

March 17, 2021

To the Cal Poly community and beyond:

On Tuesday, March 16th, a 21-year old white man shot and killed eight people, six of whom were Asian and seven of whom were women, at three Atlanta-area spas. While news media outlets and police reports have not named this as a racially motivated hate crime, the situation is clear: the shooter frequented these massage parlors due to a sexual addiction, and expressed that he wanted to “eliminate these temptations” because he was having a “bad day.”

This is not a coincidence or an isolated incident, as Asian women have long been targets of white, cis-heteropatriarchy, both abroad in their homelands and here in the United States. A long history of anti-Asian hate and violence that has manifested through exclusionary policies has been further fueled in the past year by the racist language (the “kung flu” and the “Chinese virus”) used by the previous President’s administration and the Sinophobic narratives perpetuated by mainstream U.S. news media outlets.

The shooting of multiple Asian women is an unspeakable tragedy that is part of a series of increasingly visible anti-Asian sentiments that have always existed. Ultimately, the necessity of using statistics to prove lived experience speaks to the invisibilization and trivialization of anti-Asian racism, which affects those across all Asian cultures and ethnicities—including East, Southeast, and South Asians.¹ However, the numbers tell a story: between March 2020 and February 2021, 3795 hate incidents were reported to [Stop AAPI Hate](#), an initiative which formed in response to rising bigotry and xenophobia due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

In particular, these reports showed that Asian *women* were 2.5 times more likely to be targeted. Combined with the words and actions of the Atlanta shooter, this statistic speaks to the gendered dimensions of racism in the United States and the unique misogyny faced by Asian women. Asian women have historically been seen as docile and submissive sexual objects, available for the consumption and domination of white men. This harmful image has strong roots in United States imperialism, as American soldiers stationed overseas were encouraged to view Asians as inferior, allowing them to justify the assault, torture, and murder of Asian women².

This statement marks three that we have sent out over the past year as the steering committee of the Asian Pacific Islander Desi American Faculty Staff Association (APIDAFSA), addressing anti-Asian racism in the wake of COVID and the murder of Black people by law enforcement. We realize that a statement will not be the solution to systemic racism; we share this letter in the hope that it will be one piece of many that will allow us to come together in solidarity and healing as an APIDA community. There is urgency in taking a stand to move toward transformative action, and in order to do this, we must understand that the racism we experience today is

¹ <https://www.theatlantic.com/ideas/archive/2021/03/cathy-park-hong-anti-asian-racism/618310/>

² Maeda, D. J. (2009). “Are we not also Asians?” Building solidarity through opposition to the Vietnam war. *Chains of Babylon: The Rise of Asian America*. (pp. 97-126). Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.

historical and systemic—part of the overarching societal structures that maintain white supremacy and harm *all* people of color, in particular Black and Indigenous people.

The unique racialization that APIDAs experience as both the hardworking “model minority” and the inherently un-American “perpetual foreigner” is a result of a legacy of news media, lawmakers, and public figures instigating tension between communities of color to maintain the status quo. U.S. policy excluded Asians from immigration and citizenship so that they could not become an influencing factor in American politics, while at the same time public discourse ascribed Asian workers more inherent value than their Black and brown counterparts. This is called racial triangulation: by positioning Asians as the “successful” and “apolitical” minority, it then became possible to justify the systemic barriers that continue to disadvantage Black and brown people by shifting the blame from the systems themselves to the individuals for not working hard enough to succeed³. With this in mind, we, the APIDAFSA steering committee, recognize that our desire for justice in this time is intrinsically bound with the struggles of other communities of color. We recognize the support that we have been given from others, commit to a collective vision of liberation, and hope to continue mutually supporting and uplifting each other as collaborators.

For white folks who are looking to support the APIDA community and its members who are experiencing harm, we ask you to continue your self-education and support organizations and initiatives that are doing local, grassroots work. We suggest the following, which is by no means an exhaustive list:

Actions

- Question and/or call out relatives or friends who make racist or microaggressive remarks
- Use your privilege, time, and energy to educate those who you are close to who may not have had these conversations otherwise
- Realize that you will constantly be learning and unlearning, and seek out opportunities to do so
- Recognize that you cannot be anti-racist without supporting justice for all BIPOC and acknowledging intersectionality in your activism
- Deconstruct the common association of “Asian” as solely “East Asian,” and commit to learning about the diverse experiences within the APIDA community rather than seeking one monolithic “Asian” narrative
- Condemn any media attempts to humanize the shooter or sympathize with his life

Learning

- An overview of [the long history of anti-Asian exclusion and racism in the United States](#)
- Foundational to Asian American Identity: [Racial Triangulation of Asian Americans](#)
- Intersection of race & class: [Exclusion of Asian Americans from Labor Unions](#)
- [Impact of U.S. imperialism & Vietnam War on Asian Americans](#)

³ Kim, C. J. (1999). The Racial Triangulation of Asian Americans. *Politics & Society*, 27(1), 105–138. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0032329299027001005>

- Watch: [Who Killed Vincent Chin?](#)
- Commit to [learning about abolition](#); do not call for further policing in an attempt to “protect” Asian communities

Organizations

- [AIWA – Empowering immigrant women in the San Francisco Bay Area](#)
- [Red Canary Song](#)
- [National Asian Pacific American Women’s Forum](#) and its chapter in Georgia
- [Asian Americans Advancing Justice](#) and its chapter in Atlanta
- [Stop Asian Hate: What You Can Do To Make a Difference](#)
- [Send Chinatown Love](#), supporting small, cash-only businesses in Chinatown

Events

- [#StopAAPIHate: Taking Action Against Anti-Asian Violence](#)
Cuesta College and Cal Poly SLO, April 21st from 3:30-5:00pm
 Since the start of COVID-19 lockdown in the US, over 4,000 attacks on Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders (AAPI) have been reported—with many targeting the elderly population. Cynthia Choi, co-founder of #Stop AAPI Hate and Executive Director of Chinese For Affirmative Action, joins us to talk about the phenomenon of scapegoating, the data collected on these verbal and physical attacks, and the pressing need for community-led, intersectional public safety initiatives.
- **May is APIDA Heritage Month** and the Multicultural Center will be collaborating and hosting many events throughout the month, from socials to workshops and speaker series to State of APIDA. Be on the lookout for more information and follow [@calpolyapida](#) on Instagram for updates.

In closing, we would like to honor the lives that were lost. We choose not to include their names, because they have been robbed of the agency to share their stories in the ways they would have chosen for themselves.⁴

Today, we mourn again. Tomorrow, we organize—for our communities and against racist, white supremacist, cis-heteropatriarchal, state-sanctioned violence. We can't do this alone, so please reach out to us—for support, for community-building, for collective action.

Signed,
 The APIDAFSA Steering Committee

⁴ <https://twitter.com/tamaranopper/status/1372596925506203648?s=20>