



April 2, 2020

Dear Asian Pacific American Law Students Association:

China Flu. Chinese Virus. Kung Flu.

These are just a few of the terms recently thrown out in reference to COVID-19. Commonly known as “coronavirus,” the Trump Administration and its allies are racially rebranding the virus to distract from the Administration’s grave mishandling of the emerging crisis and are shifting blame onto persons of Chinese descent, and by extension of bigoted ignorance, all Asians in the United States.

These are historic times – the Supreme Court has suspended oral arguments for the first time since 1918, we are in the middle of the most virulent influenza pandemic of the last century, and the stock market has seen the greatest plunge since Black Monday of 1987. With uncertainty comes fear, and with fear, anger. There were more than [650 hate crimes](#) committed against Asian Americans in the week of March 18-25, 2020; by March 31, [reported hate crimes skyrocketed to 100 per day](#). Animosity towards Asians is at its highest since the Immigration Act of 1917 and [Takao Ozawa v. United States \(1922\)](#), in which the Supreme Court denied Japanese Americans the right to naturalized citizenship.

The current Administration and its allies have exploited racism for political capital. Many of our fellow citizens, out of fear, ignorance, or bigotry, refute the inherent racism in the term “Chinese Virus.”

We address some of the arguments emerging from the ovens of revanchist xenophobia below:

1. Senator Chuck Grassley (IA) [said that “China Flu” is not racist](#) because we’ve also used names for diseases like the “Spanish Flu.” The Spanish Flu reared its ugly head in 1918; just think about the state of race relations back then. Then, as now, political forces are at work to radicalize pandemic-induced fears to sow rage and ethnocentric fears. We should not resurrect the specter of century-old racism.
2. In a [tweet](#), former White House Director of Speechwriting Marc Thiessen said that the term “Chinese Virus” is not racist because it is a geographically accurate term, akin to West Nile Virus or MERS, a position mirrored in [a piece published by The Federalist](#). This statement is intentionally obtuse. Both of those diseases refer to a geographic region without a nominal or specific association with a country or ethnic group.
3. Senator Jon Cornyn (TX) derided China as being [“a place where people eat bats and snakes and dogs and things like that.”](#) NRA Board Member Ted Nugent [echoed this sentiment](#), saying that the eating of exotic animals reflects a culture of evil, calling it “the same Asian culture of the Bataan Death March and the Rape of Nanking” Senator Cornyn also incorrectly blamed China for being the source of Swine Flu and MERS. These

grossly inaccurate statements reflect the broad stroke assumptions used to group all Asians as one monolithic body that is a prime vector of disease.

4. The Chinese government has [accused](#) the United States of creating the virus. This is a conspiracy theory and in no way justifies politicians bartering xenophobic conspiracies in kind, such as Representative Peter King (R-NY) stating that allegations of COVID-19 as a Chinese bioweapon are “[worthy of investigation](#),” echoing a conspiracy theory [promulgated by Senator Tom Cotton \(AR\)](#). The same breed of false blame placed by the Chinese government on the United States is equivalently weaponized by racists against all Asians.

The “Chinese Virus” endangers us because it stakes us as the virus and white nationalism as the cure. COVID-19 is the most virulent disease in a century; as cases increase exponentially, hate crimes and racial blame will proportionately increase. Despite a recent statement encouraging the “[\[protection\] of Asian Americans](#),” President Trump continues to tap into an ocean of racism that will produce a tsunami of abuse, and the FBI warns that [hate crimes will continue to rise](#).

We are physically separated from one another, and our isolation makes us vulnerable. I implore you to look out for one another and be advocates for all Asians. Through unity, our community can survive the gathering storm of prejudice.

The Asian Pacific Policy & Planning Council is compiling a registry of hate crimes committed against Asian Americans. If you have been the unfortunate victim of a hate crime, please report it to the police and to the APPPC [here](#). You can also report incidents to the New York Attorney General’s Office at civil.rights@ag.ny.gov or 1-800-771-7755.

Please stay safe, stay healthy, and stay vigilant.

Best,

Alexander Woo
APALSA President 2019-2020