



## Standing Against Anti-Asian Racism

March 19, 2021

**Dear Berkeley Public Health Community,**

Today I am writing to you with a broken heart.

Several times over the past two months I started to write this message. After the fatal assault of [Vichar Ratanapakdee](#). After the murder of [Angelo Quinto](#) (at the knee of the police) came to light. After the [string of violent attacks](#) in our own backyard in Oakland and San Francisco. But each time, I stopped halfway because the pain got too personal.

But today, in the aftermath of [Tuesday's shooting in Atlanta](#) that took the lives of eight people including six Asian women, I can no longer be silent.

While the motive is still being investigated, the mass shooting is the latest incident in an upsurge of violence and hate crimes against Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders (AAPI) since the pandemic started. [Stop AAPI Hate](#) has received 3,800 self-reports of anti-Asian racist incidents (with more than two-thirds reported by AAPI women) since March 2020.

All this has stirred up intense personal anguish which has made this message almost too painful to write. It took me back to my first experience of racism at age 11, a few months after my family immigrated to the Bay Area (Concord) from Taiwan. One day I was riding my bike in the neighborhood and was stopped by a little White girl shouting

something at me. She couldn't have been more than six years old. Even though I could barely understand English at the time, I could tell she was shouting racial slurs at me, making a slanted eyes gesture, and telling me to go back to where I came from.

Years later, I'd often wonder what could have filled her heart with so much prejudice and hate at such a young age. And what made her feel so privileged on the basis of race that entitled her to put down a stranger twice her age and size.

But at the time I didn't know what to say or do. So I just left. I didn't even tell my parents because I didn't want to worry them. Frankly, all I wanted was to fit in. To belong. I thought if I just kept my head down and worked hard, one day I would prove my worth and earn my rightful place in this country. Like many of my AAPI friends, that's how I've dealt with racism most of my life.

But I was wrong. By not speaking out more, I've contributed to the **invisibility of anti-Asian racism**. It's not taught in most textbooks. It's not talked about much in the media. Even after recent killings, there have been few mass protests. No national reckoning.

But it's there. It has always been there. Anti-Asian racism has been a stain on our nation's history, even if we don't always see it.

It was there in 1882 with the enactment of the Chinese Exclusion Act, the first and only major federal legislation to explicitly suspend immigration for a specific nationality. Chinese Americans were demonized as the Yellow Peril, even after 20,000 Chinese immigrants had risked their lives to build the transcontinental railroad a decade earlier.

It was there in 1942-46 when 100,000 Japanese Americans were sent to internment camps, all the while brave Japanese American men and women in uniform fought against Germany and Japan to defend our freedom.

It was there in 1982 when Vincent Chin was brutally murdered by two white auto workers who mistook him as Japanese and blamed him for the loss of their jobs. The two assailants never served time in prison.

In times of crisis, [anti-Asian scapegoating have become an American tradition](#). We saw it after 9/11, with the surge of hate crimes against many of our South Asian American communities of Muslim, Hindu, or Sikh faith.

And it has been on the rise ever since the beginning of this pandemic, inflamed by President Trump's racist and xenophobic rhetoric about the "China virus" or "Kung Flu" and spread by his followers which added fuel to the surge in anti-Asian racism, even as many AAPI frontline workers put their lives at risk to protect the public's health.

Anti-Asian racism comes in many forms. The fetishization and misogyny against Asian women. The desexualization of Asian men. We are made fun of for the way we look. The way we drive. What we eat. What we wear. How we speak. How we parent. We are treated like perpetual foreigners no matter how many years or generations we have been in this country. A guest in our own home.

By the way, calling us the model minority is no accolade. It is nothing but a ploy to downplay the role of racism in the persistent struggles of other BIPOC communities, a convenient rationalization for White supremacy. But it has pitted Asian Americans against other BIPOC communities, and fueled anti-Black racism among Asian Americans and anti-Asian racism among African Americans that erupted in the LA riot and persists today in many marginalized communities.

The model minority myth of universal success among AAPIs also obscures the fact that many in our communities are struggling. By lumping all AAPIs together, it masks a [poverty rate](#) of 29% among Burmese Americans and 22% among Hmong Americans, compared to 11.8% among all Asian Americans. While [infant mortality](#) was 3.6 deaths per 1,000 live births for Asian Americans in 2018, it was 9.4 among Native Hawaiians and other Pacific Islanders. Without disaggregation of health and other data for AAPI groups, health inequities and social injustices in many of our diverse communities will remain invisible.

Anti-Asian racism isn't always in your face. It can manifest in subtle biases and stereotypes that reduce us to unidimensional, overachieving, almost robot-like caricatures that play into the whole myth of the model minority; capable of working hard and following directions and getting the job done, but incapable of full expression of our humanity including vision and judgment and creativity and emotional intelligence and other qualities required for organizational leadership. These stereotypes cause many AAPIs get passed over for promotion or even training for leadership roles, which may explain why [Asian Americans make up 27% of professional staff at the top five companies in Silicon Valley, but only 14% of executives and 2% of Fortune 500 CEOs; 11% of law-firm associates but only 3% of partners; 7% of tenured faculty but only 3% of deans and 1.5% of college presidents; 9.8% of federal](#)

[workforce but only 4.4% of senior executive service](#). Some in our communities refer to this as the bamboo ceiling.

I can go on and on, but I am only one voice. One of many, many voices out there that need to be heard. So I have three asks of our community today.

**First**, to our faculty, academics, staff, and students who identify as AAPI, please speak up. Make your voice heard. Tell your story. Share your experiences of racism. This is our moment to name it, confront it, shine a light on it. Our collective pain will remain invisible until we call it out.

I know how hard this has been for many of you. Our hearts go out to the victims of recent racist attacks and their families, as well as so many in our community who have been in anguish. For those who may be in need, here a few helpful resources:

- For students, find [where to get support and make a report](#).
- [Asian Pacific American Student Development](#) (APASD) offers advising and programming for Asian American, Pacific Islander, South Asian, Southwest Asian, and North African (AA/PI/SSWANA) communities.
- [Counseling and Psychological Services for Asian Pacific Islander Students](#) (CAPS) is a resource listing counselors who specialize in working with AAPI students. CAPS also hosts a [weekly discussion and support space](#) for AAPI students. Students are welcome to drop-in.
- [Employee Assistance](#) is available to any staff member who would like to talk to a counselor.
- [Stop AAPI Hate](#) tracks and responds to incidents of hate, violence, harassment, discrimination, shunning, and child bullying against Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders nationwide.
- Learn how you can help when you see incidents of hate, violence and harassment through [Bears that CARE—our active bystander training](#).

**Second**, to our non-AAPI faculty, academics, staff, and students, please say something. Many of your AAPI friends, colleagues, and neighbors are hurting silently right now; tell them that you see them. You feel their pain. You stand in solidarity with them. I can't tell you how much it meant to me to wake up yesterday to this message from the Epi faculty:

*Dear Epidemiology Graduate Students,*

*The tragic events in Atlanta on Tuesday are but the latest in a year of horrific racist attacks on the Asian American and Pacific Islander (AAPI) community since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic. Since last March, there have been 3,795 reports of hate incidents targeting Asian-Americans nationwide, of which 68% were reported by women, according to Stop AAPI Hate. These have included homicides, assaults, and instances of harassment or vandalism against AAPI individuals, businesses, and communities. We know these data are most certainly an undercount.*

*Like most of you, our personal and professional lives have been turned upside down by the COVID-19 pandemic for the past year. And yet, Tuesday's hate crime that resulted in eight deaths reminds us that many in our community face the dual threat of COVID-19 as well as anti-AAPI racism which has sadly become intertwined with much of the discourse around the pandemic. This attack also underscores the misogyny that adds another layer of violence faced by AAPI women. There is an urgent need for increased vigilance to identify and act against anti-AAPI racism, at all times including when we discuss COVID-19.*

*Together with the entire SPH community, we commit to fighting racism and white supremacy in all of its forms, including anti-AAPI racism, and to creating a more diverse, equitable, and inclusive division, community, and world. We commit to sustained discussions and actions to ensure that real changes are made.*

*We look forward to working with you and all members of the SPH community to make these possibilities a reality.*

*In solidarity,*

*The faculty of Epidemiology*

And another message from the JMP:

*Dear JMP students, faculty, and staff,*

*We are horrified by the murders in Atlanta yesterday, as well as by the recent attacks against Asian and Asian American people in Oakland and San Francisco.*

*Our hearts ache for the families of the victims. The murders in Atlanta occurred on the same day StopAAPIHate.org released a report documenting nearly 3800 incidents of anti-Asian hate during the pandemic. We stand in solidarity with our Asian and Asian*

*American students, faculty, staff, and community. We recognize that our Asian and Asian American students, staff, and faculty may be experiencing trauma and a multitude of emotions including sadness, fear, anger, and despair. We acknowledge the deep pain, and the need for accountability for the ways in which lives, communities, and freedom are being threatened.*

*Because next week is Spring Break for UC Berkeley, we will not activate a JMP racial and sociopolitical trauma protocol. If you would like to talk to any one of us, please reach out to a JMP faculty and/or staff. Listed below you will find resources available at UC Berkeley, along with advocacy resources throughout the community.*

*Yours,*

*The JMP Leadership Team*

For those of you who want to learn more about anti-Asian racism, here are a few good recent articles to get you started.

- [The long, ugly history of anti-Asian racism and violence in the U.S.](#)
- [The long history of racism against Asian Americans in the U.S.](#)
- [Asian Americans Are Still Caught in the Trap of the 'Model Minority' Stereotype.](#)
- [Berkeley expert: In times of crisis, anti-Asian violence is an American tradition.](#)

But please share other articles or resources you've found useful. You don't have to be an expert to speak up; you just have to care.

**Third**, let's recommit ourselves to becoming more anti-racist as individuals and as a community. In these dark days, I have to say I'm so thankful to be in a community where I can send out a message like this, knowing that many AAPIs out there going to work (or appearing on Zoom) this morning will have to hide their pain because no one at work will understand what they are going through. It's comforting to know that I am among friends and colleagues who believe we are better than this, and are willing to roll up their sleeves to make this country and the world a better place.

I usually bcc everyone in my messages to avoid a lot of reply all's that might flood your inbox, but today I will ask for your forgiveness and encourage everyone to **reply all to this email thread**. Your message of

support and solidarity, however brief, will mean so much to so many in our community who are hurting right now; please join me and speak out against anti-Asian racism.

Thank you.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Michael C. Lu". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal stroke at the end.

**Michael C. Lu, MD, MS, MPH**

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