

## **Educators Pledge to Support AAPIs and Advance Justice during Asian American & Pacific Islander Heritage Month 2021 and Beyond**

Over the past year, attacks on Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders (AAPIs) have increased dramatically. From violent and deadly assaults, to property damage, to hate speech, bullying, and harassment in-person and online; from boycotts of businesses to refusals to serve customers or clients; from microaggressions to social ostracism—the statistics are alarming. The organization, Stop AAPI Hate, documented nearly 3800 attacks between March 2020 and February 2021, including on young students and the elderly, and particularly on East and Southeast Asians and Asian Americans, which may sound like a high number but is likely a significant undercount. Another organization, AAPI Data, estimated that, in the first three months of 2021, AAPIs experienced hate crimes and hate incidents at rates almost twice the national average (1.8 for AAs; 1.7 for PIs), although the forms of attack most commonly experienced differed by AAPI ethnic group.

Inflammatory language at the start of the COVID-19 global pandemic that placed blame on China may have sparked a rise in attacks, but such violence has a much longer legacy. Injustice towards AAPIs results from not merely individual biases and actions, but a complex web of ideologies and systems long animated in the popular imagination, social and cultural institutions, public policy, and international relations. These include the racializing of disease; the Orientalist construction of an inferior East; the exoticizing of Asia and hypersexualization of Asian women; the exclusion of Chinese in early immigration laws; the imperialist wars and neglect of refugee crises in Asia; the belligerent occupation, colonization, militarization, dispossession, or tourist consumption of Hawai‘i and other Pacific islands; the stereotypes and commercializing of the Model Minority, Yellow Fever, and Yellow Peril; the WWII incarcerating of Japanese Americans; the banning of Muslims; the deporting of undocumented immigrants; and the renewed use of cold-war rhetoric that positions China as a threat.

These narratives both reinforce and are reinforced by other structures of oppression—white supremacy, misogyny, labor and land exploitation, homophobia and transphobia, Islamophobia, xenophobia, ableism—which, together, serve larger political purposes, such as justifying U.S. imperialism, normalizing state violence, hindering cross-racial and intercultural solidarity, and protecting the elite’s concentrated wealth and continued capital accumulation. Other consequences include the erasure of the roles that AAPIs have played in advancing justice, and the erasure of AAPIs themselves. Even the official grouping of “AAPI,” while at times inviting coalition building, has served to obscure diversity. A case in point: almost never addressed, even in conversations about racial disparities, is that Native Hawaiians and Pacific Islanders have experienced COVID-related infection, hospitalization, and death nationwide at rates higher than any other racial or ethnic group.

The only way forward in understanding the problem of injustice is to look intersectionally across systems and relationally to Black, Indigenous, Latinx, and other communities of color. The resulting solution will consist not of punishing individuals—as in the call for more policing and hate-crimes legislation—but of movement-building strategies equally intersectional, relational, and systemic. Social movements can advance justice when they mobilize the masses to deepen our understanding and reframe dominant narratives about the problems and solutions. As we construct these solutions collectively, we then have the potential to realign institutions, policies, and practices. Social movements are, at their core, educational, and therefore, educators and educational scholars can and must play a leading role.

As the United States approaches the 2021 Asian American and Pacific Islander Heritage Month—officially commemorated in May but observed by many schools, colleges, and universities in April—the need for a stronger movement against anti-AAPI injustice cannot be clearer. We, educators and educational scholars across the spectrum, pledge to support AAPIs and advance justice by engaging in the following three movement-building strategies and actions, starting during AAPI Heritage Month 2021 but continuing year-round:

- 1) **We Pledge to Learn and Unlearn Collectively.** We recognize that we as educators and scholars—even if we identify as experts in our fields—have much to learn and unlearn as we engage in deep critical inquiry about the intersectional and systemic nature of injustices targeting AAPIs. We can do so by holding ourselves accountable to inquire with and learn from and alongside our colleagues, especially those whose scholarship, arts, and activism constitute the field of AAPI Studies. Suggested Initial Action: read and discuss various works with colleagues in order to learn more deeply and expansively about AAPI Studies, including the many topics raised in this pledge.
- 2) **We Pledge to Teach and Assess Our Teaching Collectively.** The annual AAPI Heritage Month provides an opportunity to expand the curriculum about AAPIs, but it also reminds us of the responsibility to assess how and what our institutions, programs, and courses might be teaching about AAPIs through the indirect and unintended “hidden” curriculum that typically conveys contradictory messages. We accept the responsibility to ensure that our curriculum offers intersectional, systemic, and self-critical lenses, be that through our courses and programs, extracurricular offerings for students, events and exhibits for the public, professional development for educators, public statements, and partnerships with communities. We affirm the value of continuing to build spaces outside of institutions that offer different models of education, like those of Freedom Schools and Consciousness Raising Groups. Suggested Initial Action: work with colleagues to organize a range of ways to teach AAPI Studies to students and the broader community both in and outside of classrooms.
- 3) **We Pledge to Speak and Advocate Collectively.** We reject the notion that education should or can ever be neutral on the topic of injustice. This is a moment when students, parents, and educators alike are expressing concern about the safety of AAPI students as campuses reopen nationwide for in-person instruction. We refuse to stay silent, but we also recognize that we must do much more than voice sympathy and support—we must build our capacity to reframe the debate and advance justice. One topic around which to mobilize is the struggle over anti-racist curriculum: while some states are expanding Ethnic Studies in K-12 schools and higher education, other states are considering legislation to prohibit teaching about systemic racism. Last fall, when faced with similar calls to whitewash curriculum, over 2300 educators and educational scholars signed a public statement, *Education for Democracy Demands Educating Against White Supremacy*. Suggested Initial Action: organize colleagues to speak with leaders at the school, district, state, and federal levels and through the media to oppose curriculum that obscures anti-AAPI injustice and advocate for policies, curriculum, and reforms that advance justice.

***I, \_\_\_\_\_,  
join a growing movement of educators and educational scholars  
as I pledge to take these and other actions to advance justice  
during Asian American and Pacific Islander Heritage Month 2021 and Beyond.***