For this listening session, WFMN joined a public community event led and organized by the Asian Minnesotan Alliance for Justice (AMAJ), a collective of Asian American organizations dedicated to fighting for solidarity and justice in Minnesota. This session was held in the same week as a series of attacks that resulted in the murder of six Asian and Asian American women in Atlanta. The incident was the latest in a long history of anti-Asian racism, hate, and racialized misogyny. As we listened to direct experiences of anti-Asian hate in Minnesota and nationwide, we were challenged to work together to take action against racism, violence, and discrimination. AMAJ includes six WFMN grantee-partners working in the areas of safety, economic security, and leadership. Speakers included CAAL Executive & Network Director Bo Thao-Urabe, Lieutenant Governor Peggy Flanagan, U.S. Representative Ilhan Omar, and additional leaders and members of the local Asian and Asian American community.
LISTENING TO

Minnesota’s Women & Girls

At the Women’s Foundation of Minnesota (WFMN), we know that to improve the lives of all Minnesotans, we need strong grantmaking and policy agendas that are grounded in both qualitative and quantitative data. WFMN conducts research to listen, learn, and drive action with communities to create a state of gender and racial equity. We believe that women and girls in communities across Minnesota are the experts our state needs to shape real, lasting solutions.

Through nine Listening Sessions in WFMN’s Road to Transformation Listening Series in March 2021, we deepened our understanding of the real, lived experiences of Minnesota women and girls so that we can continue to strategically eliminate the challenges and barriers they and their families face because of injustice in our systems.

As a statewide community foundation, we convene and listen to center the vision and solutions of communities pushed to the margins and then activate our collective power to drive lasting change. The themes and solutions that surfaced across the Listening Series will inform the Women’s Foundation’s statewide agenda for gender and racial equity, using our levers for grantmaking, policy, strategic partnerships, narrative change, and research for years to come.
What the data show

Anti-Asian hate crimes increased by nearly 150% in 2020.

Stop AAPI Hate, a national coalition that tracks cases of anti-Asian hate crimes, documented nearly 4,000 racist incidents during 2020. These incidents ranged from verbal harassment to physical assault. The Minnesota Department of Health has also reported an increase in anti-Asian incidents since the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic.¹

Rhetoric from political leaders has helped fuel anti-Asian hate.

As several well-publicized elected officials dubbed the pandemic “The China Virus” and the “Wuhan Virus,” anti-Asian hate crimes have been on the rise, with anti-Asian rhetoric soaring on social media. This anti-Asian sentiment is not new, but it has been exacerbated by the language used by those who are meant to show leadership and advocate for the well-being of all Americans.²

Research suggests that when people see Asian Americans as “foreigners,” they are more likely to act violently towards them.

The study indicates that the subconscious belief that European Americans are “more American” than Asian Americans has steadily declined from 2007 to 2020. However, this trend sharply reversed at the start of the pandemic when public officials began using “The China Virus” and other similar terms on social media to describe COVID-19, effectively stigmatizing an entire group of Americans and putting them at greater risk of experiencing violence.³

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Asian Minnesotan Alliance for Justice (AMAJ), a collective of Asian American organizations dedicated to fighting for solidarity and justice in Minnesota, organized this public panel event.

This community conversation took place virtually following the killing of eight people, six of whom were Asian American women, in Atlanta, Georgia. The event reflected generations of anti-Asian discrimination and violence, including verbal and physical harassment in public spaces, mass deportation of Asian immigrants, and the deaths of Christian Hall and Angelo Quinto at the hands of police. Women’s Foundation leadership, staff, and stakeholders joined more than 800 people in attendance online and obtained permission from event organizers to use information from the event in this report to highlight the issue of rising anti-Asian hate and violence in Minnesota.

Panelists joined community leaders and elected officials in sharing their direct experiences, grief, solidarity, and solutions, along with their calls to action for the Minnesota community.

The Asian Minnesotan Alliance for Justice (AMAJ) includes:

- Asian American Organizing Project (AAOP)
- Asian Media Access (AMA), CAPI-USA
- Coalition of Asian American Leaders (CAAL)
- Filipinx for Immigrant Rights & Racial Justice Minnesota (FIRM)
- India Association of Minnesota (IAM), Japanese American Citizens League - Twin Cities (JACL)
- National Asian Pacific American Women’s Forum (NAPAWF) - St. Cloud Chapter
- Release MN8
- Reviving the Islamic Sisterhood for Empowerment (RISE)
- SEWA-AIFW
- The Southeast Asian Diaspora (SEAD) Project
- TaikoArts Midwest
- Theater Mu
- Transforming Generations
- Vietnamese Social Services (VSS)
**Misogyny and racism intersect.**

Given the murder of six Asian American women the week before this event, the hosts and panelists centered the interconnectedness of misogyny and anti-Asian hate. The Asian American women panelists and the women elected officials who joined the event expressed the ways in which they felt impacted by the intersection of white supremacist systems and attitudes and gender injustice.

“They were targeted, and their lives were taken away because of racism and misogyny. We are devastated, but the community is not surprised. Violence has been experienced across the country. The rhetoric [from political leaders that] assigned blame for a global pandemic had a direct correlation to the increase of violence, which disproportionately impacted women, children, and the elderly.”

“We cannot separate the racism and misogyny from that incident. [We also know] there are deep roots [of white supremacy] in this country. It is not an accident that folks feel invisible and disposable. There is a system in place that has led us to this moment.” – Lt. Governor Peggy Flanagan

Panelists and other community leaders expressed the depth of the painful impacts of racism and misogyny on the Asian American community.

“Asian people have been seen as subhuman due to white supremacy.”

“Something we were raised to do as first- and second-generation immigrants in America: We were taught ‘Do not object.’ ‘Don’t put a target on your back.’ It’s trained within us not to object [to anti-Asian hate]. That’s how we were taught to survive.”

Both racism and misogyny must be challenged for Asian American and other marginalized communities to thrive.

“Atrocities can happen when misogyny and racism go unchecked. Everything that is happening now is not new.”

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**Anti-Asian hate is not new.**

The Asian American women panelists shared personal experiences of anti-Asian hate. Some experiences were within the context of the pandemic while others expressed that these incidents of hate speech and violence have happened at various points in their lives. These stories demonstrate how anti-Asian hate is meant to make Asian Americans feel unwelcome and unsafe in public spaces like parks, grocery stores, schools, and businesses. They show how white supremacy and racist ideologies are passed from generation to generation, and how anti-Asian hate impacts Asian American children and their caregivers.

“A white mother and daughter saw me [in the grocery store] and the mother quickly snatched her daughter’s arm and said, ‘Don’t get too close to that Asian girl, she’s the reason we have this pandemic.’ That little girl, who was probably 5 years old, for the rest of her life will remember that moment and believe that we deserve the trauma that we experience. That woman chose to teach her daughter hate and racism that day without even realizing it, without even knowing my name.”
“On Friday morning, my dad messaged me and asked how to report someone who threatened to deport him or kill him when dropping off his grandson at the bus stop in St. Paul. There was a woman driving by who rolled down her window and screamed those things at my dad: ‘Go back to your country. If you don’t, you’re going to get killed.’ She proceeded to the next bus stop, where there were some Hmong families and Asian families. She stopped at every single family and yelled the same things at them.”

“My family is Chinese. We were one of three families of color in the cul-de-sac we lived in, one of three families of color in our neighborhood. Vandalization of my home was frequent. Almost every week my house would get egged or TP’d.”

“As a little girl I used to dread going to the mall [with my mom]. I used to be overwhelmed with embarrassment and fear because every time [sales associates] talked to her, they would scream at her. They had no patience with her broken English and said, ‘Go back to your country.’ As little girls we had to interfere and translate and mitigate the situation for our mother.”

“My parents have lived here for over 30 years and don’t feel safe to walk around the community. It’s not fair. This is our space, we belong here. We’re not going to let white supremacy and racism bring us down.”

One panelist shared her experience of a white woman calling the police on her while she was at the park with her husband and child. She noted how afraid she was, knowing that as a woman of color she was at a higher risk of violence by police officers. Other panelists supported this sentiment, emphasizing that state violence, including police violence, has frequently been used against Asian American communities.

“This is not new. Interpersonal violence, state violence, and interracial conflict has existed for Asian Americans since we arrived in this country.”

In the face of this violence and race-based oppression, the panelists were resilient and determined to stand their ground: for themselves, their families, and their communities.

“I’m not going to be silent anymore or be afraid of my own community. I belong here and we belong here.”

Solidarity is needed across racial and ethnic groups.

Panelists called for community members to amplify experiences of anti-Asian hate so that the community can receive the support they need and so Americans can work together to end race-based violence against all communities. Several panelists emphasized how Asian American experiences with violence have historically been hidden, and that the silence around anti-Asian violence needs to end immediately.

“We have been the underbelly of racism for so long and it needs to end.”
“It’s appalling how silent non-Asian American voices were [after the shooting in Atlanta]. There were more social media posts about St. Patrick’s Day than acknowledging our pain.”

“Oftentimes people have been holding on to their experiences or keeping it inside because there’s this silence that people have been taught. What I often hear from Asian Americans is that they feel their experiences have been dismissed. [Racism against Asian Americans] may not look the same as other communities, but it’s still happening.”

Speakers emphasized throughout the event that while racism and state violence is experienced differently by individual marginalized communities, standing in solidarity with each other against systems rooted in white supremacy and misogyny is key to ending oppression against all communities. Panelists made clear that solidarity does not mean eliminating the unique experiences of other communities. Instead, it requires intentionality, and an understanding of how white supremacy impacts communities in different ways.

“We are harmed by the same system, but our experiences are not exactly the same. It is important to make sure we understand that.”

“It’s important for us to name the different communities being harmed from racism and white supremacy. That is the reason there’s a slogan for Black Lives Matter and Stop Asian Hate. If we just said, ‘stop hate,’ that is erasing all our pain and trauma.”

“It’s important to speak out, acknowledge, and report out hate crimes against people who look like us. It’s also important to stand in solidarity with Black and Indigenous movement leaders. It’s a delicate balance we all play a role in.”

Elected and appointed leaders in Minnesota demonstrated this solidarity with the Asian American community, offering their support and commitment to combating the racism experienced by Minnesotans across racial and ethnic identities.

“An attack on one community is an attack on all of us. Minority communities have been pitted against each other. The ‘model minority’ myth that keeps us apart is rooted in white supremacy. We must denounce all forms of white supremacy and bigotry wherever we find it. We must stand in solidarity together to fight against racism and hate and not target one another. We must fight for a more inclusive and just world for all of us.” – U.S. Representative Ilhan Omar

“It feels exhausting on any day, but when we are so isolated and far from each other, it feels more exhausting to tackle these systems of oppression and intentional racism, sexism, and oppression. I look forward to listening, learning, and acting boldly together.”

– Rebecca Lucero, Commissioner of the Minnesota Department of Human Rights

“I am here to tell you that I am your ally. As an Indigenous woman whose family has been here from time immemorial, before Minnesota was Minnesota: You belong here.” – Lt. Governor Peggy Flanagan

Finally, the participant who shared the story of her father being harassed while taking his grandson to the bus stop relayed a critical call to action from her father for the hundreds of people on the call.

“My dad has a message: Continue to stand up together to fight against racism so we can live in peace no matter what skin color we are.”
The panelists, community leaders, and hosts of the event presented several solutions to support Asian American communities in Minnesota and work in solidarity to end racism across the state:

1. **Name and hold space for conversations about anti-Asian racism:** Panelists described the silence around anti-Asian racism, both from those who experience it and from Minnesotans outside of the Asian American community. Providing Asian Americans safe and public platforms to share their experiences can help to break this silence.

2. **Invest in supports for Asian American communities, including for those who have experienced anti-Asian hate crimes:** Advocates emphasized that community organizations do not have the resources necessary to support Asian Americans who experience hate crimes in Minnesota. Investing in victim-support services, anti-hate crime legislation, and community-driven safety response, while strengthening the safety net for Asian immigrants and future generations, is critical to continued growth and strength for Asian American communities in our state.

3. **Express solidarity by reporting incidents of anti-Asian hate and/or intervening when possible:** Event speakers called for action from white and non-Asian Minnesotans to speak out when they see incidents of anti-Asian hate. One place to call and report incidents is the Minnesota Department of Human Rights helpline (1-833-454-0148).

“We have to name that anti-Asian racism exists. We need to make real investments to support communities in need and support public safety systems that keep all of us safe. We need multi-racial solidarity to address anti-Blackness and white supremacy. We need to root our work and lives in creating out of love to ensure everyone is visible and belongs.”

Learn more about the vision and impact of AMAJ by visiting their website: https://caalmn.org/asians-mns-alliance-4-justice