

# **Black and Asian leaders discuss church role in fighting racism**

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CHICAGO (RNS)—Last summer, as the death of George Floyd shined a spotlight on racism and violence against Black Americans, the Asian American Christian Collaborative marched for Black lives.

Months later, leaders of the Black and Asian American churches involved in that march began to plan a second event uniting their communities against racism.

In the midst of planning the event, Black & Asian Christians United Against Racism, organizers learned eight people were shot and killed in spas in the Atlanta area, including six women of Asian descent, and the spotlight turned on the recent explosion of violence against Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders amid scapegoating for the COVID-19 pandemic.

## **‘Commitment to an enduring partnership is needed’**

“In the wake of the surging violence against Asian Americans ... and as the Derek Chauvin trial is taking place in the murder of George Floyd, an event like this is needed more now than ever,” said Pastor Raymond Chang, president of the Asian American Christian Collaborative.

“But, more than this event, a commitment to an enduring partnership is needed.”

Panelists at Black & Asian Christians United Against Racism, livestreamed April 5 from Apostolic Faith Church in Chicago, discussed the histories,

struggles and contributions of each community and the importance of creating that partnership between them.

They included Pastor Charlie Dates of Progressive Baptist Church; Soong-Chan Rah, professor at North Park Theological Seminary; and Waltrina Middleton, executive director of the Community Renewal Society, among others.



Senior Pastor Otis Moss III of Trinity United Church of Christ in Chicago, participates in a livestreamed panel, Monday, April 5, 2021, from Apostolic Faith Church in Chicago. (Video screengrab via RNS)

In his remarks, Pastor Otis Moss III of Trinity United Church of Christ in Chicago recognized the “unique thread” of racism that ties Black and Asian Americans together in the United States.

The 1854 California Supreme Court decision *People v. Hall*, which ruled an Asian American could not testify against a white American, provided a

blueprint years later for the U.S. Supreme Court's Dred Scott decision, which ruled the U.S. Constitution did not extend citizenship to Black people, Moss said.

The Chinese massacre of 1871 in California, one of the largest mass lynchings in U.S. history, gave the "green light" to lynchings of Black people across the country, he added.

"Our oppression is linked together, but also our liberation is connected at the same time," he said.

The church gives a template for what that liberation can look like, according to Moss. He pointed to the example of the famous 1906 Azusa Street Revival in Los Angeles—led by Black, Asian and Latino Christians—as proof "the Spirit functions in a way that white supremacy could not control."

## **Men and women experience racism differently**

Panelists discussed how racism is experienced differently by men and women—and how Black and Asian American women can find commonalities in each other's experiences.

"White supremacy has often treated us in similar ways, and I think that when women share their stories and experiences with one another and hear the pain in each other's stories as well as the resilience in one another's stories, we can enter in a place of true solidarity with one another—solidarity that frightens white supremacy," said Juliet Liu, pastor of Life on the Vine Church in suburban Long Grove, Ill.

They also addressed tension between Black and Asian American/Pacific Islander communities and ways the two historically have been pitted

against each other.

Gregory Lee, an associate professor at Wheaton College, an evangelical Christian school in suburban Wheaton, Ill., explained the “myth of the model minority” started by white opponents of the civil rights movement in the 1960s.

“We’ve been trying to play to the power structures instead of opposing them,” Lee said.

## **‘What can we learn?’**

Many Asian Americans have realized “we’re being used in this game to hold down Black and brown folks,” he added. After the shootings in Atlanta, he said, they’re also realizing how vulnerable the Asian American community is.

“Asians are increasingly turning to African American sources to see how have they done it. What can we learn from them?” he said.

Several speakers at Monday’s event pointed to a New Testament passage from Ephesians, saying their battle was not against one another—“not against flesh and blood”—but rather a spiritual battle.

It’s a battle, they agreed, they’d continue to fight together in both prayer and protest.

“I think it’s a shame that we even have to ask this question why we need to care about anti-Asian racism or why we need to say that Black lives matter. The fact we have to argue about those things at all is a sad state of affairs,” said Gabriel J. Catanus, pastor of Garden City Covenant Church in Chicago.

“At a basic level, we are human beings. We bear the image of God, and God doesn’t just love human beings, he hates murder. If we are the people of

God, that should also characterize us.”