

A3PCON

ASIAN PACIFIC POLICY & PLANNING COUNCIL

20 years: American Scapegoating and Community Activism



On September 11, 2001, I was awoken by the wails of my toddler at 5:00 AM. After hearing on [NPR](#) that a plane crashed into the north tower of the World Trade Center, I took my year-old daughter out of her crib and headed to the family room to watch the [early coverage on CNN](#). I happened to catch a live shot of the second Boeing 767 dissecting the south tower. Like millions of my fellow Americans, I was aghast at what I saw. And I was in no way prepared for the senseless loss of lives and what this tragedy would mean for my community.

In the days after 9/11, [three South Asian Americans](#)—one Sikh, one Muslim and one Hindu—were killed in acts of hate. The first was Balbir Singh Sodhi, a forty-nine year-old Sikh man who was shot on September 15 while planting flowers at his gas station in Mesa, Arizona. Waqar Hasan, a forty-six year-old Muslim was killed the next day while working at his grocery store outside of Dallas, and Vasudev Patel, a forty-nine year-old Hindu was shot to death at his convenience store in Mesquite, Texas on October 4.

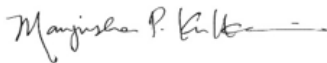
The lives of so many Arab, Middle Eastern, Muslim and South Asian communities (AMEMSA) after 9/11 were turned upside down not only by interpersonal violence, but also by policies that targeted us. In 2002, federal law enforcement pursued massive surveillance and profiling of AMEMSA community members. The U.S. Department of Justice implemented “Special Registration,” [the National Security Entry-Exit Registration System \(NSEERS\)](#), which required non-U.S. citizen men and boys over the age of 16 from 25 Muslim majority nations to report to local immigration authorities. The program resulted in the [registration of approximately 83,000 individuals](#) and the placing of over 13,000 individuals into deportation proceedings, but failed to identify even a single terrorism suspect or produce evidence of any terrorism activity.

Here in Southern California, LAPD established the [Suspicious Activity Reporting](#) (SAR) program which ordered officers to gather information on common, non-criminal activities such as photography or the expression of certain viewpoints. The SAR program lacked clear standards of how the activities provided reasonable suspicion of criminal activity and resulted instead in simple racial profiling of many of our community members.

The backlash of 9/11 was not the first time segments of the AAPI community experienced hate at the hands of our fellow Americans or faced policies by our government that targeted us. And we know in 2020 and 2021, it was not the last. The parallels between 2001 and 2021 are uncanny. AAPIs in both cases were blamed as a group for circumstances and conditions we had nothing to do with. We have been targeted for verbal harassment, vandalism, workplace discrimination and even physical assaults and homicide. And, the “perpetual foreigner” framing has been used to distinguish us from our neighbors, friends and co-workers of different races and justify profiling and surveillance activities described above and programs such as the U.S. Department of Defense’s “China Initiative” against scientists and researchers of Chinese descent.

The backlash of 9/11 and COVID-19-related anti-Asian hate are similar in one other important way: after 9/11 and during this pandemic, AAPI and AMEMSA organizations have become even more activated, have mobilized our community members and have sought -- and often achieved -- policy victories at local, state and federal levels.

On the twentieth anniversary of 9/11, let us not forget the lessons of the backlash against our AMEMSA community members. And let us AAPI and AMEMSA work together in solidarity against hate and discrimination against us all. We are them and they are us.



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The Asian Pacific Policy and Planning Council (A3PCON) is a coalition of community-based organizations that advocates for the rights and needs of the Asian American and Pacific Islander (AAPI) community in the greater Los Angeles area with particular focus on low income, immigrant, refugee and other disadvantaged sectors of the population. We set up this mailing list to keep you updated on API related issues. This includes community announcements, key news items, resources, and training. We will send you no more than 5 messages a month.

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