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The George Floyd Protests: A Guide to Practicing Anti-Racism as an Asian Ally

Practical ways Asians and Asian Americans can show up for the Black community.



By [Sammy Westfall](#)

03 June 2020, 9:35pm [Share](#) [Tweet](#) [Snap](#)



PHOTO BY [MIKE VON](#) ON [UNSPASH](#)

On May 25 in Minneapolis, a police officer pressed his knee into the neck of [George Floyd](#), a 46-year-old Black man, for [8 minutes and 46 seconds](#), as he struggled to breathe and then fell unconscious. He was pronounced dead shortly afterwards.

With each passing day since Floyd's death, protests swelled, drawing tens of thousands to the streets in over [140 cities in the United States](#), with peaceful marches, rallies, property damage, and [violent clashes with the police](#) occurring from coast to coast. They protest not just Floyd's death, but a history of systemic racism and the killing of Black people at the hands of police officers.

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Derek Chauvin, the officer, was [charged with third-degree murder and manslaughter](#). According to a criminal complaint, he continued to kneel on Floyd's neck for [nearly three minutes](#) after officers failed to find Floyd's pulse. Pinned down and in handcuffs, Floyd made his final pleas: "I can't breathe," "Mama," and "Please let me stand. Please."

Three other officers were involved in the incident. One of them, Tou Thao, was caught on video standing by idly, casually officers participated and watched; no one took any action to save my brother's life."

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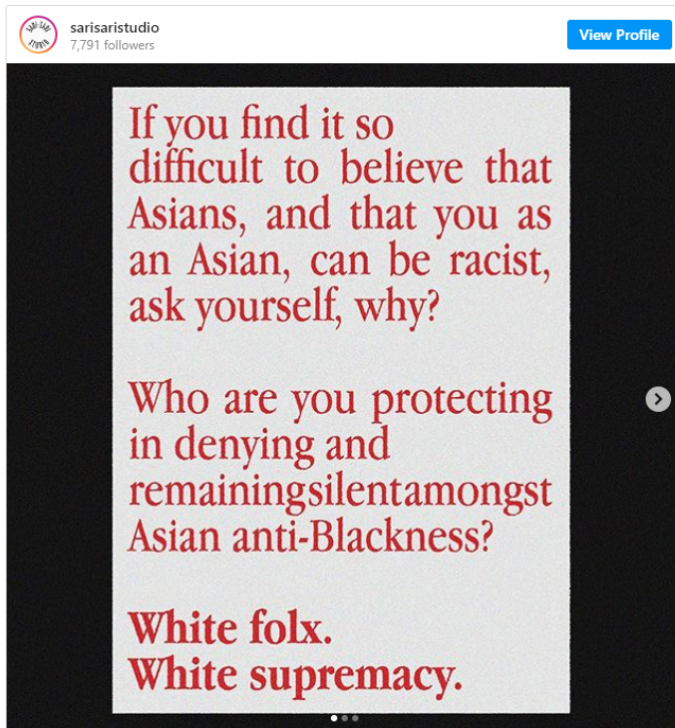


wrote Philonise Floyd.

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The idleness of Thao, an Asian American officer, has become a symbol of the tangible consequence of inaction, and tendency of the Asian community to turn a blind eye when it comes to matters of race.

Now, many Asians and Asian Americans are harnessing their outrage at Floyd's death to call out Anti-Blackness in the Asian community, as advocates emphasise that Asian silence and inaction have not only been an easy option, but one that directly benefits the system of white supremacy.



Mal Tayag of Sari Sari Studio, a creative house that produces empowering content for the Filipino diaspora, told VICE that it was important to call out their own privilege because that is the first step to solving an issue. She said this was not to “villainise our people,” but instead to say that they see what is intrinsically wrong, to show that “lives are at stake and we are a part of the problem.”

“Everything is connected. We can start by digging deeply and unpacking our complex Philippine history and personal Filipinx experiences. Racism and colorism has always been embedded in our Filipinx psyche,” Marielle Sales, co-founder of Sari Sari, said.

Jana Lynne Umipig, a Filipina educator and activist, has similarly created [resources on Black and Filipino solidarity](#), and how to begin unpacking how colonial history has taught Asians to value white structures and systems.

“Wherever you show up, wherever you

“wherever you show up, wherever you show up to, understand that it is our collective responsibility to deconstruct, dismantle, and do away with the racism that has shaped our upbringing as colonised peoples and has positioned us against Black people,” Umipig told VICE.

Conversations about racial privilege have also opened up in Southeast Asian countries like Malaysia, especially following the national outrage over former Miss Universe Malaysia Samantha Katie James’ [Instagram story](#) on the protests, in which she told Black people to “Relax, take it as a challenge... You chose to be born as a ‘coloured’ person in America for a reason.” Malaysians are calling on those who criticised the beauty queen, to also check themselves – and channel the same energy into talking more about racism and [police brutality](#) in Malaysia.

To be an ally requires work. It requires active unlearning and examining one’s implicit biases and complicity. It requires understanding the historical context of the Asian and Black liberation struggle, and what is at stake. It requires speaking out and showing up, to not just be “not racist” but actively be [“anti-racist.”](#)

So what can Asians and Asian Americans do?

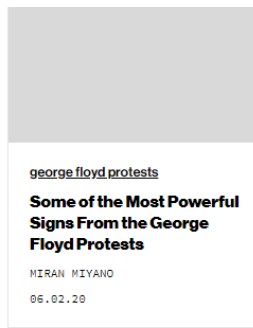
Acknowledge embedded anti-Blackness in Asian communities

From colourism to cultural appropriation and staying silent when Black people experience violence, anti-Blackness perpetuates in many forms among Asian communities. And there is a long history to how it gained its foothold.

Since Asians first arrived in the U.S., they were depicted as morally depraved, exotic threats – the “yellow peril” – that jeopardised Western freedom and independence. Starting with the Chinese Exclusion Act in 1882, which singled out Chinese labourers, American immigration law effectively shut out all immigration from Asia by 1924.

But, in a radical racial flipping, by the mid-century, the “model minority myth” took root: Asian Americans were characterised and glorified as “industrious, law-abiding citizens who kept their heads down and never complained,” [wrote Jeff Guo](#). This narrative, upheld by white and Asian communities alike to this day, delegitimises the struggle of all people of color, especially Black Americans.

One [1966 U.S. News & World Report article](#) directly pitted Asians against Black people: “At a time when it is being proposed that hundreds of billions be spent to uplift Negroes and other minorities, the nation’s 300,000 Chinese-Americans are moving ahead of their own – with no help from anyone else.”



Asian Americans — and their perceived hard work and collective success — have been used as a "racial wedge": by directly juxtaposing Black stereotypes, Asian Americans can distance themselves from the struggles of Black people and position themselves in closer proximity to whiteness. The 1966 article goes on to say that the Asian "story of adversity" would "shock those complaining about the hardships endured" by the Black community.

But the equivalencing of Black and Asian experiences is false.

In his book *Her Majesty's Other Children*, philosopher Lewis Ricardo Gordon lays out the two dominant principles of racist ideology: "(1) be white, but above all, (2) don't be Black."

Political scientist Claire Jean Kim, in her article "Are Asians the New Blacks?," explains that since their first arrival to the U.S., Asians have been figured as "not White, but also, and primarily, as not Black."

"White supremacy has pushed them down, and anti-Blackness has provided the floor beneath which they cannot fall," Kim writes.

Kim told VICE that while the term "people of colour," has had some productive purpose in its century of use, it has since become a "set of blinders." She points to African American Studies scholar Jared Sexton's critique of the term, which he argues glosses over differentials in status and power among non-white groups, deflecting from the singularity of racial slavery and Black oppression.

Both Black and Asian Americans have had their identities weaponised against their claims to American citizenship. However, Asians experience a different kind of racism — particularly organised around their foreignness — to that which is faced by Black people. Anti-Blackness is not only a global phenomenon, but also a structural feature of society, Kim said.

"Anti-Black racism saturates every aspect of American life. It is inescapable. And it has become naturalised," historian Ellen Wu told VICE.

Without a careful understanding of this history, it is difficult to comprehend "why white people built our economy, political institutions, health care system, housing, schools, media, prisons, police forces, social organisations, and cultural forms and norms to benefit themselves at the expense of Black people. Anti-Black racism is foundational to American life," she added.

Anti-Blackness pervades globally, and is prevalent in Asia too. In April, McDonald's China came under fire after one of its stores in Guangzhou banned Black people. Malaysia's housing policy has not outlawed racial discrimination, enabling landlords to have "preferred" or "only" ethnicity requirements, even hanging up banners reading "No Africans" or "Chinese only."

Raise awareness among friends and family

Engage in honest conversations about race with family members, and call out racism in all its forms. These discussions may be uncomfortable, bringing up feelings of guilt or shame, but that is precisely why they are important.

Silence — whether stemming from feelings of discomfort, detachment, or being taught not to “rock the boat” — is tacit approval. Family harmony is a [value generally carried by Asian cultures](#), where challenging elders or their views can be seen as a sign of disrespect and disobedience. In the U.S., the model minority myth teaches Asian Americans that they benefit from inaction and being apolitical. But, in realising one’s own complicity and implicit biases, they can work to dismantle that thinking.

Filipino American community activist Kalaya’an Mendoza told VICE that having brave conversations with family and loved ones is crucial. “Disrupting the narrative that vilifies and dehumanises Black people is one accessible solidarity action everyone can take,” she said.

Following the 2016 police killing of Alton Sterling, a 37-year-old Black man, a group of Asian Americans drafted [Letters for Black Lives](#), a crowdsourced, multilingual letter to create space for conversations about racial justice. Addressed to “mom, dad, uncle, auntie, grandfather, grandmother,” the letter broaches topics of anti-Blackness in Asian communities.

“Sometimes people are rude to us about our accents, or withhold promotions because they don’t think of us as ‘leadership material.’” Some of us are told we’re terrorists. But for the most part, nobody thinks ‘dangerous criminal’ when we are walking down the street. The police do not gun down our children and parents for simply existing. This is not the case for our Black friends.”

The letter goes on to make an appeal using the “American Dream.”

“I hope you can consider this: the American Dream cannot exist for only your children. We are all in this together, and we cannot feel safe until ALL our friends, loved ones, and neighbours are safe.”

Educate yourself on injustice and anti-racism

Follow the lead of Black writers, thinkers, and organisers, but don’t burden them by asking them to educate you. Instead, do your own work to learn about racism and justice, and then leverage your privilege and amplify the demands of the Black community. [Here’s](#) a good place to start.





FILIPINOS MARCHING FOR JUSTICE IN JACKSON HEIGHTS, QUEENS NYC ON MAY 30. PHOTO COURTESY OF ANAKBAYAN QUEENS NY.

Join the Black Lives Matter movement

Some moments have divided the Black and Asian American communities.

In 1992, Soon Ja Du, a Korean convenience store owner shot and killed Latasha Harlins, a 15-year-old Black girl, after falsely accusing her of shoplifting a \$1.79 bottle of orange juice. Taking place within weeks of the Rodney King beating and 1992 Los Angeles uprising, dozens of Korean businesses were damaged and burned. In 2014, Peter Liang, a Chinese American police officer in New York, fatally shot Akai Gurley, a Black man. As the first NYPD officer convicted in a line-of-duty shooting in a decade, a subset of the Asian community held pro-Liang rallies, arguing that he was prosecuted for his race. Others called for justice for Gurley. And recently, a vocal group of Asian Americans has been rallying against affirmative action in colleges.

Though there is a history of wounds between Black and Asian communities, there is also a history of solidarity. And importantly, there is a long history of Black people showing up and fighting for the Asian community. The Asian American Movement, which took off in the U.S. in the late 1960s was largely inspired by the Black Power Movement.

Many of the freedoms and comforts that Asian Americans enjoy are those that Black people fought hard for, Wu said.

“African Americans have done most of the work to widen access to housing, education, employment, and voting for non-white racial minorities, including Asian Americans,” she said.

The Asian Solidarity Collective, a San Diego grassroots organization, told VICE that they acknowledge that many of their attained privileges resulted from the Civil Rights Movement, Black liberation movements, legacy of Black abolitionists, and Black feminists.



[george floyd protests](#)

George Floyd's Death Moves the World to Protest Against Racism and Police Brutality

MIRAN MIYANO

06.01.20
MIRAN MIYANO

06.01.20

“It is through ancestral guides, like Yuri Kochiyama and Grace Lee Boggs who were committed to solidarity and movement building, that we are moved to do more than just show up, but actively work to address anti-

Blackness within ourselves and within our communities,” they said.

The history of Black activists showing up for Asians is storied: for example, the Black community’s support for the Asian American fight for justice after the [racist murder of Chinese American Vincent Chin](#) in Detroit in 1982. A coalition of Black leadership paid for a 1978 [New York Times advertisement](#) to call on the U.S. president to facilitate the entrance of refugees from Vietnam, Laos, and Cambodia into the country: “We sympathise with our Asian brothers and sisters in the refugee camps. But our concern must transcend the safe boundaries of mere sympathy. We must move to action,” the ad read.

Today, Asian Americans are asking each other to step up and do better than their past failures allowed.

To some in Asia, the [Black Lives Matter](#) movement may seem too distant to be relevant across national borders — but the movement is global, supporting Black lives striving for liberation across the world. Racism is a global system, and working towards anti-racism is not just about calling out the U.S., but looking at Asian complicity in the system as well.

Put your pen and money where your mouth is

Once you’ve started the work of raising awareness, learning, and unlearning, don’t stop there. Step up and take direct action in solidarity in the form of signing [petitions](#) and using your platform to speak out against injustice.

If you have the financial means, donate to the [families of victims of police brutality](#), [mutual aid funds](#), [Black Lives Matter](#), bail funds — which provides [cash bail](#) for people sent to jail for pretrial detention — and other criminal justice organisations. If you don’t have money to give, watch [this YouTube video](#), whose ad revenue will benefit Black Lives Matter.

Also, look locally. A number of organisations around Southeast Asia are addressing inequality, [repression](#), xenophobia and detention. Find and support the organisations doing work in your own community.

Most importantly, don’t stop. Anti-racism action should not just be taken this week, but every single day. It is a decision one must actively choose again and again.