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Epic High-Fantasy Response to Asian Xenophobia During COVID-19 Pandemic

"The United States will be powerfully supporting those industries, like Airlines and others, that are particularly affected by the Chinese Virus. We will be stronger than ever before!" This is a tweet from President Trump. Notice the phrase "Chinese Virus". Although the virus originated from China, these bigotry terms and ideas target Asian Americans. However, this is no surprise. Historically, fear and anxiety lead people to "prescribe an 'otherness' to disease to feel protected and ascribe blame to justify prejudicial rhetoric", or in other words, xenophobic hate and violence. The United States is home to nearly 21 million Asian Americans and already we are seeing cases of violence and hate. The COVID-19 pandemic has put the world in a dangerous time, but it is neither the fault of Asians nor the time to cause more separation. If this Asian xenophobia is to continue, there will inevitable repercussions post-pandemic.

Fortunately, solutions exist to deescalate this new wave of xenophobia. One current solution suggests education of the ignorance. In fact, the Center for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) suggests that to "help stop the stigma ... by knowing the facts and sharing them with the community". However, this may not be enough, especially when the President of the United States is not taking his organization's advice on the matter.

A better solution exists in between the lines of "Children of Blood and Bone", an epic high fantasy novel, by Tomi Adeyemi. Although the novel may be for young adults, it depicts a lot of mature concepts. In fact, Tomi Adeyemi created her story with her experience of "being black in America during a time of high-profile police shootings". She has taken this experience to give the children of her culture "a mirror" and others "a window ... to see what people who are different from them are going through". Adeyemi has been quite successful at that. Multiple reviews have applauded her effective ability to tackle heavy subject of discrimination in the novel. Tomi Adeyemi depicts multiple aspects of discrimination against the majis through the violence Zelig experiences. Furthermore, she instills in her characters the belief that restoring magic will give power back to the majis and end the violence in Orisha. With this storyline, Adeyemi has unintentionally presented a powerful solution in battling the new coronavirus-related xenophobia with our world's own magic: Asian collectivism.

The current situation of xenophobia is also very similar to the xenophobia experienced by Muslims after the September 11 terrorist attacks. Dubbed as Islamophobia, this xenophobic hate follows a hasty generalization fallacy, concluding that since the September 11 terrorists were Muslims, all Muslims are terrorists. In other words, just because of their religion and the way they look, they are immediately thought to be a threat to many Americans. Muslim Americans still face many discriminations, especially after President Trump condoned

Islamophobic fear by initiated a ban on multiple Muslim countries. It's been almost two decades and yet the xenophobia has not stopped. Reasons as to why can be narrowed to two possible explanations: ongoing conflicts and lack of a single, strong voice. In the past decade, multiple terrorist attacks linked to Islamic terrorist groups. Each time this occurs Islamophobia flares up and Muslim American efforts to eliminate hate is forced to take steps backwards. In regard to Muslim American efforts, there has been much progress with groups supporting multiple issue, multiple ethnicities, and multiple religious sects. However, this "immense diversity in the Muslim American community, it is difficult to reduce it to a single voice" that is strong and impactful. Without large numbers and support from all activist groups, Muslim-American impacts to reduce Islamophobia is limited. In an effort to combat the new Asian xenophobia, the same mistakes should not be made.

Just as the maji's strength come from their magic, Asians have a long-standing value of collectivism, a social construct that is identified by:

One well-accepted set of characterizations of individuals with high levels of collectivistic tendencies states that they (a) 'see themselves as parts of one or more collectives (family, coworkers, tribe, nation)', (b) are 'primarily motivated by the norms of, and duties imposed by, those collectives', (c) are 'willing to give priority to the goals of these collectives over their own personal goals', and (d) 'emphasize their connectedness to members of these collectives'.

In other words, these collective individuals tend to choose the community over himself or herself. Traditionally, these ideas are instilled in Asians at a young age and are expected to carry on. However, times have changed, and the valued idea of collectivism is slowly fading from the context of Asian Americans. First, recent significant historical events, such as the Vietnam War, has sponsored ethnic divides among the Asian-American community. Second, failed collective efforts of the Asian-American community has left a bad taste. For example, the violent massacre at Tiananmen Square has scared Chinese Asians from participating in political activities. However, it should be noted that here in America, it is a democracy; such violent acts cannot be legally committed for political participation. Third, collectivism has also faded in Asian-American culture due to communist regime using this Asian value to legitimize themselves. Again, however, this is in a social context of another country and different purpose. The second and third points should be considered, but in the context of a collectivism effort among Asians-Americans in the United States, it is not quite as relevant. In both of these points, there is a different type of enemy than what Asian Americans are facing now. Lastly, one of key point in Asian collectivism is that Asians are often motivated by the "appreciation [of] the organization and consequences of affect, cognition, and interpersonal behavior", or in other words, an Asian collectivist considers the reputational consequence before acting and avoid changes to their community's norms. In the context of political participation, Asian Americans view themselves as better off than other minorities, especially African Americans, thus, it makes no sense to disrupt the norm. To disrupt the norm and fight back could possibly mean

losing status as the model minority, bringing unnecessary change. Overtime, fear and separation has halted the collectivist nature of Asian American, leading to Asian apoliticalness.

For many immigrant experiences in America, it requires assimilating to the American culture. Often times, this changes the values of a person. This is especially notable in the Asian American community. After years of mistreatment as laborers, Asian Americans worked tirelessly at the fact to assimilate to American culture. Then, when World War 2 occurred, Japanese Americans were discriminated against and efforts to assimilate were restarted. Today, Asian Americans have gained a reputation of the model minority and “suggests the ideas ... that [Asians] have successfully integrated to American society”. However, such a notion has actually halted the Asian American political strength as a community. First, it should be understood that as the model minority it does not mean that Asians have assimilated. In fact, most still consider the idea that Asians can never be truly assimilated into the white American context. Rather, America has granted Asian Americans “relative valorization”, or cultural recognition. Second, this status as a model minority have “ostracized [Asians] from civic participation”. Asians have been somewhat satisfied with the idea of just a white man’s demeaning respect and rather not work politically to change it. Third, Asian Americans, in an effort to assimilate, have forgotten the strength of a collective effort. Instead, they have strongly adopted Western individualism and concern themselves with one self’s financial well-being. This adoption has led to the idea that “Asian Americans are too busy getting ahead and making money to worry about politics.” The constant repetition of this idea has led Asian Americans view that economic success is more important than politics. However, the truth of the matter is that strong political participation is crucial now during this pandemic and its related xenophobia.

Right now, there is public outcry for justice by the Asian-American younger population, celebrities, and leaders. Like the general public, they, too, see the cases of xenophobic violence on social media pages, news media, and elsewhere and are reacting to it. New York House Representative Grace Meng reminds the current situation shows we are still outsiders, despite being revered for our model minority status and it is time to speak out. “Minor Feelings: An Asian American Reckoning” author Cathy Park Hong similarly calls out her Asian-American community to “stop following the carrot” that is being the model minority, “be enraged”, and “speak out about this hate ... and [proactively] fight” the current xenophobic hate. Other Asian-American leaders have “vowed to speak out and protect their community”. An organized Asian-American political voice is needed more than ever if they are to halt the growth of xenophobia.

From a collectivism point of view, current Asian-American activist have chosen to disrupt from Asian-American norms. Now, they are sending an open invite to join them. A study critically analyzing Asian-American participation suggests that “their political fate ... depend on whether they are able to marshal ... a sense of linked fate ... in the group ... toward political participation”. Currently, the situation fits the bill more than ever. All Asian-Americans, especially East and Southeast Asians, are being targeted by the COVID-19 xenophobic hate and violence, thus sharing a “linked fate”. This linked fate ties one Asian-American to another, depending in each other for the Asian collectivism support required to fight this fight. Fighting

this fight will not be easy, but with strength in numbers and an Asian collectivist spirit can be won.

In “Children of Blood and Bone”, a ritual using the relics must be performed to restore the magic and complete the adventure. Similarly, in order to restore the collectivism and complete the political activism journey against the Asian xenophobia, a ritual using social media is in order as well. Social media is a powerful tool that can reach a massive audience and effectively carry out proposed action plans. Currently, the coronavirus federal stay-at-home order and social distancing requirement has blocked traditional political activism routes, such as rallying. However, the online format of social media allows it to still to be a viable solution. Even more so, the current environment set by the rules, have had more recent activity than ever. With people and students at home with nothing to do, social media has been turned on more than it used to, thus an action plan with social media would it be a safe method of political activism during this time, it would also be very effective.

The action plan is not comprehensive, but by the recommendation of UNICEF, ways to fight xenophobia are exploring cultures and teaching others and calling out bigotry and hate and standing up for others. To explore and teach others about culture, it is most important to choose the right platform. A video format is desired when educating and showing, so a social media platform allowing video formats, like YouTube and Facebook, would be most effective. In addition, due to the small attention spans, short, fun clips like TikTok can be highly effective in educating younger age groups. The second method requires more proactiveness on Asian-Americans. Since there is no safe way to congregate right now and start new coverage, social media can be effective. Since there is a sense of anonymity, there is less of physical threat to social media actions. Asian Americans need to share their stories with the community and general public. Other Asian Americans need to share and support each other stories in order to reach outside the Asian sphere. At the same time, Asian Americans should call out any hate and bigotry seen. For example, many did not President Trump get away with his xenophobic slur, calling him out on his tweet and causing an effective media frenzy over it. These social media plans are key to prevent the further intensity and spread of xenophobic hate during quarantine times.

Asian American xenophobic hate is something most didn't expect. For years now, as the model minority, Asian Americans have stood at the sidelines of discriminatory hate until now. The 2020 COVID-19 pandemic has changed the way American culture is viewing the Asian American community. What use to be begrudging respect is now fear of disease turned into hate. Already, this hate has caused violence against Asian American in communities all over the United States. If Asian American let this persist, there will be dire consequences post-pandemic. The time is now to stop this virus. Luckily, answers as to how were not too far away. Hidden in “Children of Blood and Bone” are analogical depictions of the current state the coronavirus-related xenophobia and furthermore, a solution of a magical adventure of restoring Asian collectivism through to be completed by social media.

