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"Capitalism requires inequality and racism enshrines it." —Ruth Wilson Gilmore

In the United States, racism against Asian Americans, whether in a public rally, in the public space or in the classroom, has become routine.

In March 2020 Donald Trump called the coronavirus "Chinese Virus." On June 20, 2020, at an anemically attended rally in Tulsa, Oklahoma, Trump named the deadly coronavirus "Kung Flu." The same week a white California professor, Matthew Hubbard, was put on leave after he asked a Vietnamese student to change her name. The student's name is Phuc Bui Diem Nguyen. In Vietnamese "Phuc" means endearment and beauty. The professor said that in English her name sounded like "F-ck boy" and the student needed to "understand" that her name has "an offensive sound" in his English language.

Then on June 21, 2020, an Indian restaurant owned by a Sikh family was vandalized by white supremacists in downtown Santa Fe, New Mexico. When the Sikh owner, Bajit Singh, walked into his restaurant, India Palace, he found "racial slurs graffitied all over the wall": "White Power," "Trump 2020," "Go home." The Council on American-Islamic Relations (CAIR) and the New York-based Sikh Coalition also condemned the attack. Ibrahim Hooper, CAIR's national communications director named this vandalism a "hate attack" and said how such an attack "once again demonstrates that growing white supremacy, xenophobia, Islamophobia and racism target every minority community and must be challenged by people of all races, faiths and backgrounds."

This is not the first time Sikhs have been attacked by white supremacy groups. Anti-Sikh hatred has been on the rise following Trump's election, but the violence against Sikhs has always existed in the U.S.

Racialized violence in the U.S. against Asians is not new. While racism has existed since the first major wave of Asians arrived as early as 1850s, racialized violence against Asian Americans comes in waves and is expected to rise as we get closer to the U.S. elections in November 2020. Historians are predicting that something akin to the racial violence known as the "Red Summer" that erupted in 1919 may be repeated. The eruption of violence in 1919 was directed solely at African Americans. This time, however, this racial violence may also be directed against Asian Americans, as we have already begun to see the rise in racist attacks associated with the scapegoating of Asians since the arrival of COVID-19 in the U.S.

While there is much written about the insidious and brutal forces of everyday white supremacy in the U.S. and how the Asian American diaspora has experienced many forms of exclusion (as portrayed in the most recent PBS documentary on Asian Americans), one question still remains. *Why have Asians/Asian-Americans, a minority group themselves, collectively remained so racist when it comes to their interactions with Black people?*

This is a history of racialization predicated upon the old colonial principles of "divide and rule," placing Asian Americans "above" African Americans in terms of class, power, wealth, access and education.

The video of George Floyd's public lynching and Tou Thao's back turned toward Floyd as he died calling out his mother's name has opened up an unavoidable dialogue on anti-Black racism, a debate with a long history. This is a history that is punctuated by an intersectional history of colonialism, anti-colonial violence, casteism, colorism and the model minority myth. This is a history of racialization predicated upon the old colonial principles of "divide and rule," placing Asian Americans "above" African Americans in terms of class, power, wealth, access and education.

Thao's complicity represents an Asian American bystander syndrome that has resulted from deep-seeded anti-Black conditioning mixed with the fear of losing Asian Americans' alignment with whiteness as being honorary whites. It is this complicity-fueling syndrome that needs to be understood and disrupted.

Let's face it. This complicity against Blackness is a symptom of imagined power and superiority. This complicity is a struggle to be a part of the myth of the American dream, an impossible dream to become ideologically white. To live like the *Dick and Jane* fantasy coupled with the history of colonialism and colorism is the closest route to entering a world of power and access that whiteness ensures.

For instance, in the Enid Blyton stories like *Noddy* (books that I grew up reading as a child in India in the early '70s), there is the presence of "golliwog" dolls, an anti-Black imagery. These dolls "were often rude, mischievous, elfin villains." Such images of anti-Blackness, along with Bollywood's representations of anti-Blackness, which Dhruva Balram calls an "endemic problem," re-instilled already discriminatory practices against the Dalits — or what Gandhi called the "Harijans" — in India, which continues to this day. For that matter, Blyton's *The Famous Five* series, which is set in the U.K., was not that different from William S. Gray's *Dick and Jane* series set in the U.S. where the white middle class is glorified. This is the imagination of class privilege, a privilege that the model minority class of Asians coming to the U.S. post-1965 thought was their ticket to the American Dream.

Beyond the world of colonial literary imaginations, the imagination of whiteness as simply being "superior" to being Brown or Black, and its relationship to power and desirability, is also a result of the presence of U.S. imperialism in Japan, South Korea, the Philippines and Vietnam. Militarization forcefully contributed to anti-Blackness in the Asian psyche. In many of the fairly

homogenized Asian countries like Japan, the Philippines, South Korea and Vietnam, the presence of U.S. Military bases served as the first contact with Blackness. While African American men occupied positions of power as American soldiers, Channelle Russell in "Blackness and Japan" also asserts how "they were also subjected to both the prejudice of racially-segregated policy and wide-spread colorist notions concerning darker skin in Japan. For example, during the period of occupation, it was commonplace for black soldiers to be referred to as *kurumbo*, a highly-derogatory Japanese racial slur for black."

The forces of racial capitalism, neoliberalism, white supremacy and a history of state violence — all taken together — unite Asian Americans and Black people much more than they divide.

In 2017, there was a photography exhibit by photographer Yu Huiping at the Hubei Provincial Museum in Wuhan titled "This Is Africa." In this exhibit, images of wild African animals were juxtaposed with Black African people. After complaints were filed by Africans (including students living in China) that the display was racist, the exhibition was removed.

While it would be too reductionist to claim that everyone belonging to the Asian American disapora is affected by anti-Blackness, it is fair to assert that most Asian/Asian Americans have been brought up with some notion of colorism and casteism, whether they belong to the working class or hold the model minority status.

For instance, the South Asians who arrived in the U.S. as a result of the 1965 Immigration Act were primarily part of the intellectual and professional class. Yet their educated backgrounds did little to dismantle their deeply rooted ideas of anti-Blackness stemming from casteist notions of social stratifications and colonial ideas of anti-Blackness. This is Asian American anti-Blackness in the form of what Mai Der Vang calls "colonized loyalty" – the "subservience and colonized loyalty to white people." This "colonized loyalty" is coupled with a mindset of acceptance and hierarchy based on colorism and exclusions based on one's skin color.

The "model minorities" of the post-1965 generation were perceived as distinctly different from the South Asians in 1911. The 1911 U.S. Immigration Commission identified South Asians as the "least desirable race of immigrants thus far admitted to the United States" according to historian Erika Lee. In 1907 the riots in Bellingham, Washington, led by white working-class men terrorized the South Asian migrant workers and within 10 days of the riots they were successful in driving the entire South Asian population out of the city.

Yet, there is a failure to understand how the forces of racial capitalism, neoliberalism, white supremacy and a history of state violence — all taken together — unite Asian Americans and Black people much more than they divide.

In the 1960s, white liberals purposefully weaponized and promoted the model minority stereotype to stifle Black social movements.

This routine turning away by Asian Americans — especially the model minority bourgeoisie living in their imaginary world of whiteness – comes out of many Asian Americans' embrace of a false narrative of assimilation built on layered denials: Denials about racial discrimination and structural racism in the schools and their workplaces. Denials that their (sub)conscious preferences for lighter complexions is a result of deep-seated anti-Blackness. Denials about hate crimes and attacks on civil liberties post-9/11 (that did not spare South Asians from being put into detentions, being deported and even being killed). Denials that Asian Americans are also victims of police brutality.

It is not that long ago that Srinivas Kuchibhotla, an Indian engineer, was killed by white supremacist Adam Purinton. Prior to that, in 2006, a Hmong man, Fong Lee, was shot eight times by a white Minneapolis police officer, Jason Andersen. Andersen claimed Lee was armed and had motioned to shoot him. Andersen was later indicted by a federal grand jury on a criminal civil rights charge. Much to the disappointment of Lee's family, Andersen was exonerated in 2009 by a jury in a federal wrongful death lawsuit brought by Lee's family.

While Youa Vang, mother of Fong Lee does not know Floyd's family, she understands their pain. In her shared grief and solidarity and while speaking in her native Hmong, Vang sobbed and said, "I want the family to know that I'll grieve with them, I sympathize with them, and I'm sending them love." This was no easy task, and yet this public acknowledgment is the beginning of a postponed narrative of healing, and a call to end anti-Black violence.

This narrative of healing and addressing anti-Blackness, however, may also be gendered. Mai Der Vang, in her insightful essay, "To Hmong Americans, On Racial Justice and Patriarchy" claims:

> As a Hmong woman born and raised in this country, I have often found that this particular type of "Hmong man" also embodies patriotic pro-assimilationist tendencies coupled with a superficial belief in the American Dream. In other words, he is someone who might seek social validation from the mainstream. Or he might be someone who fulfills too easily the lackey role, sometimes unbeknownst to himself. Or worse, he can be someone who fails to or is unable to interrogate and dismantle the parts of his own culture that have long granted him far too much privilege over women.

The relationship here between gendered colonialism, anti-Blackness and racism is deeply woven into the consciousness of many postcolonial subjects. Many Asian Americans also think of themselves as "honorary whites," based on their per capita income and occupational status. Their almost nonexistent contact with other working-class communities of color (including their own) often prohibits them from understanding racial and economic disparities faced by these communities on a daily basis.

The Asian Americans who represent the "model minority" class are those whom Martin Luther King would have classified as mimicking what he called the "white moderates." In his April 1963 "*Letter from Birmingham Jail*," after King had been arrested for publicly protesting racial inequality, he described his disappointment with the white moderates.

> . . . who is more devoted to "order" than to justice; who prefers a negative peace which is the absence of tension to a positive peace which is the presence of justice; . . . Shallow understanding from people of good will is more frustrating than absolute misunderstanding from people of ill will. Lukewarm acceptance is much more bewildering than outright rejection.

When it comes to standing up for racial justice, Asian Americans are the honorary white moderates with their "lukewarm acceptance." They are the model minorities *still* standing on the fence of the racial justice movement while their children have forcefully joined the struggle to dismantle white supremacy and anti-Blackness. Racial justice educator-activist Simran Jeet Singh, who was born and raised in San Antonio, Texas, says, "What I am noticing now is young people saying that it is uncomfortable but we don't have the luxury anymore to ignore [anti-Blackness]." Yet the creation of the model minority demographics was not an accident, but a strategy promoted by the forces of white supremacy to pit Asians against African Americans.

In the 1960s, white liberals purposefully weaponized and promoted the model minority stereotype to stifle Black social movements. Ellen Wu in *The Color of Success: Asian Americans and the Origins of the Model Minority* argues how Asian Americans were used against other communities of color, especially African Americans, to prove that meritocracy and equal opportunity when successfully used are a road map to move away from oppressive conditions.

Solidarity between and within communities of color remains our only chance to fight against the brutal and insidious forces of racism, white supremacy and racial capitalism.

Just like white moderates, the Asian Americans with opportunities who have embraced the "model minority" myth are much less likely to protest. They are taught that participating in protests are disruptive, disrespectful, and an act of defiance. Most are apprehensive of riots and many fear their properties will be damaged. Most have embraced the idea that it is not protests but hard work that will be the ticket to their assimilation into white America. Besides, their "unwavering faith in the government and liberal democracy as opposed to political protests were the keys to overcoming racial barriers as well as achieving full citizenship," noted Wu.

Yet the truth is all Asian Americans are *not* model minorities.

As *The New York Times* reported, "Hmong-Americans do not fit cleanly into the country's broad racial categories. Because so many came as impoverished refugees, they are more likely to be poor than many other Asian immigrants from places like China and India who often have specialized degrees." Also, Kabzuag Vaj, a Hmong American and the founder of Freedom Inc., a nonprofit aiming to end violence toward minorities, women and the LGBTQ community, understands the nuanced nature of anti-Blackness among Asians based on class.

Vaj, who herself came to the United States as a refugee, explains how the U.S. resettled Southeast Asian refugees (following the Vietnam War) in poorly funded urban areas with deprived infrastructures where Black and Brown communities had to exist side by side. "When

you are put into this situation, and you live amongst other poor black and brown folks with very little resources, there is that piece of strain between communities that must fight for the same resources," Vaj said. "There isn't enough for all of you."

Here, both anti-Black and anti-Asian racism along with poverty plays a role in triggering various conflicts based on interlocking systems of oppression. For the Twin Cities' Hmong community, at least for now, as reported by *NPR*'s Ashley Westerman and Noel King, this "debate over anti-Blackness is mostly being talked about behind closed doors."

Poet-activist Ed Bok Lee, a resident of Twin Cities for decades, tells Westerman and King that "If you are Asian American and you are anti-black, it's probably because you see black people through a white hegemonic lens of racism, colonial-style racism. For Asian Americans to grapple with this moment will involve opening up a lot of personal and historical trauma of racism and colonialism."

In the midst of this private or public reckoning, there are, however, Asian-American-Black solidarity movements actively emerging since 2014. In the wake of Michael Brown's shooting in 2014, Emma Chin recalled Vincent Chin's brutal death by beating on June 23, 1982, and commented that "more than three decades after Vincent Chin's death, the decision not to indict Darren Wilson reminds us that our justice system is still broken." While Chin's death had galvanized the Asian diaspora in 1982, we are witnessing another such galvanizing moment in 2020 since the COVID-19 breakout and George Floyd's lynching and the rise in hate crimes against the Asian diaspora.

There is a recognition that racial violence and xenophobia are intersectional. "We can't keep on recalling something that happened 30 years ago without conceptualizing how anti-Asian hate is connected to this constant drumbeat of violence against Black, brown and Indigenous people," she said. "Justice isn't 'Just Us'," said Renee Tajima-Peña, director of the Oscar-nominated documentary, *Who Killed Vincent Chin?* and producer of the recent *PBS* film series "Asian Americans."

Calls for solidarity from Black comrades led to the formation of #AsiansForBlackLives, a grassroots organization with radical Asian American activists in the Bay area. Similarly, Seattle Asians for Black Lives calls for "special attention to interrupting the anti-blackness that lives in the American shadow." They ask, "how are we complicit in upholding anti-blackness and the white supremacy that feeds it? Are we willing to interrupt our complicity in order to move in the rhythm of justice?"

Many young Asian Americans like Korean-American Joyce Kang have joined the various solidarity movements to address anti-Black racisms. For instance, Kang's letter addressed to "Mom, Dad, Uncle, Auntie, Grandfather, Grandmother, Family" is a call to end Asian American complicity. While this letter was written after Philando Castile's shooting in Minneapolis in 2016, it has now been rewritten to include George Floyd's death.

Can the uprisings in the wake of George Floyd's murder be the beginning of interracial solidarity and healing between Black America and Asian Americans? Are Asian Americans, in the words

of Soya Jung, ready to unleash the "model minority mutiny?" Are Asian Americans finally ready to confront what Vijay Iyer calls our "complicity with their excess?"

After all, without the Immigration and Naturalization Act of 1965, a direct gain of the Civil Rights Movement, most of us would not be here.

After all, only in solidarity between and within communities of color, remains our only chance to fight against the brutal and insidious forces of racism, white supremacy and racial capitalism.

After all, racism obeys no boundaries.

After all, we still have Ruhel Islam. Islam's Bangladeshi Indian restaurant in Minneapolis, Gandhi Mahal, burned and yet Islam supported the protest against Floyd. "Let my building burn," but "[j]ustice needs to be served."

As police fired tear gas into crowds, Islam's restaurant became a refuge for the injured.

After all, Islam reminds us that our survival is dependent on interracial solidarity, not anti-Black racism. "We can rebuild a building, but we cannot rebuild a human."

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