

The American Educational Studies Association Executive Council's Statement on the Atlanta shootings and rampant anti-Asian racism during the global pandemic

“Love isn't about what we did yesterday; it's about what we do today and tomorrow and the day after.”

-Grace Lee Boggs (2011)

The AESA Executive Council mourns the loss of eight lives, including six Asian/Asian American women on Tuesday, March 16, 2021. These shootings, both planned and targeted, took place across three spas in the Atlanta area. The EC stands in solidarity with them, their relations, and Asian Pacific Islander Desi American (APIDA) communities at large in this call for action to stand up against and admonish any forms of violence and oppression to effect long-lasting structural change.

According to group Stop AAPI Hate!, more than 3,500 hate incidents were reported by those of Asian descent in the United States from March 19, 2020 to February 28, 2021, with more than 500 acts of violence occurring in 2021 alone. To be sure, this number is not reflective of the actual number of incidents that Asian Americans encounter on a daily basis. These acts of racism and discrimination include: 1) verbal harassment and microaggressions, 2) physical assault, 3) civil rights violation (e.g., workplace discrimination, refusal of service, and being barred from transportation), and 4) online harassment. Women report hate incidents 2.3 times more than men. Anti-Asian hate crimes increased 149% in sixteen of the US's largest cities in 2020, as reported by the Center for the Study of Hate & Extremism (CSU-San Bernardino). Most disturbing is the harm done to our most vulnerable populations, our elders.

The Atlanta area shootings are fueled by a year-long, ongoing global pandemic that has undoubtedly cast Asian and Asian Americans as objects of scorn and blame for the social, economic, and political conditions of our time. This is not new. While the latest tragedy is appalling, it did not “come out of nowhere.” Asian bodies have always been objectified and their labor commodified.

While the following list is not exhaustive, we trace here some points in this history: 1) exploitation of Chinese workers during the building of the Transcontinental Railroad, 2) 1871 Chinese Massacre in Los Angeles where 19 Chinese immigrants were lynched, 3) 1882 Chinese Exclusion Act, 4) internment of 120,000 Japanese Americans during WWII, 5) the American War in Vietnam and its aftermath, 6) Vincent Chin's murder, 7) the increasing racialization/surveillance of Muslims, Arabs, and South Asians since 9/11, 8) the criminalization of Asian American youth, in particular working-class Southeast Asians, 9) the misogyny toward Asian/Asian American women tied to war, media representations, popular discourses, and the intersections of racism, heteropatriarchy, and sexism.

In a highly racialized and classed landscape that is the United States, Asian Americans have historically been used as a political wedge to play off other people of Color (particularly Black

and African American people) as a way to control the masses and social relations of power. This “divide-and conquer” colonial logic (and Black-white binary positioning that pervades our U.S. mentality) has had a harmful impact on how we understand difference and identity. We invite folks to stay vigilant and recognize that the fight for our humanity has always been and always will be a collective endeavor. We acknowledge and draw from histories of liberation struggles, both in the US and around the world, to understand the complexities of our time.

In a spirit of solidarity and collective action, we uplift critical educational tools and theory to center the experiences of Asian/Asian American communities and to intentionally examine the intersections of our positioned identities to engage in necessary action. This begins with consciousness-raising of aforementioned intersectional issues and their ties with globalized anti-Blackness and globalized white supremacy (Allen, 2001). For many, this can begin with consciousness-raising within (this means all of us) in our professional roles and within our research, as well as in our interpersonal relationships and communities. Our humanity suffers when we maintain such objectification of Asian/Asian American people as stereotype threat, model minority mythical standards, Affirmative Action fears, and the exoticization of Asian people, and Asian women in particular. Critical scholarship already points to actionable solutions, so we urge y/ourselves to deeply listen and use culturally attuned lenses to apply culturally-specific and sustaining pedagogies in the classroom and beyond. This deep listening can also be applied to various community organizations that have identified specific needs related to material goods, local policy action, university mental health needs, faculty-staff recruitment and retention, curricular representation, and political participation. When we perpetuate the over-writing, invisibilization, and objectification of Asian/Asian American people and experiences, we maintain the harmful narratives that serve to marginalize and dehumanize APIDA people. We must also deeply consider curricular representation and the application of critical theories in our classrooms to challenge harmful narratives, and to engage critical scholarship to work toward a more just and participatory global citizenship.

The dehumanization of Asian American people has to end and will not be tolerated. As educational studies scholars, cultural workers, academics, activists, and unfinished human beings, it is imperative that we continue to strive to imagine and actualize a different world. It is in this spirit of scholarly rigor, deep solidarity, and love that we will continue to push our work and stand on the side of the oppressed and those most dispossessed.

With love and in solidarity,

The Executive Council of the American Educational Studies Association