A Global Pandemic with Collective Liberation at the Heart of Survival
A Pandemic Anti-Racism Reader

“Yellow peril racism is strongest when people of color buy into this faction...”
- Jason Oliver Chang Ph.D.

We are living in unprecedented times with COVID-19, also known as Coronavirus. There has been a rise in anti-Chinese and anti-Asian discrimination and violence along with many efforts to combat it during this public health crisis. The time is now, more than ever, to build global solidarity that will not only challenge and address racism and xenophobia but forge new possibilities of collective action and power towards justice and liberation.
As COVID-19 began to emerge within the United States, The People’s Collective for Justice and Liberation immediately formed to address the rise of anti-Asian racism and xenophobia. The event was co-sponsored by Can’t Stop Won’t Stop! Consulting, Asian Solidarity Collective, University of Connecticut Asian and Asian American Studies Institute, 18 Million Rising, Asian Pacific American Labor Alliance (APALA), Asian Americans Advancing Justice-Asian Law Caucus. The People’s Collective brought together community organizers, scholars, and leading movement-builders for a Town Hall on Anti-Asian Racism titled, “Race, Struggle & Solidarity In the Time of A Global Pandemic” on Saturday, March 28, 2020 which had over 3,000 registrants on Zoom, over 30,000 viewers across all social media channels and had the hashtag #AntiAsianRacism trending in the US. Through a debrief with townhall panelists and an event survey filled out by over 400 attendees of the town hall; The People’s Collective received crucial feedback that would further push the dialogue as well as expand the intersectionality framing of the movement work. The survey assessment included attendees asking for additional town halls, dialogues and workshops that would provide tools, resources and further framing and knowledge on various topics such as coalition-building, restorative justice, economic justice, disability justice, mental health, education, anti-Black racism, gender violence, gender and LGBTQ justice, and so much more.

It is through this feedback that the People’s Collective developed a mission and vision that would leverage this moment to educate, agitate and politicize people to join a movement. Utilizing virtual town halls, interactive workshops and other tactics in partnership with individuals and organizations who have a track record working on issues that are discussed. This will also serve as a pipeline and bridge to existing infrastructure and campaign efforts. The People’s Collective for Justice and Liberation will engage folks across the country and globe to be a part of a movement that addresses Anti-Asian Racism and builds cross racial solidarity with other communities of color. The People’s Collective organizes with an intersectional, multi-generational and cross sector framework. The People’s Collective is committed to justice and liberation for Black, Brown, Indigenous and People of Color and all marginalized communities.

The Town Hall on Anti-Asian Racism offered a guide with tools as an entry point into the movement towards building solidarity. This reader are notes taken from the beautiful and necessary dialogue amongst the town hall panelists as well as all the
viewers that provided poignant wisdom to serve as a guiding light on how to address pandemic anti-racism. This also includes a collection of cited work produced and created by many of the participants of the town hall. The People’s Collective for Justice & Liberation offers this reader as a pathway of critical hope through a global pandemic to solidarity as we continue to fight for justice and liberation as it is the heart of survival.

Community & Collective Care

During the town hall, panelists discussed the importance of organizing mutual aids; and checking on our neighbors, people with disabilities, domestic violence survivors and our most vulnerable communities. It was AAPIs For Civic Empowerment-Education Fund’s most recent message to and from AAPI’s, “Community Care During Covid-19”¹ that reminded us of the ways Asian people have survived “colonization, war and environmental catastrophe” through community care.

Lakshmi Sridaran of South Asian Americans Leading Together (SAALT) shared on the panel, “We see so many mutual aid networks forming all over the country to support the most vulnerable communities. These are anti-capitalist solutions and they are teaching us major lessons about the failures in all of our systems.” It is with this framing of mutual aid as being an anti-capitalist solution that we give honor to indigenous communities where the practice of mutual aid is rooted. We can also make connections and reference organizations like the Black Panther Party and the ways they have provided for their Black communities through free breakfast programs and free ambulance services. Mutual Aid can also be traced back to the Common Ground

clinic in New Orleans and to more recent times how Puerto Rico gave community care to each other during the devastation of Hurricane Maria when there was mismanagement of funds and recovery efforts by a corrupt administration.²

It is through these dire times of a pandemic that mutual aid is needed as it is a vehicle to serve the people. It is in the moment of serving the people where connections are made through relationship-building as we meet the needs of the people. It’s where co-conspiratorship and allyship are formed through an understanding that mutual aid and community care is not an alternative to the capitalist system at play but rather an opposition to the systems we have been under. Community care is about building power and agency; as we take care of each other’s needs. It’s about checking on our elders, immunocompromised or immunosuppressed peoples, and the most vulnerable of our communities as we find solutions together.

Scot Nakagawa of Change Lab shared ways we can protect one another by expressing the importance of monitoring hate activity and to document incidents. He shared that it would be crucial to support cultural organizations who are providing support to those who are victimized and for the organizations to be the point of rapid response. Just a few short weeks to the town hall, A3PCON - Asian Pacific Policy & Planning Council and Chinese for Affirmative Action in conjunction with San Francisco State University, quickly created a website for people to report covid-19 related anti-AAPI hate³.

Already, there have been more than 1400 reports of anti-Asian racism⁴ which makes it even more imperative to take heed to Scot’s ask of “building an echo chamber” to

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amplify and address the continuance of Trump’s scapegoating and to “push back against the administration’s attempt to racialize the virus.” It is through this kind of community care where people can find ways to protect one another by lifting up messages from those who are being harmed and amplifying the call to action needed to keep communities safe.

During a Disability Justice presentation, organizer, Leroy F. Moore Jr. of Krip-Hop Nation shared the 10 Principles of Disability Justice created by Patty Berne from Sins Invalid, to town hall attendees which is relevant in amplifying the ways people with disabilities are amongst some of the most vulnerable of our communities who have been high risk before and throughout this pandemic. In a recent Vox article, fierce Disability Justice Organizer, Alice Wong of Disability Visibility Project pens a piercing truth, "It is a strange time to be alive as an Asian American disabled person who uses a ventilator. The coronavirus pandemic in the United States has disrupted and destabilized individual lives and institutions. For many disabled, sick, and immunocompromised people like myself, we have always lived with uncertainty and are skilled in adapting to hostile circumstances in a world that was never designed for us in the first place. Want to avoid touching door handles by hitting the automatic door opener with your elbow? You can thank the Americans with Disabilities Act and the disabled people who made it happen."

The Disability Justice movement has been a leading beacon in community care as they have an intersectionality practice along with an anti-capitalist framing which have always guided communities into how they can do the care work for and with their communities. Alice also shares the gutting reality in which many disabled people are

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currently feeling and facing, “My family and I have been sheltering in place for over three weeks in San Francisco. As news warnings of overcrowding in hospitals and scarce resources push hospitals to consider rationing care, I’m deeply concerned.” It is heart wrenching to know that there are not enough ventilators for people infected with coronavirus and that is by centering our most impacted and vulnerable of our communities where we can begin to understand that community care is vital to how we truly learn to be in community with one another. It is where we can build our base, connect with people on the ground and begin to build solidarity as we forge together, at different positionalities of impact into uncertainty but with critical hope for the change we’ve always been fighting for.

Solidarity

“Solidarity is about showing up when it doesn’t always need to impact your own community…” - Carmen Perez-Jordan, The Gathering for Justice

As Timmy Lu of AAPIs For Civic Empowerment-Education Fund asked the question, “How do we bring these different racial groups together in this fight, fighting shoulder to shoulder?” it is then that we began to think about “showing up for one another.” But what does it really mean to show up for one another as there has been a rise of anti-Chinese and anti-Asian racism while we are under a global pandemic? What does it mean to be in solidarity for Asian people when there is still much work to be done within our own communities on addressing anti-black racism? Kabzuag Vaj of Freedom, Inc. answered this as she was asked what are the alternatives to calling the police as hate crimes continue to rise against Asians, “While we’re trying to fight for people to be released from ICE detention, we cannot be part of the problem that is sending people into these systems.” She continues to ask critical questions, “How do we as a person and as a community do what’s right by us and without also further criminalizing other communities? What are the alternatives to keeping our
communities safe? What are the alternatives to not further criminalize black and brown folks? Let’s put the blame where the blame goes to - and that is people with power, and people who condone this kind of violence against us.”

Timmy went on to explain the need for thinking more than just ourselves and how we need to build cross-solidarity relationships - “It is important that we invest in each other, by sticking around, by supporting each other in need and also by building something lasting, that’s bigger than ourselves. It means for poor and working class communities, people within these communities, it’s fighting to be seen and not just presumed that all Asians are doing well. Doing this work, connecting with each other in this way, compels us to make the effort to understand our differences as we work toward a common good but also acknowledging the limitations that we have ourselves, our own outlooks, and internalized racism that we have to challenge and confront.”

He continued, “Because we are talking about solidarity and allyship here - what are we also demanding? Are we demanding just that Asians face just a little less racism? That doesn’t feel like it’s enough. Or are we demanding together that we can all live and be free in this moment of such upheaval and despair? That we can and need to be dreaming big and to be fighting anti-Asian racism. We also need to be fighting for the most marginalized and vulnerable peoples among us and that may or may not be Asian as well. So whether it’s racism or COVID-19, fighting for the most vulnerable amongst us protects us from these both twin diseases of this time - racism and this pandemic.”

Helena Wong of Seeding Change provides context and nuance as she breaks down the historical ways of how America has always utilized scapegoating as a way to relieve itself of violent crimes of war, slavery and occupation; as we currently bare witness to the way Trump and his administration is scapegoating by using racist dog whistles claiming that China are to blame for the pandemic crisis and for why we are going into a recession. Helena provided more context on how Asians and Asian American’s have always benefited for the fights of justice and equality which have been
waged by Black and Brown communities. She states, “Unfortunately many immigrants that come here don’t understand what makes this country is not what is given to people but actually what people continuously fought for, gone to jail for and died for. A lot of Asian immigrants that come to the U.S. don’t know this history but it’s also worth it to know that the state of the U.S. education system is that most people in the US don’t know this U.S. history.”

Helena then went on to share how Asians have always been part of cross-racial solidarity and social justice movements, “I want to make sure that we’re not minimizing or invisibilizing the work that Asians have done in fighting for democracy and justice for this country. Many of the Asian folks on this call (town hall) are part of social justice organizations that are actively trying to dismantle white supremacy patriarchy and class inequalities as well as fighting for climate justice, immigrant rights. Basically the gamut of issues that are out there. So let’s not let our work be minimized. We need to continue to do better on connecting anti-Asian violence to other movements including and not limited to gender justice, disability rights, anti semitic, islamophobia, indigenous rights, immigrant rights, workers rights.”

Not Business As Usual

“This is an important way we take this time to educate ourselves and reach out and find ways when we’re past the outbreak peak and social distancing is being relieved that we do not return to business as usual.”

- Jason Oliver Chang, Ph.D., University of Connecticut

“The worst thing that can happen from all of this is that we go back to business as usual and not take these hard lessons from this really challenging period that can really help us transform…” Lakshmi Sridaran said as she discussed how we are in a moment
of crisis but “we can take this opportunity to truly see what it is exposed from these existing inequities and to join the collective movement to eliminate them.”

As we face this very unprecedented pandemic it is vital that we do not go back to business as usual. We must be vigilant at resisting the ways they are pitting communities of color against each other. Angela Peoples of Black Womxn For pointed out fiercely, “Those that are responsible (for this crisis) are those that are hoarding wealth. Pitting working class people of different ethnicities against each other is typical of white supremacy. Pitting working class people of different races and ethnicity is as american as white supremacy. This is a part of the U.S. brand of capitalism - racialized capitalism. Thinking about how people are pitted against each other throughout history, 45 pivoted almost immediately. He pivoted immediately to racist dog whistles, a tool and tactic as old as the US. This is not just Donald Trump being his awful racist and disgusting self because he is - This is part of their playbook, part of the conservative and right wing folks wanting to maintain profit, to pit working class people against each other. It’s the U.S. history.”

As the death toll of covid-19 continues to rise both in the United States and around the world, it becomes clearer and clearer that our world is changing. While many of us never imagined that change would come through a pandemic such as covid-19, we must tackle the truth that we must not go back to whatever normalcy we had. Because whatever normalcy we had was an illusion of capitalism and white supremacy. Capitalism only serves the ruling class and what we are witnessing under covid-19 is the ruling class who are defending it with all they’ve got at the expense of human life. So, that leaves us at a precipice. We are at a moment where movement building must continue to forge through these unknown terrains. We are at a moment where we will need to continue to push for the change that we deserve, that we have long been fighting for - we must ensure that this change happens by our own collective action, together, in global solidarity for the liberation of all oppressed peoples.
“We have always fought, and we will win..” - Kabzuag Vaj, Freedom Inc.

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