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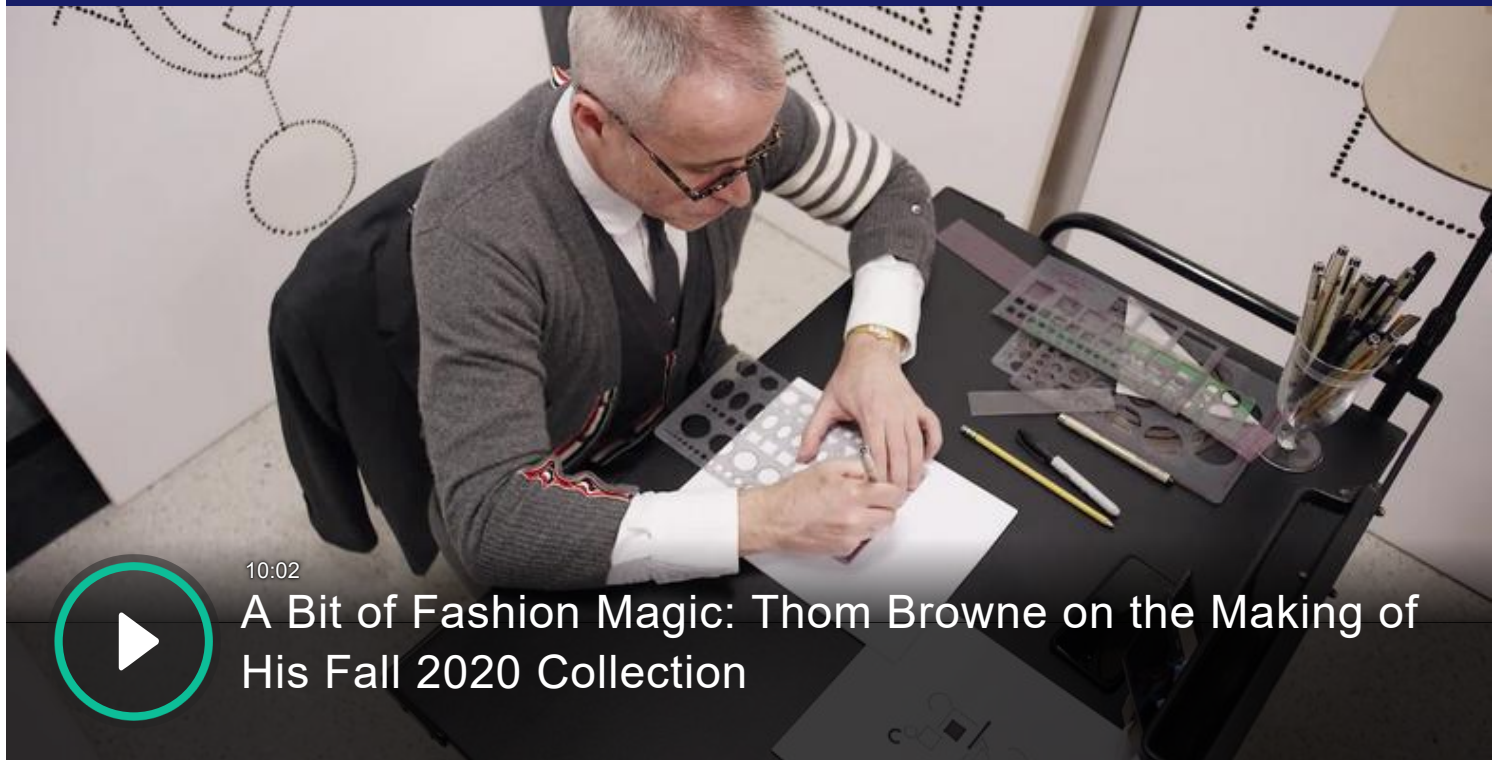
# For Asian Americans, There Are Two Pandemics: COVID-19 And Daily Bigotry

*“The person called my Filipino mother a ‘Chinese coronavirus bitch’ and said that both of my parents are ‘bearers of the virus.’”*

**By Brittany Wong**

03/25/2020 02:55pm EDT | Updated March 26, 2020





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masks. It drew attention.

“All of a sudden another passenger yelled at them, telling them to go back to their country,” Cruz told HuffPost. “The person called my Filipino mother a ‘Chinese Coronavirus bitch’ and said that both of my parents are ‘bearers of the virus.’”

They stopped taking the BART train last week, a day shy of the lockdown in San Francisco. When Cruz asked her mother if it was OK that she shared the story with HuffPost, she agreed with one request.

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“My mother wanted to clarify that this was the *third* racist incident she’s personally experienced or witnessed on the train in the last few weeks,” Cruz said. “My parents are now working from home, where my mother misses her clients, but not the racists on the train.”

Encounters like those experienced by Cruz’s parents have become commonplace for Asian Americans in the wake of the current global public health emergency.

Because COVID-19 originated in Wuhan, China, Asian Americans have been widely scapegoated, regardless of whether they’re Chinese or not. (Asian Americans — Indonesians, Chinese, Koreans, Thai, Filipinos, and others — aren’t a monolith, but for Americans with bigoted views, that hardly matters.)

Asian Americans of every descent are dealing not only with the virus itself, but verbal and physical violence from xenophobic neighbors. The choice to wear a mask or not is widely debated among friends and relatives — do you wear one to protect yourself from the virus or does it draw unnecessary attention?

The encounters are not unlike what [American Muslims and other Arabs and South Asians](#) experienced after the September 11 terrorist attacks.

While President Trump finally called for [Asian Americans to be protected](#) on March 23, he failed to acknowledge the part he’s played in their vilification. He continues to interchangeably call COVID-19 the “Chinese virus,” even as the



even changed his own news conference script to reflect that ([a viral photograph](#) shows the word “corona” crossed out and replaced with “Chinese” in the president’s handwriting). At least one member of his staff reportedly joked that it [was the “Kung Flu.”](#)

Given all that, it’s not really surprising that a bipartisan pair of House lawmakers recently unveiled a resolution that [blames China for causing a global pandemic](#) and calls on the Chinese government to publicly declare that COVID-19 began there.

But words matter and have the potential to stoke an already racially charged American landscape.

A [videotaped attack](#) on an Asian man collecting recyclables in San Francisco in late February sparked outrage and gave a glimpse into what was to come.

On March 10, a [Korean woman in midtown Manhattan](#) was confronted on the street by somebody yelling, “Where is your corona mask, you Asian bitch?” before punching the woman and dislocating her jaw. A week later in Queens, New York, a father walking with his [10-year-old son was harassed](#) by a person yelling, “Where the fuck is your mask? You fucking Chinese” before being struck over the head. And on March 14, a man was arrested after [stabbing a Burmese man and his young son](#) in a Sam’s Club in Midland, Texas. (Graphic [photos on social media](#) show the boy with a huge gash reaching from behind his ear all the way across to his eye.)



# intensified when President Trump uses terms like 'Chinese virus,' which indirectly suggest that Asians are to blame.”

- THERESE MASCARDO, A PSYCHOLOGIST WHO WORKS WITHIN THE ASIAN AMERICAN COMMUNITY

There are no official numbers on hate crimes yet, but San Francisco State University [found a 50% rise](#) in the number of news articles related to the coronavirus and anti-Asian discrimination between Feb. 9 and March 7.

The anxiety triggered by stories like this has many Asian Americans glad to follow stay-at-home orders, given what could await them at their local supermarkets. In public, they're fearful of what an errant cough or wearing a mask might do, said [Therese Mascardo](#), a psychologist of Filipino descent who works within the Asian American community.

“Asians are experiencing reluctance to seek medical care when they are ill, for fear that they will confirm stereotypes about Asians being more responsible for spreading the virus,” she said.

This is called a “stereotype threat,” which refers to the risk of confirming a negative stereotype about one's social group.

“This stereotype is unfortunately only intensified when President Trump uses terms like ‘Chinese virus,’ which



**Eugene Gu, MD**   
@eugenegu



The H1N1 swine flu pandemic that infected up to 1.4 billion people and killed up to 575,000 originated in factory farmed pigs in the United States. Yet nobody ever calls it the “American Pig Flu.” Let’s stop calling the coronavirus the “Chinese Virus.” We’re all in this together.

♡ 409K 7:19 AM - Mar 22, 2020



💬 108K people are talking about this



[Vivian Shaw](#), a post-doctorate sociologist at Harvard University, is [collecting stories](#) documenting xenophobia and racism related to coronavirus. Looking at the uptick of stories she’s received, she, too, believes Trump’s rhetoric is fueling these racially charged encounters.

She also believes it’s a highly calculated move on the president’s part.

“Trump’s current stoking of xenophobic populism is his way of signaling that the lives of Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders are useful to the U.S. insofar as they provide a way for the administration to sidestep its utter mishandling of this disaster,” she said.

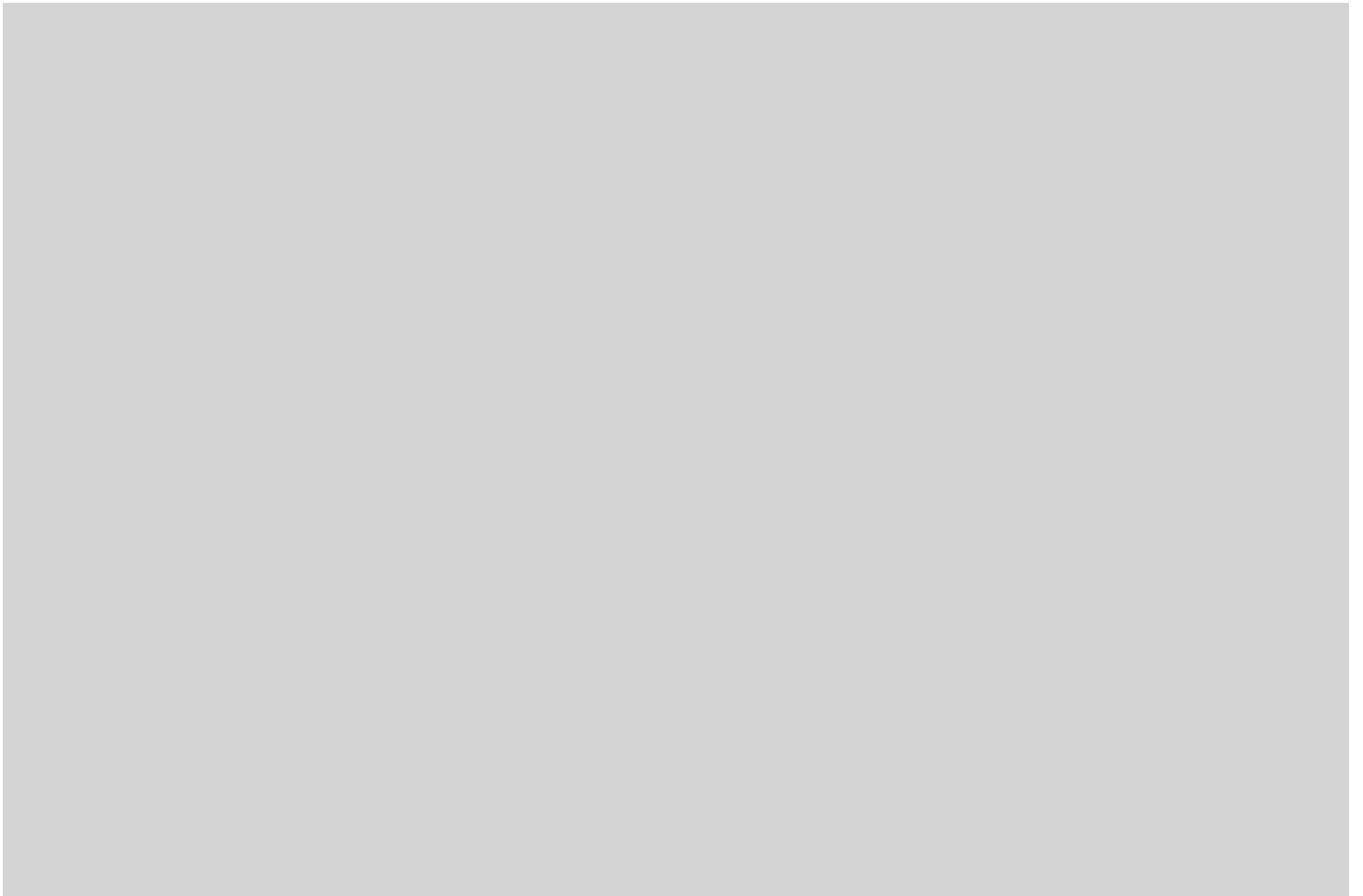
The violent incidents against Asian Americans make headlines, but there’s also heavy-handed microaggressions (sideways glances in the market, rushing out of an elevator when a person of Asian descent gets in) and verbal abuse to contend with. In interviews over the past week, readers told HuffPost that such experiences have become an everyday part of life.



flight home from Denver, CO to Newark, NJ. Barrett, who is disabled and often wears a mask due to asthma, sat down early for pre-boarding given their disability.

“While getting on the plane, a few white people looked at me with obvious disgust. There were eye rolls and exasperated ‘Ughs,’” Barrett told HuffPost. “One person even looked my way and called me gross.”

“It was degrading,” the writer said. “The comments I used to get about wearing a mask were ones of curiosity but in these cases, white people felt completely OK commenting on a total stranger. It was like my humanity or feelings didn’t matter.”



DESIGN VIA GETTY IMAGES

Many Asian Americans say they're doubly afraid to leave home, fearing not only the coronavirus but racism, too.



February, his 18-year old daughter had gone to a Joann's Fabrics to get some knitting supplies. While shopping, she encountered a hostile older white woman.

"The woman got into her face saying, 'You can't be here! You could have corona!'" Yoon said. "My daughter was shocked, confused, and uncomfortable and tried to avoid this woman, but she wouldn't leave her alone and continued."

Employees witnessed the verbal attack and immediately ejected the woman from the store.

In the parking lot, the woman found another target in an Asian family getting out of their car.

"She went straight toward them, saying the same racist things she'd told my daughter," Yoon said. "She even had the nerve to deliberately spit on them. The family was in shock and store employees quickly called the police."

On March 16, [Matthew L](#), a business analyst from New York, was at Crunch Fitness in the Financial District when a fellow gymgoer made comments about the city going on lockdown and singled him out. "Your people and your government caused this," the man told Leung.

"I was confused at first, but after realizing he was instigating me, I got in his face and returned the same energy back," Leung said. "He went on more about how the Chinese brought that 'dirty virus' over here and when I didn't back down, the argument turned physical. I got spit on my face and shirt, then a minor fight ensued."





**“It’s really disheartening to see these comments by the dozen come up in my inbox just because I am Asian, and to see that many treat this virus as a joke or feel that their racism is justified.”**

**- TRANG DONG, A UC BERKELEY STUDENT ON HER EXPERIENCES ON TIKTOK**

Leung left the altercation without serious injuries and alerted the Crunch staff to what had happened. And a good Samaritan stepped in to let the other man know what he did was “fucked up,” Leung said.

Online, where people are emboldened by the anonymity of comment sections, the taunts and racial slurs are commonplace.

Before the stay-at-home orders were put out, [Trang Dong](#), a UC Berkeley student, filmed a video where she and her cousin were “goofily eating pho” on TikTok.

As fears about the coronavirus intensified, Dong said the nasty comments began pouring in.

“It was ‘oh they’re eating bat soup’ and lots of ‘coronavirus check’ comments simply for us just being Asian,” she said. “It’s really disheartening to see these comments by the dozen come up in my inbox just because I am Asian, and to see that many treat this virus as a joke or feel that their racism is justified.”



Italian Americans — in Italy, deaths from COVID-19 [have exceeded China's](#) — Dong gets a little frustrated.

“I’ve seen no anti-Italian rhetoric surrounding their culture and food,” she said. “Most posts I’ve seen shared from Italy are the signs of unity as citizens sing together from their balconies whereas news about China is repeatedly portrayed in a negative light. It’s a vicious double standard that is only hurting Asian communities.”



**Nancy Wang \*Not A Virus\* Yuen**


@nancywyuen



I planned to go out for groceries today and this gives me pause. So sorry this happened to you Jeff. [twitter.com/originalspin/s...](https://twitter.com/originalspin/s...)

**Jeff Yang**


@originalspin

So I had my first “breathing while Asian” moment.

Went out for groceries and an older masked white woman passing by the line shouted “FUCK YOU!” at me for no apparent reason. As I stared at her, she pulled off her mask, coughed directly at me, turned on her heel and walked off.

 23
 6:44 PM - Mar 23, 2020
 


[See Nancy Wang \\*Not A Virus\\* Yuen's other Tweets](#)


Reactions to such casual, offhand racism inevitably vary. That’s understandable, said [Gabrielle Zhuang-Estrin](#), a clinical social worker who works in the Asian American community in Los Angeles.

“It’s daunting and overwhelming to respond to someone who is profiling you or using abusive racist language,” she said. “If it happens to you, remember that your response, whatever it is, is the right response: Perhaps you ignore the assailant,



see them for what they are doing: being racist.

Accepting how you handled the encounter in the moment is important, Zhuang-Estrin said, because you don't want to deal with that "pang of guilt or concern that you haven't handled the situation 'right' on top of everything else."

Talk about it online, too. To distance themselves and combat some of the xenophobia, Asian Americans have started a #IAmNotAVirus campaign (In France, #JeNeSuisPasUnVirus has been trending.)



**Burnt Rice Bunch**

@BurntRiceBunch



We are not diseased.

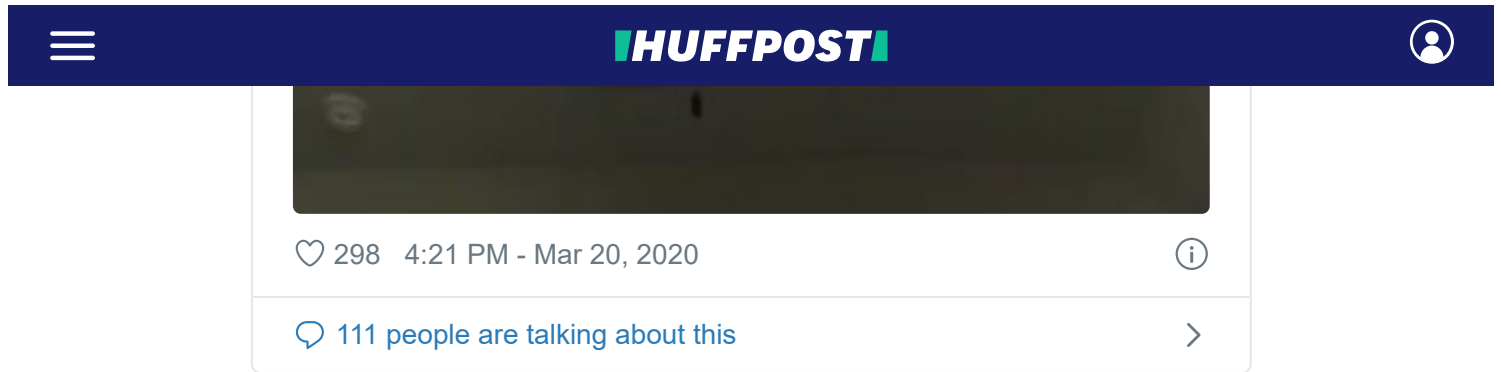
We are not scapegoats.

We are not a virus.

We are Asian-Americans tired of the anti-Asian sentiment from COVID-19.

Tell your story and join the collective of pan-asian youth retaking our narrative. [#IAmNotAVirus](#)





Hearing others' stories can be heartening, especially when you're doubting the validity of your own experiences, Mascardo said.

"It's important because when under attack, it's easy to second-guess oneself, or minimize the act," she said. "You might think, 'Did that really happen or was it all in my head? Maybe it wasn't really that big of a deal,'" she said.

Online communities — [NextShark.com](https://www.nextshark.com) or the Facebook group [Subtle Asian Traits](#) — can serve as sources for support and validation, Mascardo said.

For those who aren't Asian American, be an ally and speak up against injustice. Earlier this month, [a viral video](#) showed people on a train in the UK defending an Asian woman who was being racially harassed for wearing a mask to protect herself as a cancer survivor.



Responding thoughtfully in the moment like the traingoers is huge, especially if you have [bystander training](#). But allyship can also just mean checking in on your Asian American friends to see how they're doing, Mascardo said.



all the racism against Asians lately, I was wondering if anyone has treated you differently?' Just listen and support them," she said. "And please, don't minimize their experience."

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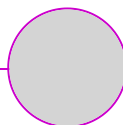
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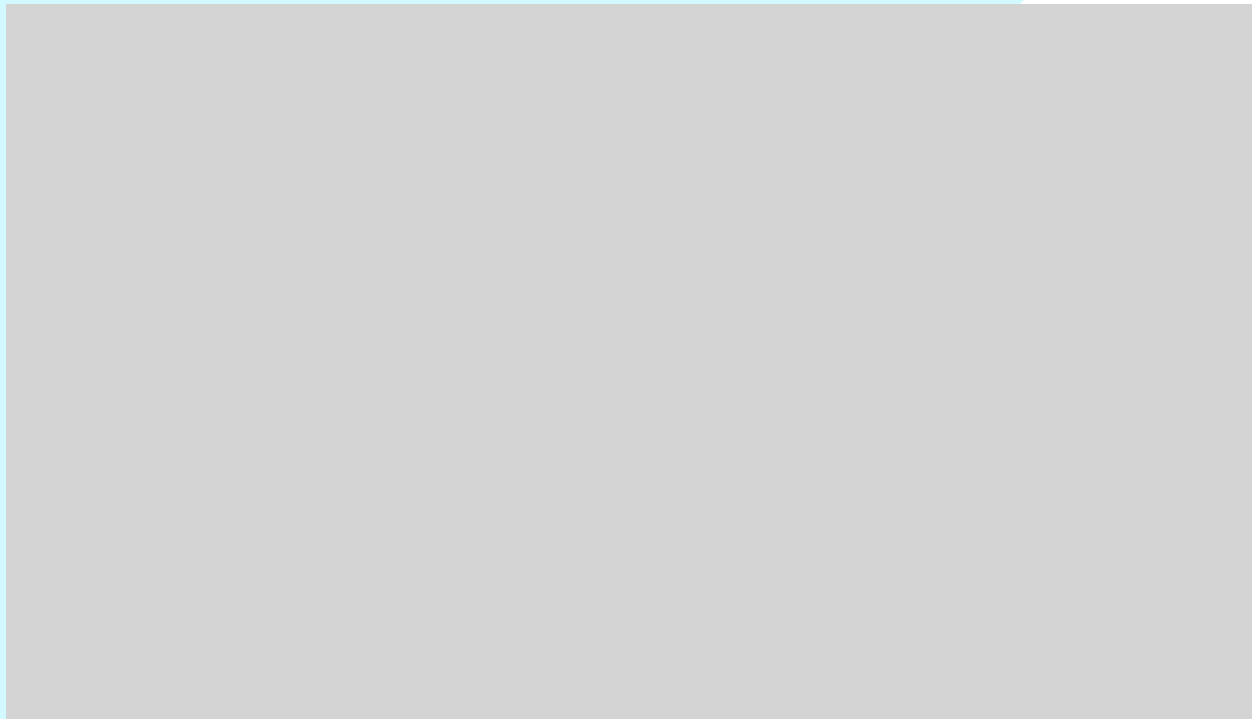
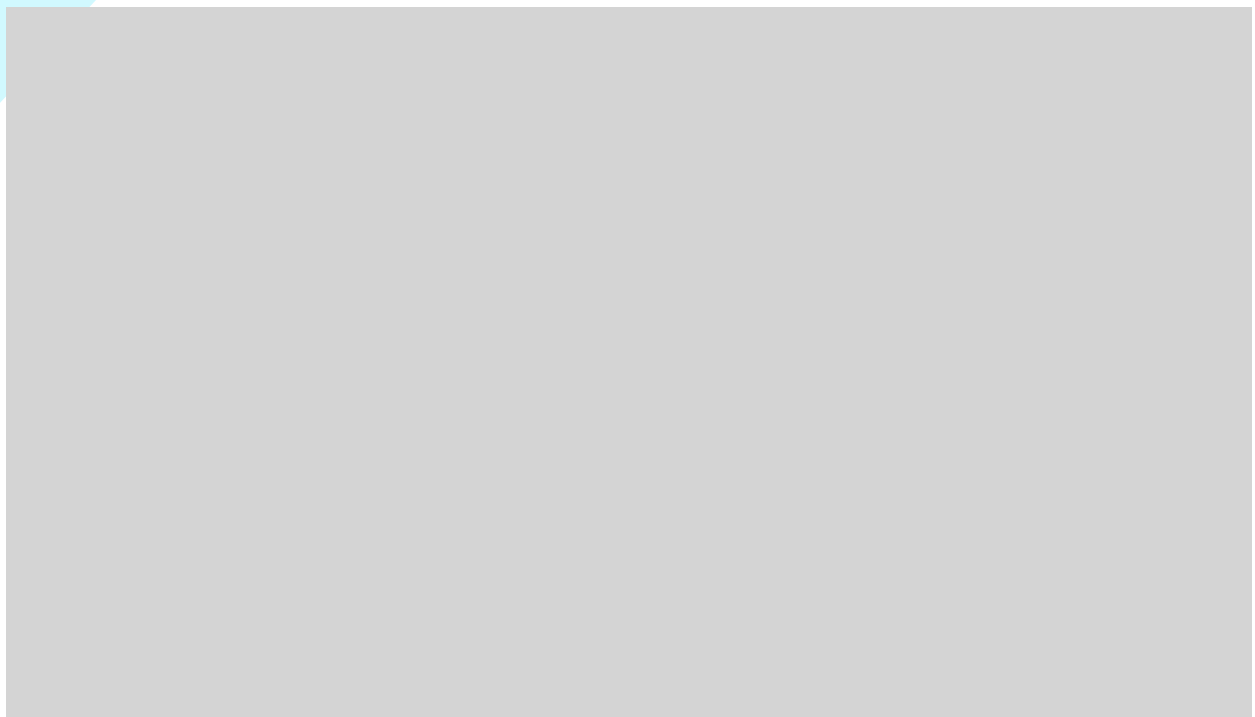
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