

**Addressing racism in the face of COVID-19 and the Black Lives Matter movement,  
Newton's Asian-American students speak up about their experiences**

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While Asian-American students face exacerbated discrimination during the pandemic due to the virus's link to China, they are also struggling to educate older family members about racism.

Dian Dian Jonas-Walsh, a recent graduate from Newton North who was adopted from China as a baby, said a lack of representation in the school and its curriculum has impacted her experiences with Asian culture.

When Jonas-Walsh was in kindergarten, she recalled being seen by people as “other.”

When she brought “mein,” a Chinese dish with noodles, her white classmates would ask her “Is that worms?”

She said she even changed how her name sounded because she wanted it to be more “American.”

“I regret that,” Jonas-Walsh said. “Because there’s no reason for me to be ashamed of my name. It comes from my Chinese name. And I’m proud of that part of me.”

Jonas-Walsh said a pattern of what she described as a lack of awareness affected her throughout her years even into high school.

“In AP U.S. History, when I started talking about historical acts of racism against the Chinese, people were very dismissive of me, including the teachers,” Jonas-Walsh said.

In April, about 30 intruders hijacked Newton South High School’s AP Chinese Zoom class — known as a “Zoom-bombing” — by hurling racial slurs and derogatory remarks that targeted the teacher and students.

Samuel Qian, a senior in the class, said he had never witnessed such hateful, racist remarks before the incident.

“It was so graphic and terrible,” Qian said. “They drew on the PowerPoint and turned it into their graffiti of hate speech.”

Amy Xiao, a recent graduate of Newton South, said she was disappointed by the school’s lack of transparency following the incident.

She said Principal Joel Stembridge sent a message to only the AP Chinese class students, stating the police had been contacted, and there was nothing else the school could do.

She said Stembriage's initial response was "inadequate" because it trivialized what had happened and made Asian-American students feel they weren't being taken seriously.

Xiao said Newton South should have sent a message to the wider community. It was not until she and several other students contacted the Asian-American Commission that the administration posted a public message denouncing the actions of the zoombombers.

"The school administration should have acknowledged that this was an act of anti-Asian racism and that they wouldn't tolerate it," Xiao said. "Without all the prodding we had to do."

This was only one of many incidents around the country.

This incident reflects the increase of Anti-Asian hostility and sentiments fueled by the COVID-19 pandemic.

According to the [Ipsos survey](#) conducted for the Center of Public Integrity, various advocacy groups and organizations have reported a rise in anti-Asian assaults, harassment, and hate crimes.

In the wake of Newton South's harrowing experience with anti-Asian discrimination, Stembriage announced the development of a human rights council to help the community prevent and respond to similar displays of hate.

However, no following statements have been made regarding the council and its plans.

Not only are Asian-American students struggling to receive recognition from institutions, but they are also struggling to educate and help their elders recognize other kinds of racism in America and why it is relevant to them.

Jenny Huang, who recently graduated from Newton North, said she showed her mother "The Hate U Give," a 2018 film praised for its portrayal of racism's vicious cycle, to try and help her understand the meaning of systemic racism.

Huang said she wanted her mother to see what racism looked like in America, why people were protesting, and why it is relevant to all people of color.

At home, Huang speaks Mandarin with her mother, who is still learning English. She said her mother never learned about systemic racism.

"I talked to her in Mandarin with the help of the movie," Huang said. "The movie was a way to visualize what I wanted to explain to her but couldn't."

Huang said “The Hate U Give” resonated with her mother as the main character was a teenage girl like her.

Huang said she was pleasantly surprised Newton’s Chinese American Association made a statement expressing support for the Black Lives Matter movement.

“In this time and age, all of us should support each other,” she said.

Xiao said the rising racial tensions in the face of the pandemic made her realize how minority communities are isolated from one other, and they have to come together to support one another during these trying times.

“At the end of the day, the same racial institutions that systematically oppress Black people do have impacts on the Asian-American communities and vice versa,” Xiao said.

“In order to fight racism against Asian-Americans, we also have to be actively playing a role in fighting racism against Black Americans.”