Asian Americans as Medical Scapegoats in 19th C.  

The 1957 “Asian Flu” and the 1968 “Hong Kong Flu”

Early reporting of the 1957 influenza pandemic in *The New York Times* was quick to name the disease as a threat from a foreign country.

- In this case, the target was China. American fears of China and the Far East reflected the Cold War political climate.
- That label implied that Red China was not only a threat to democracy but public health as well.

This framing of fear and war can be demonstrated in several *New York Times* headlines

- “U.S. Acts to Bar Asian Influenza.” June 8th 1957
- “Asian Flu Strikes East Coast Base.” June 22nd 1957 (Emphasis added)
- During the 1968 outbreak, it was even referred to as the “Mao flu” (Stanley 2020)
- There was one voice that attempted to reframe the name given to the 1957 flu pandemic in a June 1957 editorial: “It isn’t just ‘Asian Influenza,’ although that name has already been pinned on it. It is a broadly human ailment that must be met wherever it appears.”

These framings resurfaced during the 1997 “Hong Kong Flu” and the 2003 SARs outbreak.

- On March 16th, 2020 former president Trump first utilized the term the “Chinese Virus” to refer to COVID-19.
- Other Republican officials were quick to follow suit, invoking terms such as “Kung Flu,” and the “Wuhan Virus,” while advancing harmful and demonizing racial tropes about Chinese individuals.
- Senator John Cornyn (R-TX) openly justified blaming the Chinese by using racist tropes about their diet. He stated that the Chinese ate bats, snakes, and dogs.
- As a result of such framing, there was a significant increase in hate crimes toward the Asian-American community.
- According to the Center for the Study of Hate and Extremism at California State University San Bernardino, Asian-American hate crimes increased 149% in 2020 in 16 major cities across the United States including San Francisco, San Diego, Philadelphia, Boston, and New York City. NYC, in particular, saw the most drastic increase, from only 3 anti-Asian hate crimes reported in 2019 to 28 reported in 2020, an increase of 833%. San Francisco, on the other hand, showed a much smaller increase (50%), but an increase nonetheless.
- Between March 19th-December 31st 2020, the following proportions of hate crimes/assaults were reported across the United States:
  - Shaming/Avoidance: 20%
  - Physical Assault: 8%
  - Coughing/Spitting: 6%
  - Verbal Harassment: 66%
- For additional information and student testimony, please refer to the supplemental packet included with this presentation.