

STATEMENT ON ANTI-ASIAN RACISM, XENOPHOBIA,
AND GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE, MARCH 2021
THE ASIAN & ASIAN AMERICAN STUDIES CERTIFICATE PROGRAM

We stand against racism in all its forms. Since the start of the COVID pandemic, StopAAPIHate.org has reported over 3,800 incidents of harassment, bullying, verbal assault, and violence against Asians and Asian Americans, with many more going unreported. Data shows that hate crimes against Asian Americans have increased 149% from 2019 to 2020 while overall hate crimes declined by 7%. With the latest spike of anti-Asian hate since the start of 2021 and especially in the aftermath of six Asian American women (and two white victims) killed by a white gunman in Atlanta on March 16, 2021, the Asian & Asian American Studies Certificate Program (AAASCP) at UMass Amherst condemns these forms of anti-Chinese and anti-Asian racism and xenophobia, which do not happen in isolation from ongoing forms of structural racism, injustice, and inequality.

These historical patterns of racism and xenophobia are based on constructions of Asian Americans as the Yellow Peril, or some form of political, economic, cultural, and/or public threat to U.S. society and specifically to the white population. They are fueled by mis/disinformation, conspiracy theories, and rhetoric from political leaders and high-profile personalities through such terms as the “Chinese virus,” “Wuhan virus,” or “Kung-flu,” and all highlight how racism against Asians is ingrained in this country’s history. The killings of six Asian American women in Atlanta specifically highlight the misogyny, sexualization, and fetishization of Asian American women and how these are fueled by toxic masculinity. Mainstream media and popular culture further racialize and sexualize Asian women, heightening their vulnerabilities to interpersonal and institutional violence. In fact, the StopAAPIHate data shows that women report hate incidents 2.3 times more than men. These hateful acts have forced Asians and Asian Americans, particularly elderly Asians who are perceived as easy targets, into a constant state of hyper-awareness and vigilance when they are in public, taking a huge emotional toll.

Anti-Asian racism has never occurred in isolation and is always connected to other and existing forms of structural racism and inequality. We see this in the significantly dire impact of the current pandemic on other minoritized communities, particularly the ongoing assault on and overcriminalization of Black people, the systematic neglect and injustices targeted toward

Indigenous communities, immigrants from Latin America, and workers in vulnerable positions. Understanding the interconnections and intersections of these forms of institutional racism, we must commit to addressing the specific needs of the Asian and Asian American community as part of a broad commitment to diversity, equity and inclusion for all.

Our hearts and deepest condolences go out to all those who have been affected by these acts of anti-Asian hate and we join them in collective grief, sadness, and anger. We urge our political, community, and institutional leaders to center the needs of the most vulnerable members of our society, including those who already feel marginalized and face everyday challenges in their lives due to sexism, racism, homophobia, transphobia, xenophobia, religious intolerance, and other overt and covert forms of prejudice and discrimination. We ask all members of our institutions and communities to commit to building a more inclusive, equitable, and just society and respond with action to address anti-Asian racism and xenophobia.

We call on all members of our society, but particularly our leaders in local, state, and federal government and institutions of higher education, to:

- Commit institutional resources to fight racism, xenophobia, and all forms of discrimination, such as homophobia, transphobia, sexism, religious intolerance, undocumented status, and ableism, and to keep these forms of discrimination from becoming normalized.
- Allocate resources to educate about the historical and contemporary structures of racism and xenophobia in the U.S., especially support for courses, faculty, and programs/departments focused on Ethnic and Women's Studies, such as UMass Amherst's Asian and Asian American Studies Certificate Program; Department of Afro-American Studies; and the Certificate Program for Native American and Indigenous Studies; the Center for Latin American, Caribbean, Latinx Studies; Department of Women, Gender, Sexuality Studies; and the Fine Arts Center's Asian and Asian American Arts and Culture Program.
- Resources and support for centers and programs that support students, staff, and community members, such as UMass Amherst's Yuri Kochiyama Cultural Center, the Malcolm X Cultural Center, the Josephine White Eagle Cultural Center, and the Latinx American Cultural Center; the Asian and Asian American Residential Community, the Women of Color Leadership Network, the Partnership for Worker Education, Workplace Learning & Development, and Building Bridges.

In anticipation of hate incidents if/when they occur, we also call on university administrators to develop and implement clear and centralized protocols, comprehensive “best practices,” and provisions of support for those who are directly targeted or feel unsafe or threatened, and that addresses the academic, emotional, physical and material costs to those affected and that also take into account the need for responses that are attentive to the particularities of specific incidents and concerns. These include:

- Designating clear point people and centralized protocols to respond to any forms of racism and hate that impact our communities (particularly international Asian and Asian American undergraduate and graduate students) and provide timely and integrated support for:
 - Immediate needs such as emergency/temporary housing and meals, and accessing healthcare, mental health and other support services
 - Physical safety protection if needed, including move-out from or to on- or off-campus housing
 - Liaison with university offices and town police on developing alternatives to disciplinary and criminalizing responses in favor of community-centric approaches.
- Serious consideration of implementing a program or form of anti-bias training for all students that includes understanding individual- and institutional-level dynamics related to privilege, and various forms of inequality and injustice, including but not limited to racism, sexism, class stratification, homophobia, transphobia, religious intolerance, undocumented status, and ableism.

The Asian & Asian American Studies Certificate Program at the University of Massachusetts, Amherst

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