



# OPINION: WHY SOCIAL PERCEPTIONS OF RACE MATTER

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The U.S. House of Representatives sent the [COVID-19 Hate Crimes Act](#) to President Joe Biden's desk recently, [requiring](#) the Department of Justice to establish hate crime reporting processes and ensure that the data collected is "disaggregated by protected characteristics (e.g., race or national origin)." Meanwhile, under the pretense of protecting free speech, the diminishing minority—such as [Sen. Josh Hawley \(R-Mo.\)](#), the only senator to oppose the [COVID-19 hate crimes bill](#)—continue to suggest that "woke capitalism" is bringing about the "[mob-rule](#)" that James Madison had feared.

The reality, however, is resisters are simply falling behind as society's understanding of racism and colorism is [improving](#) so that we can better reflect them into policy. [Data](#) suggest populations within the United States among other nations have nicknamed the coronavirus as the "Chinese virus" and [used this as justification](#) for xenophobia and discrimination against East Asians. Even worse, [eight in 10 Asian Americans](#) say violence against them has increased compared to 56 percent of the general U.S. adult population who say the same.

Even with this evidence, there are those who continue to ignore the current plight of Asian Americans. Take the [Atlanta Spa Shooting](#). Robert Aaron Long targeted three massage parlors, all small Asian businesses, and killed eight people—including six Asian American women. But instead of recognizing this as a racial incident, Captain Jay Baker of the Cherokee County Sheriff's office said that it was due to just "[a really bad day](#)" for Long. His own inability to see racism was not new to this case—earlier he'd been caught on [Facebook](#) wearing t-shirts with the slogan "COVID-19 imported virus from CHY-NA." In spite of these discoveries, Sen. [Tammy Duckworth \(D-Ill.\)](#) has had to state that the incident "looks racially motivated" against the Federal Bureau of Investigation's initial assessments, in order to request a deeper investigation.

Though some argue Baker's description of Long's shooting incident is an anomaly, it is not. Racially insensitive narratives have been common throughout American history. Before the [Chinese Exclusion Act](#) (1882), the first law in the United States that barred immigration solely based on race, there was the [1875 Page Act](#), which—on paper—was meant to prohibit the recruitment of laborers from "China, Japan or any Oriental country" for "lewd and immoral purposes," adding that the act would forbid "the importation of women for the purposes of prostitution." In practice, the act was used as a way to prevent Chinese women from immigrating, thus reducing the likelihood that Chinese laborers would procreate on American soil.

Such historical evidence in addition to ongoing acts of racism and colorism reveals that the world continues to show growing prejudice against Asian Americans. While the discussion of race and color may be uncomfortable and difficult, it matters. Many Americans continue to mislabel acts of racial violence, or mock racial activism, as irrelevant and nonsensical. While the COVID-19 Hate Crimes Act may not be

an overarching solution to the problematic perceptions of race and color, it is a necessary start that we, Asian Americans and all Americans, desperately need.

