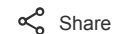


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Asian men learn a lesson in hate

Associated Press

LA CROSSE—Taro Imamura, a student from Japan, is afraid to go downtown since he was attacked by a group of men who thought he was Hmong.

The early morning of April 22 changed Imamura's view of America and La Crosse.

The UW-La Crosse student had a brutal confrontation with racism in downtown La Crosse. Now he thinks more about racism when he walks around campus and encounters other students.

"I don't feel safe and it will take a while to forget," Imamura, 21, said. "It's pretty hard to walk around, it feels like this is not my place."

Imamura and another Japanese student, Yasushi Kikuchi, were beaten by a group of white men who thought the two students were Hmong.

The La Crosse Friends of International Students, a community support group for foreign students, condemned the incident.

Initial police reports did not indicate the attack was racially motivated.

Imamura and Kikuchi were walking on a downtown street about 1:30 a.m. that Sunday after a party for another foreign student.

A group of young white men, at least four and maybe six, according to witnesses, made racial slurs and started a fight.

One man grabbed Imamura and punched him in the face, causing an eye injury, while Kikuchi was pushed down and kicked in the head.

One witness, a white woman, saw the group harassing the Japanese students.

She asked one of the men why they were picking on the students. According to police reports, the man replied: "Because we hate gooks."

The woman said she pretended to be a probation agent in an attempt to intimidate the white men, but they continued to fight and laughed at her.

She later told police, "I think the offenders are cocky enough to have bragged" about the beatings.

Imamura and Kikuchi went back to their house to call for an ambulance and police. Both men were treated at St. Francis Medical Center for injuries.

Imamura thought he would suffer permanent eye damage because he had "holes" in his retina. But laser treatments have helped and the damage may not be permanent, he said.

No arrests have been made and La Crosse police were continuing to investigate the incident.

Kikuchi said he heard Hmong slurs before the fight. He did not want to be interviewed because he fears repercussions.

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Associated Press_ LA CROSSE-Taro Imamura, a student from Japan, is afraid to go downtown since he was attacked by a group of men who thought he was Hmong. The early morning of April 22 changed Imamura's view of America and La Crosse. The UW-La Crosse student had a brutal confrontation with racism in downtown La Crosse. Now he thinks more about racism when he walks around campus and encounters other students. "I don't feel safe and it will take a while to forget," Imamura, 21, said. "It's pretty hard to walk around, it feels like this is not my place."

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