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## Keynote Address: “Asian Americans at a Crossroads”

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**UC HASTINGS CENTER FOR RACIAL AND ECONOMIC  
JUSTICE CONFERENCE:  
“CONNECTING THE THREADS THAT BIND:  
CONTEXTUALIZING LEGALIZED VIOLENCE AGAINST  
ASIAN AMERICANS”**

**SEPTEMBER 10, 2021**

*Former UC Hastings Chancellor and Dean Frank Wu gave closing remarks at the Center for Racial and Economic Justice Conference, calling attention to the black-white paradigm, the model minority myth, and the concept of the perpetual foreigner. A transcript of Wu's keynote speech is featured herein.*

**Keynote Address:  
“Asian Americans at a Crossroads”**

FRANK WU

***Biography:***

Frank H. Wu serves as the President of Queens College, City University of New York. Prior to that appointment, he served as Chancellor & Dean and then William L. Prosser Distinguished Professor at the University of California Hastings College of the Law in San Francisco. Before joining UC Hastings, he was a member of the faculty at Howard University, the nation's leading historically black college/university, for a decade. He served as Dean of Wayne State University Law School in his hometown of Detroit, and he has been a visiting professor at the University of Michigan; an adjunct professor at Columbia University; and a Thomas C. Grey Teaching Fellow at Stanford University.

President Wu is the author of *Yellow: Race in America Beyond Black and White* and co-author of *Race, Rights and Reparation: Law and the Japanese American Internment*. He had a column in the *Daily Journal*, the California legal newspaper; he blogged regularly for six years at HuffPo; and his work has appeared in *The New York Times*, *Washington Post*, *Los Angeles Times*, *Chicago Tribune*, and *Detroit Free Press*.

Prior to his academic career, he held a clerkship with the late U.S. District Judge Frank J. Battisti in Cleveland and practiced law with the firm of Morrison & Foerster in San Francisco.

## TRANSCRIPT

Good afternoon. What an honor to return virtually to University of California, Hastings College of the Law. I have a set of PowerPoint slides to show you.

It falls to me this impossible task of synthesizing a compelling conference, what has been said by so many. I'd like to talk about how is it that this violence that has become so visible, undeniable, a pattern that we've witnessed during the COVID-19 pandemic. How is it that it went unnoticed by most who weren't themselves Asian Americans? As disheartening as it has been that people have finally recognized what is happening, public officials, commentators, and the talking heads of the chattering class, for Asian Americans, we always knew that this problem existed. It just wasn't something that other people talked about. Why not?

I'd like to offer three explanations: First is the black-white paradigm, second is the model minority myth, and third is the perpetual foreigner syndrome.

## BLACK-WHITE PARADIGM

Let's first turn to the black-white paradigm. We have had, and even now we still have, a tendency to frame all issues of race as if people fit literally into just one of two boxes. You're black or you're white, and that's all there is to it. We do that figuratively as well. We frame this as a narrative of villains and victims, of the hardcore bigots, the members of KKK, and skinheads who commit these terrible crimes on the one hand, and those who are nameless and faceless, not agents of their own destiny who are acted upon, who have violence visited upon their bodies and their communities.

This image is from 1967, the long hot summer when city after city after city throughout the United States. There was unrest, which was called either a riot or rebellion, and the way that you described it indicated the perspective that you had on those events. Troops in their tanks and armored carriers rolled down city streets, as the National Guard was called out and mobilized.

The nation was so shaken up that a federal blue ribbon commission was put together, named for its chair, the Governor of the state of Illinois, Otto Kerner, the following the year, 1968, when there was additional violence. 1968 was an impossible year, as the world then saw the assassination in quick succession of Martin Luther King, Jr. and then Robert F. Kennedy running for president at the time. Well in 1968, the Kerner Commission issued its report, it was the National Advisory Commission on civil disorders, and it concluded in language that was especially stark for a bureaucratic document, that America was not one nation was instead two nations black, and white, separate hostile, and unequal. As much as that acknowledged the divide, that phrase was later taken as the title for the book “Two Nations: Black, White, Separate, Hostile, Unequal” borrowing from the Kerner report. The bestseller in the 1990s, by Andrew Hacker, offered a vivid portrayal of this color line, framed again as just literally a black and white matter.

This has been the dominant image. For those who are neither black nor white, it meant that we were excluded, that we're just not part of the picture. When I was in college writing a term paper that I would later turn into a book called “Yellow Race in America Beyond Black and White,” I knew there was a problem with that. I was offended not as an Asian American, but as someone who wanted to write a good term paper based on the facts, because I realized walking across campus or strolling down the street that this picture was inaccurate. That it didn't portray the reality around us. There are Latinos and Native Americans, people proud of their mixed ancestry.

As I researched these issues, I realized that this idea beyond black and white was not mine. As a college kid, I had that conceit many young people do, that every idea was an original I had thought of myself. Well turns out that was W.E.B. Dubois, a race man, public intellectual, one of the founders of the NAACP, the editor of its magazine *Crisis* in 1903. His magisterial work, “The Souls of Black Folk” collection of essays that's never gone out of print, is poignant in describing what it means to be a problem, talked about by others as “the Negro problem.” It described dual consciousness and proposed the idea of the talented tenth of those who'd achieved a modicum of success had not only rights but also responsibilities. Well, this idea of race beyond black and white was his. He wrote a sentence that you almost certainly have heard quoted even if you're not aware that he was its author. “The problem of the 20th century,” he said, this is in 1903, “is the problem of the color line.” Well, when a student turns in a paper with that quote, I know they haven't actually read the passage they've extracted it from, because what he actually wrote—what I quoted—isn't even half the words in the sentence. What he really wrote was that the problem of the 20th century is the problem of the color line, the relation of the darker to lighter races of men in Asia and Africa and America and the islands of the sea. He was prescient and profound. I'm sure today he would say men, and women in Asia, and Africa, and America, and the islands of the sea. This was someone whose

commitment to the struggle, the historic struggle for black equality, you could not for a moment doubt, yet he's situated that struggle within a global, universal context. So, for him, he thought that black equality was helped not harmed by being able to see not just black and white.

As lawyers, as law students, we know that you give meaning to every word, you don't treat any as meaningless surplus. So, this is the project to which I propose we return. Not only to include Asian Americans, but to include Latinos, to include people who are ambiguous, to be proud of their multiple ancestries, because without doing that we simply can't comprehend the dynamics of any issue whether it's affirmative action or whether it's border control. Whatever else you might want to talk about, the changing face of our nation demands that we see in more than a monochromatic matter. There are structures, subtleties, privileges. It isn't just about the KKK and those they attack. All of us are involved, implicated. I emphasize that doing so promotes black equality.

### **ALLYSHIP**

It turns out, of course this history has always been there. It's just been ignored, overlooked, omitted, forgotten. I'll show you just a few images of Life Magazine, the Instagram of its time, a pictorial newsmagazine which covered current events. There's Malcolm X assassinated. Dying drawing his last breaths in the Audubon Ballroom of New York City in 1963, cradling his head is his longtime confidant colleague and associate, Yuri Kochiyama, a Japanese American. There she is at the bottom a few years later giving a black power salute. This is an example of allyship—real, organic, meaningful, not as people call it today, performative. Look at the Japanese American citizens, dressed in their Sunday best, unfurling their banner, an organization founded in 1929, after much internal debate, decided that they would journey to Washington DC in 1963 to join the young Reverend Martin Luther King Jr., as he gave that speech which we now know today in hindsight, as the famous “I Have a Dream Speech.” Also portrayed here are Grace Lee Boggs and her husband James Lee Boggs, revolutionary labor leaders in my hometown of Detroit. So, this allyship has always existed, it just needs to be brought to the surface. You can see also Dr. King, and virtually the entire entourage, in the front row of this March, the Selma March, and they're all wearing Hawaiian leis. Remember, Hawaii had just joined the union in 1959, and this is before easy jet travel and overnight delivery. An Asian American clergy member who Dr. King had met in Hawaii delivered fresh Hawaiian leis to the Deep South so that they could be worn in a sign of solidarity.

These images are the documentary proof that we need to show that Asian Americans and African Americans have always worked together. It's just not something that anyone has seen fit to publicize. The same spirit,

inspired by the slain JFK, which led to the 1964 Civil Rights Act led to the 1965 Immigration Act. Without civil rights, you wouldn't have immigration.

## **ASIAN AMERICANS & MANIFEST DESTINY**

Indeed, Asian Americans have always been around. The transcontinental railroad which united the United States in what has been called "Manifest Destiny," or the notion that white European Christian settlers of the continent would exercise dominion over it from sea to shining sea, a problematic concept. Well, that was due to the labor of Chinese men, 10,000 to 15,000 of them, who built the western half of the railroad, constituting more than 90% of the workforce. In 1869, in a ceremony in Promontory Point, Utah, these iconic photos were taken. It's a small, grainy black and white picture here, but no matter how big you blow it up, you'll see that no Asian faces were invited to join in the festivities. So, they were excluded in this manner, in a literal photographic visual manner, as they soon would be in a legal, formal manner from the continent. In an act of photographic justice, the late Corky Lee, who passed away during the pandemic, brought the descendants now sixth, seventh, and eighth generation Americans back out to what is a National Park in the high desert there to restage the ceremony, with the Asians properly in the picture where they always belonged.

This presence is remarkable, and even if you study this history as I have, you come across surprises. I was shocked to pick up this book "Asians and Pacific Islanders and the Civil War Angel Islands in the San Francisco Bay." Well, that's U.S. Civil War, fought from 1861 to 1865, and that's a real photo. It's not photoshopped. It is a soldier, one of hundreds, not one or two, not dozens, but hundreds of Asian and Pacific Islander men who were found in the rosters of the Union and Confederate armies during that conflict. Yet as documented in multiple books, they were driven out in violent attacks. Men women and children killed, lynched, their homes burned to the ground in places such as Rock Springs, Wyoming, and Los Angeles, a frontier town, where in a single 24-hour time period, one out of ten of the residents of Chinese background was dispatched. The perpetrators of these crimes, many of them, were themselves newcomers, only from Europe. This wasn't natives versus aliens. It was a racial conflict, expressly referenced as such by those who were involved, when that sort of sentiment was open and unashamed.

So, the first reason we haven't talked about any of this, is because we've wanted to frame race as if everything is literally black and white. Rather black or white, and that's all there is to it. And so, if you're Latino, if you're Asian, if you're Pacific Islander, if you're anything that is somehow not quite neat and tidy in that framing, you're just literally not in the picture. They don't want to include you, you're invisible. Or even if you are there, those photos are soon forgotten, stored away in the archives, if they're preserved at all.

## MODEL MINORITY MYTH

The second reason for the skepticism about Asian Americans, which so many of us have encountered is the model minority myth, which we sometimes even hear from our friends who are progressive, who say to us, “well what's the problem?; you know you're ‘white adjacent;’ you're honorary whites; you try to be whites; you're crazy rich Asians; isn't your average income higher than that even of whites?; why can't you just accept a compliment?” so that when you protest against the model minority myth, people say you're just politically incorrect, hypersensitive, and thin-skinned. Well, I'd like to offer the reasons why the model minority myth is so problematic.

The first reason is that it's simply inaccurate as a factual matter. Asian migration in the United States is what social scientists would call bimodal, just a fancy word for saying it's a camel with two humps two peaks, not one. So, one is those high-net-worth individuals who are moving wealth transnationally. Yes, there are people who are coming with millions of dollars to buy a penthouse suite in San Francisco or New York City and install their children there because they want to avoid the problems of their homeland. Yes, that does exist. And there are those who come, not with that financial capital, but with human capital. They might have a scholarship offer in hand, which is how they got their visa. That's what happened with the 1965 policies. It's brain drain, selective migration. Alongside that there is an altogether different stream that we don't talk about: the waitstaff at the all-you-can-eat seafood buffet, the rideshare drivers, those who are undocumented, who were smuggled in on the Golden Venture, which ran aground a generation ago. And so, if you actually look statistically among Asians in the United States, income equality is greater than among any other groups, including Blacks. So yes, it is true that there are some Asian Americans who are well to do, but it's also true that there are many who are not. Second, what the model minority myth does is that it whitewashes the bias, including even in those areas where Asian Americans are reputed to doing well, such as Silicon Valley and high tech. This headline from the Harvard Business Review states that “statistically Asian Americans are the least likely group in the United States to be promoted to management.” It doesn't matter what baseline you use, if you use an appropriate one that looks at the workforce at the next level down that would be suitable to be promoted who are qualified, what you find is that Asian Americans are not overrepresented, they are rather underrepresented. But this bias is easy to deny because there is the sense that Asian Americans are all just crazy rich Asians.

Third, the model minority myth generates its own resentment. As historian Ronald Takaki said, “Asians have long been punished for their virtues rather than their vices.” Think back, this isn't new. Think back to the arguments for the Exclusion Act. There's the Samuel Gompers pamphlet,

“Meat versus Rice.” Gompers, the progressive labor leader, like many progressive labor leaders, was also a racist. He argues that Asians work too hard, that they are superior, not that they are inferior, but that they will defeat their rivals in a racial conflict. Why? He suggests that Asians subsist on rice, whereas whites have to subsist on meat and that's unfair. It's literal and metaphorical. The model minority myth suggests that Asians are too good, too smart, too hard working and have to be stopped before, in the theme of “yellow peril,” they take over. Consider, if you will, the child prodigy musician who actually does play the violin or the piano at the age of seven and goes off to Carnegie Hall and plays a sonata perfectly. What is said afterward by the critics – “well they were technically perfect, but no soul, no character because they didn't miss enough notes to seem human, they were too mechanical.” Perfection is too much, its own undoing. There's this sense that Asian Americans, through the model minority myth, are portrayed as somehow overachieving, super successful, threatening.

But fourth, the final problem with model minority myth is it ratchets up tensions, through false flattery. It's often not about Asian Americans at all, it's a subtle way of saying to African Americans, Latinos, and others “look at the Asians, they made it... why can't you?” That was true in the original 1966 New York Times Sunday magazine article success story “Japanese American Style,” it's true in so many of the articles, including academic articles that are published that describe Asian Americans as better than other minorities. Using a group comparison, that's inappropriate as a group comparison as a stereotype. But even if one were to accept the propriety of the type of analysis, that ignores the different histories and current stereotypes, that has a self-fulfilling prophecy effect. I would suggest that's the second overarching reason that Asian Americans just can't catch a break, aren't heard because when Asian Americans complain, the response is “what do you have to complain about we all know that you're doing well.”

### **PERPETUAL FOREIGNER SYNDROME**

The third and final reason is people also say, “and you're doing better than you would be in your homeland,” which is again to say Asian Americans, well it's an oxymoron, you can't be Asian and American. No matter that you're Christian, that you speak only English, that you love baseball, that you've worked assiduously to follow that futile command to assimilate, which only makes it a little odd because well then you're just trying too hard, and why is it anyway that you're Christian, or “Oh my, you speak English so well.” It's this sense that discrimination against Asian Americans isn't impermissible racial discrimination, it's just discrimination against foreigners. That's what the United States Supreme Court said throughout the 19th century in all of the cases when it evaluated the Exclusion Act. It said that this is about controlling the borders, even though, in many

instances the litigants were lawfully admitted residents or even native-born persons such as Wong Kim Ark, who established the principle of birthright citizenship for the benefit of all of us. And as the attackers in many cases were themselves newcomers to this nation, the line was not between citizens and aliens. It was between people of different races.

What has happened is Neil Gotanda and others have argued for Asians, in particular, as well as for other people of color, citizenship and race are confused with one another. Or the academic parlance, “conflated.” It becomes easy for people to say this isn't about race, this is about citizenship. It's about aliens. Yet, if you think about it for just a moment and go back and look at those cases, the line that is being drawn is not between citizens and aliens. It is rather among aliens based on race or among even those who were native born in the United States based on race. It is not at all aligned based on alienage. It's aligned based on race because those are blended together and it's people of Asian background, irrespective of whether they were born here or overseas, or how they entered.

Sometimes people say, “well Asians just came here as sojourners, they didn't really want to stay.” That may be true, that some Asians left, but it reverses cause and effect. It's the other way around from the assumption. It isn't that Asians brought discrimination upon themselves by wanting to stay only temporarily. It's that they face such insufferable bias that they had to leave in an exodus. Studies show, by the way, that European immigrants engaged in similar return migration. That is, coming here and living for twenty years or even forty years, and then returning to the old country, where relatively speaking you would be well off based on the earnings made in the new world. In any event, it also is a stereotype, a generalization from some to all. This is exemplified by that question “where are you really from?”, which isn't just something that we react to because we're being too sensitive. It's a reflection of much more. It's a suggestion that you're a liar. You can't be from America's heartland. Rather, you're secretly a sleeper agent, a spy, a traitor, and all the prosecutions of academics accused wrongly of being secretly on the payroll of the Chinese government.

This culminates with the internments during World War II. Men, women, children, the disabled the elderly. Today I just want to show you some of the images by Dorothea Lange, including the image in sepia tone of the veteran. That's a veteran of the Great War, as World War I was deemed before there was a World War II. That is a veteran who served in U.S. armed forces who dons his uniform and likely outranks those who are about to take him away. And it doesn't matter how much you demonstrate your patriotism. Nonetheless, you are legally, formally, culturally, and socially indelibly an enemy-alien based on the color of skin, the texture of hair, or the shape of your eyes. These photos by Dorothea Lange, incidentally she was commissioned by the federal government to take these photos, they were so sympathetic to their subjects that they were impounded. They were taken

away and stored in the archives hidden from view, not permitted to be published, and the negatives themselves were withheld from any type of public view until generations later scholars unearthed them and published the book. This is just the history of ordinary folks who were incarcerated by their own government. 125,000 of them, two-thirds United States citizens, along with native Alaskans. And yes, a handful of German and Italian foreign nationals who were selected on individual basis, not a group assumption.

Dr. Seuss, before he became Dr. Seuss, when he was Theodore Geisel, a budding cartoonist, drew the image of the Japanese Americans as the fifth column. The fifth column is a term for the the enemy within. That is how he showed them, spying, waiting for the Japanese Imperial Navy which they would help with dynamite.

When you look at these visual artifacts, you realize that this isn't just exaggeration. It's not just words. These sentiments turn into policy. They deprive people of freedom, and liberty, of their property, of their dignity, of their American citizenship.

The Vincent Chin case has already been discussed. It's mistaken identity twice over, one ethnicity for another since "you all look alike" and American for foreign, especially meaningful for me as a kid from Detroit. I didn't know Chin, but this case changed my life forever because then I knew that the gaslighting of childhood bullying, the common cruelty of the playground, the teasing and taunting, the relentlessness of being called "Chink" and "Jap," only to have the teachers looking on say, "just reply sticks and stones will break my bones, but words will never hurt me." But even as a kid I knew there was something wrong with that because words packed their own wallop. They inflict the trauma of an internalized sense of inferiority. Those words were preludes. They're an incitement to the sticks and stones. Well, Chin was Chinese American, he wasn't Japanese, and he wasn't foreign. He was a working-class guy, no different than those who always admitted that they killed him, and they merely denied that it was out of bigotry. Framing matters as figuratively black and white. They were good, decent, working men, as the judge who presided over the state case would say. And so of course, they couldn't be bigots. It was either a bar brawl, or a hate crime. There was no sense that it could be both. And it wouldn't have been right had they found someone who was a Japanese foreign national and bludgeoned that person to death with a baseball bat. But this mistaken identity twice over shows how powerful these emotions are of hatred. For Chin represented Tokyo and Toyota. It didn't matter that he really was Chinese Americans, as the defense lawyers would say, on behalf of the two men they admitted that they bludgeoned him to death. It wasn't that different from them, except for race. And that was the only difference that mattered.

Even when you sacrifice life and limb as the Filipino soldiers did, as the Hmong did. As Senator Daniel Inoue did, there he is with JFK: his empty right sleeve is a constant reminder that he had given his arm charging a Nazi

bunker during World War II, only to return to have fellow citizens who were white, spit upon him as he rode public transit. Tammy Duckworth lost both her legs in service to this nation. When she first ran for office, her opponent, she had spoken about her family's thirteen generations of unbroken service to this nation, of how her forbearers had fought alongside George Washington at Valley Forge, whereupon the white man running against her said that he wasn't aware that there were Asians there in the revolutionary period. Well, Tammy Duckworth is Anglo-Asian. On her father's side, she could belong to the daughters of the American Revolution. On her mother side, she's Thai-Chinese.

### **DIVERSITY WITHIN DIVERSITY**

There's so much that we must do also to acknowledge the diversity within diversity. And I know that I, myself, don't do enough of this. I regret that this conference is held on a major Hindu holiday, but when we talk about Asian Americans, it is not just East Asians, and those who were assimilated. There are South Asians, who are transforming dance culture. There are Pacific Islanders with their own unique stories. There are Southeast Asian refugees. And all of these stories are changing America. The margins are becoming a new mainstream, as Gary Okimoto argued twenty years ago. So, I am trying to make it a point to note the Afro-Asian experience, and the Asian-Latinx experience. The stories that are only now being published, only now coming to light of the Japanese and Chinese and Indian men who had African American wives, who had progeny, sometimes abandoning their families. Of the Punjabi Mexicans of California, now in their fourth and fifth generations. An entire community that arose because of anti-miscegenation laws. As in some instances two brothers of Punjabi background married two sisters who were Mexican and formed a community in California with its own distinctive culture, religion, and cuisine and traditions.

All of this we now can lift up and celebrate as diversity. The Afro Asians, such as my favorite jazz musician, Charles Mingus. There in his second album, *Mingus Dynasty*, and you might look at that and think "is he wearing his Chinese regalia mocking Asians?" No, he's paying homage to his grandfather who had come from Hong Kong. Or the woman being lifted in the chair of the traditional bat mitzvah ceremony, an adoptee Asian of Jewish ancestry by her forever family and her cultural traditions in which she was raised.

### **PANDEMIC BACKLASH**

The events of the past year, unprecedented in so many ways, have made it clear there's something going on. We can't look into the hearts of the minds of these attackers, but with the viral videos circulating with the people who've

been shouted at, with slurs, spit upon, stabbed, shot, shoved so hard to the ground as to break bones and fall into comas, shoved in front of subway trains to their death. It's so many that you can't be but persuaded that race is somehow involved here. Especially with all the people who are shouting "go back to where you came from, you made us sick," and so on and so forth. Even if it's people who aren't in any way of Chinese ancestry and who have lived their entire lives in the United States. And then the reaction of those initially who said "oh it's random," "how do you know this is about race." Or in the Atlanta case the law enforcement officer who is investigating, saying after the perpetrator had already confessed, "oh he was having a bad day." As if not only to deny that this was a hate crime, but dismissed that it was a crime at all, or a serial murder. Imagine if there were any other combination, but white on Asian. If it were Asian on white, if it were Black on white, if people would be so quick to say "wow it was just a bad day."

### **ATLANTA WAS A TURNING POINT**

The gentleman at the top of this slide, slashed in the face by the box cutter and permanently disfigured, lamented that when he cried out nobody came, that nobody responded. The video in the center no doubt you've already seen, I cannot commend it to you because of how awful it is. If you haven't seen it, it's of the brutal attack committed by someone recently released from prison on an elderly Filipina woman walking to church. Kicked in the head so severely, she had to be brought to the hospital in critical condition. But the most shocking part of the video is not the attack itself, it's in the final two seconds. You see two gentlemen, the doormen of the fancy building, who have been witnesses to the entire scene walking over, literally closing the door upon this attack, turning around, turning their backs on the victim and walking away.

So, Atlanta was a turning point, not just for Asian Americans, but for all of us, and there will be no going back. We know that there is the intersection here that gender matters, that it isn't that it's just about race or just about gender, it's about both. And that double burden of the stereotypes, the images of the "dragon lady" of the exoticism, or of the submissiveness of the geisha. There is the little Asian girl, the angry Asian girl foul mouthed who challenges every stereotype whose catch phrase is "sometimes I just get so angry" has become a meme and a popular cultural figure.

### **ADVOCACY**

This is the last slide, and I would like to close on a note of optimism. I now live in Queens, "the world borough" of New York City. And just as the pandemic was coming to an end, there was a rally against the hatred in

downtown Flushing, which in this generation has become so heavily Asian American and of every background – whether it's from mainland China, Taiwan, Hong Kong, Korea, Vietnam, India, you name it. Alongside, people who are Italian, Jewish, Greek.

Well, when I looked down at the crowd, I was honored to say a word or two to two dozen speakers. I said to those gathered there to march, who were distributing the yellow whistles as part of that nonprofit project which distributed whistles with the color that was used in a pejorative manner and emblazoned with the logo “we belong,” so that victims can blow on the whistle and bystanders can be upstairs. I looked at those gathered there to march, and I said truthfully, I've never seen this. I've never seen hundreds of Asian Americans, those with accents, their children, grandchildren. I've never seen anything like that. People who are standing up, and speaking out. Who are exercising their rights, fulfilling their responsibilities, saying “we are members of the body politic; we are not sojourners, we are here to stay.”

And as importantly, the speakers then Lieutenant Governor Kathy Hochul, now New York's first female governor; Chuck Schumer, Majority Leader of the Senate; Donovan Richards, the borough President; the Reverend Al Sharpton, civil rights activist. Speakers who were white, were black, LatinX, Jewish, gay, who represented labor said also truthfully, “I've never seen this, I've never seen this array of speakers come out.” People such as the Reverend Al Sharpton speaking so poignantly about how important it was for him to be there because this was about civil rights principles, and he would be a hypocrite if he wasn't there to call out wrongdoers, and he did it in a most thoughtful way. He was not the only speaker to do this, but also the thoughtful explanation that the attackers who were not white – emphatically without promoting stereotypes of black criminality.

And so, this rally gave me hope. I believe in American ideals, on the eve of commemoration of the 20th anniversary of the greatest national tragedy within the memories of those of us now living a flashbulb moment: 9/11. When in so many ways our shared faith in the civic culture was challenged, was threatened. We come together and as we remember those effects, it's so important to recall what drew us or our ancestors here, why this “city upon a hill” beckoned. It was freedom, it was opportunity. It was the ideals of a diverse democracy, such as have never been seen anywhere in the world over, this experiment in self-government. It's up to us, as individuals and as a community to make good on the promise to make America a new as we emerge from the pandemic.

I've been greatly honored to have this opportunity to say a few words, and I thank you for this important conference. Asian Americans are here to stay. We're equals and we will now stand up and speak out, not only for ourselves but for these great ideals. Thank you so very much.