# Racial Violence against the AAPI community

We are saddened and angered by the shooting of 8 people in Atlanta. Irrespective of the suspect's stated intentions or motivations, the horrific outcome disproportionately affected women of Asian origin (six of the eight killed): Soon C. Park, Hyun J. Grant, Suncha Kim, Yong A. Yue, Delaina Yaun, Paul Andre Michels, Xiaojie Tan, Daoyou Feng. It is but the most recent in a long trend of racist violence against Asians in the United States, women in particular.

***The Systemic Nature of Recent Violence against the Asian American and Pacific Islander Community***

Historian Erika Lee recently [testified before Congress](https://docs.house.gov/meetings/JU/JU) and offered the following telling evidence. Anti-Asian hate crimes increased by 149% in 16 of the United States' largest cities during 2020. In all but Washington DC this represented an increase over 2019.[[1]](#footnote-1) The [Stop AAPI Hate National Report](https://secureservercdn.net/104.238.69.231/a1w.90d.myftpupload.com/wp-content/uploads/2021/03/210312-Stop-AAPI-Hate-National-Report-.pdf) notes that AAPI women report hate incidents 2.3 times more than men. In many instances cited by Professor Lee in her testimony, aggressors blamed Asian victims for the pandemic. In a perverse example of how race is made in everyday life,, people with origins as diverse as the Philippines, Korea, Vietnam, and Burma were attacked for their presumed connection to and as carriers of the coronavirus. In contrast, no aggression has been aimed at U.K citizens for the highly contagious and deadly British coronavirus variant B.1.1.7.

The AAPI Hate National Report documents a disturbing number of anti-Asian hate incidents: 3,795 incidents from March 19, 2020 to February 28, 2021. Some key facts:

* Verbal harassment (68.1%) and shunning (20.5%) (i.e., the deliberate avoidance of Asian Americans) make up the two largest proportions of the total incidents reported.
* Physical assault (11.1%) comprises the third largest category of the total incidents - that’s over 400 incidents of assault.

At the national level, Chinese are the largest ethnic group (42.2%) that report experiencing hate, followed by Koreans (14.8%), Vietnamese (8.5%), and Filipinos (7.9%). Spatially, businesses are the primary site of discrimination (35.4%), followed by public streets (25.3%), and public parks (9.8%). Online incidents account for 10.8% of the total incidents.

***Historical Violence against Asians in the United States***

Anti-Asian violence dates back a century and a half and includes physical, emotional, and legal violence. Since the 1870s, Chinese men have been lynched, massacred, and run out of neighborhoods. Japanese, Filipino and other Asian immigrants have been attacked by individuals and crowds.

Anti-Asian legal violence was institutionalized at the national level in the form of the 1882 Chinese Exclusion Act which barred Chinese workers, prevented the naturalization of Chinese immigrants, and made it difficult for Chinese Americans to travel freely. State and city laws had tried to ban, segregate, and denigrate Chinese immigrants well before the Chinese Exclusion Act. The 1875 Page Act specifically linked the immigration of Chinese, Japanese and Asian women generally to the regulation of prostitution - a cultural association that has been at the root of violence against Asian women.

The 1907 Gentlemen's Agreement between the United States and Japan barred Japanese immigration. The 1917 and 1924 Immigration Acts created an "Asiatic Barred Zone" against Japanese, Filipinos, South Asians, and added a head tax and literacy test for all immigrants (39 Stat. 874). It banned entry of "aliens ineligible for citizenship" which was an underhanded way of excluding Asians (other undesirable groups were targeted by nationality quotas) (1924, 43 Stat. 153). In 1942, President Franklin Roosevelt forcefully relocated and incarcerated 120,000 Japanese Americans. State officials surveilled and harassed Asian Americans at every turn. Recently, political rhetoric at the highest government levels linking Chinese to the coronavirus has created a climate in which violence could be wielded against anyone perceived as Asian.

***The Hypersexualization of Asian Women***

In view of the violence in Atlanta and nationally, it is especially important to recognize the longstanding hypersexualization of Asian women by white society and men. As sociologist [Kimberly Hoang observes:](https://bit.ly/2QmsZ4T) “we must address the fact that gun violence, race, and gender all intersect here. Asian women both in the sex industry and outside it frequently experience sexaulized racism”. Our CU Boulder colleague, [Jennifer Ho has argued](https://cnn.it/3bZsKoS) that being an Asian woman means that “you are a blank screen on which others project their stories, especially, too often, their sexualized fantasies -- because US culture has long presented Asian women as sexualized objects for White male enjoyment.” Sociologist Nancy Yuen has outlined [the sexual stereotypes](https://n.pr/3eYmGyY) that have historically dehumanized Asian women.

As sociologists, we bear witness to and against these nefarious trends, history, and stereotypes. We express solidarity with the Asian American and Pacific Island communities and especially our students, staff, and colleagues. Following CU Boulder's Chancellor, we invite readers to: "act directly against acts of racism directed against our Asian, Asian American and Pacific Islander communities by being an ally and [an active bystander](https://www.colorado.edu/dontignoreit/how-help/bystander-intervention) [and] ...to take full advantage of the expertise on our campus, to become more educated about these issues, and to [explore ways of showing our support to our Asian, Asian American and Pacific Islander communities](https://bit.ly/2NFdMLu)."

## Resources:

* [CU Chancellor’s message](https://bit.ly/2NFdMLu) about Anti-Asian violence and resources
* [Bystander intervention](https://www.colorado.edu/dontignoreit/how-help/bystander-intervention)
* CU Center for Asian Studies [statement and upcoming anti-racism events](https://bit.ly/3cl1nWh)

1. See Prof. Erika Lee’s Historian Erika Lee, [testimony before Congress](https://docs.house.gov/meetings/JU/JU) and the Center for the Study of Hate and Extremism, California State University San Bernardino, “Fact Sheet: Anti-Asian Prejudice March 2020,” March 1, 2020, https://www.csusb.edu/sites/default/files/FACT%20SHEET-%20Anti-Asian%20Hate%202020%203.2.21.pdf. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)