

March 2, 2021

Dear Campus Community,

“We are all caught in an inescapable network of mutuality, tied to a single garment of destiny.” (Martin Luther King Jr., 1963)

It is with a troubled heart that I have been observing the recent upsurge in violence directed at our Asian American and Asian immigrant brothers and sisters. From coast to coast, and even right here in Southern California, hate crimes directed at those of Asian descent have been on a precipitous rise over the past year, coinciding with the COVID-19 pandemic. Like the violence against black and brown bodies, brothers and sisters in the Jewish, Muslim, and LGBTQ+ communities, and the poor whose lives are played out at the margins of society, this latest surge in aggression and brutality against individuals of Asian descent, including the elderly and children, sickens me. I write to raise my voice in condemnation of this cruelty, and to ask that you join me in speaking out against these atrocities.

While some politicians and pundits have found it expedient to scapegoat China or Asia in general as the “source” of the COVID-19 virus, there is nothing to be gained by pointing fingers, assigning blame, or engaging in juvenile name-calling. Sadly, many in the general public have followed suit, using a deadly pandemic as cover to unleash their hatred on innocent men, women, and children who try, as best they can, to navigate the same pathways to productivity and success that we all do.

Whether this anti-Asian sentiment is expressed via racial slurs shouted from a passing car, dehumanizing words painted on a wall, or actual physical assaults and violence, it is unacceptable and reprehensible. Consequently, these incidents must serve as reminders to us all that as a nation which aspires to be a more perfect union, the collective will that promotes and exhibits decency and compassion in times of challenge must overwhelm the tendencies to blame, scapegoat, and denigrate others’ humanity. We must take the time to let our sisters and brothers in the Asian community know that we support them through these troubling times.

I am also reminded, as Dr. King asserted years ago, that in the end, **we will remember not just the words (and actions) or our enemies, but the silence of our friends.** Therefore, we must redouble our efforts at combatting the pernicious influence of racism that tends to rear its ugly head in trying times. We must use our voices to speak out against the assaults on people’s humanity. We must demand accountability for those who engage in racist fearmongering, and insist that law enforcement step up their efforts to protect the vulnerable among us, irrespective of their demographic background. We must confront those who would denigrate our Asian brothers and sisters, and let them know that ignorance, intolerance, and incivility have no place in a civil society, and will not be tolerated.

It is truly a sad state of affairs when even in the midst of our recovery from a deadly pandemic, there are those among us who continue to attempt to sow division and hatred, rather than coming together as one community and nation to fight a common enemy. Despite this latest trend, however, I am confident that the Toro Nation will continue to stand strong in the face of such

mindless aggression, and will continue to recognize and live by the credo that we are all one people, challenged by the same adversities, and committed to a relentless pursuit of freedom, justice, and equality for all.

I am reminded that in the Japanese tradition, a thousand origami paper cranes can be given to the ill to wish for and speed their recovery. Perhaps we can use that same symbolism to wish that the sickness and pathology of racism in this country can be healed, and that those who have been assaulted by this pernicious evil can once again feel safety in the spaces they occupy and visit, love in their hearts and peace in their spirits.

Sincerely,
Thomas A. Parham, Ph.D.
President