

# THE MGRUBLIAN CENTER FOR HUMAN RIGHTS



**Spring 2020**

# A TIME LIKE NEVER BEFORE



On March 11, 2020, CMC students received notice that due to the COVID-19 pandemic, CMC's campus would be closing in the coming days. Students were sent home - to complete their semesters remotely through distance learning. The world was further rocked by the murder of George Floyd, sparking a new wave of protests against the injustices black people face in America.

This issue features student articles and op-eds discussing human rights abuses in the wake of a global pandemic; and showcases the unique ways CMCers have remained engaged in human rights activism from home.

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# An Amplification of Xenophobia

By Maya Shah



Image via Associated Press.

A global crisis is the time for understanding and compassion. Sadly, many are using the coronavirus to express and justify their xenophobic views, and have chosen the Asian American community as their scapegoat. Yet those who hold xenophobic views have been doing a lot more than pointing fingers, with acts of discrimination ranging from derogatory name-calling to acts of violence. "San Francisco State University found a 50 percent rise in the number of news articles related to the coronavirus and anti-Asian discrimination between Feb. 9 and March 7" [1].

Many businesses have been hit hard due to the pandemic, and none more so than Asian American businesses. Some have reported an 80% drop in revenue, and Chinatowns have turned into ghost towns. Asian American employment has also been impacted by the virus. Asian American unemployment has skyrocketed much faster than any other minority group [4].

As if economic pressure was not enough, Asian Americans have faced both verbal and physical attacks. "By late April, a coalition of Asian-American groups that had created a reporting center called STOP AAPI HATE said it had received almost 1,500 reports of incidents of racism, hate speech, discrimination, and physical attacks against Asians and Asian Americans." These instances range from forms of degradation like name-calling and spitting to acts of violence [2]. One Asian American gave his story; he was waiting by the bus when a man began to berate him:

"I ignored him ... [then] an object of substantial weight was thrown at me with high velocity – missing me but impacting the side of the bus with a sickening ‘thwack.’ Instantly, I sobered to an awareness in the amount of trauma the object would have caused if it had struck my head" [2].

# An Amplification of Xenophobia

Despite the widespread nature of these attacks, there has been no government intervention to stop such hate crimes. In fact, President Donald Trump and Secretary of State Mike Pompeo called COVID-19 "the Chinese Virus" and "Wuhan Virus" respectively. Their actions go directly against the World Health Organization's guidelines for naming diseases: that is, diseases are not to be named after the location it originates from, in order to avoid associating a disease with a particular ethnic group [1].

There are many ways to help the Asian American community during this difficult time. The easiest way is by supporting Asian American businesses, such as by ordering takeout from a restaurant or by shopping at a local Asian grocery store. You can also help while at home by participating in social media campaigns like #RacismIsAVirus and Wash the Hate. If you are interested in more hands-on activism and live in the L.A. area, #LoveLT, an organization started by the Little Tokyo City Council, is seeking volunteers to deliver produce to those in need [3].

During this difficult time, we need to not only be cognizant of stopping the viral spread of COVID-19 but stopping the spread of hatred too.



Image Via Vox

## Works Cited:

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3. <https://www.nbcnews.com/news/asian-america/how-help-struggling-asian-american-communities-amid-coronavirus-pandemic-n1178516>
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# Fighting for A Nation During Midterms

By Sydney Heath

CLAREMONT, Calif. -- While many college students worry about getting good grades, going to parties and avoiding gaining the freshman 15, CMC sophomore Yara Ismael has been busy organizing protests, lobbying Congress and publishing in the *Wall Street Journal*.

Since leaving Iraq in 2014, Ismael has become one of the United States' most outspoken activists for Kurdish rights. Ismael's dedication to the Kurdish cause began when she moved to Corona, California at age 13. She wanted to maintain her connection to her Kurdish roots and deeply identified with the plight of the Kurdish people in the Middle East.

The Kurdish people make up one of the world's largest nations without an independent state. They occupy an area known as Kurdistan, which spans parts of Iraq, Iran, Syria, Turkey and Armenia. The Kurds have fought for more than 100 years to create an independent Kurdistan after facing extreme discrimination and violence in their respective countries. In October, Ismael, who identifies as Kurdish, Iraqi and American, helped organize a protest in L.A. that drew over 300 people. The demonstration took place in front of the Turkish Consulate in response to the removal of U.S. troops from the Syrian border by the administration of President Donald Trump. This action gave President Recep Tayyip Erdogan of Turkey the green light to enter Syria and overtake the Kurdish army at the Syrian border. "It proved to me -- and the world -- that neither democracy nor anything else is powerful enough to prevent one man's decision from destroying a nation, a movement, an aspiring democracy, and a whole people," Ismael said. "It reaffirmed to me the Kurdish saying that there are 'no friends but the mountains.'"

In November, Ismael co-authored an article for the *Wall Street Journal* about the Trump administration's decision. The article was titled: "Heartbreak for Kurdish-Americans: It's painful to watch our adopted country betray our homeland." Following the protest, Ismael flew to Washington D.C. to speak to representatives and other government officials to make sure the U.S. government was informed on the ways in which the Kurds were suffering in the Middle East. She considered her visit a success in that two significant acts were passed by Congress following her trip: The first condemned Turkey's attack on the Kurds in Syria, and the second imposed sanctions on Turkey. "We felt like we were being heard, and it was a really eye-opening and learning experience for me," Ismael said.

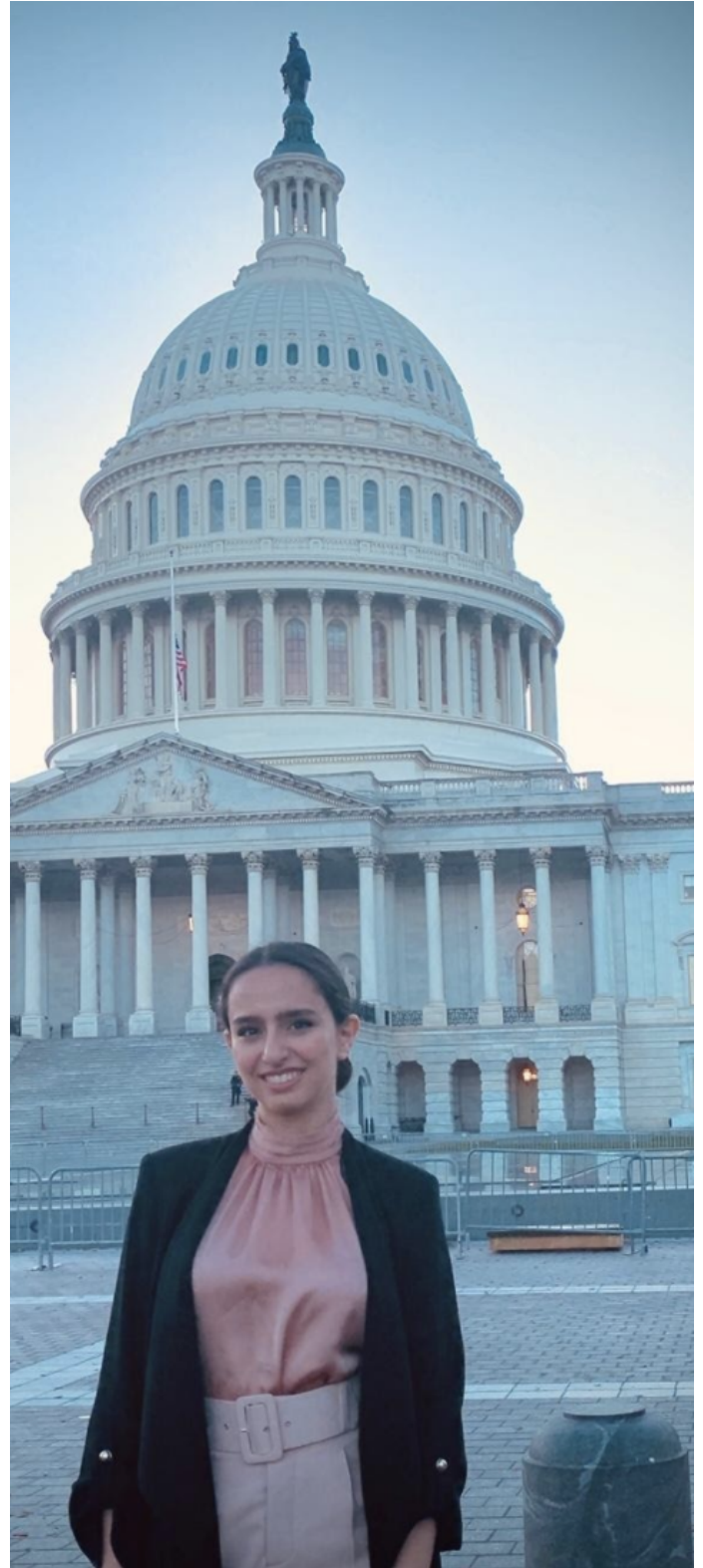


Photo via Kurdistan 24

# Fighting for A Nation During Midterms

Ismael is currently pursuing a major in International Relations with a sequence in Human Rights. Her confident, strong-willed personality does not fit her small stature, and her large, lively brown eyes do not reflect the few hours of sleep she gets most nights as she tries to balance activism with schoolwork. In the midst of planning the October protest in L.A., Ismael had to drop one of her more demanding classes and decided to take a break from her job in CMC's financial aid office. Ismael has continued her activism through organizing phone banks, fundraising and working to unite the Kurdish communities across the country. She hopes to continue to spread awareness for the situation of the Kurds and feels that officials are generally open to learning more.

The issue lies in the fact that Kurdish communities have not worked together to make their cause known. "I think that goes back to the organizational weakness of the Kurdish community here, which also needs to work harder than every other community, not just because of the complexity of the situation but also because we have four other nations deliberately spreading false information and countering any efforts our communities make," Ismael explained. The Kurdish community is lucky to have found such an unrelenting, passionate advocate who will no doubt play an important role in persuading the U.S. to reaffirm its alliance with the Kurds.



Yara Ismael '22 in front of the U.S. Capitol

# Op-Ed: Discrimination Written into the CARES Act

By Marycarmen Montanez

On March 27, the CARES Act was signed into law, becoming the largest economic stimulus package ever passed in the history of the United States. Many families and individuals, devastated by the economical impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic, began receiving stimulus checks. However, this bill failed to provide aid to one of the communities most affected by the pandemic: undocumented immigrants.

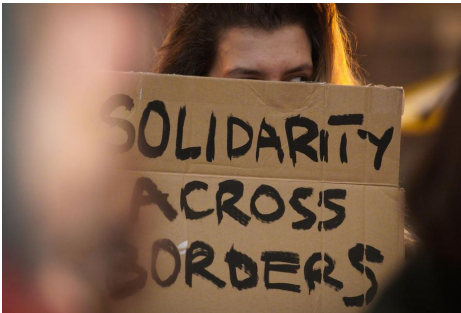


Image Via The Verge



Image Via The New York Times



Image Via Star Tribune

Immigrants are an important part of our nation; they pay billions in taxes annually and work many of the jobs that are now not only suddenly considered essential, although they have always been, but are also the backbone of our country. The food you eat on your table was most likely planted and harvested by immigrants who not only work long hours in grueling conditions, but are also severely underpaid. Many work as nurses and doctors -- those at the frontlines of the pandemic. Many are teachers, grocery workers, and DACA students pursuing their college education. Many have found themselves unemployed and without an income or financial assistance, are struggling to survive. They are our neighbors, our friends and peers. It can be easy to settle to the default argument that the federal government is explicitly excluding this community because they are not citizens of the country.

However, if you identify with this statement, then I hope you are angered to hear that U.S. citizens, if they are married to an undocumented immigrant, have also been denied from receiving a stimulus check. This is not about citizenship; the pandemic is a global issue. It surpasses any human-made, arbitrary construct, and while the virus does not discriminate against race, socioeconomic class, and citizenship status -- people of color, immigrants, and those of lower socioeconomic class are disproportionately affected the most by the impact of the pandemic.

By not including undocumented immigrants or spouses of undocumented immigrants into the stimulus package, the federal government is sending a clear message: they do not care about the this community or the value they add to our country. They are leaving an entire group of people to suffer on their own in a time in which certain constructs should be placed second after the overall well-being of a country's valuable members. Denying people the very basic means to survive during a pandemic is a massive human rights violation. We cannot bring back the hundreds of thousands who have died because of lack of access to basic healthcare, PPE, shelter, food, and financial support, but we can hold leaders accountable for their poor planning and gross mismanagement of this crisis.

# The Plight of Migrant Workers in India Amidst the Pandemic

By Shania Sharma

In the first months of the coronavirus pandemic, it was termed the great equalizer, because the virus infected people regardless of race, ethnicity, or socioeconomic status. Since then, it has become clear that there is nothing 'equalizing' about this crisis, and the lockdown, Although keeping us safer from coronavirus, the situation has stripped people of their livelihoods and put their health and wellbeing more at risk than ever.



A line of Migrant workers waiting  
(taken from my window)

Amidst the lockdown in India, millions of migrant, daily-wage workers that moved to big cities from small towns in search of opportunity, have lost their jobs. They have no savings to sustain themselves during the lockdown and dwindling faith in the fact that the government is going to provide even their basic necessities.

From this group, thousands of workers decided that they would be safer in their home towns. And with buses and trains not functioning, several families have begun the home-bound journey on foot. So they are walking home; sometimes barefoot, bearing the weight of all their belongings on their necks and backs, with young children, spending hours without food and water, all with the hope that returning home will bring some solace. The images of calloused feet, tears, and the cries of the children will haunt our country forever.

In response to pressure from several groups, the government began to organize buses to take these workers and their families home. The schedules of the buses, however, were very poorly organized, and there were not nearly as many vehicles as needed to accommodate the demand. Because of their desperation, many families have been waiting in packed crowds for buses. When asked why they are risking their health, many of them plainly answer that their fear of starvation is bigger than their fear of contracting the virus.



# The Plight of Migrant Workers in India Amidst the Pandemic

People are horrified at the amount of inaction that is seen all the way from the central government to local offices. The fact is that their gatherings are a huge health risk to us all, which has, at the least, driven people to acknowledge their suffering out of their own fear of the spread of the virus. The pictures of them waiting at bus stops and at different toll plazas has made the rounds quickly. When these pictures and videos first emerged in March, no one had imagined that more than two months later we'd still be seeing the same images of people sitting on streets in big groups in hopes that a bus will arrive that they are able to get on. Media coverage has included constant reminders that these are recent pictures, and not old ones, and that the plight of these people continues, with inadequate responses from government and from citizens with the capacity to help.

There is hope bubbling amidst the suffering: volunteers who risk their health every day, independent media covering the stories that big media houses are ignoring, instances of religious harmony with Muslims celebrating Eid by feeding hungry families. But it is painful to acknowledge how India has failed its migrant workers, whose labor is the backbone of our cities. It is not the scope of any one article to cover the story of millions such people spread across India, nor does the term 'migrant workers' do enough to humanize these people, but it is important to repeatedly draw attention to their anguish- despite the moral fatigue that this may bring.

**If you have any ability to help, please click on the links  
below:**

**Indian passport holders: [https://goonj.org/donate/?  
utm\\_medium=null&utm\\_source=null&utm\\_campaign=null](https://goonj.org/donate/?utm_medium=null&utm_source=null&utm_campaign=null)**

**Other passport holders: [https://goonj.org/donate-foreign/?  
utm\\_medium=null&utm\\_source=null&utm\\_campaign=null](https://goonj.org/donate-foreign/?utm_medium=null&utm_source=null&utm_campaign=null)**

# Creative Resistance Against A Humorless State: Carnavalesque Protest And Satire In Hong Kong

By Anna Choi

On August 7th, 2019, I watched my dad smile for the first time in days. Two weeks ago, triad members attacked subway passengers thought to be protestors while police watched. Four days later, police dressed as protestors carried out brutal arrests where subdued, compliant arrestees were beaten until their faces were covered in blood.

But all this didn't matter, because around us, teenagers and young adults were laughing and singing while waving laser pens at trees and rhetorically asking: "Why isn't it burning?"

The "laser show" was spontaneously organized in response to the arrest of Baptist University Student Union head Keith Fong the night before. Fong stated he had bought laser pointers to star-gaze, but according to police, Fong was detained for buying "laser guns." Since protestors use laser pointers to shine at officers' eyes and surveillance cameras, police were trying to crack down on their use.

After seeing police demonstrate that the confiscated "offensive weapons" could burn newspaper, one man raised a copy of People's Daily, the official Chinese Communist newspaper, for others to "burn." As the Star Wars theme played, protest supporters gathered to shine lasers and gasp in mock astonishment at the fully-intact paper. Soon, glow-sticks, disco balls and speakers were brought out as people danced, played party games and projected hand-shadow shows onto the planetarium.



A Chinese military helicopter flies low as protestors hold a peaceful rally calling on the international community to sanction the Hong Kong government. Photo: Anna Choi

# Creative Resistance Against A Humorless State: Carnavalesque Protest And Satire In Hong Kong

From their windows, luxury hotel guests wary of the violent protests watched the comical scene of people unsuccessfully attempt "arson". International media outlets reported the playful act of resistance while even local news, who usually practice self-censorship, ridiculed the police. In the end, Fong was released without charge.

This was a small success story of carnivalesque protest in Hong Kong, and other examples, such as the 2019 Halloween protests have brought international outcry and helped sustain the movement. However, many see them as futile methods against a humorless state that simply conducts violent dispersal and arrest operations.

Virtually, the government has further demonstrated its intolerance for criticism. In mid-May 2020, Radio Television Hong Kong was forced to suspend a show, Headliner, after the government demanded it apologize for insulting the police. The satirical series was prominent for brazenly slamming government and police repression of protests, their blind subordination to Beijing and corrupt policies in response to the Wuhan coronavirus. Now, with China enacting a draconian national security law, Hong Kongers may have to find subtler, more creative forms of resistance, for "carnavalesque protest only succeeds when there are checks and balances in state power." This quote by Michael Lane Bruner, Ph.D., professor of persuasion and politics, is part of his larger theory that parodic protest actions "are particularly prevalent when those benefiting from rampant political corruption lose their sense of humor, become ridiculous in their seriousness, but are incapable, for one reason or another, of silencing their prankster publics." Historically, "religious and state institutions provided holidays serving a carnivalesque function of reinforcing social order by allowing its temporary subversion," hence thin-skinned regimes may face serious backlash for banning sardonic protests.

According to Bruner, those on the losing end must find "opportunity structures" that make it difficult for the state to forcefully halt creative forms of protest. Since China is under fire for covering up the coronavirus, an obvious choice for Hong Kong would be seeking support from other countries. Hong Kongers will also continually appeal to the US to counter Chinese incursions into the city's autonomy through the Hong Kong Human Rights and Democracy Act.

A gloom has settled in my city, but when the next "laser show" rolls around, Hong Kongers will be looking to the international community for much needed support.

# The Anti-Racist Book Club



Given the recent murders of George Floyd, Breona Taylor, Ahmaud Arbery, and countless other unarmed black Americans, Sobé Uwajeh, Sahib Basin, and Hailey Wilson came together to form a summer book club at CMC to facilitate a dialogue about systemic racism in America. We will be reading three books: *Stamped from the Beginning*, *Between the World and Me*, and *The New Jim Crow*. Each of these books were chosen with the aim to better educate the CMC community on this issue, how they may perpetuate it or be complacent in it, and actions they can take to combat racism within their own life and the CMC community. The idea is not just to discuss contemporary issues but to understand the unique perspectives offered by the authors before bringing them to bear upon our shared realities. As of today, our book club has over three hundred "members", ranging from CMC students to CMC trustees. We also have had over 100 students sign up to participate that are part of the class of 2024. We are so appreciative that the Class of 2024 is taking the necessary steps to enter CMC committed to educating themselves on how to be actively Anti-Racist.

In addition to the book club meetings we are hosting, we have also had facilitation training meetings hosted by Nyree Gray, Vince Greer, and John Lenssen for all of the facilitators recruited for the discussions. With each meeting, we are bringing together faculty, professors, students, and trustees to discuss and understand the complexities of racism in America. It is a great effort by Claremont McKenna College in creating and becoming a community of Anti-Racists.

# ASCMC: Making a Better CMC

For the 2020-2021 term, ASCMC has put student advocacy at the forefront of its priorities. During his campaign, President Johnson Lin ran on a platform of elevating marginalized communities and increasing the college's institutional accountability. Lin's first act as President was meeting with numerous affinity group leaders to discuss how ASCMC could better serve marginalized students on campus. After leaving campus due to COVID-19, ASCMC worked with the Nobody Fails at CMC Coalition to pursue equitable grading policies and facilitate discussions between students and President Chodosh, Dean Uvin, and other CMC administrators.



Despite typically being inactive outside of the academic year, ASCMC has preserved its momentum by working on several initiatives during the summer. In the days following George Floyd's murder, ASCMC swiftly compiled resources for students to educate themselves and participate in becoming actively anti-racist. In the weeks that followed, ASCMC worked closely with leaders of the Black Student Association and the Black Women's Collective to host "We Stand with You", a virtual space that allowed black students who requested a platform to share their experiences and for non-black students to learn about being better allies. In total, nearly 300 CMC students, faculty, and administrators attended this event. Following that, ASCMC engaged the 5C student governments to collaborate on "5 Colleges, 1 Cause", a student-alumni matching fundraiser that generated over \$56,000 for five non-profit organizations dedicated to social justice for black communities across the country.

To better inform the perspective of student leaders, ASCMC is reading and discussing "So You Want to Talk About Race" by Ijeoma Oluo. The Diversity and Inclusion Committee (D&I Committee) is planning several speaker events throughout the year that will educate students about race, especially in the academic sphere. The D&I Committee is also working on a pilot program that will provide language resources to non-English speaking parents and families during orientation. ASCMC will also be compiling a list of race-related courses at the 5Cs to evaluate the diversity of the consortium's coursework and provide its students with resources during course registration. On the events side, ASCMC is reevaluating the campus's party culture and how student activities can be more inclusive to students of all backgrounds.

As we look to the future and to a new, albeit very different, academic year, ASCMC hopes to be an agent of change to help steer the College to be a more inclusive and equitable space for all students.



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For more information, please visit <https://human-rights.cmc.edu/>

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