

## AMERICAN ASSOCIATION FOR PSYCHOANALYSIS IN CLINICAL SOCIAL WORK

### MARCH 16, 2021 ATLANTA MURDERS

The AAPCSW Board commissioned its *Diversity and Social Action Committee* to create the following statement:

As members of the American Association for Psychoanalysis in Clinical Social Work (AAPCSW) and in solidarity with our Asian, Asian-American, and Pacific Islander (AAPI) fellow citizens, we express our deep sorrow over the horror of the Atlanta murders on March 16, 2021 and extend our condolences to the families of the victims and the communities affected by this tragedy.

We are alarmed at the rapid acceleration of hate crimes against AAPI communities; unfortunately, this violence is not new.

Our country has a long history of othering Asian and Asian-Americans – particularly AAPI women – through stereotype, objectification, racialization, and misogyny, which has created the conditions by which hate is mobilized and projected in dehumanizing ways. Beginning with the 1875 Page Law and the 1882 Chinese Exclusion Act – the first Federal laws barring a racial or ethnic group from entering the United States – to today’s targeted violence, AAPI have had to endure a largely unacknowledged history of marginalization, caricature, and xenophobia.

It is against this backdrop that California Representative Ted Lieu told his House Judiciary Committee colleague: “I’m asking you to please stop using racist terms...I am not a virus.” (The Washington Post, 2021).

The Asian American Psychological Association (AAPA), testifying before the U.S. House of Representatives Judiciary Committee (March 18, 2021), reported that Stop AAPI Hate, which tracks hate crimes, received 3,800 reports of anti-Asian hate acts between March 2020 and February 2021, an increase in 2020 of 149%, with women reporting twice as many incidents as men. In the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, 64% of Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders surveyed believe political rhetoric increased bias against their racial/ethnic group. AAPA and Stop AAPI Hate also found an elevation in one or more raced-based traumatic stress symptoms: depression, intrusion, anger, hypervigilance, physical symptoms, decreased self-esteem, and avoidance. And 95% of respondents said they now view the U.S. as physically more dangerous for Asian Americans.

Eng and Han (2019), in *Racial Melancholia, Racial Dissociation: On the Social and Psychic Lives of Asian Americans*, state: “Race is as much about skin color and physiological markings as it is about a wide range of disparate social and psychic experiences of segregation and assimilation, absence and belonging, integration and dissociation, inclusion and exclusion” (P. 9). We also know that the conscious and unconscious negotiation of these processes involves loss that, without appropriate support, can lead to individual and intergenerational trauma. Part of the legacy of this history and a fundamental core loss for AAPI communities has been the perpetual experience of being marked as excluded foreigners, even for Asian-Americans born in the U.S.

This tragedy demands that we ask important questions about sexuality, aggression, addiction, and racial dynamics. As psychoanalytic clinical social workers, we know about the importance of context and about the complexities of intersectionality and the associated socioeconomic, political, and cultural consequences of “othering.” We must remain vigilant in updating our knowledge about the unique challenges that such othering creates, and uphold our dedication to our professional commitment to supporting those who must grapple with its resulting effects.

In the face of the heartbreaking Atlanta murders, we join Stop AAPI Hate and AAPA in calling on Federal, State, and Local authorities to respond in affirmative, trauma-informed, and community-driven ways to AAPI communities that so urgently need collective healing and support. The time is now!

References:

Asian American Psychological Association. (2021). Hearing on “Discrimination and Violence Against Asian Americans”. Written Testimony before the United States House of Representatives Judiciary Committee, Subcommittee on the Constitution, Civil Rights, and Civil Liberties. [www.aapaonline.org](http://www.aapaonline.org)

Eng, D.L. & Han, S. (2019). *Racial Melancholia, Racial Dissociation: On the Social and Psychic Lives of Asian Americans*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.

Lieu, T. (2021, March 19). ‘I am not a virus’: Lawmakers clash during emotional hearing on attacks. *The Washington Post*, P. A4.