Protests across the US against anti-Asian violence

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Demonstrations and vigils against anti-Asian violence took place across the US over the weekend in the aftermath of the shootings in Atlanta last Tuesday in which eight people were killed, six of whom were Asian women.

Hundreds assembled at Woodruff Park in Atlanta at noon on Saturday and marched a half-mile to the Georgia State Capitol chanting "Stop Asian hate" and "Asians are not a virus." They rallied with hundreds of others at Liberty Plaza across the street from the Capitol.

The protest was promoted with the hashtag #StopAsianHate and brought together many people of Asian descent who were participating in a demonstration for the first time in their lives. For example, 54-year-old Elisa Park, from Marietta, Georgia, told the *New York Times*, "I was staying in silence for a while, you know, sweep it away, keep head down, work hard. But not this time."

Many participants in the Atlanta rally noted the increase in the instances of attacks on Asian Americans since the onset of the pandemic and, in some cases, pointed out that people they know have been living in fear for months. Ms. Park said that her aunt was afraid for her safety and others have been afraid to simply walk their dog.

The protesters mourned those who were shot and killed at the three Atlanta establishments on March 16, all of whom have been identified by authorities. The police identified the four victims shot at Young's Asian Massage in Acworth, Georgia, as Delaina Ashley Yaun, 33; Paul Andre Michels, 54; Xiaojie Tan, 49; and Daoyou Feng, 44.

Elcias R. Hernandez-Ortiz, 30, an immigrant from Guatemala who was walking past the massage parlor to a money exchange business next door, was also shot and critically injured at the location in Acworth. Doctors told Hernandez-Ortiz's wife that he had been wounded in "the forehead, throat, lungs and stomach" and would face a long recovery. Flor Gonzalez told the *New York Times* of her husband, "He's still alive, he's fighting for his life."

Those killed at Gold Spa include Hyun Jung Grant, 51; Suncha Kim, 69; and Soon Chung Park, 74, and the shooter killed Yong Ae Yue, 63, at the Aromatherapy Spa across the street from the Gold Spa.

On Wednesday the shooter, Robert Aaron Long, 21, of Woodstock, Georgia—a town of 33,000 people in Cherokee County and about 36 miles northwest of Atlanta—was charged with eight counts of murder. As the shooter remains held without opportunity for bail in Cherokee County, officials state that the investigation into the murders is ongoing.

Long has maintained that the attacks were not racially motivated and that he had a sex addiction and that he saw the spas as "a temptation … that he wanted to eliminate." Atlanta police have reported that it is too early to know the suspect's motives for shooting nine innocent people.

Rallies and demonstrations were also reported in San Francisco, Houston, New York City, Pittsburgh, San Antonio, Buffalo, New York and Boise, Idaho. Thousands marched in Montreal on Sunday against racism and hate crimes against Asians. The instances of racist hatreds against Asians have also been on the rise in the capital of Quebec over the past year. Authorities reported that 22 "heinous" crimes were committed against Asians in Montreal in 2020, a five-fold increase over 2019.

Hundreds of protesters gathered in New York City's Union Square on Sunday morning, one of several events scheduled across the five boroughs of the city.

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WPIX reported that there have been at least 14 anti-Asian assaults in New York City so far in 2021. On Saturday, police reported that a man yelled anti-Asian slurs at a 66-year-old before punching him in the face in Chinatown.

The protests in Atlanta and elsewhere in the country were reminiscent of the George Floyd demonstrations against police violence of last spring and summer in that those participating came from a wide range of ethnic backgrounds. Thousands of people—young and old, black and white, foreign and native born—have turned out with hand-made placards, signs and banners demanding equality, justice and an end to discrimination and racialist hatred.

The overwhelming majority of the public is outraged by the horrific increase in anti-Asian racism and violence that has been intensifying across the US in correspondence with the lies advanced by sections of the American political establishment and the corporate media along with far-right conspiracy theorists that the COVID-19 pandemic was deliberately spread in the US by the Chinese government.

The protests expressed the broad sentiments of the US population, who thoroughly reject the xenophobic anti-Asian and anti-Chinese propaganda being spewed out by both the Democrats and Republicans that is behind the growth in the number and severity of the attacks on Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders across the country.

Public opposition to anti-Asian attacks has been building for months with protests taking place in many cities prior to the shootings in Atlanta last week. Hundreds had previously gathered in New York City on February 20 and February 27 in support of the Asian community and against white nationalist hate crimes. In the first two weeks of March there were also a series of protests in Los Angeles, Seattle and Philadelphia.

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