

Letter to Asian Diasporic Library Workers

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Content Warning: Mentions of racism and violence

Friday, February 22, 2021

To Our Fellow Asian Diasporic Library Workers

As many know, the COVID-19 pandemic, now in its 11th month in the United States, has seen [a rise in anti-Asian hate crimes](#), largely attributable to the racist rhetoric and misinformation about the origins of the novel coronavirus spread by the previous presidential administration. In the last month, we have seen multiple reports of violent hate crimes, especially against our elders. These include the [killing of Vicha Ratanapakdee](#) in San Francisco, the attack on [Noel Quintana in New York](#), the violent robbery of a [64-year-old Vietnamese American woman in San Jose](#), and a viral video of an [attack against an elderly Asian man in Oakland](#). This was not a new phenomenon for Asian and Asian American communities even at the beginning of the pandemic. Many South Asian, Muslim, and Sikh communities have been impacted by violent hate crimes since the rise of Islamophobia throughout the 2000s, with relatively little national attention.

We are a group of Asian diasporic library workers reflecting on these recent events including the recent surge of anti-Asian violence especially in the Bay Area, anti-Black responses to that violence in Asian communities, and the controversy around *School Library Journal's* February cover. These events are particularly weighing on us during a deeply racialized pandemic, and during the month of Lunar New Year, a time of community and connection for many of us. In reflection with each other, we decided to write this call to action in hopes of highlighting ways that we can build solidarity among Black, Indigenous, and people of color.

We are troubled by the virulent anti-Blackness that we see in our community's responses to recent violence, including calls for increased police presence, and misguided calls for Black communities to

“show up” in solidarity with Asian communities during this moment. We see these responses as counter to racial justice in many ways. As we have learned, especially since the growth of the Black Lives Matter movement, the practices and roots of policing in the United States preclude its ability to serve as an effective response to racial violence because police are so often the perpetrators of racial violence especially against Black and Brown people. At a time when the systemic anti-Black violence threaded throughout the COVID-19 pandemic collides with the violence directed against our own communities, we believe that strengthening the solidarity and coalition between our communities is the way forward. With mindfulness of the brutality directed by police against our Black and Brown family, we call for models of [transformative justice](#) instead.

We recognize that Asian stereotypes of respectability and the myth of the model minority are constructed directly against Black communities to present anti-Black policies, not as systemic racism, but instead as a racial and cultural failing for Black people. While there are certainly aspects of the model minority myth that hurt us, we recognize that we do not suffer the legacy of chattel slavery and genocide, such as the harms of the same [carceral \(il\)logics](#)** or the [school to prison pipeline](#) that affect and continue to take Black and Indigenous lives. We assert that aspiring to be accepted by white cultural systems should not be a primary motivator of action in our communities. Our collective future lies in liberation with Black and Indigenous peoples, not in tandem with white supremacy and state violence. Asian people are made complicit in dominant systems of whiteness through the promotion of anti-Blackness in our community. As a community, we have significant work to do to unlearn anti-Blackness and redirect our actions toward justice. The worrying and sustained rise in anti-Asian and anti-Black violence colliding at the intersection of systemic racism and xenophobia reinforces the need for increased solidarity and coalition between and among Black and Asian communities.

Recently, *School Library Journal's* February cover featured blackface and centered the needs of white children during Black History Month. *SLJ's* responses to the outpouring of readers' criticism, most visibly the statements of Editor in Chief Kathy Ishizuka, largely focused on the publication's intent, which minimized the real impact of their actions on Black readers. We support the statements of others who have delved into the anti-Blackness of these responses, such as the [Asian Author Alliance](#), [Dr. Nicole Cooke](#), and [Nicole Cardoza of Anti-Racism Daily](#).

All of these events weigh heavily on our hearts. We call on fellow Asian diasporic library workers to build our community's capacity toward racial justice alongside Black and Brown communities. We suggest the following starting points for solidarity:

- Educate ourselves in order to address the systemic whiteness in which we have been indoctrinated. None of us are rendered innocent of racial prejudice purely because we are subject to racial prejudice ourselves.
- Recognize and accept leadership from Black people in frameworks of racial justice and follow Afro-Asian people to lead us towards that justice.
- Address racism in our workplaces and in our profession with a focus on its material and collective impacts, rather than on individual feelings of distress.
- Acknowledge the culture of anti-Blackness in our communities and our organizations, identify instances as they arise, and enact zero tolerance policies.
- Resist the idea that a neutral perspective on race is even possible, let alone to advance racial justice, and recognize that failing to stand in solidarity with our Black and Brown colleagues and communities upholds the status quo of whiteness.

May the new year bring us health, joy, and renewed energy toward racial justice.

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Chúc Mừng Năm Mới
새해 복 많이 받으세요
新年快樂

Signed,

Desmond Wong
Anastasia Chiu
Jessica Dai
Deborah Yun Caldwell
Charlotte Roh

*The editors of up//root recognize the significance of the authors' message as they have collectively chosen to express it. Therefore, the editors were intentional about keeping copy edits and any changes to content to a minimum.

Disclaimer: Charlotte Roh is a member of the up//root advisory board.

**In our search for a citation, we found it surprisingly difficult to locate a source that defined carceral logic plainly and was also written by a person of color. We cite here Mariame Kaba's article from 2014, co-written with Dr. Erica Meiners, which explains carceral logic as "a punishment mindset," a concise but thorough definition for any unfamiliar with the term. Per up//root's policy of citing BIPOC exclusively, we would like to note that as far as we are aware, Dr. Meiners is not BIPOC. However, as this oft-cited piece is an excellent partner to the following linked citation by Kaba on the school-to-prison pipeline, we thought its inclusion to be appropriate despite the deviation from up//root's policy.