

Eight dead in Atlanta-area massage parlor shootings, including six women of Asian-American descent

Trévon Austin
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Eight people, mostly women of Asian descent, were killed Tuesday evening in three shootings at Atlanta-area massage parlors. Robert Aaron Long, a 21-year-old man suspected in the shootings, was taken into custody by police in southwest Georgia hours later.

While the specific motivations behind the mass killings remain unclear, they take place within the context of a wave of anti-Asian violence that has been stoked by the efforts of the ruling class to blame China for spread of the coronavirus pandemic.

There were clear concerns throughout the US political establishment that the massacre could be the prelude to further attacks on Asians, although the alleged perpetrator has denied a racial motivation. President Biden issued a statement declaring, "I have been speaking about the brutality against Asian-Americans, and it's troubling ... I'll have more to say when the investigation is completed."

Atlanta Mayor Keisha Bottoms said, "Whatever the motivation was for this guy, we know that many of the victims, [the] majority of the victims were Asian ... We also know that this is an issue that is happening across the country. It is unacceptable. It is hateful, and it has to stop."

According to Cherokee County Sheriff's Office spokesman Jay Baker, the attacks began around 5:00 p.m. when five people were shot at Young's Asian Massage Parlor in a strip mall near Acworth, about 30 miles north of Atlanta. Two people died at the scene. Three victims were taken to a hospital, where two later died.

About an hour later, Atlanta police responded to a call of a robbery in progress in the city's Buckhead neighborhood. Officers found three women dead at the

Gold Spa. While still on the scene, police received a call reporting shots being fired at another spa across the street. Police found another woman fatally shot at Aromatherapy Spa.

Police stated the victims in the Acworth shooting were two Asian women, a white woman and a white man. The fifth victim was a Hispanic man, who was injured and taken to the hospital. All four victims in the Atlanta shootings were Asian women, police said.

The sheriff's office identified the Cherokee County victims as Delaina Ashley Yaun, 33, of Acworth; Paul Andre Michels, 54, of Atlanta; Xiaojie Yan, 49, of Kennesaw; and Daoyou Feng, 44. The man who was injured was identified as Elcias R. Hernandez-Ortiz, 30, of Acworth.

In a statement to the press, Atlanta Police Sergeant John Chafee said video evidence suggested all three shootings were connected.

"Video footage from our Video Integration Center places the Cherokee County suspect's vehicle in the area, around the time of our Piedmont Road [in Atlanta] shootings. That, along with video evidence viewed by investigators, suggests it is extremely likely our suspect is the same as Cherokee County's, who is in custody."

In a video statement on Facebook, Crisp County Sheriff Billy Hancock said his deputies intercepted Long, the suspect, around 8:30 p.m. along the interstate, after being notified he was headed toward their county.

According to Cherokee County Sheriff Frank Reynolds, Long told police the shootings were not racially motivated, and that he thought he had a sex addiction. Long said he saw the businesses as a

temptation that he needed to eliminate. Reynolds did not say if Long ever went to the parlors where the shootings occurred. He also said the suspect was planning to go to Florida in a plot to attack “some type of porn industry.” The FBI said it was “assisting the local investigations” on Wednesday. No other details were released about the FBI’s involvement.

It is unclear if the businesses had any ties to sex work, but Atlanta Mayor Keisha Lance Bottoms said the spas were “legally operating businesses that have not been on our radar.”

Although Long denied having any racial motives for the massacre, municipal governments in many US cities immediately dispatched additional police to Asian neighborhoods and Asian-run massage parlors on the assumption that there might be similar attacks. In New York City, a police department spokesperson said the NYPD was deploying counterterrorism officers to Asian communities “out of an abundance of caution.”

The fears of further attacks on Asian American targets are an indication of the political climate being whipped up in the United States. President Trump led the way, with his demonization of immigrants and claims that COVID-19 was created by China to target this country. The Biden administration has continued to pursue claims that coronavirus was manufactured in a laboratory in Wuhan, China, while presenting China as the main threat to US global domination.

In his speech last Thursday night on the first anniversary of the pandemic, President Biden warned against anti-Asian bigotry, a backhanded acknowledgement of the impact of the strident anti-Chinese demagoguery of the Trump administration, which continues in a less crude fashion under the Democrats.

According to Stop AAPI Hate, a group that tracks incidents of discrimination and xenophobia against Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders, there have been nearly 3,800 incidents of discrimination or attacks on Asian Americans from March 2020 through February 2021.



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