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The Butterfly Effect

Ongoing Racial Segregation

Eight minutes and 46 seconds. In 8 minutes and 46 seconds, you can respond to the piles of emails that you procrastinated to answer for a few weeks, call a long distant friend for a short conversation, or even, if you are very productive, run a quick mile around your neighborhood. However, on May 25, 2020, grief and anger swept over the nation when George Floyd, a 46-year-old African American man, was killed for passing counterfeit currency to a teenage employee. His death happened in less than 530 seconds.

My mind filled with horror as soon as I saw the helpless face of George Floyd pinned to the cold cement ground. In the video I saw, a father of five children and a husband to a beloved wife was stripped down to nothing as the now-former white policeman, Derek Chauvin, cut his final breath.

"He was just crying out at that time for anyone to help because he was dying," Maurice Lester, a friend of Floyd and witness of the crime, said. "I'm always going to remember seeing the fear in Floyd's face because he's such a king. That's what sticks with me, seeing a grown man cry, before seeing a grown man die."

Racism is a barrier that separates human beings from uniting, a barrier that keeps America from evolving as a whole. Many people assume that America is a place for equal treatment and freedom for everyone, no matter their racial or cultural background. However, in contrast to many beliefs, racial prejudice in the 21st century in America is an uncontrollable wildfire. And the wrongful deaths of George Floyd and Breonna Taylor is just one of the many sparks that ignited the inferno.

When the historic *Brown v. Board of Education* ruled that schools' segregation was prohibited, African Americans with other minorities cheered in happiness. When Martin Luther King Jr. delivered his notable *I Have a Dream* speech, America was full of hopes for a better future without racial segregation and prejudice. However, I, as a person who first-hand experienced racist bullying, believe that nothing has changed. We, the minorities, were never considered the same or equal to the majority.

I remember once when my classmate said, "you probably have straight A's because you're Asian."

What does "being Asian" even mean? The groundless stereotypes that have developed around Asian communities are affecting everyone's perspective of Asians. Forming these foolish stereotypes about a particular group of people because of their appearance has been ongoing. The recent upbreking of COVID-19 made life for Asians in America even worse.

Recently, I was filled with rage as I read the story of a Korean man in *Times Magazine*.

Abraham Choi, a 2nd generation Korean-American, was spat and coughed on by a man just because of his Asian appearance.

"All of you should die, and all of you have the Chinese Virus," the man said to Choi after cursing at him.

Asians have been the target of scathing comments and physical violence because "we" have spread the virus. And the

racial remarks of the virus by influencing politicians did nothing to help.

When President Donald Trump referred to COVID-19 as "Chinese virus" and "kung flu," it was a sign that xenophobia toward Asians is entirely tolerable. And the story of Choi is a direct example of how President Trump's racial comment influenced one person to change their vocabulary from COVID-19 to "Chinese virus." A person who influences others made one of the most racist comments to the public as if it was nothing. And society is never going to change if these prejudicial comments are made continuously by influential people.

After reading more racial attacks (verbal and physical) on the Asian community, I was shaking with fury as I busted into the kitchen to tell these horrific stories to my mom.

My mom gave me a blank stare as she grabbed a white mask and her leather purse off the counter.

"I have to go shopping," my mom mumbled. "Is there something you have to ask me?"

"Mom," I spat. "Look. At. This."

I shove the paper into my mom's hands as she slowly reads the articles.

"This is not right," I raged as my mom handed back the article. "Right?"

However, to my surprise, she replied flatly, almost as if she was not even startled or angered. "I've been hearing that news all over the place now. It's normal. We have to be careful too now. We have to be careful not to anger those xenophobic people. It's scary."

I was speechless at first. But, a sudden epiphany struck me as I realized what she was saying. We, the Asians, have started to take in this racial violence as if we deserve it. Instead of getting angry at the xenophobic people, we, the victims, decided, starting from some time ago, to accept those comments and physical violence.

"We have to endure it. We have to live like this until racism is eradicated. And I am sure that that's not going to happen anytime soon," my mom added before she grabbed her car keys and strolled out the door.

The Brighter Future

"While I may be the first woman in this office, I will not be the last because every little girl watching tonight sees that this is a country of possibilities."

On Friday, November 14, Kamala Harris, a running mate with Joseph Biden, became the 46th vice president of America. However, that was not the most significant interest among netizens; the biggest and the most shocking news was that Kamala Harris rewrote American history by becoming the first Black and an Indian descendant woman to be elected as a significant political position.

Most of the news articles released after the election results were titled, "First Woman of Color to be elected..." or "First Black and South Asian Woman to become..." Harris did not receive tremendous attention because of the title "46th vice president of America," but because of the modifier "first Black and Asian female vice president."

Black discrimination takes a major portion of the rather short 240 years of American history. Key events such as the Underground Railroad and the Civil Rights Movement brought significant changes to African Americans' lives. However, even with the effort and deaths of thousands of African Americans, Black discrimination and racism toward minorities stayed stagnant.

Nevertheless, hope arrived on November 4, 2008, when Barack Obama became the first Black President of the United States. Even though some skeptics greeted the news with disappointment and criticism, his result brought tears to thousands of African Americans who suffered from continuous racial discrimination.

"The American people sent a very great message to the world today," Abdul Kareem, a 42-year-old taxi driver, said. "They did not discriminate between white and black. ... Even whites in the U.S. voted for Obama regardless of his

color. The American people want change."

Throughout his marvelous career, President Obama brought prominent changes to the country. For instance, the 2012 presidential election was the country's most ethnically and racially diverse election ever in history. Racial minority groups, such as Blacks, Asians, and Hispanics, represented almost one-third of the voters. Furthermore, Obergefell vs. Hodges' case became another monumental event in history with the majority of Americans, for the first time in history, to support same-sex marriage. With the victory of Obergefell, all U.S. states were required to legalize same-sex marriage.

With the flourishing of diverse races and ethnicities, America seemed to have a much brighter future than ever before. However, as Obama's era came to an end in 2016, the United States once more entered a painful period of racial segregation.

Even a few months ago, Black Lives Matter protests proved that racial segregation in America was inevitable. With the unjust deaths of George Floyd and Breonna Taylor, America once again plunged into the age of dreadful racial isolation. All hopes of eliminating racial prejudice seemed to have vanished.

The second hope arrived in the United States when Kamala Harris was nominated as Joseph Biden's running mate for the 2020 presidential election. However, derogatory criticisms and phrases attacked Harris as soon as the news broke out.

"I thought that wasn't even a contest last night. She was terrible. I don't think you could get worse," President Donald Trump said the morning after the vice presidential debate. "And unlikeable. And she is."

"All she needs to be qualified is a black (crude term for female genitalia)! No brain needed!" Mehridith Philips Venverloh, the wife of San Francisco Bay's school board president, also tweeted.

The terrible adjectives such as "monstrous" or "nasty" were thrown in front of Harris's name like a trend just because of her racial background. And these words brought anger from nonracists and served as a shortcut in dehumanizing and patronizing Harris.

Even though these verbal slanders made Harris's path a little rocky, in the end, she earned the title of 46th vice president-elect of the United States; she rewrote history once more.

2020 has been a year that has been unwelcomed by many, but to me, it was a year of hope and joy, a year in which minorities were able to shine in the U.S.A.

As a Korean, I am proud to acknowledge the accomplishments of a Korean boy group BTS. By topping the "Hot 100" Chart for two consecutive weeks with their single "Dynamite" and being nominated for "Pop Duo/Group Performance at GRAMMY as a non-American singer, they have done something that has been considered impossible in Korea.

The groundbreaking achievements from minorities are spreading like wildfire, and I believe that Harris's small flap can result in large differences in the United States.