

10th Anniversary Essay

© *Journal of International Students*

Volume 10, Issue 4 (2020), pp. i-vi

ISSN: 2162-3104 (Print), 2166-3750 (Online)

Doi: 10.32674/jis.v10i4.2929

ojed.org/jis



Neo-Racism and the Criminalization of China

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Earlier this year, the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) elevated “hate-fueled violence” to a top national security priority, putting racist violence on the same threat level as terrorist groups such as ISIS (Allam, 2020). In other words, there are just as many serious challenges to safety inside the United States as outside its national borders. And much of this danger is racially motivated. Among the leading targets are immigrants or those who appear as immigrants. For example, the United States experienced a surge of random attacks against those of Asian descent earlier this year, as they were wrongfully blamed for spreading COVID-19 (Wang, 2020).

As for U.S. higher education, international students have been both threatened and viewed as threats. Especially since 9/11, they have been under the presumption of being an endangerment to the safety of Americans. This remains evident today, not just in current federal procedures, such as the Student Exchange Visitor Information System (SEVIS) but also in current political rhetoric and selective immigration policies. One clear example is the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) rule months ago that international students would be deported if their universities go online (Castiello-Gutiérrez & Li, 2020). In their appeal in the Harvard and MIT lawsuit (President and Fellows, 2020), DHS explicitly stated to the courts that international students would otherwise be a threat to “national safety.”

In response, we witnessed a massive public outcry across educational, governmental, and commercial sectors in support of internationals and arguing for the wealth of benefits they bring. And, while DHS rescinded that rule soon after, there has remained numerous, more selective targeting toward a certain type of international: those from China. The general public has less opposed this anti-China