



Radio Free CSU: CFA and COVID-19

Episode 2 –Vulnerable CSU Populations and How Racism, Bigotry Spread with the Virus

INTRO TO PODCAST

Audrena Redmond: Last time on Radio Free CSU: CFA and COVID-19...

roll intro music

Charles Toombs: Something horrible was happening in the country, in the CSU and with our members.

Audrena Redmond: A moment in time unlike any other in modern era. A pandemic, health crisis manifesting here.

Kevin Wehr: This crisis, this pandemic has really brought out and shown us shown of the weaknesses and vulnerabilities in our system and our way of life.

Audrena Redmond: Campuses went virtual with a lack of a consistent, coherent statewide plan.

Meghan O'Donnell: We even had faculty that first week of virtual instruction teaching in their cars outside of Starbucks, because it was the only way they could get access to strong enough Wi-Fi to run a Zoom class online.

Audrena Redmond: Amidst the confusion, something that may have been missed: vulnerable populations. And a familiar trope came emerged.

START PODCAST

roll podcast music

Audrena Redmond: Hello and welcome to Radio Free CSU, the official podcast of the California Faculty Association. I'm your host Audrena Redmond.

Before we begin our conversation on CFA and COVID-19, you should know that this week will be a little different than we originally planned. We are delaying our discussion on the great adaptation and emergency changes to teaching and learning. It's an important issue and that will come soon.



Instead, we will be discussing the rise in anti-Asian sentiment in the wake of the coronavirus crisis. This is an important issue – and as an anti-racism and social justice union, we knew we needed to change lanes this week

I am joined today by Darel Engen who is CFA Associate Vice President and professor of history at CSU San Marcos, Darel Engen and Vang Vang – a librarian at Fresno State, specializing in linguistics, women's studies and student support services. Vang is also a member of the CFA Bargaining Team.

But first, we're joined by Dr. Russell Jeung -- a CFA member and professor of Asian American Studies at San Francisco State. He is also a co-founder – co-launcher if you will – of a website that is starting to collect stories and record acts of violence against Asian Americans that occurred after COVID-19 was announced as a thing here in the United States. It's so interesting to note that within the first year of its inception, they have collected over 1,500 responses from folks across the country. So, I wanted to just jump in and talk with Russell about that.

Russell: Tell us more about this website that was launched: [Stop AAPI Hate](#) and what is it that you have been hearing from the AAPI community across the country, here in California, and maybe even from folks in the CSU?

Russell Jeung: Thanks, Audrena, and thanks CFA for hosting this particular segment of the program.

Being a professor in Asian American Studies at San Francisco State, I knew that whenever pandemics hit and whenever they come from Asia, Asians in the United States get scapegoated. That's been the history of Asians in America. From smallpox to the bubonic plague, diseases have been used to create health policies that excluded Asians, quarantined Asians, detained Asians, deported Asians. And so I knew that the scapegoating would occur again, as soon as I heard about how widespread the coronavirus was in China. So, I sought to document and to actually warn government that this was going to happen and we... and so I began to track news accounts using secondary sources and we saw a 50 percent rise in xenophobic incidents.

And in ethics studies, we always partner with community organizers and partners, and so I contacted Chinese for Affirmative Action in San Francisco and the Asian Pacific Policy and Planning Council in LA. And there are two civil rights groups and together, we contacted the State's Attorney General to establish a reporting center. Their office said they didn't have the capacity. So, we have to create our own website. And like he said, within just four weeks regathered over 1,500 accounts of anti-Asian hate and violence. So that just shows how widespread it is. We didn't even publicize this site.

Audrena Redmond: Where were the complainants, where were these coming from? Where they coming from mainly from California since you are California-based and the other organizations are as well?

Russell Jeung: We wanted it to be a California-based site that we could provide resources, you know, to local agencies, so if they had wanted mental health support, they could, you know, contact their local



agency. But we got 45 states reporting and people internationally reporting, and about 60 percent are outside the state.

Russell Jeung:—It just shows how pervasive and widespread the issue is and how, again, how much people wanted to air their grievances, to share their stories.

What we found was about 80 percent was verbal harassment and shunning. But these weren't just cases of microaggression. They were actually really harsh, mean, racist comments where people were, you know, yelled at, with people using racial slurs, oftentimes with elderly and youth present. So, we know we're targeting more vulnerable groups. Women were targeted two to three times more than men. And so again, when you read, just palpable how hate-filled people are now towards Asian Americans.

Another 10 percent of the cases were workplace, er, civil rights violations. So people were being treated differently and mistreated at the workplace. They were being barred from establishments. They weren't being given rides to Uber and Lyft. And so that's a whole different type of discrimination.

And then the third major category was actual physical assault and those rise up level of hate crimes, people could have been arrested for them. And so people are getting shoved, they're getting pushed, they have rocks and bottles thrown at them. (**Audrena Redmond:** Wow.) A lot of times, Asians are getting spat upon and coughed upon. And so it's really dehumanizing. It's really, sort of, incomprehensible for me to treat others this way. But I think because it's related to the pandemic and the disease, people feel like they can re-infect Asians by spitting at them or coughing at them. (**Audrena Redmond:** Right, right.)

Just, just – yeah, so that constitutes a hate crime as well. It constitutes a public health threat. And in, in the East Coast, one guy who is white, got arrest for terrorism, for coughing on produce, and on the white cashier, but that's happening to Asians across the country, hundreds of times. So you could say we're facing mass terrorism, bioterrorism by people coughing and spitting at us.

Audrena Redmond: So, Vang, if I may... I remember having a conversation with you last week and you were sharing what this is, what this time period is like for you and your family and your concerns going forward. So, can you talk a little bit about how you've been impacted?

Vang Vang: I think for me and my family, I have two kids. One is 13. One is nine and since the shelter that the governor put in place, we haven't left the house at all. We go to our backyard and, you know, hang out there, but to get the necessary shopping, you know, buying food and things that we need every day, my husband does that. And you know, he just feels that it's a lot safer in terms of health wise having one person being out there than all of us. And he just feels that it's just more safer in terms of him being there as a male. So, you know, to me, I never really thought about it in terms of what Russell was talking about women being targeted more often than men. But, you know, that was in his head and he was just like, it's just more safer this way. So I'll just go and take care of the things that we need. And you know, you guys stay around here and hang out here. So since then, say almost a month, we haven't left the house except



just walk around the yard. And it's been pretty good. But I would say that I never really, you know, internalize that and thinking that my safety, the safety of my children are in jeopardy. Until you know, you start hearing you start seeing this on the news. And you know, when you call and talk to other friends and neighbors, and they start talking about, oh, I went to the grocery store and I was the only one in line. Nobody was lining after me. And you know, so it's them telling you these stories and in a way, I felt privileged that my husband is taking care of these things for me, but at the same time, it shouldn't be this way. Even though it's a stay-in-place shelter, you should be able to, you know, feel safe and walk outside and, you know, say hey, you know, this is okay, everybody's in it together, but you don't feel that you don't feel like everybody's in it together.

Audrena Redmond: You know, Russell that sounds familiar, huh?

Russell Jeung: Yeah, totally sounds familiar. I think Asian Americans are hyper aware of how they're being racially profiled, like how others are profiled for being threats, or for being dangerous and then excluded or detained or incarcerated, that's how Asians are being experiencing it now. And so, if you wear a mask, you're afraid, 'oh, people see me as a threat and a disease carrier.' And if we don't wear a mask, people see us as a disease carrier anyway, and say we're negligent. And so they attack us. So we can't win either way. We're afraid of coughing in public because people then again, suspect us and either shun us or (inaudible) fight or flight mode that people go into. They see us as a threat and they go into fight or flight mode.

Audrena Redmond: Right. So so that's that's how people are feeling in this time and we're still doing physical distancing. What Vang, or Russell, might you imagine it would be like when we return to campus when we are back to normal, so to say?

Russell Jeung: I don't think things are going to go back to normal. I think this hate is only going to increase and for several reasons. First of all, the Republican Party is making it their strategy to China relations, their primary campaign. And they want to make China the enemy so that they could avoid being blamed for their administration's ineptitude in handling the crisis. They want to rile up their base. And so by China bashing, they create a scapegoat. And the thing is that the consequences fall on Americans. So there's the China bashing, plus, the longer we stay in sheltered in place people are already trying to get out of the quarantine. (**Audrena:** Right.) Yeah, and then people are also upset that the economy is tanking and you know. (**Audrena:** Yes.) Then finally, you know, as death smell, you're going to be even more angry. So those four factors are just going to make people more and more upset, more and more fearful. And I think that, like we said they're going to want to blame something or some people and throw blame Chinese and consequently, Chinese and American Asians in America.

Vang Vang: A lot of times when you are equating Asian Americans to the Chinese government or, you know, that robs us of our identity as Americans. Many of us have been in the US for generations, we call the US home for generations. And we've never been to China or gone back home or... But, you know, they



still think that all Asians are either from Chinese Japanese, and you know, I am Hmong. I can differentiate the difference between the different ethnic groups and the different communities. It's the offhanded comment and jokes that really have unintended consequences down the line, that harms the Asian communities here. And I know that every community is experiencing we're going through this problems and all these troubles that we have that comes with this but on top of that, you feel all this tension and, you know, you feel like a victim when you shouldn't be. But you know, it's almost as if we're always the target to be the victim.

Audrena Redmond: Right? You know, we were you were you were talking about microaggressions. And and Russell has talked about macro aggressions. These things will play out on our campuses, they will play out among students and between students and maybe even between colleagues. We're not we're not immune from the messages that our society gets, because we live in and we experience it and we have the news inputs. But Darryl, let me ask you, as a historian, you know, this, this is, we've seen this before. This is what happens.

Darel Engen: Oh, yeah. And, you know, if if you know, some history or ethnic studies, you know, that that these kind of things are just not that unusual, and when Russell said that, you know, he already anticipated this happening, and was ready to get on this and start getting these reports and documenting these things. Because he knew, right he, he studies, ethnic studies, right? And he understands these things. And if you do that, and if you study history, you know how these things work. And it's, it's not just the API community, this is a kind of a constant in history when, you know, bad things happen like this, something that's not, doesn't have an easy solution, like a pandemic, you know, some unseen, you know, cause, people look for scapegoats. They look for an easy answer and blaming somebody else is the easiest thing to do. And when you blame somebody else, do you blame somebody who's in the majority, somebody who's powerful? No, you look for somebody who's not like you who's viewed as the other who you think you can, you know, put down without the fear of tremendous reprisals. And that's why, you know, especially, you know, ethnic groups, minority groups tend to get singled out in these situations. And so you go back in history, you know, my period in the ancient world when Romans persecuted Christians, because this the very first persecution of Christians in the Roman Empire was when the Roman Emperor Nero was blamed for a great fire that took place in the heart of Rome and killed a lot of people. People were looking for somebody to blame, they initially blamed the Emperor. And to deflect that blame, he looked for a group that people kind of didn't like already, because they were different. And these were these new Christians. This was this was in 64 CE. And so he blamed it on them and everybody was willing to jump on board. This happened during the bubonic plague in the 1300s in Europe when people didn't know what was happening. All of a sudden people would die, and they look for a scapegoat and who was the minority group that they could attack then? It was the Jewish population of Europe. And they said, 'well, you know, they've, they've never liked Christians anyway. So it must be them. They must be responsible for this.' And there were, you know, conspiracy theories about them poisoning wells and so forth and killing Christians off that way. So that's what happened then and you know, you can go to the economic troubles



and the problems in the 1930s and how you know, Nazis in Germany again, blamed a minority group for those very difficult problems to solve looking for a quick answer. I mean -- and so if you look at the history then of Asian Americans right, you've got the same thing, you know, where problems you know, employment problems, let's say in California with the blame that on Chinese immigrants taking our jobs, we have to exclude them we have to project or you look at World War II. Oh, you know, all of a sudden we have this war to deal with. And it's not just the Japanese overseas or their government that we blamed for the attack on Pearl Harbor. Now we suspect Japanese Americans, right? And some, like Vang said some people and their families have been here for generations. But no, you now get other, 'you're not like us. You must be the enemy. You must be suspected. This is how these things work, right? When you have long-standing racial stereotypes, a racial narrative about a group, you know, that might be held under wraps, and you won't have, you know, obvious manifestations of that racism. But all it takes is a crisis like this, for it to bubble up to the surface into overt discrimination, overt violence, rhetoric and so forth. And it's been a tool of politicians to use such rhetoric to single out a scape goat, press those buttons, and use it for their own political gain. That's, that's also a standard thing we see as well. And that's why it's so alarming to see that going on now when our own government, as Russell said, when you know, the strategy, you know, of a political party, is to blame one group, right, as a way of deflecting blame from their own incompetence in dealing with what the real problem is a virus, right? It's a medical problem -- (**Audrena Redmond:** Right.) -- and they have to single out a group of people to blame because that's so much easier to do.

Audrena Redmond: We still need to be prepared for what the returns to school might look like. What thoughts do you have or what advice you have for administrators, faculty, CFA, and students for that return that inevitable return at some point, we will?

Vang Vang: I don't think that any of us will feel safe or feel some kind of normalcy if there is no vaccine. Without a vaccine, we're kind of in this holding stage of, you know, 'should I make the decision to be physically there? Should I make decision to teach online to learn from online?' And I think officials and our presidents and the chancellor's office needs to understand that without that vaccine, there is no guarantee. There is no such thing as you know, 'it's okay, everybody can come back.' You have all these tension all these build up that's been going around for the last couple months

Darel Engen: One thing I know, is important is for campuses, their administration, their faculties, to really be clear in, in, in making their values, you know, visible to everybody in the campus communities that these kind of, this kind of discrimination, this kind of racism just won't be tolerated. And, and I think on top of that, too, I mean, I mentioned ethnic studies and history that, you know, education in these areas. You know, this, this is why, you know, turning the CSU into some kind of vocational institution is a mistake. You know, in a society like ours, we need to have the kind of education where people can understand the dynamics of things like racism. And, and that can only happen if we do foster ethnic studies education, history education, education in the humanities and social sciences and so forth. So we just got to make



those values clear. And we have to understand there's more to life than just, you know, a vocation, obviously, that's really important. But in a democratic society like ours, people just have to be aware of these kinds of issues. That's the only way they're going to stop the cycle and this sort of historical, sad, historical, you know, record of discrimination like this and racism like this coming to the surface every time there's another crisis. (**Audrena Redmond:** Mhmm) Education, I mean, this is why I became an educator because it's the key really, I think, to putting a stop to these kinds of things.

Vang Vang: I would also want to add that, you know, in terms of the anti-race..., anti-Asian racism, I know that it's not just in the US. But anti-Asian racism is a global phenomenon. And I think now is the time to correct people who are calling the COVID-19, the Chinese virus or, you know, Asians who are carriers, and to explain how it is connected to a longer history of racism against Asian Americans. Because as you know, Darel was talking about education is important. But each and all of us can do this right now. Every day that we have conversation with people, with our children, with our friends or neighbors, you can have this conversation with them.

Audrena Redmond: Before we go, Russell, can you just say again, where folks can report incidences of anti-Asian violence?

Russell Jeung: So, if you come across an incident or you've been experiencing one yourself, you could submit a report to Stop AAPI Hate. And also, I just want to announce CFA is funding a video about anti-Asian racism in the Age of Coronavirus. And that could be used for classroom use, again exploring the historical context, the contemporary social political context, explaining the rise of racism and then how we can mobilize together to challenge it. So look out for that video.

Audrena Redmond: Thank you so much Russell Jeung, Darel Engen and Vang Vang. We've had an important conversation. We'll get back to those next time on Radio Free CSU. We'll be examining the great adaption and changes to teaching and learning, the lessons that emerged from the emergency virtual teaching.

Until next time, Radio Free CSU.

roll outcue music