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The Chinatown section of Boston CRAIG F. WALKER/GLOBE STAFF

One of the common claims voiced time and time again amid the coronavirus pandemic is that we are at war but with an invisible, faceless foe. For many Americans, this is not true; to them Asians and Asian Americans are the faces of COVID-19. They are the faces

of the enemy.

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who prepare and deliver meals, stock grocery shelves, work in plants to manufacture face masks and respirators, comfort the living, and care for the dead. They are the heroic ones called upon to venture into danger rather than shelter from it.

Before college classes moved online, a student of Asian descent told how she feared going to class and perhaps coughing and incurring the wrath of her teacher and classmates. She then asked me whether I thought that the treatment of Asian Americans and the manifestations of prejudice would weaken after the pandemic subsides and we can address more clearly the wages of intolerance and xenophobia. I replied that the long experience with race in this country suggests that lessons are often not learned and, as often as not, trauma elicits scapegoating and prejudice again and again. But I also told her that I hoped that I was wrong.

Change can begin with small steps. Perhaps the next time we brush our teeth, wash our hands for the umpteenth time, or tackle the challenge of our unruly hair, we can glance at

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