

NARRATOR:

The Disability & Philanthropy Forum presents Jennifer Lee, founder of the Asian Americans with Disabilities Initiative.

JENNIFER LEE:

I'm so happy to be talking about these two movements side by side, because it's a conversation that I don't think enough advocates are having right now in today's day and age. I think, for some context, I want to bring us back to the spike in anti-Asian hate. And when I use that term where I talk about racially motivated violence and discrimination against Asian-Americans, which really was tracing back to a former president's commentary about COVID-19 as the "Chinese virus" or the kung flu.

But it would be a mistake to also think that anti-Asian hate and violence started only in 2020, when in reality, racially motivated violence has been a reality for multiple decades and centuries since immigration, and since we talked about what it means to assimilate into the American project. I think when we think about racially motivated violence and brutality today, we should think about how our bodies move in this world, and particularly, how bodies become disabled under the weight of structural injustices.

I think here, I would be remiss not to acknowledge the model minority stereotype, which refers to the notion that Asian-Americans are culturally hardworking and superior as a means to explain their upward mobility. And this is a harmful stereotype that is rooted in anti-blackness and white supremacy that is meant to act as a wedge in between black and Asian communities. The limited academic research available shows that disabled Asian-Americans in particular are the least likely to disclose a disability in the workplace or the classroom.

And a lot of the cultural stigmas within both of these communities compound, meaning that they're the least likely to seek help and to ask for assistance or to even apply for accommodations even when they are entitled to it. I think, in the same way, within our nonprofit The Asian Americans with Disabilities Initiative, last year in January, 2022, we published our first resource guide for disabled Asian-Americans. But the majority of the comments and the remarks we received were completely anonymized. The large portion of our community is finding our resources helpful, but is still unwilling to identify as disabled themselves. They're rejecting the terms chronically ill. And it goes back to what it means for a larger cultural movement to tackle ableism and the kind of stigmas that exist in our communities and outside our communities.

When I mentioned the parallel narratives of resistance, part of what I refer to is recognizing that our battles are not the same. These injustices are certainly different between the Asian-American and the disabled community. But what we can do is recognize the intersectional nature of what it means to be caught in both threads and what it means to create space in a meaningful manner for disabled Asian-Americans for decades to come.

NARRATOR: To continue your learning journey, visit [DisabilityPhilanthropy.org](https://DisabilityPhilanthropy.org).