

**State Headquarters**

2966 Woodward Avenue  
Detroit, MI 48201  
Phone 313.578.6800  
Fax 313.578.6811  
E-mail [aclu@aclumich.org](mailto:aclu@aclumich.org)  
[www.aclumich.org](http://www.aclumich.org)

**Legislative Office**

115 West Allegan Street  
Lansing, MI 48933  
Phone 517.372.8503  
Fax 517.372.5121  
E-mail [aclu@aclumich.org](mailto:aclu@aclumich.org)  
[www.aclumich.org](http://www.aclumich.org)

**West Michigan Regional Office**

1514 Wealthy St. SE, Suite 260  
Grand Rapids, MI 49506  
Phone 616.301.0930  
Fax 616.301.0640  
Email [aclu@aclumich.org](mailto:aclu@aclumich.org)  
[www.aclumich.org](http://www.aclumich.org)

April 27, 2020

Sent via email

Re: Harassment of Asian Community

Dear Elected Official,

On behalf of the American Civil Liberties Union and American Civil Liberties Union of Michigan, we write to express our grave concern over the increasing incidents of hate, discrimination, and violence against Asian Americans—a community of all immigration statuses. We urge your office to send a public message that attacks against Asian American communities, and the scapegoating of Chinese American community members in particular, is unacceptable and that Asians are an integral part of U.S. communities.

As the COVID-19 pandemic continues to take an increasing toll on our country, Asians in America have experienced alarming levels of harassment as well as physical attacks. In the timespan of two weeks, Asian Americans reported experiencing over 1,100 racist acts.<sup>1</sup> In early March, an elderly Chinese American had his grocery cart spat on by someone in metro Detroit and a man working as a butcher in a grocery store faced verbal assaults from customers.<sup>2</sup>

Similar and even more extreme incidents are occurring all over the country. In California, a sixteen-year-old student was hospitalized after being physically assaulted at school over inaccurate racial stereotypes related to the coronavirus.<sup>3</sup> In New York, a twenty-three-year-old woman was punched in the face by a man who yelled expletives at her connected to the coronavirus, and another man was verbally harassed and sprayed with what appeared to be air

<sup>1</sup> Press Release, Asian Pacific Policy and Planning Council and Chinese for Affirmative Action, *STOP AAPI HATE Receives over 1,100 Incident Reports of Verbal Harassments, Shunning and Physical Assault in Two Weeks* (April 3, 2020), [http://www.asianpacificpolicyandplanningcouncil.org/wp-content/uploads/Press\\_Release\\_4\\_3\\_20.pdf](http://www.asianpacificpolicyandplanningcouncil.org/wp-content/uploads/Press_Release_4_3_20.pdf).

<sup>2</sup> *Chinese Americans in Michigan Anxious About Racism Over Coronavirus*, Detroit Free Press (Mar. 19, 2020), <https://www.freep.com/story/news/local/michigan/2020/03/19/chinese-virus-trump-racism-michigan/2871119001/>; *Michiganders Urged to Fight Discrimination Connected to COVID-19*, Fox2 Detroit (Mar. 26, 2020), <https://www.fox2detroit.com/news/michiganders-urged-to-fight-discrimination-connected-to-covid-19>.

<sup>3</sup> *Teen Student in LA Assaulted as Coronavirus Fears Stoke 'Racial Backlash'*, CBS Los Angeles (Feb. 13, 2020), <https://losangeles.cbslocal.com/2020/02/13/teen-student-in-la-assaulted-as-coronavirus-fears-stoke-racial-backlash/>.

**State Headquarters**

2966 Woodward Avenue  
Detroit, MI 48201  
Phone 313.578.6800  
Fax 313.578.6811  
E-mail [aclu@aclumich.org](mailto:aclu@aclumich.org)  
[www.aclumich.org](http://www.aclumich.org)

**Legislative Office**

115 West Allegan Street  
Lansing, MI 48933  
Phone 517.372.8503  
Fax 517.372.5121  
E-mail [aclu@aclumich.org](mailto:aclu@aclumich.org)  
[www.aclumich.org](http://www.aclumich.org)

**West Michigan Regional Office**

1514 Wealthy St. SE, Suite 260  
Grand Rapids, MI 49506  
Phone 616.301.0930  
Fax 616.301.0640  
Email [aclu@aclumich.org](mailto:aclu@aclumich.org)  
[www.aclumich.org](http://www.aclumich.org)

freshener by a fellow passenger on the New York City subway.<sup>4</sup> In Texas, three family members, including two children, were stabbed at a Sam's Club by a man who inaccurately associated them with the virus based upon their race.<sup>5</sup> These stories reflect an alarming trend that shows no signs of slowing.

This is not the first time that marginalized communities—including people of Asian descent—have faced increasing harassment and violence in the face of a national emergency, both in Michigan and across the country. After a wave of immigration from China to California in the late 1800s, Asians in the United States were targeted using racist stereotypes that developed into policies and laws, such as the 1882 Chinese Exclusion Act, which was not fully repealed until national quotas were eliminated in 1952.<sup>6</sup> During World War II, the U.S. government actively fabricated smears against Japanese people in the United States, including in filings before the Supreme Court, resulting in the mass incarceration of people of Japanese descent, including U.S. citizens, in internment camps. In 1982, Michigan resident Vincent Chin, a Chinese American man, was murdered after an argument at a bar in Highland Park, blaming him for the success of the Japanese auto industry that led to layoffs for the Big Three. Just days after September 11, Muslim, Arab, Iranian, Middle Eastern, and South Asian communities faced a spike of hate crimes, including some homicides;<sup>7</sup> the numbers have never actually subsided and discriminatory policies followed. With the rise of COVID-19, fear is once again driving racism and creating an environment rampant with acts of hate and violence in which many Asians in America are afraid to go out to seek basic necessities.

COVID-19 is devastating communities all over the United States. Fear and anxiety are a constant, which is why it is so important that people don't have to fear being targets of racist attacks on top of the pandemic. It is the duty of public officials to uphold the civil and constitutional rights of all individuals regardless of race, ethnicity, nationality, disability, income, or any other protected characteristic. As in past moments of national crisis, the leadership of our elected officials will shape not only the impact of the moment itself, but also the ongoing impacts of racism in our communities. The silence of our elected officials, or worse, their tacit support of those engaged in harassment and violence, contributes to this environment and emboldens these attacks. No one should be afraid to seek out their basic necessities, let alone be harassed or attacked.

<sup>4</sup> Ewan Palmer, *New York Police Investigating Two Alleged Coronavirus-Inspired Hate Crimes Occurring on Same Day*, Newsweek (Mar. 13, 2020), <https://www.newsweek.com/coronavirus-new-york-asians-hate-crime-chinese-1492216>.

<sup>5</sup> *FBI Calling Stabbing at Midland Sam's a Hate Crime*, CBS7 (March 30, 2020), <https://www.cbs7.com/content/news/FBI-calling-stabbing-at-Midland-Sams-a-hate-crime-569233691.html>.

<sup>6</sup> Matthew Lee, *Coronavirus Fears Show How 'Model Minority' Asian Americans Become the 'Yellow Peril'*, NBC (Mar. 9, 2020), <https://www.nbcnews.com/think/opinion/coronavirus-fears-show-how-model-minority-asian-americans-become-yellow-ncna1151671>.

<sup>7</sup> See e.g., Rana Sodhi & Harjit Sodhi, *Remembering Balbir Singh Sodhi, Sikh Man Killed in Post-9/11 Hate Crime*, Story Corps (Sept. 14, 2018), <https://storycorps.org/stories/remembering-balbir-singh-sodhi-sikh-man-killed-in-post-911-hate-crime/>.

**State Headquarters**

2966 Woodward Avenue  
Detroit, MI 48201  
Phone 313.578.6800  
Fax 313.578.6811  
E-mail [aclu@aclumich.org](mailto:aclu@aclumich.org)  
[www.aclumich.org](http://www.aclumich.org)

**Legislative Office**

115 West Allegan Street  
Lansing, MI 48933  
Phone 517.372.8503  
Fax 517.372.5121  
E-mail [aclu@aclumich.org](mailto:aclu@aclumich.org)  
[www.aclumich.org](http://www.aclumich.org)

**West Michigan Regional Office**

1514 Wealthy St. SE, Suite 260  
Grand Rapids, MI 49506  
Phone 616.301.0930  
Fax 616.301.0640  
Email [aclu@aclumich.org](mailto:aclu@aclumich.org)  
[www.aclumich.org](http://www.aclumich.org)

We urge you, as an elected official and representatives of your constituents, to issue a statement declaring that hate, racism, harassment, and discrimination are unacceptable and send the message that you will not tolerate the singling out of anyone based on ethnicity and scapegoating. In these times, your leadership is crucial to the treatment of your community members and their safety and security. Those engaged in such racist, hateful behavior must know that their actions will not be tolerated, and those impacted must know that as individuals, families, and communities, they will be supported and protected.

In order to prevent the mistakes of the past, we urge your office to use the tools at its disposal to denounce the spread of xenophobia and racism and the misinformation driving them.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Dave Noble".

Dave Noble, Executive Director  
American Civil Liberties Union of Michigan

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Kimberly S. Buddin".

Kimberly S. Buddin, Policy Counsel American  
Civil Liberties Union of Michigan