

# Anti-Asian racism and our identity | Opinion

Updated Mar 28, 2021; Posted Mar 28, 2021



Rebecca Wong, a high school junior, was and recently named a finalist in the New York Times “What has it been like to be a teenager during the first year of a historic pandemic?” project. Rebecca says, “This is how I felt in 2020...I wanted people to see what I saw.”

By [Star-Ledger Guest Columnist](#)

By **Rebecca Wong**

My generation grew up with racism embedded in conversations. Kids asked the questions “where are you really from?” or “do you eat dogs?” as if they were asking “what’s your favorite color?”

Although the environment became toxic, filled with comments and questions from little kids unaware of their prejudice, I was ignorant of the racism in society. As I grew older, I became more aware of the implications of these comments. But, I never spoke out and allowed them to become associated with my identity.

My generation grew up being labeled as the “model minority,” the myth that all Asians are successful and problem-free. We lived with this guise, and that’s the main reason Asian American and Pacific Islander (AAPI) hate was concealed for so long. These myths and stereotypes were microaggressions on the community and have impacted us for years.

Racism toward Asians was not always just expressed in microaggressions; there have been attacks against the community. And they didn't just begin with the pandemic. Last year has only ignited the violence against the AAPI community, causing hate crimes against Asians to [increase by nearly 150%](#) — a staggering number that has been highlighted throughout reports of these crimes.

Although the rise of hate crimes was unfathomable, the lack of media coverage made the community suffer in silence. Day after day, there would be new cases of victims with no coverage. It was as if the whole nation turned away when we needed them the most.

Society only expressed outrage after six Asian women were among the [eight people killed](#) — Delaina Ashley Yaun, Paul Andre Michels, Daoyou Feng, Xiaojie Tan, Soon C Park, Hyun J Grant, Suncha Kim, and Yong A Yue — in and near Atlanta on March 16. Only then did people see the prejudice that seeps deep into our nation, how AAPI attacks were happening too often without consequence.

There has to be a way to start addressing these problems. People need to start learning about racism, creating an open line of communication to discuss these topics such as microaggressions and the hidden history of Asian racism. If we can't be open to discussing these issues, then nothing will be fixed. We can not go back to hiding this hate and racism behind a facade — keeping it hidden will continue this vicious cycle.

Education is key for kids to understand, become aware, and to learn to be compassionate about other cultures. Change starts with the kids. It's our future that we have to build. We have to work hard in order to reverse the waves of racism.

*Rebecca is a junior at Tenafly Public High School. She was recently named a finalist in the NY Times "What has it been like to be a teenager during the first year of a historic pandemic?" project. Her [photo, shown above, was published](#) on March 7.*

*Our journalism needs your support. Please subscribe today to [NJ.com](#).*

*Here's [how to submit an op-ed or Letter to the Editor](#). Bookmark [NJ.com/Opinion](#). Follow us on Twitter [@NJ\\_Opinion](#) and on Facebook at [NJ.com Opinion](#). Get the latest news updates right in your inbox. [Subscribe to NJ.com's newsletters](#).*