



Proposed English Department Statement on Anti-Asian Racism

April 14, 2021

The Fordham English department condemns the ongoing surge of anti-Asian violence. We are outraged at the assault, harassment, and murder of Asians and Asian Americans. We mourn the senseless loss of life, and we stand in solidarity with the victims, their families, and their communities.

The surge in anti-Asian violence has undoubtedly been fueled by former President Donald Trump, who insisted on referring to the coronavirus as “the China virus” and “kung flu.” As scholars of language and literature, we know well that words matter. These ignorant and gratuitously insulting labels gave the virus a racial meaning, enabling Trump to scapegoat Asians and Asian Americans for his own failure to manage the global pandemic.

Nevertheless, anti-Asian racism long pre-dates Donald Trump. It is evident in the history of the Asian coolie trade, a racialized system of bonded labor that, in practical terms, differed little from the African slave trade it supposedly ameliorated. It is evident in the West’s many forgotten wars of imperial conquest in Asia, whose devastating consequences provoke Asian migration to the West to this day (“we are here because you were there,” as the immigrant slogan goes). It is evident in the anti-Asian riots that have punctuated American history from the mid-nineteenth century on: the mass lynching of Chinese Americans in Los Angeles in 1871; the violent expulsion of South Asian Americans from Bellingham, Washington in 1907; the bombing of the Filipino Federation of America building in Stockton, California in 1930; the slaughter of Southeast Asian American elementary school children in 1989; and many, many more. The Page Law, the Chinese Exclusion Act, the Angel Island Detention Center, alien land laws, anti-miscegenation acts, the incarceration of Japanese Americans during World War II, the murder of Vincent Chin, the persecution of Muslim Americans especially following 9/11, the relentless hyper-sexualization of Asian and Asian American women—the history of anti-Asian racism in the US is long and getting longer.

Anti-Asian racism targets Asian and Asian American women in distinct and particularly violent ways. Literary critics Mai-Linh Hong and Aline Lo explain the matter powerfully in their [statement on the recent mass murder in Atlanta](#): “Asian and Asian American women are



routinely dehumanized, sexualized, and depicted as subservient objects of male violence in literature, popular culture, and public discourse. Violence, especially sexual violence, against Asian women is routinized both in real life and in the movies. Like most Americans, [the Atlanta shooter] no doubt consumed countless examples of racist, misogynistic tropes and stereotypes regarding Asian women, as well as portrayals of white, male entitlement to Asian women's bodies. Moreover, law enforcement and our legal system have long criminalized women connected to sex work rather than protecting them against violence or exploitation. As scholars and critics of a biased social imaginary—the cultural realm of shared narratives, images, and discourses—we are unsurprised when men act aggressively towards Asian or Asian American women *and* blame the women for it.”

Several media outlets have attempted to narrate the rise of anti-Asian violence as a story of Black-and-Asian conflict. That narrative is at best historically uninformed and politically naive. It ignores the structural conditions that function to produce interracial conflict in the first place: housing segregation, red-lining, selective immigration policies, economic competition in the context of racialized impoverishment, and the ceaseless circulation of racist stereotypes in American media. These conditions were not invented by Blacks or Asian Americans, nor do they benefit Blacks or Asian Americans. Rather, they serve the interests of white supremacy. By obscuring this fact, the narrative of Black-and-Asian conflict works to drive a wedge between two communities with a shared history of racial oppression. In the end, it reduces Asians and Asian Americans to pawns in the violent project of anti-Blackness, and we reject it accordingly.

Instead, we affirm the long history of Black-and-Asian solidarity: Frederick Douglass advocating for Asian immigration to the US; Black US soldiers joining Filipino Freedom Fighters in their struggle against American imperialism; Black newspapers arguing against school segregation for Asian American children; Black labor unions embracing Filipino workers in the 1930s; Malcolm X and Martin Luther King denouncing the Vietnam War; Blacks and Asian Americans joining arms in the Third World Liberation Front; legendary activists Grace Lee Boggs and Yuri Kochiyama fighting tirelessly for civil rights and Black power; Asians and Asian Americans marching to support the Black Lives Matter movement; and Black folks marching to stop anti-Asian violence. These ongoing histories should remind us that, whatever



the tensions between Black and Asian American communities, the root problem is ultimately white supremacy.

We note with dismay that, despite President McShane's recent statement on anti-Asian racism, Fordham has offered virtually no support for Asian American studies—that is, for precisely the education most relevant to combating anti-Asian racism. Only once in its history has the university ever conducted a faculty search specifically for a specialist in Asian American studies. To date, the university has only three tenure-line faculty who specialize in the field, two of whom are housed in the English department. This type of erasure only contributes to the possibility of anti-Asian violence. As such, we urge the university to address this glaring gap in its curriculum with all due speed. A [petition](#) to this effect has circulated and gathered over 1,200 signatures.

Finally, to the students, alumni, colleagues, staff, and other members of the Fordham community directly affected by the rise in anti-Asian violence: we see you; we love you, and we are fighting for you.

Suggested Readings

History and Sociology

- Sucheng Chan, *Asian Americans: An Interpretive History* (Twayne, 1991)
- Gordon Chang, *Ghosts of Gold Mountain: The Epic Story of the Chinese Who Built the Transcontinental Railroad* (Houghton Mifflin, 2019)
- Scott Kurashige, *The Shifting Grounds of Race: Black and Japanese Americans in the Making of Multiethnic Los Angeles* (Princeton University Press, 2007)
- Erika Lee, *The Making of Asian America: A History* (Simon & Schuster, 2015)
- Daryl J. Maeda, *Chains of Babylon: The Rise of Asian America* (University of Minnesota Press, 2009)
- Mari Matsuda, "We Will Not Be Used," in *Where Is Your Body? and Other Essays on Race, Gender, and the Law* (Beacon Press, 1996), 149-159
- Mae Ngai, *Impossible Subjects: Illegal Aliens and the Making of Modern America* (Princeton University Press, 2003)
- Gary Okihiro, *Margins and Mainstreams: Asians in American History and Culture* (University of Washington Press, 1994)
- Rhacel Parrenas, *Servants of Globalization: Migration and Domestic Work* (Stanford University Press, 2015)
- Jean Pfaelzer, *Driven Out: The Forgotten War against Chinese Americans* (University of California Press, 2008)



- Vijay Prashad, *Everybody Was Kung Fu Fighting: Afro-Asian Connections and the Myth of Cultural Purity* (Beacon, 2002); and *The Karma of Brown Folk* (University of Minnesota Press, 2001)
- Nyan Shah, *Contagious Divides: Epidemics and Race in San Francisco's Chinatown* (University of California Press, 2001)
- Helen Zia, *Asian American Dreams: The Emergence of an American People* (FSG, 2000)

Literary and Cultural Criticism and Theory

- Anne Anlin Cheng, *Ornamentalism: A Feminist Theory of the Yellow Woman* (Oxford University Press, 2019)
- Robert G. Lee, *Orientalism: Asian Americans in Popular Culture* (Temple, 1999)
- Lisa Lowe, *Immigrant Acts: On Asian American Cultural Politics* (Duke University Press, 1996); *The Intimacies of Four Continents* (Duke University Press, 2015)
- Kent A. Ono and Vincent Pham, *Asian Americans and the Media: Media and Minorities* (Polity, 2009)
- Celine Parrenas Shimizu, *The Hypersexuality of Race* (Duke University Press, 2007)

Selected Works of Literature

- Ayad Akhtar, *Disgraced* (Back Bay, 2013)
- Carlos Bulosan, *America Is in the Heart* (University of Washington Press, 1973)
- Don Mee Choi, *Hardly War* (Wave Books, 2018)
- Tsering Wangmo Dhompa, *In the Absent Everyday* (Apogee, 2005)
- Jessica Hagedorn, *Dogeaters* (Pantheon, 1990)
- Kimiko Hahn, *Unbearable Heart* (Kaya, 1995)
- Cathy Park Hong, *Minor Feelings: An Asian American Reckoning* (One World, 2020)
- Kahled Hosseini, *The Kite Runner* (Riverhead, 2003)
- Lawson Inada, *Legends from Camp* (Coffee House Press, 1993)
- Sabina Khan, *The Loves and Lies of Rukhsana Ali* (Scholastic, 2019)
- Maxine Hong Kingston, *The Woman Warrior: Memoirs of a Girlhood among Ghosts* (Knopf, 1976).
- Jhumpa Lahiri, *Interpreter of Maladies* (Houghton Mifflin, 2000).
- Rattawut Lapcharoensap, *Sightseeing: Stories* (Grove Press, 2004)
- Chang-rae Lee, *Native Speaker* (Riverhead, 1995)
- Timothy Liu, *Burnt Offerings* (Copper Canyon, 1995)
- Rahul Mehta, *Quarantine* (Harper Perennial, 2011).
- Bharati Mukherjee, *Jasmine* (Grove, 1989)
- Nayomi Munaweera's *Island of a Thousand Mirrors* (St. Martin's, 2014)
- Milton Murayama, *All I Asking for Is My Body* (University of Hawaii Press, 1988)
- Viet Thanh Nguyen, *The Sympathizer* (Grove, 2015)
- John Okada, *No No Boy* (Charles Tuttle, 1957)
- Vaddey Ratner, *In the Shadow of the Banyan* (Simon & Schuster, 2012)
- Aimee Suzara, *Souvenir* (WordTech Editions, 2014)
- Le Thi Diem Thuy, *The Gangster We Are All Looking For* (Knopf, 2003)
- Samrat Upadhyay, *Buddha's Orphans* (Houghton Mifflin, 2010)



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Department of English

- Ocean Vuong, *On Earth We're Briefly Gorgeous* (Penguin Press, 2019)
- Alex Wagner, *Futureface* (OneWorld, 2018)
- Bryan Thao Worra, *Demonstra* (Innsmouth Free Press, 2018)
- Karen Tei Yamashita, *I Hotel* (Coffee House Press, 2010)
- Kao Kalia Yang, *The Latehomecomer: A Hmong Family Memoir* (Coffee House Press, 2008)
- Charles Yu, *Interior Chinatown* (Pantheon, 2020)