

Min Jin Lee's Speech

[01:03-01:46]

Good evening. I would have preferred to have been with you under much happier circumstances. However, I want you to know that I do feel some joy in this trial that we are undergoing because you and I are together tonight. You may have been feeling alone in your distress. We now know that we are not alone! We have each other.

[02:53-03:58]

Earlier this month on March 3rd, I took an informal survey on Twitter and asked Asians and Asian Americans the following question in light of the rise of insults, assaults, and killings of members of our community: "Have you changed any of your daily behaviors relating to transportation, school, walking, exercise, or food, or work?"

Almost 500 of you wrote back to me and I want to thank you for your trust in sharing your lives. You told me that you are afraid. That you take an inconvenient route if it better ensures your safety. You wear hats and sunglasses to hide your Asian face. You have a contingency plan in case you get attacked. Sort of like a "fire drill of life."

[06:57-07:57]

I'm a novelist and it is my job to have empathy for everyone. And I imagine that things must be pretty awful for a person to carry a hammer, to shout racial slurs, sleep on the streets, be off their medication, and wish to take another person's life. My assailant is likely a person without much reason, and I'm sure he's desperate. And yet, when I think of my brothers and sisters almost imprisoning themselves in their homes, modifying their own faces in the hopes of not getting hurt, I get angry. Why are we tying ourselves in knots trying to solve a problem that we did not create?

[08:48-09:05]

So I think to myself, "what can I do? How can I help you? How can I help myself?" I don't want to be hypervigilant forever.

[11:34-11:49]

Each of you carries a slingshot in your pocket. You can use the slingshot to find those who can help us find structural, comprehensive, permanent answers.

[12:44-13:11]

Speak out. Tell them that they should pay attention because you are paying attention. And I promise, I promise you will feel better. And even if you don't see changes right away, you are writing your story. And by telling your story, you will be helping to solve our problems – which will take time.

[15:52-16:58]

I will never be ashamed for being hated for my race. This shame belongs to the racist. It is not my shame.

I say these things because I want them to feel stronger. Because as a person who studies human motivation for a living, what I really hear in these questions is the following. I hear, “I want to be loved, I want to be accepted, I want you to know me.” So I ask you, please tell us who you are. Tell us your name. Tell us your story. Speak and be remembered. Thank you. Good evening.

Lee, Min Jin Lee, Speech at the Break the Silence Rally, Mar.16, 2022, New York, YouTube @rchandra2006.
<<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rVYZ5bEGv3w&t=462s>>