



A Letter from Head of School Mel MacKay: In the Aftermath of Atlanta: Giving Voice to Those Who Need to Be Heard

This week's shootings in Atlanta targeting women of Asian descent are the most recent deadly example of what happens when we fail to protect one another from prejudice and hatred. It is a too-familiar pattern in the United States – though not only in the United States. Whether our minds return to the attacks on a Charleston church in 2015, an Orlando nightclub in 2016, a California synagogue in 2019, a New Zealand mosque in 2019, or another such event that you now recall, the same feelings of deep disappointment in our society come to the surface. That in the 21st century there would be people among us prepared to kill a person because he or she is Asian or female or black or gay or Jewish or Muslim is a bitter reminder of our failures to protect one another.

The Atlanta murders are not an isolated event. We know this because for the past year, Asian Americans have been speaking out against the increasing amount of physical and verbal abuse they have been subject to. We are not talking about a single day in Atlanta or a problem particular to the streets and subways of New York. Hate incidents against people of Asian descent in America have risen into the thousands since early 2020, as reported by Stop AAPI Hate, an Asian American organization determined to end the violence through education, political action, and community support.



In Maine we are fortunate that our streets feel safe. People are generally friendly and helpful to one another. But that's me talking – a white male in a state that is not very diverse. More important is for people like me to listen to the diverse voices around me, and these voices – whether Asian, black, Native American, LGBTQ+, or another – continue to report that in the United States of America, they too often do not feel welcome or safe.

I was struck this week by the words of Bee Nguyen in reacting to the Atlanta shootings. Georgia's first Vietnamese American legislator, Nguyen said, "[T]hese were targeted killings. And quite frankly, we have seen in the past when these mass shootings occur, there's a tendency to provide excuses for those who commit these atrocities. And those excuses are always to somehow justify that they're not hate crimes. It humanizes the suspect instead of humanizing the victim." Once news of the killings began to spread, Nguyen's phone didn't stop ringing as Asian Americans expressed fears about things as mundane as leaving their homes or going shopping.



Rep. Nguyen

Nguyen is a keen observer and notes that the violence we are seeing is occurring at the "intersection of gender-based violence, misogyny and xenophobia." In other words, the Atlanta attacks were not about just one thing. In the light of history, prejudice and hate always represent a kind of intersection of social psychology, economics, and politics. The dynamics underlying hate crimes are familiar, and I think that's why the words of Atlanta mayor Keisha Lance Bottoms are appropriate now: "In the same way African Americans across this country asked for support and we asked for people to stand with us over the summer, it's important that people stand with our Asian brothers and sisters . . ."



Mayor Bottoms

At John Bapst we stand with our Asian brothers and sisters. We stand with those whose voices are crying out for understanding, recognition, fairness, and justice. We may be only a tiny part of global society, but it's our goal – through our mission statement revision, our admissions and hiring, our curriculum and professional growth, and our outreach – to be a determined part of the push to embrace, educate, and change the world.