

March 2021

Dear Friends,

We were all saddened to hear of the tragedy in Atlanta, another senseless crime, innocent lives lost, communities shattered, and families mourning the loss of their loved ones.

But for some of us this shooting triggered old wounds that have been festering for a lifetime, wounds we don't often talk about, wounds we often deny or ignore. I have failed to speak up; today I would like to share some of my thoughts, not out of anger, but out of care for our community, to provide an opportunity for increased awareness and understanding, in the hopes that we can continue to work to become a hospitable community for all.

When Alex Jun came to speak to our staff, he described microaggressions as "death by a thousand paper cuts." To be Asian in America is to live a life filled with these thousands of paper cuts, microaggressions which constantly remind us that we are not fully accepted as Americans; we are perpetual foreigners. To be Asian in America is also to live a life where people continually make assumptions about us. Many view us as the "model minority," thereby diminishing our hard work and successes as if we were born with an innate ability to achieve, and sometimes resenting us for our success and viewing us as competitors, not collaborators.

- I know that growing up, I lacked Asian representation and it limited my life's experiences. I didn't see myself in my textbooks or on television. I never connected with a special teacher or professor who looked like me and inspired me. As a result, I've felt insecure and hesitant to speak up in many spaces throughout most of my life.
- When my daughter was in 6th grade, 8th graders would regularly call her and her best friend "ching-chong."
- Many people cannot tell my daughter and her best friend apart. They are both Asian, they don't look alike and her best friend wears glasses. This is a "paper cut" that regularly occurs. My daughter acts as this is no big deal, but as a mom, I wonder, how does this affect her self-image and self-esteem? How will this manifest itself in her future?
- During this pandemic, my children were at Home Depot and someone yelled "Wuhan" at them as they quietly stood in line. I've never overtly told them not to engage or respond. But they instinctively remained quiet, standing in line, and never saw the face of their accuser.
- My cousin-in-law was tragically killed by drag racers who hit her car; one news station used a picture of her still living sister-in-law (who has the same name as her) in the news story.
- Though I am one of the most senior members of the staff, I often feel that my opinion is neither respected nor valued at FA. This is why I usually do not speak up in faculty meetings and sometimes team meetings. I have tried to speak up a few times, but my comments seem to be disregarded. Other louder voices dominate, I choose not to fight.

After the Atlanta shooting, people from across the country reached out to see if I was okay. However, my Asian colleagues and I did not hear from anyone from the district, no one reached out to check on us, no statement was made, until one finally appeared on Friday. In the last year, there has been a huge increase in anti-Asian violence across the U.S. with California having the highest number of reported anti-Asian hate incidents. Our students are very aware of this as evidenced by their comments when I discussed the Atlanta shootings with them. Their comments included:

- *As an Asian, I guess I'm always worried when my mom goes out to work.*
- *It is really scary to know that people close to me like my friends could be targeted and hurt. What is even more scary is that some people will try to justify other people hurting my friends just because they are Asian.*
- *These events are happening today and we are trying to stop it. Asians are being hated on and attacked just for being Asian.*
- *Asian hate crimes are a serious issue and have to be resolved*
- *We need to put a stop to the racism in our communities.*

This year I have taken advantage of our virtual environment and my connections with the Twitter history community to invite guest speakers into my virtual classroom and to take my students on virtual field trips. Tomorrow Simon Tam, a speaker who looks like the majority of our students, who spent 10 years fighting for his case to reach the Supreme Court, who has experienced racism, bullying and others trying to define him, will be speaking to my students. I invite guests such as Simon Tam to my classroom for my students, so that they will be comfortable seeing people who look like them, as well as those who don't, so they will know and understand other's stories, so they develop empathy and understanding. I do all of this in the hopes that their world will be expanded and that they will see the possibilities before them, not the limitations, as they go forth to make a difference as engaged, informed and empathetic citizens in our country.

Thank you for listening. If you talk to my fellow Asian colleagues and our students, they will have stories to tell you as well. Listening is a powerful tool. When we listen empathetically to each other, we can stop assuming, we can start understanding, and we can begin healing. We can work together to build an outstanding community where all are welcome, feel welcome and heard. As Alex Jun and Chimamanda Ngozi stated, the danger of a single story isn't necessarily that it's wrong, but that it's incomplete. Let's work together toward making our FA story one that is rich, wonderful, inclusive, empathetic and complete.

Grateful for you all,
Karalee