



THE LAWRENCEVILLE SCHOOL

Comments in School Meeting

March 17, 2021

Later in this meeting, I will be issuing some words of welcome back to campus, but I want to pause and second Soleil's very important comments about the episodes of violence against Asians and Asian-Americans that have been occurring.

There has been a clear spike in brutally violent acts during the pandemic – the evidence is undeniable. And in my mind, it is all but impossible to see this as anything other than a reprehensible pattern of racial scapegoating and terrorizing, especially in the context of a pandemic originating in China.

I have spoken to this community about senseless, hateful tragedies on many previous occasions, far too many, such as the anti-Semitic attacks at the Tree of Life Synagogue in Pittsburgh, the murder of 49 people at Pulse, the gay nightclub in Orlando, Florida, and last spring, following the murders of Breonna Taylor and George Floyd – and in each case, these must be seen as part of larger, historic patterns of systemic oppression: violent racial injustice, virulent anti-Semitism, and anti-LGBTQ+ hatred, to name a few. And while some seem tempted to regard the attacks as isolated incidents, it is important not to trivialize what is going on or undermine the urgency of coming together to denounce the larger pattern of violence, and as Soleil has said so well, the history of anti-Asian racism that long precedes coronavirus.

During the latter part of the 19th century, with the arrival of significant numbers of Chinese immigrants, as has been the case with almost every new arrival group, there began a regular series of oppressive measures, ranging from limiting basic rights through local and national statutes to organized violence by vigilantes, sometimes sanctioned by law enforcement to commit crimes against Asian communities across the country.

In 1871, an anti-Chinese mob lynched 18 Chinese men after cutting a destructive wake through the city's Chinatown. In 1882, Congress passed the China Exclusion Act. And of course the widespread internment of Japanese Americans during World War II is well known, but what is perhaps less-widely known is that after the war, Japanese "families returning home from detention camps were greeted with arson and murder from those who still questioned their loyalty," as historian Stephanie Hinnert writes in a [recent *Washington Post* article](#).

These are just a few examples – even cursory research quickly reveals the extent of this aspect of our national history.

Soleil made the point well. We, as a country, need to understand our own history, and we need to stand up with a unified voice to denounce these actions as un-American and counter to everything we stand for.

Thank you.

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