

CALIFORNIA MUSEUM

April 20, 2021

As we have struggled through the COVID-19 pandemic, a rising tide of racism and xenophobia directed toward Asian American members of our communities has plagued our state and our nation. In Huntington Beach, hateful fliers were posted on a family's home. In Fresno, a man's car was defaced with a hateful message. In Sacramento, San Jose, and Milpitas, businesses were vandalized. Between March 19, 2020 and February 28, 2021, the reporting portal Stop AAPI Hate received 3,795 reports of incidents targeting Asian Americans – over 1,600 in California alone - ranging from verbal harassment to physical violence. This number does not include the countless interactions that go unreported.

The California Museum, home of the Unity Center, denounces all racially motivated acts of aggression and stands with our Asian American friends, colleagues, and community members.

Like others around the world, we are horrified and saddened by the March 16, 2021 murders of eight people, including six women of Asian descent, in Georgia. Regardless of the suspect's stated motives, the attack cannot be viewed in isolation from the background of racism and misogyny that has led to attacks on so many Asian Americans, most often women, over the past year and indeed throughout our nation's history.

The Museum's mission is to engage, educate and enlighten people about California's rich history, its diversity and its unique influence on the world of ideas, innovation, art and culture. We know that our state's diversity is its greatest strength.

Through the lens of California history, we tell stories of times our state has not lived up to this ideal, when racism has been written into our laws and apparent in our deeds. We also celebrate actions Californians have taken to dismantle oppressive systems.

Through our work in telling these stories, we know that anti-Asian racism is nearly as old as the state itself. Unfounded ideas about Chinese immigrants spreading disease and endangering public health led to discriminatory laws such as the Chinese Exclusion Act, the first to bar immigration based on race. Chinese Californians' resistance to these laws established legal precedent for many of the civil rights we enjoy today, including birthright citizenship and access to public school for all.

We also know that times of fear leave us particularly vulnerable to enacting racist policies. The federal commission tasked with assessing the incarceration of Japanese Americans during World War II determined that this violation of their constitutional rights was the result of racism, wartime hysteria, and failure of political leadership. During this time of global pandemic, with fear and racism on the rise, we must look to wise leadership, both in our political representatives and within ourselves, to avoid the mistakes of our past.

History teaches us that we are better together. We draw inspiration from solidarity movements of the past and we applaud the organizations that are collecting the stories of the present.

The California Museum asks the members of our community, now more than ever, to speak up against all acts, big and small, fueled by racism and xenophobia. By standing together today, we can achieve a stronger and more inclusive tomorrow.