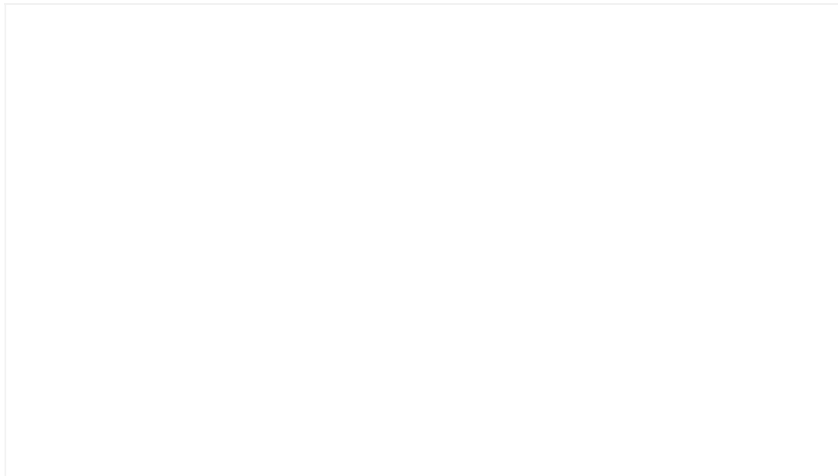


## OPINION

# I'm Korean-American. My neighbors scare me more than coronavirus | Opinion

Daniel Son, Special to the USA TODAY NETWORK    Published 6:30 a.m. ET April 27, 2020



What do the coronavirus and most Americans have in common? Neither one can tell the difference between Korean and Chinese people. To the virus, everyone looks the same. To the average American we Asians “all look the same,” too. Why does it matter? Because, like contracting the coronavirus, simply looking Chinese can get me hurt or killed.

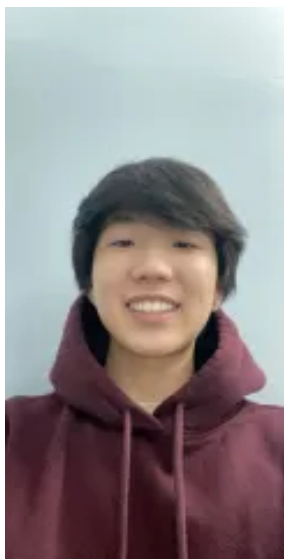
I am an Asian-American teenager living in Palisades Park, New Jersey. I do not cough on vegetables. I do not eat bats or Pangolins. I did not go to Florida to party on the beach during Spring Break. I maintain the proper social distance and isolate myself as required. But, I also eat fast food like my peers. I love to run. I like playing League of Legends and the typical stuff any American teenager loves. You can’t tell all that just by looking at me — especially if you’re silently blaming me for the virus outbreak because you think I’m Chinese.

Yes, China is responsible. But does that mean that all Chinese people are inherently bad, and that all of them are individually responsible for the actions of people who share the same race as them? No.

That’s just like saying that all Americans are murderers just because an American committed a murder. There is no reason for people to see all Asians as virus-carriers, and yet, they do.

I’m an American. I’m Korean. I’m your neighbor. I’ve grown up here just like you have, so why is it that people still stare at me like I’m an infected carrier?

There are millions of Asian-Americans, some of whom have never been to China, or even Korea or out of the United States, who are buying guns and sheltering in place and self-isolating. It’s not because we fear the COVID-19 virus, but because we fear our neighbors. It’s like World War II Japanese internment camps where Japanese Americans were forced into concentration camps in America after the bombing of Pearl Harbor. More than



Daniel Son (Photo: Provided)

120,000 people of Japanese ancestry, including entire families, most of whom lived on the Pacific Coast of America, went from being community members to community outcasts. Why? Because of their race â€” something they couldnâ€™t change. Those of us who remember those times, or have relatives who do, are worried.Â

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Now, with the simple declaration that the current shut-downs of bars, small businesses, theatres, gyms and public venues like campgrounds and parks are â€œfor the good of the health of the country,â€ we wonder, will governors and the president think internment camps are a good idea too?

Donâ€™t say, â€œOh, of course not. Thatâ€™s not reasonable or logical.â€

Is it reasonable or logical for people to hoard toilet paper and hand sanitizer? Itâ€™s perception, not reality, that drives people to act the way they do when theyâ€™re terrified and in fear for their lives.Â Â

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The media has covered Asians buying guns â€” making us look even more threatening. But what about how weâ€™re being affected? What weâ€™re experiencing? What we fear? Asians are buying firearms in order to protect themselves from the very possible attacks of racists, and from ordinary people who are scared and uninformed. The media does not cover nearly enough of the assaults, harassment and abuse towards Asians. I see more about this racism on social media than I do on the actual news, which goes to show how lacking the media is in the coverage of Asians. Why do Asians today have to tolerate the inexcusable hate crimes done against us? It just seems like the fear we contain inside ourselves is unknown to other non-Asians. In order for people to acknowledge and understand our pain and fear, the media needs to do its part and spread awareness about Asians as well as this virus.

So, before staring at and avoiding us Asians, please take into account our feelings; our emotions. Think about the pain we are going through, and how scared we all are to even step foot outside of our houses. The world would be a much better place if we just stayed calm and rational and tried to understand one another.

*The writer is a high school sophomore who lives in Palisades Park.Â*

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