

IN SUPPORT OF BLACK LIVES & BLACK LIFE

Asian & Asian American Studies Program at UNLV

UNLV's Asian & Asian American Studies program writes in solidarity with movements and rebellions erupting nationwide demanding an end to the violence and murder of Black people at the hands of police. We are deeply hurt and outraged by the recent killings of George Floyd, Breonna Taylor, and Tony McDade as well as the lynching of Ahmaud Arbery. We join Black community activists, organizers, scholars, friends, and countless others leading the charge for peace with justice, and to state unapologetically that Black lives matter and Black life matters.

Echoing the insights of Black scholars and activists, what we are experiencing is not merely a response to a few isolated, viral incidents. It is an expression of frustration and righteous anger over institutionalized anti-Black racism that developed and evolved over four centuries through a lethal combination of theft, enslavement, dehumanization, death, displacement, segregation, divestment, and countless legal and extralegal racist policies and practices, including what Ida B. Wells referred to as "Lynch Law." The psychological and material impact and consequence of this is immeasurable. It cannot be reduced or relegated to what happened "a long time ago." Nor is it simply a "few bad apples" acting on their own accord. The legacies and sedimentation of the history of anti-Black violence and racism structures all of our lives today. It is felt acutely in wealth disparities, health inequities, distribution of resources, policing and mass incarceration, and the extension of Lynch Law.

As scholars and educators we want the uprisings to be understood in its proper context, to think about how it is both driven by, and a response to these historical and contemporary conditions. More directly, we believe the uprisings to be a logical outcome of what happens when attempts to address systemic racism are invalidated, ignored, or met with fierce opposition. We believe this is what happens when a simple human rights request—that police stop killing Black people—is labeled as controversial and divisive or denied with "they deserved it." This, mixed with the threat and uncertainty of a global pandemic that has hit the Black community disproportionately hard, is the starting point for making sense of why people are risking their lives on the streets.

As the protests morph (as protests do), we understand it can be upsetting to watch private property destroyed and businesses go up in flames, but the state is murdering Black people on video, without consequence—and that must remain the focus; it must end. It is upsetting to watch the media fixate on burning buildings and "rioting," which distracts us from the fact that George Floyd was murdered by a police officer. Instead, we need to encourage deeper reflection on more urgent questions: what exactly is the "right" way to feel and respond to unchecked state-sanctioned violence and murder? What is an effective way to protest and fight against institutionalized racism? And how does one do this when the very institution you are challenging sets the terms of how, when, and where you can protest and then uses

physical force to keep you in line? The long struggle for Black freedom and liberation teaches us that there is no right way, and that every possible avenue and strategy of action imaginable is required--in fact these disparate strategies, organized and unorganized, function together--to enable change and transformation.

As a program with roots in Ethnic Studies, the professors and students of Asian & Asian American Studies support calls for justice for the latest killings and for Black freedom and liberation more broadly. We do so in obligation to our field's tradition and history. From its inception, the approach of Asian American Studies went beyond cultural pride and self-awareness to interracial solidarity to fight against racism, imperialism, and white supremacy. There are numerous examples of Asian-Black coalition and shared struggle against oppression throughout history, exemplified in David Fagen--a Black U.S. soldier who defected to the Filipino Army during the Philippine-American War, the Third World Liberation Front, Grace Lee Boggs, and Yuri Kochiyama. As scholars and teachers who study and interrogate racism, racial violence, capitalism, imperialism, and settler colonialism, we cannot dismiss the rebellions as just a Black issue. These larger systems and issues have had wide ranging, albeit uneven, effects on Asian American and Pacific Islander communities (as we see with the current anti-Asian sentiment under COVID-19) as well as Indigenous and Latinx peoples. Our histories and experiences are thus overlapping and intertwined, and we are united by a commitment to social justice and human dignity.

But we also recognize that our communities occupy very different positions in American society. Whereas African Americans are treated as a problem, Asian Americans are upheld as a solution and seen as the "model minority" that other groups of color should aspire to. However, as "model minorities," Asian immigrants and Asian Americans have been pitted against Black people and used to discredit and undermine challenges to institutionalized racism, especially protests. But Asian Americans are not passive tools. They have and continue to be active participants in reinforcing and perpetuating anti-Black racism, including via policing. Chinese American NYPD officer Peter Liang shot and killed Akai Gurley in 2014; in George Floyd's murder, video footage revealed Hmong American officer Tou Thao standing guard as Derek Chauvin knelt on George Floyd's neck for 9 minutes behind him. For many, Liang and Thao symbolize both the complicity of Asian Americans in the state-sanctioned killing of Black people and the embodiment of anti-Blackness within Asian America. At the same time, we can look to Hmong refugee, Youa Vang Lee, whose son, Fong Lee, was killed by a white Minneapolis police officer in 2006, asked for the community to support the movement by stating "This is something that hurts. We have to join hands with them."

There is much work to be done. For Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders who want to move toward abolishing state violence and racial terror, one of the ways we can show up and support immediately is to combat anti-Black racism in our own communities--friends and family included--and within ourselves. We can also extend these efforts into whatever non-Black spaces we have access to.

At UNLV, we demand more resources and support to grow the African American and African Diaspora Studies program (AAS) in particular and ethnic studies programs in general. Specifically, we support the program's call for UNLV to end all contracts with LVMPD and to redirect a portion of those saved resources to the AAS program. AAS is the primary hub of community-accountable scholarship, teaching, and activism on Black issues on campus. We encourage all students to take AAS courses to study about Black experiences and sharpen your analysis and critique of anti-Blackness. This is where you'll find in-depth and sustained "conversations" and "dialogues" about Black lives and Black life in America and globally.

In Asian & Asian American Studies courses, you can expect us to continue to draw connections and comparisons between Asian Americans and African Americans. In addition, our courses will feature more content and discussion of anti-Black racism in Asian American communities and throughout Asia and the Pacific. Above all, we can work to build power and continue to forge solidarities outside the confines of the university by supporting and honoring activists, groups, and movements in Las Vegas and around the country fighting to end police violence against Black people.

We know that Asian-Black tensions are real and palpable. But our current historical moment is opening up room for us to pivot and struggle together for a new world. "Yellow Peril supports Black Power!" From the trenches of COVID-19 racism, the rallying cry is as relevant and necessary as ever.

In solidarity,
Asian & Asian American Studies Program
University of Nevada, Las Vegas

Here are more ways to support and help:

[Movement for Black Lives with Policy Demands](#)

[Reclaim the Block](#)

[Black Visions Collective](#)

Showing up for Racial Justice: [Black-Led Organizations List](#)

[Northstar Health Collective](#)

[Asians4BlackLives](#)

[People's Collective for Justice and Liberation](#)