



Policymakers, It's Time to Stop the Perpetuation of Asian Stereotypes

On March 20, 65th District Assemblywoman Sharon Quirk-Silva hosted a “Stop Asian Hate” press conference at Fullerton City Hall. Many elected officials expressed solidarity with the Asian and Asian American community against the upsurge in verbal and physical attacks. Several Asian American elected women spoke about their personal experiences of being dehumanized and silenced due to stereotypes about their race and sex, and their very real fear for their own safety and the safety of their families.

And yet, even in that moment of speaking their truth, Asian Americans women were silenced once again.

Instead of learning from the speakers before him, Fullerton Mayor Bruce Whitaker highlighted and perpetuated the very stereotypes of Asian Americans that inspire hate and violence towards our communities. He remarked “one of the things that brings about dislike of Asian Americans is their propensity to excel in academics,” invoking an old and tired trope, the model minority myth. This stereotype pits communities of color against each other, and is used to justify the disinvestment of resources from Black, Indigenous, and other people of color. In addition, the model minority myth harms Asian Americans because it masks the very real economic, social, and health needs of low-income and marginalized Asian American communities.

Mayor Whitaker also commented on the City’s exchange of artist groups and city councils with sister cities in Asia and the Pacific Rim. The Mayor’s statement reflects a common yet erroneous conflation of Asian Americans and people living in Asia. This kind of thinking contributes to the stereotype that Asian Americans are “perpetual foreigners” who can never truly be seen as “American.” The perpetual foreigner stereotype leads to the type of scapegoating that occurred when Japanese Americans were forcibly removed and incarcerated in internment camps because they were associated with the country of Japan during WWII. Similarly, the perpetual foreigner stereotype has directly led to the violent targeting of Asian Americans during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Asian Americans in Action strenuously rejects the continued promotion of the model minority and perpetual foreigner stereotypes and urges all community leaders to re-examine their use of stereotypes in their public statements and in their policymaking.

Asian Americans in Action is a progressive, nonpartisan, nonprofit 501(c)(4) organization that seeks to elevate the political voice and impact of the AAPI community in Orange County, CA.