

 CORONAVIRUS POLITICAL IMPACTS

# Andrew Yang faces backlash from the Asian American community over op-ed

*The former presidential candidate has been criticized for comments last week.*

By **Stacy Chen**

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## Who is Andrew Yang?

The entrepreneur became CEO of Manhattan Prep, a test-prep company that was acquired by Kaplan in 2009.

Drew Angerer/Getty Images

Former Democratic presidential candidate Andrew Yang is facing backlash from the Asian American community for his column in [The Washington Post](#) last week addressing racism surrounding the [novel coronavirus](#).

The article, titled "We Asian Americans are not the virus, but we can be part of the cure," was published April 1 in response to the [recent surge of](#)

[discrimination](#) against Asian Americans amid coronavirus fears. It starts with Yang's recent experience at a grocery store when he writes he felt judged and demeaned.

"For the first time in years, I felt it. I felt self-conscious -- even a bit ashamed -- of being Asian," Yang wrote.


[MORE: Backlash against Asians could hinder efforts to contain coronavirus, expert says](#)

In many cases, that unease and wariness towards Asian Americans manifested into [harassment](#) and violent attacks around the country, including a man in New York City who was [sprayed](#) with air freshener while riding the subway, a Filipino boy [bullied](#) at a California middle school and the [stabbing](#) of an Asian American family in Midland, Texas, where the suspect allegedly claimed he targeted the family because they were Chinese.

As a way to improve the current situation, Yang implored Asian Americans to demonstrate they are part of the solution by embracing "our American-ness in ways we never have before."

"We need to step up, help our neighbors, donate gear, vote, wear red white and blue, volunteer, fund aid organizations, and do everything in our power to accelerate the end of this crisis. We should show without a shadow of a doubt that we are Americans who will do our part for our country in this time of need," Yang wrote in his op-ed.



 *FILE PHOTO: Democratic presidential candidate Andrew Yang greets supporters before taking the stage during a rally in Washington Square Park, May 14, 2019, in New York City.*  
Drew Angerer/Getty Images

Jenny Yang, an Asian American comedian and writer whose known for using her work to address Asian American issues, said this is the wrong message.

"I felt my stomach sink," Jenny Yang told ABC News. "Andrew is telling us we cannot expect telling people to not be racist to work, so we should lean in to be more American so we will be less threatening to other Americans," - a direct reference to Yang's words in the article, "I obviously think that being racist is not a good thing. But saying, 'Don't be racist toward Asians,' won't work."

Two days after the article was published, Jenny Yang posted a video of her attempting to take the former presidential candidate's advice and embrace her "American-ness" in order to show "how ridiculous this premise was."

In the video, she is dressed in red, white and blue and is standing on the street with a sign that reads, "Honk if you won't hate crime me," while handing out Clorox wipes to strangers. The video had garnered over 78,400 views through Sunday morning.

*hey @andrewyang, consider this me showing my  
"AMERICAN-NESS" [pic.twitter.com/ENfs9wnF3G](https://pic.twitter.com/ENfs9wnF3G)*  
— Jenny Yang (@jennyyangtv) April 3, 2020

"We are fighting two viruses at once," Simu Liu, an Asian Canadian actor who's best known in his role in the TV show "Kim's Convenience," said, calling Yang's op-ed "a slap in the face."

Set to play Shang Chi, the first Asian American superhero in the Marvel Universe, Liu initially responded on April 2 to the piece on Twitter: "At a time where Asian diaspora from around the world are experiencing massive racism and discrimination, @AndrewYang basically just told us to suck it up, eat a cheeseburger and buy an American flag."

To which Yang responded the next day, "Just saying that we need to do all we can to ease this crisis and step up in this time of national and global need," adding that he's proud of his heritage and knows people will have different takes.

*Thanks Simu. Just saying that we need to do all we can to ease  
this crisis and step up in this time of national and global need.  
Lead and serve. Very proud of my heritage and know that  
different people will have different takes.*  
— Andrew Yang 🇺🇸 (@AndrewYang) April 3, 2020

Liu, who said he recently experienced harassment when someone yelled "coronavirus" at him outside a restaurant in Sydney, said he appreciates the dialogue from Yang but believes he backpedaled and failed to address the problem.

"It frames the onus on us, somehow we have to prove we are worthy of belonging. We do belong, the burden should not be on us," Liu told ABC News.

Yang's team had no comment when ABC News reached out for a response.



The call for Asian Americans to display their "American-ness" was only part of the problem, experts argue. Yang's invocation of Japanese-Americans who volunteered for military duty during World War II, without proper historical context, was another point of contention, they said.

"Many in our community, during and after the forced removal of our families in '42, argued precisely what Yang is saying. Just be good Americans, don't make waves or protest, show how patriotic we are and everything will be fine. Well, my family lost their constitutional rights. I wouldn't consider that 'just fine,'" Bruce Embrey, the co-chair of the Manzanar Committee, a nonprofit organization dedicated to raise awareness about the incarceration of Japanese-Americans in World War II, told ABC News.

Embrey, who had four uncles serve in WWII, says their heroism shows an incomplete story. His mother's family was held at Manzanar, a concentration camp in California, where there were protests and strikes. Japanese-Americans spoke up and actively challenged the notion of patriotism, Embrey added, and that led to progress like the Civil Liberties Act of 1988, which offered redress to every Japanese-American incarcerated during the war.

"Fighting for one's rights against inequality and racism has been a constant in our nation's history. Fighting back is as American as you can get," Embrey said.

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## Editor's Picks



FBI warns of potential surge in hate crimes against Asian Americans amid coronavirus



Lisa Ling says Trump is 'deflecting blame' by calling coronavirus 'Chinese virus'




Andrew Yang calls Trump 'symptom of a disease'



This isn't the first time Yang has found himself in hot water with the Asian community. He faced criticism when he used racial stereotypes in his speeches, saying the "opposite of Donald Trump is an Asian guy who likes math," referring to his campaign slogan "Make America Think Harder."

In a September Democratic presidential debate, Yang said, "I'm Asian so I know a lot of doctors" when addressing the health care system in the U.S.



 *FILE PHOTO: Several thousand of Los Angeles residents attend a rally for Democratic presidential candidate Andrew Yang on Sept. 30, 2019, in Los Angeles.*  
Ted Soqui/Sipa USA via AP

Author and journalist Jeff Yang, whose work has focused on Asian American identity, points out that Yang has a unique and challenging role when it comes to representing Asian Americans in national politics, a community that's "almost as diverse as the country at large."

The complex nature of the group is why Yang needs to be more thoughtful, Jeff Yang told ABC News, especially with such a significant platform. He

said Andrew Yang should clarify people's perceptions of Asian Americans rather than dilute them into racial tropes.

In March, the FBI released an analysis predicting an increase in hate-crime incidents against Asian Americans "based on the assumption that a portion of the US public will associate COVID-19 with China and Asian American populations." The analysis indicated there has already been an increase in reports of hate crimes from Los Angeles to New York to Texas.

[\(MORE: FBI warns of potential surge in hate crimes against Asian Americans amid coronavirus\)](#)

With the rising wave of coronavirus-related racism, groups like the Asian Pacific Policy & Planning Council, Chinese for Affirmative Action and San Francisco State University's Asian American Studies Department launched sites allowing people to report cases. In just the past two weeks, they have received over [1,100 reports](#) with incidents ranging from verbal harassment and shunning to physical assault.

Asian American Advancing Justice, the nation's largest Asian American legal and civil rights organization, has also been tracking coronavirus-related racist incidents.

[MORE: What we're learning from online coronavirus screening project](#)

Stewart Kwoh, founder of Asian American Advancing Justice, believes the winning strategy to combat racist behavior is twofold: first, people need to stand up, call it out and mobilize other groups for support, and second, there needs to be unity against the virus, our common enemy.

"I think he (Yang) neglected to emphasize the first part; he did not take a strong stand on fighting racism, that's where the criticism is well taken," Kwoh told ABC News. Given that, Kwoh believes Yang's heart was in the right place and that some of his argument is valid.

Every major shift in culture in this country came from people who spoke up, Jeff Yang said, adding, "It's not about an apology, but a bigger conversation, and that means loud noises and resistance."

**What to know about the novel coronavirus:**

- *How it started and how to protect yourself:* [\*\*coronavirus explained\*\*](#)
- *What to do if you have symptoms:* [\*\*coronavirus symptoms\*\*](#)
- *Tracking the spread in the US and worldwide:* [\*\*coronavirus map\*\*](#)

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