

Atlanta shootings expose growth of anti-Asian violence in the US

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A subcommittee of the House of Representatives held a hearing on Thursday entitled “Discrimination and Violence Against Asian Americans,” the first time the US Congress has addressed the issue since the 1980s when Chinese American Vincent Chin was murdered.

The hearing before the House Judiciary Subcommittee on the Constitution, Civil Rights and Civil Liberties—originally scheduled weeks ago—took place two days after 21-year-old Robert Aaron Long shot and killed eight people—six of whom were Asian women—at three different Atlanta-area massage parlors, all of which were Asian-owned.

Although the motivations of the shooter Long remain unclear, the targeting of Asian-owned massage parlors in Atlanta has highlighted the growth of anti-Asian violence in the US. Racist sentiments have been increasing and deliberately whipped up during the COVID-19 pandemic. This campaign was spearheaded by former-President Donald Trump, who repeatedly used racist terms to describe COVID-19 like “Wuhan virus,” “Chinese Plague” and “Kung Flu.”

In a statement that verged on justifying the actions of the Atlanta shooter, Cherokee County Sheriff’s Office spokesman Captain Jay Baker told the media during a press conference that Long was, “pretty much fed up and had been, kind of, at the end of his rope. And yesterday was a really bad day for him, and this is what he did.”

It was subsequently reported that Captain Baker had posted a photo of a shirt on Facebook last April that contained the message “Covid 19 imported virus from Chy-na.” The Cherokee County Sheriff’s Department immediately went into damage control with another officer issuing a statement on Thursday stating that “Captain Baker had a difficult task before him, and this was one of the hardest in his twenty-eight years in law

enforcement.”

During the House subcommittee hearing, a truly horrific picture was painted of the growth of anti-Asian violence and hate in the US. Manjusha P. Kulkarni, Executive Director of the Asian Pacific Policy & Planning Council and Co-Founder of Stop AAPI Hate reported the following statistics between March 2020 and February 2021:

There have been 3,795 self-reported incidents of bias and discrimination against Asian-Americans and Pacific Islanders (AAPI) from all fifty states and the District of Columbia.

These instances are made up of verbal harassment (68.1 percent), shunning (20.5 percent) physical assault (11.1 percent), civil rights violations such as workplace discrimination, refusal of service and being barred from transportation (8.5 percent), and online harassment (6.8 percent).

Women experience hate incidents 2.3 times more than men. Youth (up to 17 years old) report 12.6 percent of incidents, and seniors (60 years old and older) report 6.2 percent of the total.

Chinese are the largest ethnic group (42.2 percent) to report instances of hate, followed by Koreans (14.8 percent), Vietnamese (8.5 percent) and Filipinos (7.9 percent).

Businesses are the primary target of hatred (35.4%), followed by public streets (25.3%), public parks (9.8%) and online acts of hatred (10.8%).

An example of the verbal harassment experienced by Asian Americans is described in a Stop the AAPI Hate report: “I was shopping at [store] in Milpitas [California] when an older man started making faces at me. I asked him what was wrong, and he said, ‘What’s wrong? You are out here shopping!’ I was confused, and he followed up with, ‘We delisted your companies, shipped back your international students...when do you ship out? When do you ship out? We are going to take away your citizenship!’”

Kulkarni also noted that studies show that as many as three in ten Asian Americans have experienced racial slurs or racist jokes since the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic. She said a poll in April by the Center on Public Integrity (CPI) found that 30 percent of all Americans and 60 percent of Asian Americans had witnessed someone blaming Asians for the spread of the pandemic.

A Harris Poll from April also reported that 75 percent of Asian Americans are concerned about hate and discrimination. In the intervening eleven months, it is likely that instances of anti-Asian violence and discrimination have increased.

Dr. Erika Lee, Regents Professor of History and Asian American Studies and Director of the Immigration History Research Center at the University of Minnesota, also gave testimony. Dr. Lee said that a report released by the Center for the Study of Hate and Extremism at California State University, San Bernardino showed that hate crimes against Asian Americans rose by 150 percent in sixteen of America’s largest cities between 2019 and 2020.

Additionally, Dr. Lee reviewed the history of racial violence against Asian Americans going back 150 years. Throughout this history and in the present situation, the attacks on Asian Americans were encouraged and abetted by both government policy and public statements by political figures. In 1882, Congress passed the Chinese Exclusion Act, the first US federal law to prohibit Chinese immigrant laborers from becoming naturalized citizens. It was not overturned until 1943.

In the 1930s, Japanese, Korean, South Asians and Filipinos were barred from entering the US and from becoming US citizens. Perhaps more well-known is Executive Order 9066, signed in February of 1942 by President Franklin Roosevelt, initiating the forced

relocation and mass incarceration of 120,000 Japanese Americans. These Americans—two-thirds of whom were American-born citizens—were forced from their homes and sent to prison camps as “prisoners without trial” for the duration of World War II.

While the Biden administration is attempting to distance itself from the growth of anti-Asian violence, the Democratic Party is intensifying the policies pursued by the Trump White House in relation to China. As reported by the *World Socialist Web Site* on Tuesday, behind the backs of the US public, the Biden administration is seeking to encircle China with offensive missiles based in Japan, Taiwan, and South Korea.

Central to this “great power conflict,” with implications for a third world war with nuclear weapons, is the attempt to develop anti-Chinese sentiments within more backward layers, including by propagating the lie that coronavirus was deliberately spread around the world by the Chinese government.

The source of the growth of anti-Asian violence in the US is the world capitalist system. Just as in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, the ruling elite is using anti-Asian ethnic and racial hatred to divide the working class.



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