we are no more willing to say [JAPANESE]. It can be helped. And we're going to fight against every semblance of this today. Thank you very much.

KENNETH OYE: Thank you, Paul, for your words. The next speaker is Kathy Moon, a professor at Wellesley College. And I'm going to have to introduce Kathy with a personal note.

We first met a long time ago, when I was teaching an international relations seminar at Princeton University. And there was a student that kept making remarks and comments that undercut 90% of the conventional wisdoms in the field. And that student went on to be very famous, working at the Brookings Institution, becoming the foremost authority, actually, on US relations with Korea, both Koreas.

And when I say a fearsome professor at Wellesley College, I use that bus to commute. And I'm sitting there anonymously. And I keep hearing students talk about Kathy Moon, the brilliant professor who scares them with her comments.

And that's part of Kathy. But Paul warned us against simple categorizations of people. And so I'm going to ask for forgiveness as I categorize Kathy just a little bit.

We're dealing with a situation where we see a mixture of racism, xenophobia, and sexism and misogyny all blended together. And Kathy also speaks to us not just as a scholar, but as a Korean-American woman whose mother is a minister, immigrant family, with research and personal experience, with a sort of, let's call it the gendered take on these issues.

So I've asked Kathy to talk a little bit about Atlanta, but beyond that, more broadly, about the acts of violence that we see and her personal reactions to that. Kathy, forgive me for putting you into boxes in the way that Paul just warned us not to do. But thank you so much for coming.

**KATHERINE
MOON:**

Thanks so much, Ken. And your boxes are very generous and kind. One box you forgot to mention is that I am a feminist. And I would say that is a primary identity for me in my work, my research, my teaching, as well as in my life, personal life, and certainly in the way that I look at some of these recent events affecting Asian-Americans and our country.

I'm going to start by continuing this discussion that Dean Nobles and Professor Watanabe started, focusing on Asian-Americans as the other, the invisible, et cetera. And I have my own ism for it, foreignerism, I call it. It's a little clunky, but forgive me.

I use the word "foreignerism" because I think this is something that is particularly salient in terms of targeting Asians. Not all immigrants in America are considered foreigners the way Asians and Asian-Americans continue to be considered as foreigners. Other immigrants, other ethnic minority groups have targeted Asian-Americans as foreigners.

I myself, I cannot tell you how many times I have had racial slurs, taunts, bullying by whites, Blacks, Latinos. It runs the gamut. So what is it about Asians and Asian-Americans?

We don't invite this kind of discrimination and racism. We are not the only immigrant groups in the United States that stick out. But somehow, this particular type of othering, this foreignerism is something that is a huge burden on many of us.

Asians and Asian-Americans, as Professor Watanabe, has mentioned, we have been part of American society since the mid-1800s. There actually were Chinese who fought in the US Civil War. The first time I learned that was not that long ago.

And I was floored. And I was moved. Because it gave me, as a Korean-American, a much deeper sense of roots.

And every time in my own family, extended family, I have a new birth in a nephew, or niece, or a cousin's child, I feel a particular kind of an emotional stimulation, the sense that the roots are thickening, deepening, and that the branches are getting greener and fuller. Why do I react that way? Because of this foreignerism that I and many other Asians and Asian-Americans live with every single day. Whether it happens or not, psychologically, it's just pervasive.

We so much want to be regarded by non-Asians and Asian-Americans as part of the American fabric, as an organic part, not some plopped image standing there or stuck on the fabric, but an integral, organic part of that fabric. But even with multiple generations that root us in American life, we continue to be regarded as visitors, tourists, temporary residents, as quote, "not real Americans."

And I think that foreignerism renders Asians into targets for racist actions and violence by those who are not of Asian descent. And as people have already referred, but I'm going to specify here, Monday, a Filipina American, age 65, in New York City, in broad daylight, late morning, 11 something in the morning, was violently assaulted by Brandon Elliott, who yelled out, "F you! You don't belong here."

How many times have we as Asians and Asian-Americans in this country heard this? Today, Mr. Elliott was charged with felony assault as a hate crime. He was caught and arrested and charged.

My field, my training is international relations and comparative politics. I don't study American politics. So what I'm going to offer you today is a brief discussion of how recent events, Atlanta and elsewhere, connect with the international. And for this, I have to go back to the history of wars in which the United States has been involved, especially in the 20th century.

Since the mid-20th century, Americans encountered more Asians on Asian territory than in the United States. And Asians became the quote, "other," either as vicious enemies-- specifically, Japanese during World War II or the Pacific War, communists in China, North Korea, Vietnam, Laos, Cambodia-- either vicious enemies needing to be destroyed or weak and helpless victims, people needing to be protected and saved from communism-- South Koreans in the 1950s, South Vietnamese in the 1960s and '70s, and Filipinos, because the Philippines has been a military ally of the United States and the US has had large scale naval bases there and we still have active port calls there.

Severe poverty and weak political order internally in these countries meant millions of Asians were put into subservient roles for the US forces, literally as servants, domestic servants, cooks, both male and female, prostitutes, shoeshine boys. And when I say prostitutes, I use the word "prostituted women." I don't use sex workers. Mostly because the women I have interviewed for my own research in Korea, who worked around the military bases, they do not necessarily use that term to identify themselves, especially those of older generations. But basically servants, sexual servants, in addition to all these other types.

Large scale troop presence inevitably created sexual commerce as camp followers and rest and relaxation industries, R&R industries, that's the euphemism for the entertainment industries that cater to US troops, popped up. And although Thailand never experienced war fighting by US forces on its own soil, Thailand became a hotbed of the R&R industry to accommodate us servicemen fighting in Southeast Asia.

And I find that there is a continuing depiction of Asians and Asian-Americans as weak, passive, scared in the media portrayal of the responses, Asian's and Asian-American's responses to the recent violence. We all have read in the papers and watched and heard on news shows the terms, fear, trauma, afraid to go out, used to describe so-called Asian responses. And I've always wondered, over the last two weeks or so, who are these Asians and Asian-Americans who are referring to themselves this way, or referring to all of us this way?

I really don't think people have been surveyed. If anybody wants to survey me, I'm happy to tell you, I am not someone sitting at home, afraid to go out, traumatized and fearful. But I find that these terms reflect and reinforce these negative stereotypes of people of Asian descent as being weak and passive.

As we will soon hear, Representative Tram Nguyen will talk about her activities and the activities of other leaders, Asian-American and not, people who are actively asserting, actively resisting, and actively fighting the kind of violence that has been perpetrated on Asians and Asian-Americans.

[BELL RINGING]

As far as the Atlanta shootings go, they have generated concern over sexism and misogyny in addition to racism. And I want to just give you a brief overview of what many Asian women have had to deal with in Asia, before they even came to the United States. But also the kind of images of Asian women that have developed over time through the US military experience in Asia, the view of Asian women as sex servants.

There is a historical context. Large numbers of US soldiers who went to Asia from the 1940s to the current day were and are very young often teenagers or 20 somethings who never had left their hometowns and ended up landing in these quote, "foreign countries," these exotic, so-called exotic countries, where the people they saw were local camptown people, people living around US military bases that developed businesses to accommodate American soldiers' consumption habits, cheap bars that usually have women for sale. Asian countries became synonymous with cheap available sex.

And as much as Asian governments have disliked and chafed at the view of their countries as one large brothel, these governments are also responsible for having facilitated widescale sex industries. Politicians, political leaders, business people, they used women's bodies to gain national security commitments from the United States as well as to gain foreign exchange. The women themselves in Asia were often harassed and physically beaten and assaulted in different ways from local police, from traffickers, bar owners, pimps, from US troops. The list goes on.

Many egregious murders and unbelievably outrageous, heinous crimes took place in these compounds on women's bodies and lives perpetrated by US servicemen. In some instances, we can trace the history of US involvement in Asian wars directly to sex establishments owned and worked by Asians in the United States. But in many cases, we cannot.

More recent Chinese immigrants, people who did not encounter US troops on Chinese soil, have set up sexualized massage establishments. For example, the infamous Orchid's of Asia Massage Shop in Florida, where Robert Kraft, the owner of the New England Patriots was caught on video in 2019. And I want to make sure that we are including all women who work as massage therapists, massage workers, not just Asian women, when we talk about the potential and real violence against women.

Whether female massage workers are professionally trained and licensed or not, whatever their skin color and cultural background is, they face the reality of danger posed by their clients, men. And in recent days, some of you might have been reading about Deshaun Watkins, a star football player. He's a part of the Houston Texans, a football team.

I don't follow football at all. But I couldn't help but read this stuff because it's outrageous. Since March 15 of this year, 21 women have filed lawsuits against him for sexual offenses. All, I believe, if not most of whom, are massage therapists that he hired.

Today, anti-Asian racism, I think, is a mix of old, the old, meaning the history of Asian land wars involving the United States, as well as the poverty and underdevelopment of Asian countries from the '40s to the '80s or so, a mix of the old and the new. Of course, we already have had the rise of China and the rise of Korea, Taiwan, Singapore. The rise of Japan occurred way before all these countries.

But most recently the rise of China, it's in the news all the time, in the trade wars, and Mr. Trump's outrageous racist sentiments against Chinese and China have done a huge disservice. Envy and resentment as well as active Japan bashing and China bashing by politicians have helped create this current situation.

I want to close with a plea for us to pay as much attention to another form of systemic violence what we might call systemic gun violence, as we pay to the violence against Asian-Americans, Black Americans, and so many other peripheral groups, societally peripheral groups in this country. Systemic gun violence, it is institutionally legally enabled and facilitated. And mass shootings are just a tiny fraction of the massive use of firearms and the damage to life and property that it causes in civilian life.

Gun deaths are about 40,000 a year, on par with deaths from breast cancer, pancreatic cancer, liver diseases, vehicle accidents. It's an outrageous reality and we live with it every single day, year after year. And mass shootings get large scale media attention, but we still fail to get legislative and legal changes that reflect basic common sense and decency around the acquisition, possession, and use of firearms.

Even if racism and sexism were to be eradicated in an ideal world, the permissive availability of firearms, military grade in particular, will cause people in every demographic and identity group to lose lives and loved ones and suffer immeasurably. I leave you with this list, based on *New York Times'* findings that I culled, of mass shootings in recent years. They range from all over the country, involving perpetrators from various ethnic and identity groups as well as, of course, victims from various ethnic identity groups.

You can get shot going to church, synagogue, the grocery store, Walmart, to a bar, to a nightclub, to a gas station, and school. [INAUDIBLE].

KENNETH OYE: OK. I lost my sound. And just wanted to check, first, Kathy, have you finished? And two, can anyone hear me?

CHRISTINE We can hear you, but I think we lost Kathy. She had bad connections.

PILCAVAGE:

KENNETH OYE: OK. So what we'll do is actually move to our next speaker. And we'll perhaps get Kathy to kind of finish her finishing remarks a little bit later.

We're going to be moving to State Representative Tram Nguyen. And you know, after all these professors come on, let's get someone that actually has lived in the real world. So Tram has been a legal aid attorney working in the community.

And you want to talk about front line experience with issues on everything from domestic violence to a whole range of matters, Tram has lived there. But after that, she actually went into politics. And I have to tell you, it is so nice to actually see someone with decency and intelligence and a certain selflessness going into that profession.

She's been representing the area around North Andover and Essex for a couple of terms now, has been re-elected. Thank God. And look, OK, we've had professors talk about what you do when you see situations you don't like. What state legislators do when they don't like what they're seeing is they introduce legislation to try to fix part of the problem.

So very pleased to have Tram speak. And among the topics that she's going to focus on will be legislation to strengthen anti-hate crime laws in the Commonwealth of Massachusetts. She did have a forum this morning with Attorney General Healey that was excellent on this topic.

And it's just a real pleasure to be greeting a new friend, Tram, along with all of my old friends, who have spoken in the earlier part of this panel. But Tram, thank you so much for joining this discussion at MIT. And the floor is yours.

TRAM NGUYEN: Thank you so much for inviting me to be a part of this forum today. And really such a pleasure to hear from the professors. I know you tease them. But as an Asian-American studies, a sociology major, that was just fascinating to me. And really, I'm glad to have the space for reflection and for bringing our community together to take a stance against anti-Asian hate and violence.

It has been such a hard year and even harder with all that has happened within these past two weeks. As mentioned, the mass murder in Atlanta, which resulted in eight deaths, six of whom are women of Asian descent, followed by the mass shooting in Boulder. And just this week, with the attack of the 65-year-old Asian woman.

And I think the fascinating thing about that was, the worst part, I think, is seeing how little empathy there was for her. There were people there who just turned their backs like she was invisible, like she didn't matter. And I'm feeling anger and grief. And I am heartbroken seeing that.

And I really hope that we are all, especially my Asian and Asian-American and Pacific Islander friends and family, are taking the time to prioritize their mental health as we wrap our head around all of this. The hate and violence need to stop. There is no place for this in the Commonwealth or anywhere.

And as mentioned by the professors before this, this didn't come out of nowhere. There has been a long boil of hate in this country that was being ignored or outrightly dismissed. We have lived in the shadows, invisible, overlooked, stereotyped, and relegated as diseases, and as mentioned, foreigners and sex objects, and just purely second class citizens for far too long.

And the professors have gone through both the US history and also global history. But we also want to talk about the global history of racism, but we want to talk about the microaggressions that we all endure every single day. If you ask any Asian person, I'm sure, we all have many stories to tell of people making fun of us for our slanted eyes, or our small stature, or ridiculing us for our accents, for those of us who are newer immigrants.

And this perpetual foreigner concept, it is not anything that's happening elsewhere. It's not anything that's happening at another time and place. This is happening right now. And I could give you a prime example.

As mentioned, I was practicing as a legal services attorney before getting elected. And I was standing in front of the Suffolk Probate and Family Court right in Boston, down the street from the State House. And I was with a client who was a new immigrant, I was speaking to her in Vietnamese. And this man rode by on his bike and said, "Get the F out of my country. You don't belong here."

And these microaggressions really matter because, what is the signal? That we currently don't belong, and that we don't have a voice, and that we are easy targets. And that just seems to be the theme as we continue to talk about hate and violence and why certain groups are targeted.

And unfortunately, it has only gotten worse within the last 12 months. We've seen an increase of 150% of anti-Asian violence. And since March of 2020, nearly 3,800 incidents have been reported. None of this is OK.

And I realize that the Atlanta mass murders have brought anti-Asian hate crimes to the forefront. And I'm really encouraged to see that these crimes are getting the coverage that they deserve. And I hope that this energy and enthusiasm for real reform will continue to mount with the support of folks like you.

But I also want to make the point, as the Dean mentioned earlier, that this hate, hate crimes is not specific to the Asian community. Bias-motivated crimes based on religion, disability, gender identity, and gender remain a troubling--troublingly high levels. And we've only seen an increase this past year.

And we must do better than that as a Commonwealth, to not only empower victims so that they don't feel isolated and ignored, but also hold perpetrators accountable. And that's why I'm so proud to join the Attorney General, as well as Senator Hines, in filing The Hate Crimes Bill, to rework our current statutes to better reflect their intended purpose, which is to charge individuals who target a person based on their membership in a protected class to increase accountability. So currently in Massachusetts, we have two statutes that address hate crimes, but they are vague and partially overlapping.

This bill would combine them into one statute and give clear directives to prosecutors and the judiciary to apply these laws fairly and correctly. One of the most important aspects of the bill is that it would codify the meaning of "because of," by clarifying that the intentional targeting of someone based on their membership of a protected class does not need to be the predominant, substantial, or sole reason for the crime. Essentially, to break it down, the bill would make clear that prosecutors don't need to prove that the perpetrator was motivated solely by animus or hate towards a victim's protected class.

It's important for us to recognize that in all of these situations, what often motivates a hate crime is not actual animus towards a group, but the fact that the group has been designated by society as an acceptable group of targets. And therefore, these people, perhaps intentionally, even unintentionally, choose to target them because they think they can get away with it. And in many of these instances, motivation for a crime is not clear cut, as you have only one factor. So the bill would allow for prosecution of a perpetrator, even in instances where the intentional targeting of a protected class is just one of many factors. And so we want to make sure that that would allow for more accountability.

And the other important aspect of the bill is that it would expand the protected class to include immigration status as well as gender. Because we've seen that there is an increase, the example of me standing in front of the courthouse, the person had no other information about me other than the fact I was speaking another language. And we've seen not only those types of verbal attacks, we've also seen physical attacks against people based on their immigration status. And so we're looking to provide better protection.

The bill also makes clear that violent threatening and destructive behaviors in conduct are not protected under the First Amendment. And it's important for people to realize that. And it would also make sentencing proportional to the actions or the underlying crime, so that not all perpetrators are lumped into one, for instance, differentiating between assault, versus assault with a weapon, or an assault that result in bodily harm as well as strengthening penalties for repeat offenders.

And so it's important for me to note here that we're not proposing a new law. We're looking to make the current law less confusing to allow for law enforcement and the judiciary to effectively hold perpetrators accountable who target people in protected classes. And it's also important to note that we're not setting new mandatory minimums, which is important as we try to work towards criminal justice and all the other issues relating to that.

I also want to note that hate crimes are not just crimes against individuals. It's important to realize that hate crimes are meant to terrorize entire communities. These are crimes against all of us. Hate crimes, much like terrorism, are designed to create fear and make people feel unsafe.

I mean, I completely agree with Professor Moon when she said, you know, Asians are not timid or fearful. But when these actions, when these crimes are committed, they are meant to make you feel fearful. And that's what we need to fight against.

That's why we need to name hate crimes for what they are, that they are crimes motivated very motivated by hate. And we need to prosecute them to an added degree to tell the communities that we see them, that they are valued, and that we won't tolerate such violence and hate. And furthermore, I want to note that this bill is not the end all be all. It is only one of many solutions.

Since we need to find a multifaceted approach to deal with racism and hate and find other ways to support vulnerable communities as well. As mentioned, I worked as a legal services attorney and have spent my entire career helping vulnerable communities, trying to uplift their voices. And I want to make sure to continue that work.

So we need to work on issues of racial justice, social justice, economic justice, gender justice, and continue to fight for equity in the areas of access to housing, transportation, health care, and other basic necessities, as well as making sure that we work on issues of language access. All of this is in conjunction with one another, not either-or. I also want to push for better education for k-12 students to learn diverse and inclusive curriculum so that our children can be raised appreciating diversity.

I filed a bill to develop frameworks intentionally designed to avoid perpetuating gender, cultural, ethnic, or racial stereotypes and build racially and culturally responsive knowledge and combat racial and cultural bias. We want to elevate history and achievements and key writings of members of communities of color and other marginalized communities. And the framework should reflect sensitivity to different learning styles and impediments to learning. And of course, we want to do all this with input from stakeholders, including educators, students, members of the communities of color, and other marginalized communities in the development of these frameworks.

And I know that this is one of actually several bills currently pending in the legislature with similar ideas, including one which would establish an anti-racism and equity in education trust fund administered through The Commission for Anti-Racism and Equity in Education, which would not only work on curriculum, but also increase support and retain teachers and counselors of color in public schools. All these are great ideas that I support. And I look forward to working on this session.

We need to continue to look to how we can provide support to folks in the community. We need to provide opportunities for people to report hate crimes. Because what we are seeing across the country is an underreporting as well as an underprosecution of hate crimes. And we need to help people to report these hate crimes to their attorney general.

There's actually a hotline that was shown in the contacts earlier and perhaps it could be shown later on. But there's a special hotline 1-800-994-3228 for victims to go and report what they've gone through, or ask someone to help with the reporting. There's also a Massachusetts Office on Victims Assistance that many people may not know about that could provide assistance to victims and their families.

But in addition to that, I also want to think through how can we not just penalize people, but think about transformative justice. And some ideas have been thrown out to perhaps provide opportunities for people convicted of hate crimes to learn about racism and how their actions affect whole communities, which is certainly something to explore.

And lastly, I want to emphasize the fact that being a silent bystander is no longer an option. We need to invest in upstander training, to teach people how to stand up against racism and discrimination, either for themselves or as allies in a safe way. And I know that more information has been provided earlier on during of the forum and will be provided later on.

We need to continue to stand together. We need to call out racism when we see it. We need to continue to advocate for not only additional resources for community members, but to hold perpetrators accountable. And I hope that you would look into this bill. And if you have any feedback, please contact my office.

We're very early in the legislative session. It's a two year session, and we're in the beginning of year one. We want to work with you to incorporate your feedback. We want to hear from community members about how this affects them and how you could be a part of the process.

So please reach out. And if you are interested, please contact your legislators about this bill to let them know that this is happening. Most people don't realize that over 6,500 bills are filed each session. And we want to hear from our constituents about what bills matter to them. And so it would mean a lot to your legislators to hear from you.

And then please just remember to stay safe and that we're all in this together. And I'm just so glad to be a part of this forum today. And I really look forward to further discussion with you all. Thank you.

KENNETH OYE: Thank you so much for your remarks. We're going to turn to Q&A. And I want to put up one slide as we make this transition.

The way that we're going to do the Q&A is that Chris Pilcavage will be monitoring and has been monitoring the Q&A window. And she's going to pick the questions that are getting a lot of attention on point. And she'll read them aloud.

But I wanted to put up a slide-- is it visible now-- of an announcement that we made. And you can see the information on this event at the top. And the first comment, the very first comment that popped up was the Asian community needs to speak out about the harmful effects of China. Why? Because this-- COVID is worse than September 11.

And I kind of think that comment underscores the need for the event, blaming the Asian-American community, holding individuals here responsible for what's going on in China. I'm sparing you the rest of a long exchange. We've all spent too much time on social media.

But the essence of that remark captures part of the problem that we're dealing with. So I'm going to turn to Chris now. And Chris has been assiduously going through the questions entered.

And she'll be reading some aloud and calling on people. But Chris, the floor is yours. And I'm going to turn off the screen here with the wonderful message from that first commenter. Chris?

CHRISTINE PILCAVAGE: Thank you, Ken. Maybe we can have the panelists also react to the slide that you put up. And thank you, the panelists. What an engaging thought-- lots of food for thought.

We have an incredible amount of questions. And I've had other people email me and send private questions that they would like for you to address. But let me pick up the one that has had the most hits.

And this has been touched upon by both Paul and Professor Watanabe and Representative Nguyen. But he was at first a little cynical, saying come on. Let's be realistic.

This forum, the recent letter from MIT'S president, and the rhetoric by politicians and pundits, among others, are largely reactionary. We have yet to develop a sustained effort to minimize racism and xenophobia and to address the root causes. What will it take to bring about a lasting effort in this country to attack these root causes for all minorities and non-whites? So maybe Professor Watanabe, maybe, if you'd like to take a stab at it, as well as Professor Moon and Representative Nguyen?

PAUL
WATANABE: Well, I am, of course, in agreement with the notion of fighting root causes, whether it's over the root causes of the disparities reflected in the COVID-19 pandemic in which it's impacted communities of color in inordinate ways compared to the white population. Or whether it's something like the way in which racial politics and justice works out in the United States, or injustice works out in the United States.

But look, it's going to take a revolution. Indeed, it's so ingrained in American history and the structure the economic and political and legal realities of life in the United States, that we're not going to just simply wave a wand and change all of these structures that have been-- this is what systemic racism looks like. We're seeing the manifestations of it today.

To me, as I get older, I must say one of the things I just want to see in terms of the dealing with the Asian-American violence, I just want to see people be able to live their lives without being hassled in this way by discrimination and by physical or mental or whatever prejudice or threats.

You know, people don't have to like me. I'm Japanese-American. People may not like me. They may have a problem with me.

But I just don't want them to be able to come and threaten myself, my children, my grandchildren, and so forth. And to the extent that we can manage the diversity within the United States, that for me is a short term goal. Whether we're going to be able to change the power structures within the United States and so forth, that's a long term operation. That's a long term project.

But for me, the idea is to walk down the street and not have to worry that you're going to get spit upon, and somebody is going to yell at you, or that you're a school kid and don't have to have somebody bully you in school, or something like that, that to me is a small victory. But it's a bit of a victory at this stage. And I think, for now, I think I'm going to be content with that rather than to try to change the entire system of racism and systemic racism, which needs to be a focus. I'm not saying that. But in the short term, that's what I would like to see happen.

CHRISTINE
PILCAVAGE: Thank you, Professor Watanabe. Professor Moon, I know we had some technical difficulties at this tail end of our session. I was wondering if you wanted to make a comment on this question. Oh, you're on mute, Professor Moon.

TRAM NGUYEN: And I'd love to hear the rest of your thoughts on gun violence as well.

CHRISTINE
PILCAVAGE: Yes.

KATHERINE
MOON: I don't know when I froze. But I was actually very close to the end of what I wanted to share. So I really had wanted people to look at the document, just the compilation of these mass shootings. Because I think those facts speak for themselves more than any kind of editorializing might.

But I will-- I echo some of the sentiments that Professor Watanabe already articulated. So I will pass the mic over to Representative Nguyen.

TRAM NGUYEN: Well, as I mentioned earlier, we do need to get to the root cause. And it's not just by criminalizing. It's about working on the social justice, racial justice, economic justice issues so that we can uplift certain communities.

But like I said, it has to be an either-and sort of approach because as we've seen in these examples of hate crimes, resources don't necessarily shield you from the violence. And so this is why it's very important for us to address both the violence and what we can do to uplift communities.

CHRISTINE PILCAVAGE: Thank you, Representative Nguyen. It seems like it is a group effort, isn't it? Shifting a little bit, I'd like to juxtapose the next two questions that came up.

And all of you have addressed this during your talk. And we had one of our audience ask about, how do you think we as Asian-Americans have also been sold the idea that all of us are the same as well? And how can we combat this [INAUDIBLE] America [INAUDIBLE]?

And another person asks, well, do we need to further classify ourselves to sort of distinguish one another? So it was about the putting oneself into the little box issue. And I also like to highlight about, in the recent-- even in the COVID vaccine, my husband, who's an immigrant from Hong Kong, when he had to select his race, Asian was missing. But it was included in ethnicity.

So what is this in terms of-- are we sold into a big Asian-American bubble? Or then, if you can comment about do we need to further classify as Professor Watanabe mentioned about, the incredible spectrum of Asians in this country? Perhaps, maybe, Professor Watanabe, if you can comment on that? Or Professor Moon?

PAUL WATANABE: I run an Institute for Asian-American Studies. So I may be guilty of this lumping together. But I think there's some basis for it.

And there may be some inconsistency between my desire to get more granular and disaggregated data. Because I think that we understand what's going on within the community if we do so. And that's something that I push for and I that Representative Nguyen has pressed for and others have pressed for is the need for more disaggregated data to capture this complexity.

But look, the Asian-American notion is in some ways a political category. And it's a useful one. To lots of Americans, it doesn't matter where we're from. We're all, in some ways, considered the same.

You know, it doesn't matter whether a Vietnamese person, or a Korean person, or a Cambodian person, or a Japanese person opens a store in a white neighborhood and they don't want you there. Almost certainly, they'll spray paint, "Go home, gook." We're all "gooks" in some respects. We're all classified together to some degree.

And that's in part, actually, our strength. If you understand, and most Asian-Americans do understand, that our individual countries back in Asia were often-- our history had been at conflict with each other, and so forth. That's been the story. And it's a continuing story.

But here in the United States, there is some satisfaction to know that these countries whose ancestors back there may have warred with each other, here in the United States, we're linked together. And our fates are linked together. And as long as they are, we're going to fight together.

And there's strength in being united together. And to me, I think that that's a reality. That's a political strength. And that's something that I think is very real. And I think it's a source of strength, not of weakness, to have this unified conception about what it means to be an Asian-American.

CHRISTINE Great. Thank you, Professor Watanabe.

PILCAVAGE:

KATHERINE If I could add a couple of thoughts. I think Professor Watanabe is absolutely right. That the notion of being Asian-
MOON: American, it is a political title or category. And that as much as it's a response to the "gookification," I'll add a more clunky term--

PAUL There you go.

WATANABE:

KATHERINE --to how people who are not of Asian descent see us, it can be very empowering. And when you need a large
MOON: collective of people, it certainly is a smart way to go.

But I think-- I don't know what the motivation was of the person who posed that question in the chat. But we live our lives not politically every single day. And I think it's important to keep that in mind that, as just regular human beings, we have multiple identities, multiple hats, faces, that we put on, we take off, we change all day long.

I am, yes, Asian-American at times. I am Korean-American at times. I am always a woman. That's clear.

[LAUGHS]

I am many, many things. I am a wife. I am an auntie. I am a sister. All of these identities, and I love and cherish my Korean cultural traditions and heritage.

But my extended family now has people of European descent, Vietnamese descent, Jewish descent, Buddhist, Christian. And we're an open tent. We'll just keep going and expanding with our own diversity.

So when I am with my cousin's husband whose family's from Vietnam, I fully share his heritage. Because he shares it with me. And we share our Korean heritage with him and his family. Same thing, I want to learn Hebrew to support my relations who are going to be up for bar mitzvah and bat mitzvah soon.

So I think that on a personal level, we just need to be as free to express our multiple identities, our multiple passions, concerns, orientations, as comfortably as we can. And I think that's a way to support what Professor Watanabe said, that the goal for him, eliminating racism, it's not going to happen tomorrow or next year. But that we, hopefully, can be freer every single day to just live out the various faces, tongues, cultures, customs that we feel comfortable with and that we feel comfortable exploring.

CHRISTINE Wonderful. Thank you. Representative Nguyen, did you want to add anything?

PILCAVAGE:

TRAM NGUYEN: No, I was really just taking in all that they've been saying and reflecting on that. And really, we have a bill on disaggregated data, because we know that there are inequities in access to many things like housing, transportation, education, even health care now, given the pandemic. And so it is important to be able to get that disaggregated data to see how we can better serve the different communities. But I completely agree that we all hold multiple identities. And the main thing is to celebrate those differences.

CHRISTINE PILCAVAGE: Thank you. The next question that was sent to me comes from Atsuko Fish, a trustee and founder of The Fish Foundation. But I'd also like to share an abridged version of a statement that she posted today before I go to her question.

Recently, she was out walking, followed by a young girl on a bike. The young girl asked me where I live, so I pointed out my house. As she stopped and watched me go towards my front door, she said no. You don't belong here.

Atsuko Fish is an immigrant, originally from Japan. But she's called Boston her home since 1983. And she and her husband has created a family foundation to serve immigrants in Massachusetts and high proven risk youth, as well as leadership development for women in Japan.

And for 10 years, she served as the chair of the board of the Asian Task Force Against Domestic Violence, who are also our co-sponsor tonight. And Atsuko was reminded of our country's long history of the systemic racism and gender-based violence that we've been discussing tonight. And as an Asian woman, she's been targeted, like many of us, about discrimination and racism on the streets as well as our workplace.

These experiences, as was highlighted by all our professors here, is rooted in the misogyny, in the hypersexualization. And she's hoping that Asian women, to break our silence and serve as role models to young girls and young women. And I'm hoping that will also be to men and be role models to young boys as well.

And her question is so we highlighted what people can do as a collective, individual. Representative Nguyen mentioned about upstander project. But I'd also like to bring in Antonio's question about what can we ask the corporate America and what can we ask them in helping address this issue as part of whether it's a rubric under the DEI. So what action can be taken within the corporate America? Maybe if I can have Representative Nguyen?

TRAM NGUYEN: Thank you for that. And I always go back to that representation does matter and that we have to have a seat at the table. And even before this forum started, we were talking about representation and what it means to get more AAPI folks elected so that we can work on long term solutions, so that we could make these transformative changes, whether at the state level or the federal level.

And in terms of the corporate world, I've always worked in the nonprofit world, so it'd be hard for me to comment on that, but just thinking generally about what it means to set targets and goals. Because it's one thing to say we care about diversity, but what does that break down to? And is it diversity in terms of your workers, or diversity in terms of leadership? Let's think about that and that's what we need to work on, to get that data, so that we can continue to advocate on these issues.

CHRISTINE PILCAVAGE: Thank you, Representative Nguyen.

PAUL WATANABE: I think Atsuko's experience tells you one thing. And that is, to a lot of people, it's not your stature or whether you have contributed in various ways, as Atsuko has and her husband has and others have. For many people, you're nothing more than what you seem on your physical face.

And that is, I'll never forget what Senator Inouye, who was the head of the Iran-Contra hearings, that one of the attorneys for Oliver North, in a aside, his microphone was not turned off, simply referred to Senator Inouye, who was the chair of the committee, as "a little Jap."

This is a guy who was more than "a little Jap," of course, if anybody knows the experience and the history of Senator Inouye. But to him, that's what he was reduced to. And I think for a lot of people, that's what you are. It doesn't matter what you've achieved. It doesn't matter who you are.

And it's not a protection against that as well. And that's something we have to understand. You may think you're at the height of the world. And you may think you have the world all-- you know?

I think of Wen Ho Lee and going after him. And I thought, Wen Ho Lee, he's about the perfect American. Not only is he a scientist, he's working on building nuclear weapons. My God, you can't be any more American than that, right?

And yet, the American government goes after him, or the professors here at MIT, which individuals are going after. In some ways, that's not a protection against this. And that, I think, we have to understand.

But I think going forward, that's a way to break the invisibility. I will tell you that the next time they go after Atsuko Fish, or if they try to do something to Atsuko Fish, as they did to people like her in 1942, I think that response may be quite different.

I think the attempt to take Ken Oye, to put him in a concentration camp, is going to be different than it was to put his parents in one, right? Because the visibility is important. If you're going to start rounding up Asian-Americans for some particular reason, let's go down to the White House and put Kamala Harris in a concentration camp, or do something like that against her. It's going to be different.

And that's part of the reason why I think that the current period might be different. The invisibility can be broken. And we have people like Tram Nguyen, for example.

It's going to be different. We did not have people like her in 1942. We did not have people like her after 9/11. But we do have them now, and I think that that's going to be important.

**CHRISTINE
PILCAVAGE:**

Absolutely. It's not going to be [JAPANESE] no more. No more [JAPANESE].

That we do have this vibrant community, an uprising, an uplifting that people are voicing and being a collective action and this generation shift. I know we are running close to the clock. And I know some of our panelists have a hard break at 6:30.

But if those who might be able to stay on, I would like to ask the panelists to stay on to take on a few more questions. And I know those who have other obligations will need to leave for those events. Would that be OK?

And on that note, I'd like to share a question from an MIT student, Yu Jing Chen, who's a junior. She is Vice President of MIT's Undergraduate Association, also one of the founders of the MIT Asian-American Initiative. It's the first MIT club dedicated to Asian-American advocacy.

And she, along with her MIT friends, have been quite active. I just want to highlight a few things because I know a little bit about her. They've partnered with other schools across the US to fundraise for the Asian-American Advancing Justice.

They've been interfacing with MIT campus offices to give inputs and working on developing external legislative calls for action as well as calls on MIT for what it can and should do. And I hope Representative Nguyen, they have been in touch with you. If not, they will be.

And I also want to mention that this weekend there's going to be a graduate as well as undergraduate run installation on MIT's Kresge Lawn that will light up the campus with 3,795 flameless candles, bringing attention to more than those numbers of hate incidents against Asian-Americans this past year alone. And her question is, what responsibilities, and this is the word I really want to highlight, responsibilities do you think higher education or even education in the secondary and primary have in helping eradicate anti-Asian racism and violence? And what can universities or schools do? Maybe if I can have even Professor Moon start, maybe Professor Oye, if you'd like to chime in as well?

KENNETH OYE: I'm going to defer to the panelists on this one. Again, I have a tendency to talk too long on this subject. Kathy, Paul, Tram, your thoughts?

KATHERINE MOON: I'll be quick because I have to depart. One thing that we can do in the academy is do the kind of thing we're doing here. As I listen to folks and watch, I sit here going, this very seminar is a political act. How often do you see people with Asian-looking faces, whatever that means, on a video screen talking comfortably and as part of the real pack, rather than as some kind of a sideshow or invited guest, in a foreignerism sense?

The more that we have these kinds of fora, the more that we have folks in the classrooms, that people have already talked about the importance of bringing the curriculum into classrooms, that include curricula, that include Asian-American history and experiences, those kind of things will certainly help enlighten folks from a young age on. And I think one thing I try to do personally with some of my students of Asian descent is I try to really when I say support them, I mean really try to be a core for them, to help strengthen their core. Sometimes, to stand up against their own family members who believe that you have to do life in a certain way, follow a certain tradition, especially females.

I have been at Wellesley almost 30 years. And I have had students of Asian descent who come and say, I was raised not to talk. I had my grandfather, my grandmother, my father saying a girl should not be heard, should not be seen. And as much as I respect and really enjoy my own cultural traditions and heritage that are Korean, I don't put up with that.

And I gently try to get my students to really reflect. What do they really believe in? What do they really want in life? How do they want to go about living their lives on their terms without necessarily dissing or disrespecting their parents, but learning how to navigate all this?

People of every culture face this problem, what family members want you to do versus what you want to do in life. But I think young people of Asian descent really struggle with this, that it becomes just really heartbreaking for a lot of folks. And I think, as somebody who is in the classroom in a position of so-called authority, I think it's our job to say, you know what? We're here for you.

We're going to hear you out. We support you as long as what you want to do is constructive and good for your life. We're here for you, even if some of your loved ones are not.

And I carry that out with my students, even after they graduate. And I think on a personal level, that can go a long way. I have had people do that for me. They weren't all Asian, either.

KENNETH OYE: I was going to say, Kathy, I'm sure that they weren't all Asian. But I'm also sure that what you're saying now is very much consistent with what I know of you. Kathy is the student who corrected my exaggerated attention to game theory and international relations when we first met. Let me actually ask that we, in the formal session on that very excellent note, with a short thanks, obviously, to the panelists for their wonderful talks, to Michelle and Laura for their great staff support, and most of all to about 450 of you who were providing great questions.

What we're going to do is probably end the formal session now. But I think we can keep the room open. I understand that Kathy has to go right now. Paul, I think can hang out a little bit. Tram can hang out briefly before having to run off to legislative session.

TRAM NGUYEN: Unfortunately, I have to run as well. But yes, I'm going to put my contact information in there in case people want to follow up.

KENNETH OYE: Good. OK. So we'll end the formal session now and keep the room open if people would like to, again, pose other questions or have a little bit of back and forth. But thank you, Kathy. Thank you, Melissa and Tram. I mean, this is wonderful stuff.

And you're right. The act of actually exchanging points of view, talking honestly, is a first step and a critical first step that should take place more often. Thank you all.

**CHRISTINE
PILCAVAGE:** Thank you. And perhaps this might be a first in the series, that we might have smaller, less formal venues to discuss this topic. And, again, my thanks to the panelists. Thank you very much for coming today.

**PAUL
WATANABE:** Mhm.

KENNETH OYE: Great. So now Chris, you can read some of the 51 questions that have piled up in the Q&A then that we didn't get to, or we can--

**CHRISTINE
PILCAVAGE:** Actually, a lot of them are comments, right? There are many people after Paul spoke, after Kathy spoke, after Tram spoke, everybody was thanking-- Paul, you know, what you brought up, your statistic and your insights.

You know, the questions keep jumping. Because people are still writing them. There's one that says, for those of us who are younger, and who are perhaps ABCs, that believe we are American despite having family in China, who may hold related beliefs, but are not part of the Chinese government, should we be forced to disassociate with them?

KENNETH OYE: Yeah. Boy, that's a great question. I mean, let me speak to that one just a little bit.

I'm a Japanese-American. And that issue of association with Japan, OK, or your association with China, can be kind of sensitive. When I was a child growing up in the 1950s, I actually wasn't sure what I wanted to have to do with Japan. I mean, Chris, I might be Director of the MIT Japan program, I don't speak Japanese.

And part of it was that I was getting beaten up every day in kindergarten for being Japanese, for bombing Pearl Harbor. But it didn't stop there. I mean, later in life I was working on trade policy. And I had a paper that was critical of some aspects of Japanese policy, in fact, very critical.

And that being mistaken for being Japanese, not as an American with an independent voice, that was a mistake that some Japanese made. I got a call from a foreign ministry guy who was saying, you know, it would be very good if you could adjust the outcome and the conclusions of your paper in a way that would make less grief for us. And to get a call from an official from another government pushing that. He later called to apologize for making that call. There was someone that was pushing him to do it that I could hear in the background.

But these kinds of confusions take place all the time. And now, it's a big deal if you're Chinese-American. It's a big deal because the concerns over China, some of which are certainly appropriate, but you're being held responsible for them.

And you know, a failure in reporting can lead to federal prosecution. That's something that we've seen on the MIT campus. So your point is one very well-taken.

A feeling of some ambivalence is probably inevitable. But I have to say that I kind of criticized myself for not learning the language, or being maybe a little too concerned about these issues. On the other hand, if you're a kindergartener getting beaten up for being Japanese, it's kind of understandable as well.

PAUL WATANABE: Yeah, but Ken. I was involved in this project several years ago about ambassadors, or people who represented the United States in other countries. And part of it was wondering why, for example, and in terms of ambassadors to Japan, I don't think there's ever been a Japanese-American who's been ambassador to Japan.

KENNETH OYE: Unlike Ireland.

PAUL WATANABE: One time, there was a Chinese-American ambassador to China, Gary Locke. And it got all sorts of excitement. Like, how can we put a Chinese-American in charge of our diplomacy? And if you think about that, the norm is, of course, no one would ever-- indeed, people would expect an Irish-American to be our ambassador to Ireland, or somebody with an English background to be our ambassador to England.

And so why is that? Why is there a difference? Why is there some suspicion that if Paul Watanabe were the ambassador to Japan that, in some ways, that's nefarious? That's wrong.

But of course, if somebody like Nate Kennedy was ambassador to Ireland that, of course, is right. That's a wonderful thing. That's the way it should be.

And I think it is this notion that people from Asia, where they came from, and the countries from which they came from, the lines between them being here-- and we may have been here for decades. Our ancestors may have been born here in the 1840s somewhere in the United States. And that's where we trace our ancestry.

And yet the line between where we are in Asia and the country is often blurred. Whereas for most European immigrants, the line between where you are here and your loyalties and so forth and where you came from are often hard and fast. And that continues to be a problem, I think. And it shouldn't be a problem, but it often is.

And it's reflective, once again, I think, of this perpetual foreigner status. Which Asian-Americans, in particular, I think Kathy's right-- more than any other group, Asian-Americans have been burdened by this notion of otherness based upon our so-called foreignness.

KENNETH OYE: Yeah.

CHRISTINE PILCAVAGE: Absolutely. And you know, I'm looking at the clock. I think we can talk until midnight and even beyond on this discussion.

But I just want to read one comment that was addressed to you, Paul, from Connie Chang. And she writes, if Professor Watanabe could include in written form his statement on eradicating persistent racism, the last words of his talk, I would appreciate it. I think that statement should be signed by organizations supporting hashtag Stop Asian Hate, like the one that was signed by many organizations after the recent worldwide vigil in remembrance of the victims of the Atlanta shootings. So somebody asking and requesting you putting your statement forward.

PAUL WATANABE: Well, I want to thank you for that. And I want to say that part of this is a context for this. And part of it-- I read the chat.

And people say, you got to stand up. You've got to admit the reality, that many of the people who are victimizing Asian-Americans are Blacks. And that's supposed to sort of stop the discussion and say, boy, we've got to really deal with this reality.

And I'm telling people, it's much more complicated than that. You've got to deal with the notion of racial triangulation and so forth and all of that. And the way in which they get people of color fighting against each other, this is exactly part of what the idea is.

And to me, I think the idea of solidarity-- in a very honest sense, I think solidarity between people of color is critical. And I think that there's a tradition of that, and there's a basis of that, and there's a practical reality of that really can be something powerful. And I think that if there's a threat, if you will, to the dominant structure, so people say how can we change things? The greatest threat is if the oppressors see the oppressed joined together.

And that, I think, is our potential strength. And that, I think, is a very real strength. And that's something that, if people want some real change, that's one of the ways that we can attempt to at least try to bring change and at least suffer together, if necessary, but triumph together if necessary as well.

CHRISTINE PILCAVAGE: Absolutely. I find that American racism is adaptable and transferable, as you're saying, to different groups. And that we have to rise up and be in solidarity to one another and realize the interconnectedness of all of this racism that we have. Over to you, Ken, for final comments.

KENNETH OYE: OK. Well, just in closing, there are a couple of points that I think have been made that-- well, so many points that merit following up. And we're not going to do it all right now. But the comments about how, if you're an Asian-American, we're all lumped together.

And I was actually thinking about an example from long ago. A good friend of mine in college, Ben, went to my hometown to have a meal in an all night diner. And he was beaten savagely in the parking lot of the place where I'd worked as a dishwasher by guys who'd returned from Vietnam, and they were beating him up shouting specifically anti-Vietnamese slurs. And Ben was sitting there, scratching his head. Well, he was hurting a lot.

But you know, we talked a little bit afterwards. And he was kind of reflecting on, am I going to say, well, I'm Chinese, and not Vietnamese. And don't beat me up?

No. His point was, to a degree, we don't control how we're treated. We're lumped together. And that's one reason why, just looking at this panel and thinking about it, there's sort of a natural concern for each other. But that natural concern for each other also has to extend to others. OK?

My parents were locked up, as were so many others during World War II, in the middle of a prison camp in Arizona for doing nothing, just for being born of the wrong race in the United States. But their takeaway from that experience is one that I'm kind of thinking about now. Their takeaway was not shame at all over what had happened to them. They were quite angry about it, to some degree.

But their takeaway was do not let this happen to others. OK? It was partially, of course, regard for other Japanese-Americans or other Asian-Americans. But their point was general.

Do not let this happen to others. Be active in the civil rights movement. Be active in the media fellowship house.

And my father's takeaway was also reach out. Be the gentle hand of mercy helping those in need all over the place. He did refugee relief work.

The point that comes from this-- and Paul, your remark about how the efforts to divide us are so great-- I kind of wish my parents could be here. Along with Kathy's mother, Paul's parents, you know, Chris, your mother, we could drag her in, too. And Tram's parents-- I'd really be curious about them. But what that older generation would have to say to the younger generation that was so much of the audience today? You know, I think there's a lot of reaching across lines, not just across ethnic groups by ancestry, but across generations as well.

But thank you all. Thank you all for coming to the event. And we should figure out ways of following up. Thanks, again. Goodnight.

PAUL Thanks, Chris. Thanks, Ken. Thank you very much.

WATANABE:

CHRISTINE Thank you. Goodnight.

PILCAVAGE:

[MUSIC PLAYING]