Responses to student essays and videos   August, 8, 2020
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(This text was originally intended for an oral response, not a formal written essay.)

Claire, Alan, Luke, Nidhi, Sarah, and David, thank you for your thought-provoking essays and video responses. Your projects are situated in and respond to the global crisis of the Covid-19 pandemic, and they shed light on pressing issues at the intersection of race, disease, and public health, from the surge of anti-Asian xenophobia and racism to the pandemic's disproportionate effect on historically marginalized minority communities in this country.

Claire's research focuses on discrimination and hate crimes against people of Asian background in the pandemic. Alan explores this topic through the lens of misinformation. Luke and Nidhi both tackle the model minority stereotypes, Luke contending with Asians as the perpetual foreigners and Nidhi exploring the harm of such stereotypes on Asian-Black solidarity. Adding to these lines of investigations, Sarah and David shed light on the pandemic's exposure of racial disparities among marginalized minority communities, especially among the Black and Latinx communities.

I am inspired by your effort and thoughtfulness in developing critical analysis and skills in conducting surveys and locating academic references or media sources. Here, I will offer brief feedback on each of your projects, both the essay and the video response.

Clarie, I was particularly struck by what you conclude from your survey that "the majority of students…are more fearful of suffering discriminatory attacks than they are of actually contracting Covid-19." In your video, you elaborate on another stunning point – a parallel between western media's responses to SARS and to Covid-19, especially in their choices of terminologies and utilization of images of Asian people wearing masks in virus-related reports.

The appropriation of these images and sometimes the misuse of these images are so visually impactful that it might be worth bringing them to the essay for a textual analysis. If space allows, you may situate anti-Asian racism in a broader historical context. Offering a historical background about yellow peril or Chinese/Asian exclusion in the late 19th century and early 20th century will also help us conceptualize the western media's appropriation of images of mask-wearing Asians – it not only stigmatizes Asians as the virus-carriers, the danger, and the threat, but also reinforces the racialization of Asians as the alien other.

Alan, in the video, you vividly described getting "dirty looks" for wearing a mask while traveling during spring break. Your research contends with anti-Asian racism from the framework of misinformation or "infodemic" and underlines the importance of directing people to platforms that offer credible information. Your hope is that offering credible information, in turn, reduces discrimination and hate crimes towards Asian Americans. Misinformation is a big obstacle in our battle with the coronavirus, and it is imperative to offer such an analytical lens and examine its consequences. In particular, the concept "infodemic" has great potential. Within the current framework, as I read the essay, I feel analytical difficulties that you encounter. On the one hand, it is not clear if different terms such as "(inaccurate) rhetoric," "ignorant narratives," and "fake news" are defined as "misinformation". On the other hand, as you mention Trump's usage of "the Chinese virus" or "Kung flu", it suggests that a linear framework of misinformation is insufficient. Broader and more complex issues, such as the politicization and racialization of the virus, require multifaceted approaches beyond the single perspective of misinformation.

Luke, your contestation of the model minority stereotypes centers on Andrew Yang's op-ed, in which Yang calls for Asians to "embrace and show our Americanness" to combat racism

and to be a cure of the virus. You argue, "In fact, the xenophobia towards Asian Americans during the pandemic highlights the Asian community's true standing in society: foreigners living among Americans." "Foreigners living among Americans" hits the core of the ambivalent Asian American positionality, the perpetual foreignness. I'm very impressed by your ability of textual analysis and of advancing your arguments on underlying issues. A Columbia University student wrote a response to Andrew Yang's op-ed that shares similar perspectives with yours. In case you haven't read it, it was also published in *The Washington Post*. I'm pleased that you cite historian Judy Wu's review of the two prominent books on model minority by two prominent Asian American historians, Madeline Hsu and Ellen Wu. I hope you will have a chance to read them in the future to advance your research on the model minority concept.

Nidhi, your article examines the model minority myth from a different perspective. You are particularly concerned with the harm of model minority stereotypes that intend to shame the Black people and, as a result, undermine Asian-Black solidarity. You located William Pettersen's article published in 1966, the first one that articulated a successful story of model minority. As you adequately observe, the model minority discourse has its anti-Black roots. By referring to affirmative action and applying critical race theory, you further explore the problematic of this prevailing discourse. I have a couple of suggestions on your otherwise remarkable work. First, you should provide some basic information about the survey that you conducted. If you don't want to do it in the main text, use a footnote or appendix; but, in one way or the other, you should provide some descriptions about what you call "a 2020 survey". Secondly, since the essay is situated in the current Covid-19 pandemic, will you be able to offer some perspectives to building Asian-Black solidarity in the time of Covid-19, or under the

circumstances of the simultaneous unfolding events of the pandemic and the Black Lives Matter movement?

David, you examine an urgent issue of the disparities that Black and Hispanic communities experience during the coronavirus pandemic. Your research is built on the survey that you conducted, which collected 99 responses from "students and adults from Washington University in St. Louis and Chicago, Illinois." The results of your survey remarkably align with disparities between whites and minority groups prevalent in different spheres of the society, and many of them are structural and systemic. As an aspiring student in medicine (pre-med), you are particularly concerned about what you termed as "medical racism" and remind people of the seemingly unconnected events of Black Lives Matter and the Covid-19 health crisis that expose in common issues of racial disparity and racism towards Black people.

Here are a few suggestions. In the essay, you apply an aggregated category "minority groups" in the main text while showing data about "Asian," "Black," "Hispanic," "Multiracial/other" in the charts. Your research targets Black and Hispanic communities, but, in your statistical analysis, it seems like the label "minority groups" includes everyone who is non-white. Furthermore, the details about the survey cannot be neglected in the essay. Based on your analysis, the most important data are those that indicate the ethnic and racial background of your respondents. In addition, maybe consider slightly revising the title to "COVID-19 and Systemic Racism" or "COVID-19 Exposing Systemic Racism".

Sarah, your video really stands out. I don't know what particular program and skills are required to take such a fun and innovative approach, but it is absolutely remarkable. Racism as the epidemic is a great concept. Although it is not your focal point, it is particularly memorable that you refer to the historical construction of the Black body as the inferior in the essay. You

use St. Louis to show how the coronavirus is disproportionately affecting the African American community and revealing the existing structural racism. You propose tangible solutions in the conclusion: "each person's specific access to communication resources to vocalize and respond to cases of discrimination with facts and realities" and "creating a public communication setting that considers how systemic racism hinders the ability to respond effectively to the Covid-19 pandemic." After referencing of the problematic construction of the inferior Black body and racial disparities in St. Louis, it would bring a cohesive critique to advance the arguments about the intersection of race, disease, and racism. You have been thinking of these intersecting issues; such intersectionality can in fact be placed in the center of your inquiry.

I really enjoyed reading the six essays and getting to know more about each of your projects in the videos. These projects took place in a specific historical context in the midst of a global health crisis, and they shed light on the ways in which race and disease, as well as politics and public health, are inevitably intertwined in this context. When it calls attention to racial inequality, racism, and racialization, hopefully, the pandemic offers new frameworks and opportunities to reconsider ethnic and racial solidarity. If you are interested in developing these projects in the future, it would be helpful to consider the broader historical landscape, both domestic and international. For instance, "the Chinese virus" traces back to the centuries-old yellow peril paranoia, and in the current context, it signals the troubled US-China relationship, which had been carefully built in the past several decades.

Claire, Alan, Luke, Nidhi, Sarah, and David, thank you for the inspiration that your work will bring to the university community. I look forward to hearing about your future work at WashU.