

JOINT STATEMENT

Social Work's Call to Action Against Pandemic Othering and Anti-Asian Racism

The Academy for Social Work and Social Welfare (AASWSW), the Asian Pacific Islander Social Work Educators Association, Council on Social Work Education, Filipinx Social Work Network, Group for the Advancement of Doctoral Education in Social Work, Korean American Social Work Educators Association, National Association for Social Workers (NASW), National Association of Deans and Directors of Schools of Social Work, Society for Social Work and Research, South Asian Social Work Educators Association, and The St. Louis Group unequivocally stand in solidarity with the Asian, Pacific Islander, and Desi* American (APIDA) communities across the United States and around the globe. We condemn the alarming rise in discrimination, oppression, harassment, violence, and racism perpetuated against APIDA people in the wake of the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic.

The March 16 attacks and loss of eight lives in Atlanta, Georgia, came on the heels of ongoing marginalization and “othering” of APIDA people that began when Asians first immigrated to the United States and has dramatically intensified during the COVID-19 pandemic, often fueled by fear-mongering rhetoric from political leaders. As anti-Asian sentiment began to spread across the United States, APIDA communities have experienced discrimination, physical violence, verbal attacks, and overt racism that promoted xenophobic sentiments that APIDAs are separate from the American society and are in some way the “other.”

The STOP AAPI Hate Reporting Center recorded an overwhelming 3,800 hate incidents toward APIDA people between March 2020 and February 2021 ([Asian American Psychological Association, 2021](#)). Anti-Asian hate crimes increased by 149% in 16 cities in 2020, and Asian American women disproportionately experienced more than 60% of the reported hate crimes ([Center for the Study of Hate & Extremism, 2021](#)). Asian elders have become targets of violence and fatal assault in major U.S. cities. Nationally, Asian and Black Americans reported higher rates of negative experiences based on their race and ethnicity, where 31% of Asian Americans reported being the subject of racial slurs ([Ruiz et al., 2021](#)). International students who have been subject to recurring threats of exclusionary policies that jeopardize their ability to study in the United States have not only been disproportionately affected by the COVID-19 pandemic but international students—especially from APIDA communities—have also become easy targets of anti-Asian racism on U.S. campuses ([American College Health Association, 2020](#)).

Though acts of discrimination against APIDA people have increased since the onset of COVID-19, the history of racist and xenophobic attitudes toward APIDA communities is often absent in the present-day discourse on race relations in the United States. The history of bias casting APIDA communities as the “yellow peril” and perpetual foreigners has been woven throughout several discriminatory and imperialist policies: the Page Act of 1875 that restricted Chinese women from immigrating to the United States; ethnic exclusionary laws such as the 1882 Chinese Exclusion Act; the Gentleman’s Agreement of 1907; the 1934 Tydings-McDuffie Act; the incarceration of Japanese Americans during World War II; the illegal overthrow of the Hawaiian Kingdom; the militarization of the Pacific Islands; the Patriot Act in the aftermath of 9/11 that caused violence targeting South Asians; and more recently, the Muslim ban, the desecration of Mauna Kea, and the deportation of Southeast Asian refugees. Although APIDAs are a diverse conglomeration of more than 30 distinct ethnic groups that speak more than 100 languages, this broader historical context points to the many forms of structural racism and violence that continue to shape the everyday lives of APIDAs in the United States.

The “model minority” myth has systematically perpetuated APIDA labor exploitation, both economic and intellectual, to uphold racial injustice, deprive political representation, and protect White

supremacy. Race, gender, sexuality, and social class are often intertwined in the historical oppression of APIDAs through the White male gaze. Asian American women have been sexualized and objectified in misogynist and sexist depictions as dragon ladies and lotus blossoms. Asian men have been dehumanized as passive, effeminate, weak, or stereotyped as one-dimensional characters. At this defining moment in history when the nation is undergoing a racial reckoning, social work must lead the charge to speak out against hatred, discrimination, and unjust systems that create hierarchies among Black, Indigenous, and other people of color (BIPOC). As a profession deeply rooted in social justice goals and the promotion of racial, social, economic, political, and environmental equity, we call the social work community to action:

1. **LEARN** about the history of anti-Asian racism and oppression and how White supremacy and systemic racism have negatively affected APIDA communities.
2. **REFLECT** on our own biases and our cultural conditioning toward people of Asian ancestry.
3. **REJECT** the insidious myth of the “model minority” that fosters invisibility and racial erasure of APIDA experiences and creates a wedge between APIDAs and other historically and presently marginalized communities.
4. **ACTIVELY CHALLENGE** the stereotypical portrayal and exoticization of APIDA individuals and communities, especially APIDA women.
5. **PRACTICE** inclusive policies in admissions and hiring practices to ensure equity among APIDA individuals across social work institutions.
6. **SHINE A LIGHT** on the racial erasure of APIDA communities. Racism against APIDA communities warrants urgent attention in research, scholarship, education, policy, and practice. Incorporate APIDA authors and voices in social work research, scholarship, education, practice, and policies.
7. **INTENTIONALLY CONSIDER** the heterogeneity of subpopulations by age, gender, sexual orientation, ethnicity, language, national origin, and culture under the Asian umbrella in social work research, education, practice, and policies.
8. **ADVOCATE** for bystander intervention training across our communities to disrupt anti-Asian racism whenever it is happening.
9. **ADVOCATE** for targeted research and funding to examine the long-term impacts of discrimination, collective trauma, and anti-Asian racism on the health and well-being outcomes of APIDA communities.
10. **ADVOCATE** for increased funding for culturally responsive health, mental health, and other human service interventions focused on the needs and capacities of APIDA communities.
11. **SUPPORT** reporting hate crimes and anti-Asian hate incidents at <https://stopaapihate.org/>.
12. **ENGAGE** with other communities of color to address the specific needs of APIDA communities and unequivocally **AMPLIFY** the Black Lives Matter movement to denounce xenophobia, racial injustice, and violence against all BIPOC communities who have endured the brunt of the pandemic and centuries of racism and violence.
13. **BECOME AN ACTIVE PARTICIPANT** in the fight against racial “othering” and systemic injustice targeting APIDA communities. Bring attention to these issues at your institutions and with your leadership. This fight is a collective fight and everyone’s responsibility. **DO NOT** leave this fight to your APIDA communities who are experiencing collective trauma and the emotional toll of this unjust system.

We call on all social workers to actively promote social work allyship to disrupt all forms of anti-Asian racism wherever it occurs and continually work toward creating hope and healing spaces across APIDA communities, U.S. societies, and around the globe. We urge all social workers to actively practice social work leadership to stand at the forefront of an era of accountability and solidarity.

**“Desi” is a broad term used to identify members of the South Asian diaspora. Although we are using the term “APIDA” here, we recognize the distinct histories, struggles, and cultures of Pacific Islanders*

and Native Hawaiians that are different from other Asian American communities. However, we also acknowledge our shared experiences of (neo)colonialism and imperialism.

References

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