



COUNCIL FOR DIVERSITY, EQUITY, AND INCLUSION



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**ASIAN AND PACIFIC ISLANDER
HERITAGE MONTH**

ON SOLIDARITY AND THE SIGNIFICANCE OF MAY 19TH

by Kristin Hocker, EdD

In the May issue of our CoDEI newsletter we celebrate Asian and Pacific Islander Heritage Month, a celebration initiated by Congress in 1979 as Asian/Pacific American Heritage Week that was expanded to the full month of May in 1992. This year we recognize the significance in uplifting the voices, experiences, challenges as well as celebrations of our colleagues, friends, neighbors and community members who are of Asian and Pacific Islander descent, as we stand in solidarity against the rash of anti-Asian hate crimes that have been fueled by ignorance, fear and dangerous social and political rhetoric.

Our stance of solidarity, however, is not limited to the span of one month. To be in solidarity is to recognize that our lives are intertwined, and as Dr. King wrote in 1963 from his cell in a Birmingham jail, "Injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere. We are caught in an inescapable network of mutuality, tied in a single garment of destiny. Whatever affects one directly, affects all indirectly."

During 2021, hate crimes fueled by anti-Asian racism and Sinophobia have escalated over 165% within major cities around the U.S., and have made a significant jump from 35 cases within the first three months of 2020, to more than 95 cases since January 2021, according to The Center for the Study of Hate and Extremism. Yet anti-Asian racism and hatred is unfortunately not a new phenomenon, and violence against Asian and Pacific Islander communities has been perpetrated for centuries in the U.S.



Yuri Kochiyama (Photo Source: Courtesy of the Kochiyama family/UCLA Asian American Studies Center)

However, the solidarity generated between people of Asian descent and other marginalized people who have worked alongside and advocate for racial and social justice is not a new phenomenon either.

Solidarity, as defined in Merriam-Webster, is a form of unity, based on communal interests, values, and standards. In a reflection on the power of Poland's *Solidarność* movement that advocated for worker's rights and disrupted totalitarian power structures, Nikolas Prassas (n.d.) further relates solidarity to compassion stating, "In genuine compassion one plunges into the depth of the catastrophe there to share life with the person who suffers. This is simply what com-passion means - the shared suffering of two or more people held together by what they must endure" (para 3).

It was this shared suffering and compassion that brought two leaders together to form an unlikely friendship. One member of this friendship is the dynamic Malcolm X. Whether we are mildly aware or have in-depth knowledge of his work, one cannot argue Malcolm's status as a tremendous figure on our historical landscape whose radical ideas about Black Nationalism and self-determination, his membership in the Nation of Islam, as well as his unapologetic and poignant speeches, fueled the discourse of understanding concerning the Civil Rights era of the United States. His story has been recounted in numerous books for adults and children alike. Most famously his autobiography, co-written with journalist Alex Haley, was recreated into the epic film by Spike Lee in 1992.

However, we may not be as familiar of the other friend. There are only two books recounting her work and a small documentary, which signifies the problematic nature of writing minoritized people into the margins of history. Yuri Kochiyama was a survivor of the Japanese concentration camps (due to President Roosevelt's Executive Order 9066). She eventually moved to Harlem, NY to work with Asian American, Latin, Black and Third World activists fighting for human rights in the U.S. and around the world, significantly protesting the war in Vietnam. In 1963 she found herself in a courtroom with other activists and shaking hands with Malcolm X. The two eventually formed a friendship and Kochiyama joined Malcom's Organization for Afro-American Unity. In 1964, Kochiyama invited Malcolm to speak with Japanese writers and hibakusha (atomic bomb survivors), who were visiting Harlem as part of the Hiroshima/Nagasaki World Peace Study Mission. In the spirit of solidarity, Malcolm's speech connected the struggle between being designated enemies by the mechanism of war and the resulting scars from bombing to the scars from being rendered less than human through the systemic onslaught of racism.

The following year Malcom X was assassinated in the Audubon Ballroom, shortly after greeting his audience with, "As-Salaam-Alaikum" (peace be unto you). In a powerful collection of photographs from that moment, Yuri Kochiyama is seen cradling her friend's head in her lap, begging him to stay alive.

One extraordinary fact about this extraordinary friendship, built from solidarity and the mutual desire to end the suffering of racial injustice, is that Malcom and Yuri share a birthday. Albeit they were four years apart, they were both born on May 19th. For many activists today, this birthday marks an opportunity for all individuals to think about how they may tap into their own potential to have compassion and take action in solidarity for equity and social and racial justice. One great resource to find out how to act in solidarity is the Building Movement Project, where one can identify how they can contribute to a social change ecology as well it is home to the Solidarity Is project. Specifically, in honor of Asian/Pacific Islander Heritage Month, solidarity can entail supporting the numerous organizations fighting to end hate against individuals of Asian/Pacific Islander descent, such as Stop AAPI Hate.

Engaging in the act of solidarity begins by deepening one's understanding about the lives of others outside of one's own existence and beyond the limited single stories of stereotypes and biases. In this issue of our CoDEI newsletter we feature narratives from our Asian identified colleagues who were graciously willing to share their experiences of moving through the world through the lenses of their identities and worldviews. May these narratives remind us that our identities are not monolithic, and while we each have our distinct, cultural richness, we are also engrained with a deep desire to exist in a world willing to embrace us within the fullest of our humanities and enable our capacity to thrive.

For further learning about Japanese concentration camps: <https://youtu.be/hl4NoVWq87M>; and of Yuri Kochiyama: <https://youtu.be/jX6NVSgSVfc>

SON VOICES

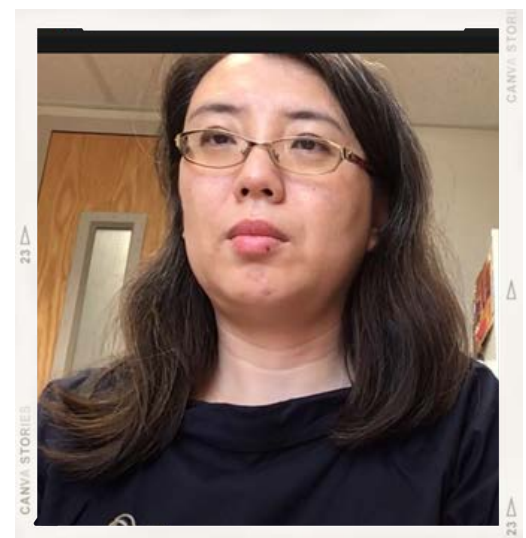
As previously mentioned this issue of the CODEI newsletter is intended to uplift the voices of our colleagues, friends, neighbors and community members who are of Asian and Pacific Islander descent. In our call for narratives, we expressed our desire to feature voices from the SON to help raise awareness that on the other side of this national wave of increased anti-Asian violence and discrimination are our friends, colleagues, family members – people we care for – who want to be safe and to feel valued and loved.

Collecting and featuring narratives from people affected by racism is guided by the theoretical framework of Critical Race theory, specifically the core tenet of counternarratives, or what the education scholars Solórzano and Yosso (2002) refer to as counter-storytelling. Counternarratives function from the idea that people who are affected by the impact of racism have the authority to speak to their own experiences (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012). They are a means of disrupting the dominant narratives generated to maintain systems that support the superiority of a dominant group over the minoritized group. The act of sharing one's lived experiences not only names the discrimination and provides truth to its impact, but it aides as a means to "bridge the gap of understanding....[they] invite the reader into a new and unfamiliar world" (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012, p. 48). Creating a bridge of understanding provides us a pathway to take action and work together to dismantle oppressive systems, policies and practices that can create a world that actively commits to providing safety, value, and love, and embracing what the author, Wade Davis, says are our "unique manifestations of the human spirit."

We begin this section with a video of by our colleague, friend and co-editor of this newsletter, Dr. Ying Meng, reading her poem. This section then ends with a video discussion between Dr. Kristin Hocker and Dr. Meng reflecting on the creation of the poem and the meaning behind the words (both videos contain captions). We hope as you listen to Dr. Meng's poem and read through each of these narratives you will take a moment to contemplate variations on the questions Dr. Hocker posed to Dr. Meng:

- What may have inspired the author to write their experiences and share their truths?
- What emotions do their narratives evoke within you? Why is that emotion emerging?
- What questions might these authors be seeking to answer as they write?

You may choose to explore these questions on your own, but you may also choose to find someone to engage in conversation and take these questions, your reflections, and the meaning-making that happens in between, to a deeper level with an eye towards how we can each be a part of a world that, as Dr. Meng states, "values each individual."



Select the image above to view Dr. Ying Meng read her poem.

SON VOICES

"Although my family and I have not experienced 'big' anti-Asian violence, we do feel the hostility in many places. One small example would be that in some supermarkets, it is very obvious that the cashier treats me and the white customer who is in front of me very differently. The white customer—smiling face, and me—poker face. The other bad thing is that sometimes I cannot even tell whether the feeling of unfriendliness stems from my own hypersensitivity given the current circumstances, or it is really because the racism is so prevailing. Now, my family and I intentionally avoid going out and avoid talking to people to protect ourselves from the uncomfortable feelings. We do think it is time to END all these hates, and encourage a culture of being nice to others."

"It is an intimidating moment right now. Anti-Asian hate crimes have caused my family to disguise ourselves with masks, sun glasses, and hats whenever we leave the house. We fear being targeted and assaulted by extremists. This is not the country we once knew. We can no longer share our views, not even our faces. I am deeply saddened that the fundamental right to feeling safe has been stolen from us, from my family, from me. It's as if the fundamental nature of our own shared humanity no longer exists."

STOP
ASIAN
HATE!
Asians Are Not Viruses
Racism Is !!
LOVE is the KEY
TO HEAL!

"I kept myself at home during the entire epidemic and had not experienced any anti-Asian incidents. But the anti-Asian news and frequently reported cases by the media made me nervous. For example, when I saw some people with suspicious behaviors, I would worry about whether they were extremists and whether they would attack me. When I heard an unexpected knock on the door when I was at home alone, I would become extremely nervous (I was afraid that someone would break into the house)."

"Most Asian Americans have been raised in the United States, in the country they know is their home."

"Until recently, I had this naïve belief that my family would not face discrimination in the Northeast because, after all, the North is where the equal rights movement originated. I was WRONG. In July 2020, my father was admitted to an Emergency Department in Rochester. Because my father does not understand or speak English, I accompanied him to the ED and was allowed to do so by the nurse manager. When I came from his room to use the restroom, I was pulled out by one of the guards and locked outside the ED. She told me that on her watch, there is no way I would return to my father. Perhaps, to that person, being Chinese equaled having no right to treatment. I was infuriated, wounded, and hopeless. I was crying in the ED until the nurse manager heard about this incident; she personally shepherded me to the ED entry and granted me access to my father's bed. She then spoke directly to the guard to state that she herself had decided to let me stay. My father was later treated for his condition and discharged in a few days. But because I was so scared to be pulled out of the ED again and forced to leave my father alone, I did not drink water for the rest of his hospital stay so that I wouldn't have to use the restroom again. I want to give a shout-out to the nurse manager at the ED because she not only saved my father, she also saved me - she saved the very hope in my heart that in the end, what is right will prevail."

Asian Americans and their descendants have been great assets to the U.S.

Do you recognize any of the following people?

- Dr. Chien-Shiung Wu** (Nuclear Physicist)
- Dalip Singh Saund** (Congressman)
- Haing S. Ngor** (Surgeon, Actor, and Author)
- I.M. Pei** (Architect)
- Jerry Yang** (Co-Founder of Yahoo!)
- Kalpana Chawla** (Astronaut and Engineer)
- Patsy Matsu Takemoto Mink** (Politician/Attorney)
- Sammy Lee** (Olympic Diver/Coach/Physician)
- Yo-Yo Ma** (Classical Musician/Performer).



"It is sad to see lots of hate crimes in Asian and Asian Americans happening in new York city and other metropolitan areas since the pandemic. A lot of people believe that it is related to the pandemic. In 2019 spring, my husband experienced horrible physical assault on the street by an total stranger near New Jersey airport. He was hit in his eye, and damaged his sunglasses, fortunately his eyes were okay. But he had brief loss of conscious. Even when I wrote this down, I am so angry and cannot find a good way to express how traumatic it is for both of us. I want people know that the discrimination and hate crime exist before pandemic, and aggregated by the pandemic. It is **WRONG** to hit people on the street just because he or she does not look like you."



Select the image above to view Dr. Kristin Hocker's interview with Dr. Ying Meng discussing her poem.



API POETS & AUTHORS

MEET

KATHY JETÑIL-KIJINER

A climate activist. A pacific poet and scholar. A nuclear activist. Kathy Jetñil-Kijiner was born in the Marshall Islands, and, in her own words, her work raises awareness on "the issues and threats faced by my people."

Source: poetryfoundation.org/poets/kathy-jetnil-kijiner

Photo Source: <http://www.kathyjetnilkijiner.com/author-bio/>



Dear Matafele Peinam, performed at the UN Climate Summit in 2014



Fishbone Hair, written for her niece, Bianca, who passed away from Leukemia in 2011.



Tell Them, performed at Southbank Centre for London, 2012 Poetry Parnassus

Click the images above to view Kathy Jetnil-Kijiner perform each poem.

Discover More

ADDITIONAL AAPI BOOKS AND RESOURCES

Asian Americans (DVD)

A production of WETA Washington, D.C. and the Center for Asian American Media (CAAM) for PBS (2020)

From a Whisper to a Rallying Cry: The Killing of Vincent Chin and the Trial that Galvanized the Asian American Movement by Paula Yoo (2021)

Facing the Mountain: A True Story of Japanese American Heroes in World War II by Daniel James Brown (2021)

Minor Feelings: An Asian American Reckoning by Cathy Park Hong (2020)

SON Book Club

The SON will be reading and discussing *Falling Leaves* by Adeline Yen Mah. This memoir presents an unflinching look at 20th century China and unfolds the story of an incredible woman's journey.

You can find a description on [GoodReads](#) to find out more about the book and the author. You may also find information on her [website](#). Copies are available from your local public library, however if you prefer to purchase a copy, we encourage you seek out **bookstores owned by Asian Americans**.

If you would like to join the book club, please email [Peter Bertoldo](#) or [Jonathan Wetherbee](#) for further information.