

LRA Statement against Anti-Asian Violence

March 24, 2021

As an educational organization striving for racial justice, the Literacy Research Association (LRA) openly condemns the recent anti-Asian rampage that occurred on Tuesday, March 16th, in Atlanta, Georgia, killing eight people, including six women of Asian descent. We extend our heartfelt condolences to the loved ones of the victims. This statement is a call to the LRA community and others to speak out against anti-Asian violence.

There are no excuses for this xenophobic and misogynistic hate crime. Unfortunately, this abhorrent tragedy is not isolated to a single event, individual, or location. The recent murders of innocent individuals in Atlanta are just one more painful experience that the Asian American Pacific Islander (AAPI) community has endured throughout the United States' history. This tragic event is also a reminder that the historical bigotry and oppression that the AAPI community in the U.S. previously experienced, is still alive.

Discrimination, prejudice, and extreme violence toward the AAPI community is clearly reflected in U.S. history. The Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882, for example, was the first significant law restricting immigration to be passed by the U.S. Congress (National Archives, 2021). Through years of anti-Chinese discrimination, this law increased tensions for new immigrants. For example, in Rock Springs, Wyoming, White miners attacked the Chinese community, killing dozens of Chinese workers in 1885 (Zang, 2021). Across the decades, the anti-Asian laws continued. In 1907, the "Gentlemen's Agreement" was signed to decrease the number of Japanese immigrants to the U.S (Gentlemen's Agreement, 2021); in 1917, the Immigration Act referred to as the 'Literacy Act' and in certain cases, as the Asiatic Barred Zone Act, prohibited immigration from Asian countries and imposed literacy tests on immigrants, creating further exclusion (Immigration History, 2019); and in 1942, with President Roosevelt's Executive Order 9066, the U.S imprisoned naturalized U.S. citizens of Japanese descent (U.S. History Science, 2021).

Discrimination against the AAPI community extends beyond institutional and systemic levels and impacts AAPI members lives at an interpersonal level on a daily basis. The murders of Asian women in Atlanta this past week makes clear that violent and discriminatory acts toward the AAPI community do not exist merely in the past. The violence extends to the present, where reports indicate a 150% increase in hate crimes against the AAPI community in 2020 (Center for the Study of Hate and Extremism, 2021; Yam, 2021). Additionally, individuals who are "marked" as Asian have been easily targeted for mockery, intimidation, bullying, and violence in schools and public spaces (see Wu, 2021). These dehumanizing acts against people of Asian descent from both national figures and at an interpersonal level continue to objectify AAPI people, perpetuating the discrimination that has existed throughout U.S. history.

Yet, the struggles and oppression of AAPI people have been largely invisible and ignored in public discourses on racism, anti-racism and discrimination. Therefore, as a community of scholars, we need to acknowledge the AAPI community's experiences to secure a justice-based future for students and families of Asian descent in particular and *all* people in general. Hate

crimes against the AAPI community are grounded in a lack of understanding of a complex, multi-ethnic diaspora by focusing on physical appearance. “Asian” is a socially and politically constructed term in the U.S., and it masks the diverse historical, political, economic, cultural, linguistic, and ethnicity of individuals of Asian descent and their unique lived experiences (Chang, 2017; Wu, 2015).

As literacy educators, we must educate and discuss the history, distinctiveness, and nuances of the AAPI community in the U.S with our students. Educators must help students understand how anti-Asian hate is implicitly and explicitly anchored in the historical context, producing hate-based incidents. Additionally, as literacy scholars, we must include diverse AAPI scholars in discussing race and racism. AAPI scholars are often excluded in panel and other forms of discussions on racial discrimination. We need to consider our research ethics and nuance reflected in the term “Asian” and in its myriad histories when we work with research partners of Asian descent.

LRA realizes that hate incidents range from implicit bias to verbal and physical violence, and many remain unreported. LRA’s recent report, “Racial Justice in Literacy Research” (2021) directly addresses these reported hate crimes within the AAPI community. In light of such on-going tragedies, daily micro-aggressions, and the grief felt by many, we encourage everyone to stand in solidarity with our Asian, Pacific Islander, and Asian American students, colleagues, neighbors, friends, and community members. LRA stands together as an organization *against* racism and hate in all forms, and *for* peace, understanding, equity, inclusion, and racial justice.

Doctoral Students Innovative Community Group
Ethnicity, Race, and Multilingualism Committee
International Innovative Community Group
Multilingual and Transnational Innovative Community Group
LRA Board of Directors

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