

Asian Pacific Studies Program's Statement Regarding Anti-AAPI Hate Crimes

The recent killing of people in Atlanta has revealed, once again, our nation's ugly reality of racial inequality and violence embedded in everyday life. This time, mostly Asian Americans, especially women, fell victim to the ruthless racial violence. The loss of the lives of innocent people is disheartening enough. What is further disheartening is that racial violence was committed even after the Black Lives Matter movement raised consciousness about racial inequality and injustice. While we are attempting to heal the deep-rooted wounds and build bridges across racial and ethnic lines, bigotry and racist hatred once again targeted Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders (AAPI), who are among the most marginalized, silenced, and overlooked minority groups in the country.

The current anti-Asian biases, discrimination and hate crimes are nothing new but are deeply rooted in history. From the incipient stage of their immigration to the U.S. dating back to the mid-19th century, Asian Americans have been subject to legal, social and cultural discrimination and exclusion. Through the Chinese Exclusion Act and the Asiatic Barred Zone Act, the U.S. government prohibited the immigration of Asians for decades and the same government incarcerated Japanese Americans during World War II. Even when Asian Americans are hailed as a "model minority," this problematic rhetoric has often served certain political or ideological interests rather than establishing them as fully accepted members of American society. The persistent view of Asian Americans as "perpetual foreigners" continues to position them as "others" whose rightful belonging to our country is questioned and denied.

Using COVID-19 as an excuse, racists and xenophobes have attacked Asian Americans, denying their basic human rights. Since the outbreak of the pandemic, anti-AAPI hate crimes have mushroomed across the nation with at least 3,800 reported cases, according to the Stop AAPI Hate Reporting Center. They ranged from verbal harassment to shunning to physical assault with alarming increase in frequency and intensification of violence. Attackers disproportionately target women, youths and seniors due to their greater social and/or physical vulnerability. These segments of the AAPI population are forced to bear an even greater toll in the wake of these attacks.

The attack on Asian American women in Atlanta and how law enforcement and the media initially framed the incident as the act of a presumed sex addict, not a hate crime, are a repetition of how AAPI women have been portrayed in U.S. public discourse. The sexual objectification of AAPI women has been prevalent from early on, from laws (e.g., the Page Act of 1875) to popular culture (e.g., Miss Saigon). The distorted images were reinforced through U.S. involvement in wars and colonization in the Asia Pacific region. Thus, the stereotypical images are the outcomes of racism, sexism and U.S. imperialism. We stand against the continued acceptance of such oppression, biases and imposition.

The Faculty of the Asian Pacific Studies Program strongly condemns the hate crimes and violence against the AAPI population. We are committed to fighting against such societal vices as racism and sexism in defense of the dignity, rights and equal footing of Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders in society. At the same time, our histories of oppression and our vision for social justice and equality are shared by many others and we will continue to work in solidarity with them to build an equal and safer society for all. We encourage everyone to join us!

In solidarity,

The Asian Pacific Studies Program