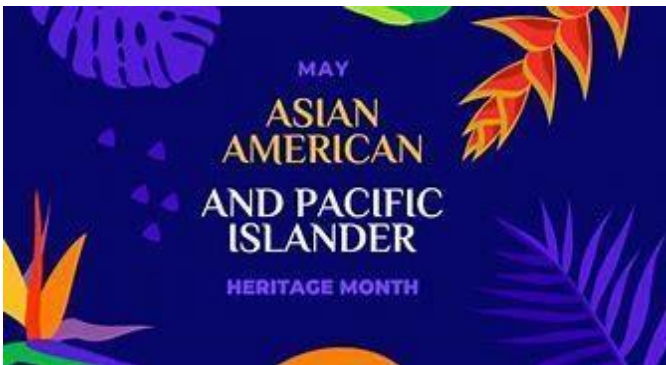




The All-Too Persistent Problem of Violence Against AAPI Women



May is Asian and Pacific Islander Heritage Month, a time set aside for recognizing the contributions and influence of Asian Americans and Pacific Islander Americans to the history, culture, and achievements of the United States. America is indeed fortunate to include in its broad and diverse cultural tapestry the rich and vibrant background of Asians and Pacific Islanders. But recent events have brought to the forefront the long history in this country of violence against Asian American and Pacific Islander (AAPI) women. It is awareness of this problem that our church’s Racial Justice Mission Group would like to highlight this month.

The history of Asian and Pacific Islanders in America explains, in part, the roots for discrimination against this population. As Dr. Connie Wue, executive director of AAPI Women Lead noted in a recent *The Atlantic* magazine article, “Asian and Pacific Islander communities writ large have experienced histories of colonization, of xenophobia, of racism, [and] of patriarchal violence.” The stereotypes of AAPI women in American culture can be seen as far back as the 1875 Page Act, which essentially barred single Chinese women from entering the country on the assumption that they wanted to immigrate for the purposes of prostitution.

This view of AAPI women as willing sexual objects, as meek and submissive, makes AAPI women vulnerable to harassment and violence and appear

as any criminal’s ideal target, notes Sung Yeon Choimorrow, executive director of the National Asian Pacific American Women’s Forum who was quoted on CNN and in the *HeraldTribune*. “American culture has hypersexualized and objectified Asian women as long as we’ve lived here,” she notes. A recent survey by her organization found that 74% of AAPI women say they experienced racism or discrimination in the previous 12 months, more than one-half identifying the perpetrator as a stranger, and 47% saying these instances happened in a public space. Racism against AAPI women has intensified with the recent COVID outbreak. Ms. Choimorrow recalls how early in the pandemic, while she was walking in her neighborhood with her daughter, a man chased her down yelling, “Go back home with your China virus.”

The recent shootings of six AAPI spa workers in Atlanta, the deaths in New York City of Christina Yuna Lee, who was stabbed, and Michelle Go who was pushed onto the subway tracks, and the case of six men arrested in San Francisco last year for more than 100 incidents of theft, robbery and burglary specifically targeted at AAPI women are just some of the more well-publicized incidents that illustrate this much larger problem. Dr. Wue notes that violence against AAPI women is layered and systemic, and most of it cannot be seen on TV or social media. “For too long,” says Ms. Choimorrow, “Asian American women have been all too visible in ways that dehumanize us but invisible in ways that make us human. Changing this will take slow steady work.”

In our congregation, this work begins with our awareness not only of the unique history, vibrant culture, and significant contributions that Asians and Pacific Islanders bring to our community, but also of this all-too persistent problem of violence against AAPI women.