

What is “Americanness”?

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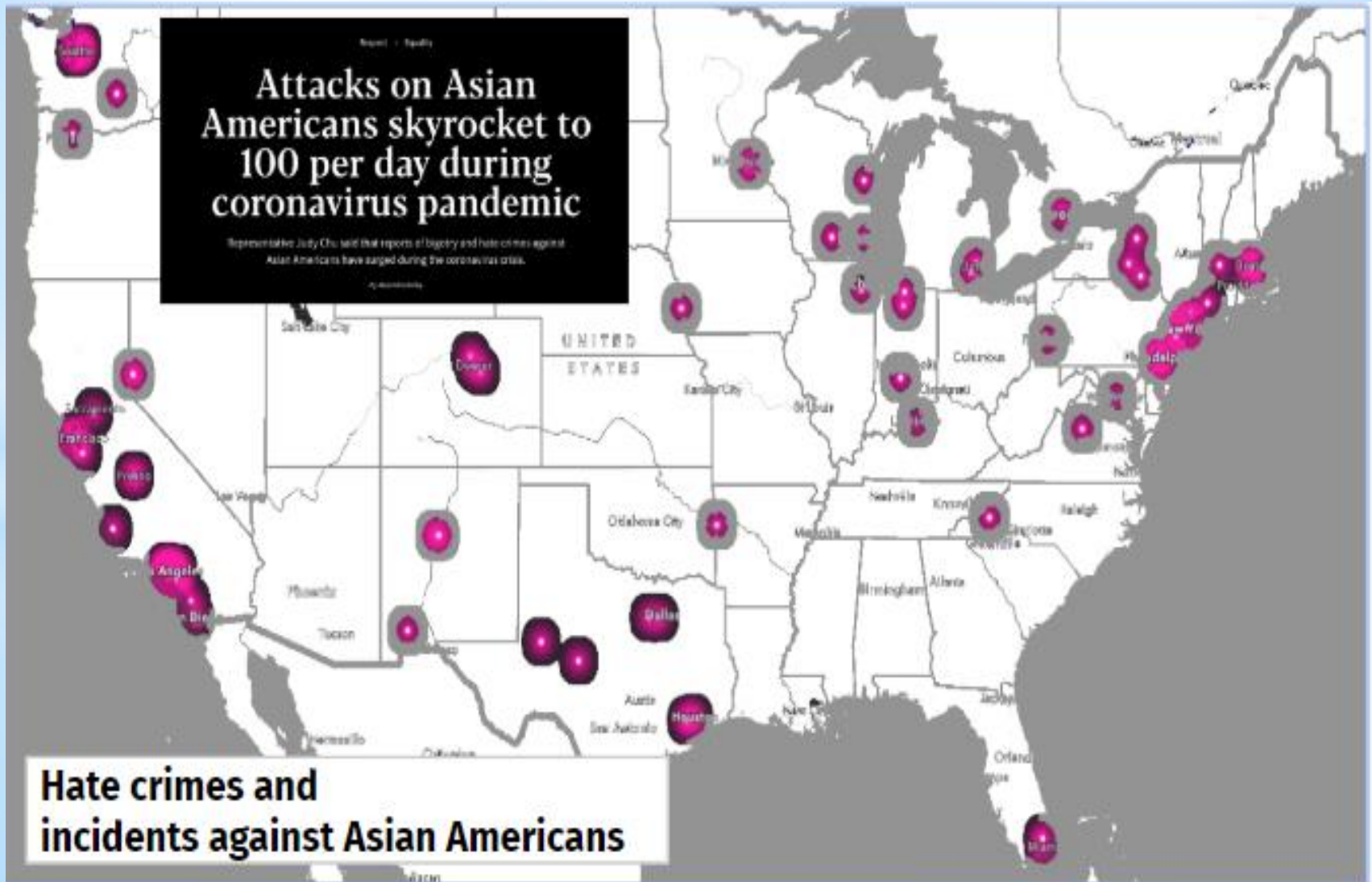
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Golden Spike

- Every year in May, Americans celebrate Asian Pacific American Heritage Month
- It has special meaning to Chinese Americans because of the Golden Spike
- Near 2,000 Chinese workers lost their lives in building the most dangerous segment of the transcontinental railroad
- Their contributions and sacrifices are forever engraved in American history
- 151 year later, Chinese Americans are still being questioned on their “Americanness”

Hate crime against Asian Americans is on the rise



The Question of “Americanness”

- The question of Americanness is a question of American Identity
- United States of America is a nation of immigrants
- People come to this land of free for religious, political, social and economic reasons
- However, one thing in common is that they all want to pursue the American dream
- The moment they decided to settle in this new world and become a citizen of this country, they adopted the identity of being an American

Define American Identity

- What does it mean to be an American?
- Being an American means to believe in the American Spirit “All Men are created equal” and everyone has “...unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness”
- The DNA of American civilization expresses freedom, human rights, openness, love, and tolerance for everyone settled in this new land

Define American Identity

The lyrics of “This is your land” best expressed this spirit

“This land is your land, and this land is my land

From the California, to the New York Island

From the Redwood Forest, to the Gulf Stream waters

This land was made for you and me.”

Define American Identity

- The Constitution & Amendments (Bill of Rights) were written to protect the American spirit
- Being an American also means to trust and participate in American democracy set up by the Constitution
- The “Americanness” is measured by one’s believe in :
 - The American spirit: equal treatment to all settlers regardless of color of skin and country of origin
 - The American democracy: resolve racial, political, and social conflicts through a transparent, participatory, and peaceful democratic process

Who is less “American”?

Measuring “Americanness” by one’s believe in the American Spirit and participation in American democracy, we can conclude that:

We must question the
“Americanness” of the perpetrator
of racially motivated hate crimes,
NOT the victim

Ideal and Reality

- The American spirit is the ideal, the shining city that attracted best talents from all corners of the world
- Collectively, these immigrants created a miracle of human history: the U.S. became the leader of the world in less than 200 years
- However, American history also has many dark pages
- Early Chinese immigrant workers encountered with opposition and adversities. Blamed as the “Yellow Peril (黄祸)”, labeled as “perpetual foreigners”, and being outcasts under the Chinese Exclusion Act for over half a century

Ideal and Reality

- Chinese Americans and Asian Americans have achieved significant advancements in American society since the 1965 immigration reform
- However, racial discrimination, while very “un-American” still exist in certain sectors of American society today
- Vulnerable minorities, including Asian Americans are still being targeted and blamed especially under crisis situations
- Chinese American community has not actively engaged in the political and civic life of America. Our voice remains weak and whispery

Ideal and Reality

- Many of us still subconsciously consider ourselves to be “sojourners (过客)” in this country, rather than fellow citizens
- If you don’t treat yourself as an American citizen, how can you expect others to accept you as an American?
- We must defend our civil rights, voice our concern and protest any forms of racial discrimination and hate crimes
- We must also demonstrate our “Americanness” by active civic engagement and making contributions as a citizen

From Sojourner to Citizen

- As first generation immigrants, we all need to take the journey From Sojourner to Citizen
- We may be at different stage of the journey depending on individual situations
- On this journey we are learning and adapting to a new identity of being an American
- In closing, I would like to share with you the Manifesto many Chinese Americans co-signed at the 2018 Chinese American Convention in Washington D.C. titled “[From Sojourner to Citizen](#)”

Thank You!