

The Guardian



'Turn back this wave of hate': 100 writers call for an end to anti-Asian hostility

Reports of hate crimes and violence against the Asian and Asian American community have surged since early in the pandemic

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pandemic of Asian Americans being blamed for “bringing the virus” into the country and being told “go back to China”.

The attacks have erupted in college campuses, city subways and online. The FBI has warned local law enforcement across the country that Asian American communities are at risk due to rising hostility during the coronavirus crisis.

Among the more serious attacks that have been chronicled was a stabbing of a Burmese man and his two young children in Midland, Texas, in March. The teenaged assailant told police he had targeted the family because he thought they were Chinese and were spreading coronavirus.

The authors of the joint statement say that “the time to turn back this wave of hate is now. Reports of any individuals being spat on, stabbed, beat up, or verbally assaulted are disturbing enough when they are isolated incidents.”

The statement continues: “When such attacks are collectively driven by hate, in such large volume, the onus lies heavily on civil society and our elected representatives to condemn them.”

The signatories comprise a roll call of top Asian American and other writers. The lead authors include the Vietnamese American writer Viet Thanh Nguyen, whose novel *The Sympathizer* won the Pulitzer prize for fiction; Ayad Akhtar, an American-born playwright who also won a Pulitzer prize for drama; American novelist Celeste Ng; and the British actor, rapper and performer Riz Ahmed.

Another of the lead authors, the Korean American writer Min Jin Lee, said she hoped the statement would be a “clarion call that all forms of racist hatred, especially at this moment, are unwelcome, unacceptable and intolerable”.

Other prominent writers among the signatories are Dave Eggers, Amitav Ghosh, Salman Rushdie, George Saunders and Alice Sebold.

The most controversial aspect of the statement is its claim that the Trump administration has been complicit in the surge in anti-Asian hate crimes. The writers say that the brazen attacks that have occurred during the pandemic “have been egged on at times by an administration drawing on racist tropes and stereotypes, eager to distract from its own missteps”.

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In March, Trump regularly used the phrase “Chinese virus”. His misleading use of the term prompted was followed by an uptick in cases of racial abuse being directed against Asian Americans.

When confronted about his use of language, Trump tried to justify it. “It’s not racist at all. It comes from China, that’s why,” he said.

Jafreen Uddin, executive director of the AAWW, said that the use of the phrase “China virus” had displayed a lack of empathy on Trump’s part towards communities impacted by the surge in hatred. “It took weeks for that phrase to stop - I think it showed a lack of understanding of the power of words.”

The joint statement is designed as the start of an engagement by the literary world that will culminate on Wednesday in a virtual day of action convened by Pen America and AAWW. The day will consist of workshops exploring the history of violence and hatred against Asian Americans in the US and poetry readings by 20 poets.

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