

WRITING SAMPLE

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This following editorial piece is featured on VO1SS Media. This particular article holds value and meaning especially for my demographic. Since the Covid-19 pandemic, lives were lost, businesses have failed, and families suffered; and In the midst of it all, provoked racism from community members and political figures. I was inspired to write this article to express the adversity that Asian-Americans have experienced directly and/or indirectly in the wake of this pandemic.

WHY YOU MIGHT WANT TO THINK TWICE BEFORE CALLING IT THE “CHINESE VIRUS”

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The COVID-19 pandemic has, without a doubt, caused a tremendous impact on our lives and almost every nation on our planet. With many people suffering from an absence of income, international students being unable to return to their families, and others going through a loss of a loved one whether it was due to COVID-19 or other ailments, it is safe to say that this global pandemic continues to be a very difficult time for most, if not all of us.

However, during these trying times, it is possible for many individuals to get caught up in other dilemmas that distract people from remembering the reality of COVID-19, which is the overwhelming

number of casualties around the world. For example, groups of individuals protesting to reopen the economy when it is unsafe to do so and putting everybody at risk or placing blame towards a certain community by naming it the “Chinese virus”.

On March 19, 2020, Journalists Maegan Vazquez and Betsy Klein published an article on CNN (Cable News Network) called “Trump again defends use of the term ‘China virus’.” This brought my attention towards the issue of individuals including President Trump who spoke during a White House press conference and defended the idea of calling COVID-19 the “Chinese virus,” because it originated in Wuhan, China.

Some may understand Trump’s reasonings, as past historical illnesses and pandemics normalized the concept of naming diseases based on its place of origin – e.g., The Spanish Flu, West Nile Virus, and MERS (Middle Eastern Respiratory Illness). The issue of individuals and powerful leaders such as President Trump attempting to normalize the term “Chinese virus” can encourage such behaviour that amplifies socioeconomic issues advanced by racial antagonism and discrimination towards a minoritized demographic.

Notably, the *World Health Organization* (WHO) emphasizes the importance of “using an appropriate name that is scientifically sound and socially acceptable” under their posting that outlines “the best practices for naming new human infectious diseases”. This is to prohibit the possibility of racism that may unintentionally arise as a product of calling COVID-19 the ‘Chinese virus’. Historical events which involve oppression exhibit reasons as to why this form of political association is problematic for those who live in China, or even those who identify as East Asian in Western countries. For example, the bondage of the “Chinese Exclusion Act” in 1923, which reflects Canada’s history with oppression and institutional racism against the Chinese.

The World Health Organization (WHO) further supports their claim, by stating: “Terms that should be avoided in disease names include geographic locations (e.g. Middle East Respiratory Syndrome, Spanish Flu, Rift Valley fever), people’s names (e.g. Creutzfeldt-Jakob disease, Chagas disease), species of animal or food (e.g. swine flu, bird flu, monkeypox), cultural, population, industry or occupational references (e.g. legionnaires), and terms that incite undue fear (e.g. unknown, fatal, epidemic)”.

The WHO announced this to crystalize that naming a disease after a certain demographic, or place of origin can evoke consequences of economic challenges, such as a substantial decline in profit within small/local businesses, and tourist attractions. By creating associations of fear with a particular place, Trump’s labelling of the “Chinese virus” invites past behaviours of discrimination, bias, and xenophobia toward visible minorities.

In Canada back in 1923, *The Chinese Immigration Act*, also known as “The Chinese Exclusion Act,” was a legislation enacted by Prime Minister William Lyon Mackenzie King . The purpose of this act was to prohibit the immigration flow of the Chinese into Canada by narrowing the qualifications, which made entry into Canada much more difficult for them. Those who were exempted were merchants, diplomats, and foreign students. This legislation was also partially due to the government placing blame on visible minorities considering postwar economic downturns. Essentially, this act functioned to legalize discrimination amongst the Chinese.

Using the term 'Chinese virus' allows the opportunity for individuals to place blame on China. This kind of behavior can encourage online communities to stigmatize and make fun of Chinese culture, as a result of a lack of knowledge towards the actual cause of this outbreak.

As some people still assume that this virus was a product of individuals consuming 'exotic' animals, it is strongly believed that the coronavirus was derived from the "wet markets" in Wuhan. These markets sell dead and live animals including fish and poultry, which often practices do not sufficiently meet the standards of food sanitization. Journalists Anne Gulland and Sarah Newey in an article titled, "What is coronavirus, how did it start and how big could it get?" stated that "hygiene standards are difficult to maintain if live animals are being kept and butchered on site". Thus, many experts believe that the likelihood of this virus coming from humans consuming bats or snakes is arguably incorrect.

Nevertheless, using the term "Chinese virus" truly undermines the real issues and the global toll of this pandemic. The bottom line is that it is our duty as citizens to focus on staying healthy and to stop the spread of the virus. As a student, I can understand the calamities that this virus draws upon. Many university students and postgraduates are going through difficult times, dealing with financial distress due to the lack of jobs available, and being unable to pay for tuition as a result of losing income opportunities.

Many of us fear that this may get worse once students return for school in the fall. Some of my peers who are international students studying abroad are unable to return to their families because it is unsafe to do so due to the turbulent and rapidly changing nature of international borders. Not to mention, there are also others who are struggling to cope with their mental health as a result of the constant panic and fear that plagues the contemporary state of the world.

For the sake of protecting the elderly and preventing our friends and families with preexisting health conditions from contracting the virus, it is imperative for everyone to practice social distancing and to stay home so that our frontline workers like the doctors, nurses, and medical staff can do their job. Rather than focus on blame, on negativity and issues that cultivate social division, we should place our energy on unity and gathering as a global community to support everyone.

1. Canadian Museum of Immigration at Pier 1. "Chinese Immigration Act, 1923".

<https://pier21.ca/research/immigration-history/chinese-immigration-act-1923>

2. Canadian Museum of Immigration at Pier 1. "Chinese Immigration Act, 1923".

<https://pier21.ca/research/immigration-history/chinese-immigration-act-1923>

3. Chinese in BC. "Immigration: Chinese Exclusion Act".

<https://www.library.ubc.ca/chineseinbc/exclusion.html>

4. Canadian Museum of Immigration at Pier 1. "Chinese Immigration Act, 1923".

<https://pier21.ca/research/immigration-history/chinese-immigration-act-1923>

5. Gulland, Anne and Newey, Sarah. "What is coronavirus, how did it start and how big could it get?".
29 April,

2020. https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2020/04/29/pandemic-what-coronavirus-covid-19-virus/?google_preview=XJpigNMHBHQY7oad9QUw7qLS_AWIAYCAgKDnoePYVw&iu=6582&gdfp_req=1

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