

Statement on the Shooting in Atlanta: Stop Asian Hate

Madison AAPI Caucus

March 29, 2021

As faculty and staff at James Madison University, we grieve for and express our deepest condolences to the families of the victims of the shootings in Atlanta on March 16, 2021. Among eight victims, six of them were women of Asian descent. We appreciate that the Biden administration and JMU leadership have expressed serious concern regarding the rising number of Asian-directed hate crimes. However, Asians, Asian Americans, and Pacific Islanders (AAPI) are still vulnerable to racist violence in public spaces, including schools, workplaces, streets, stores, and media. In the strongest terms, we condemn such crimes and hatred. We are disheartened to hear the public debate regarding whether the motive of the suspect was hatred against Asian women or primarily sexual and not racial. This fails to acknowledge that six of the victims were of Asian descent and the long history of imperialistic sexual objectification of Asian women.

Racism and discrimination against Asian and AAPI are not new but have historically been trivialized. The hostility against Asian and AAPI began as early as the 1850s when a large number of Chinese immigrants arrived in the U.S. The California government imposed a foreign miners' tax on Chinese immigrants to exclude them from the "Gold Rush". Since then, Asian and AAPI communities have continually experienced discrimination, often expressed via xenophobia, intolerance, and violence. The Page Act of 1875 – directed explicitly at Asian women – and the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882 are painful reminders of systemic discrimination in this country. The expressions of xenophobia take on many different forms and are sometimes subtle, but with many Asian and AAPI cultures that value tolerance for the sake of communal harmony, their pain often remains invisible.

Discrimination-based violence against Asian and AAPI people has risen significantly since the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic. The politicization of COVID-19 through mocking references to China or Wuhan has further ignited anti-Asian and anti-AAPI sentiment. Even as Asian and AAPI workers made up a large portion of the essential workers on the frontlines, with 1.4 million working during the pandemic [according to the New American Economy Research Fund](#), the former president did not stop referring to COVID-19 as the "China virus" or "Kung flu." This racial characterization of the virus has further provoked a wave of attacks against Asians and AAPIs. According to [data](#) from the Center for the Study of Hate & Extremism, hate crimes against Asians in 16 of America's largest cities increased 149% in 2020, even though the overall hate crimes in 15 of the major U.S. cities declined by 7%. Even more worrisome, recent acts of violence have targeted women and elderly people (Read the media coverages [here](#), [here](#), and [here](#)).

As educators, scholars, and employees of JMU, we value the goals of diversity, equity, and inclusion that bring productivity, dignity, and peace into our community. We are committed to supporting all students in becoming enlightened citizens who embrace diversity, condemn any form of hate crime, value racial and ethnic differences, and develop respect for each other. We need to provide an inclusive and supportive environment for our students that will make their

time on campus productive and meaningful no matter their nationality, race, ethnicity, gender, sexuality, ability, or language.

We cannot remain silent. We call upon our Asian and AAPI faculty and staff and our allies to speak up and stand together in solidarity. We also encourage Asian and AAPI students at JMU to speak up. In doing so, we want to assure our Asian and AAPI students that they have strong support from the faculty and staff at JMU. We also want to encourage our Asian and AAPI students to contact any of us at any time for support and to be an advocate for them. We will keep working to create more inclusive and open spaces and platforms for members of Asian, AAPI, and allies to stand together in solidarity.

We demand that JMU administrators and local government officials express stronger condemnation of white supremacy and racism that drives violence targeting Asians and AAPIs and other racial groups and commit to creating tangible change and progress towards being an inclusive community where everyone feels safe, welcome, and has a sense of belonging in our community.