

June 6, 2020

Content Warning: Racial Violence

Dear Community,

The Stanford Asian American Theater Project (AATP) stands in solidarity with the Black community in the fight against systemic police violence and anti-Black racism. Throughout history, the white supremacist systems that the United States is built on have continually devalued and threatened Black lives, leading to the murders of Tony McDade, George Floyd, Breonna Taylor, Ahmaud Arbery, Sean Reed, David McAtee, and countless others. In the following letter, **we acknowledge our community's responsibilities in the fight against racial injustice, and call for the communities to which we are close to do the same.** Additionally, in solidarity with the demands of organizers on the front lines of the Black Lives Matter movement, **we explicitly call for a commitment to police and prison abolition and for cities and counties to divest from the police and reinvest in Black communities.**

First, as an Asian American community, we recognize that we are often complicit in anti-Black racism. For many years, [the "model minority" stereotype has been used to drive a wedge between Asian Americans and other communities of color](#), especially Black communities, and to perpetuate the oppression and inequities that Black communities experience. However, as we work to challenge the anti-Black sentiments that we might find in ourselves, in our friends, and in our families, we draw inspiration from moments of Black and Asian solidarity throughout history, from the friendship between [Malcolm X and Yuri Kochiyama](#) to [the strikes of the Third World Liberation Front in 1968](#) and more. Moreover, we recognize that the civil/legal protections and social status that the Asian American community holds in the U.S. today directly result from the work of radical Black activists and organizers throughout history. Honoring this legacy, **we call on our Asian American communities to educate ourselves, hold difficult conversations with those close to us, and use our bodies, labor, and resources to support Black lives.**

Additionally, as a theater community, we recognize that artmaking has always been entangled with systems of power, and that a white supremacist society has often denied marginalized peoples — including Black people — the cultural power to tell their own stories. As we do our own work to center the aesthetics and narratives of Asian Americans, **we acknowledge that AATP has made missteps in the past when it comes to telling certain stories with justice and respect.**

However, as we continually work towards aligning our social justice values with our artmaking practices, **we are inspired by artists and organizations throughout history who have always known that art is political, and who envision art as a strategy for our collective liberation.** Two examples include Augusto Boal, a Brazilian theater practitioner who expressed in his book *Theater of the Oppressed* that [theater is a rehearsal for the revolution](#), and the more

contemporary [Center for Performance and Civic Practice](#), a theater organization that believes in “arts-based, community-led transformation.” We also feel galvanized by the current pressure on theaters to [#OpenYourLobby to provide a safe space for protestors](#), utilizing their power as property owners to support Black lives.

In this spirit, as members of a fairly well-resourced theater group at Stanford, **we are committed to using our labor and resources to amplify Black artists, stories, and theater institutions — including those at Stanford — if and whenever our support is needed. We are also committed to interrogating anti-Blackness in Asian American communities through our own artistic processes and productions.** We recognize that the appropriation of Black aesthetics and culture without valuing actual Black creators, artists, and narratives is a form of anti-Blackness common in many artistic arenas, including theater. We commit ourselves as an organization to support Black theatermakers while explicitly acknowledging the often-invisibilized contributions they have made in this field. We call on others in the theater community to also pinpoint the ways in which their art and resources can empower Black voices.

Finally, we end this letter with a call for police and prison abolition and the imagination of a world where power is returned to local communities — [demands articulated by The Movement For Black Lives](#), a coalition of Black organizers across the country. We ask those who are reading this letter to donate to mutual aid funds, bail funds, and Black grassroots organizations; to sign petitions and call representatives about demanding justice for Black lives and defunding the police; and to continue to invest in Black communities and Black lives in the long-term. Supporting the political vision of Black Lives Matter is not a separate matter from our mission as an Asian American theater company — in fact, as an organization dedicated to the work of imagination, we want to emphasize that imagination is always political. When we can, we should use our artistic and creative capabilities to imagine and build towards a more radically liberated future.

Anti-racist resources for both our Asian American and theater communities are listed on the page below, including readings on abolition.

In solidarity,
The Asian American Theater Project

Additional Resources:

Actions You Can Take:

- A list of actions specific to the Bay Area, compiled by the Stanford Daily:
<https://www.stanforddaily.com/2020/06/03/resources-for-our-readers-what-you-can-do-to-support-the-black-lives-matter-movement/>
- Donate to Black arts organizations in the Bay Area:
<http://thebaybridged.com/2020/06/01/10-local-black-arts-programs-you-can-donate-to-to-day/>
- Additionally, please research the petitions and funds in your local area!

Readings on Police & Prison Abolition:

- A short zine from the organization MPD150, giving an introduction to what building a police-free future would look like: <https://www.mpd150.com/faq/>
- A list of further reading about police and prison abolition:
<https://www.versobooks.com/lists/4732-abolition-and-black-struggle>

For Asian Americans:

- In Chinese, Hmong, Japanese, Khmer, Korean, Tagalog, Tamil, Thai, Vietnamese, and more, “[Letters for Black Lives](#)” is a multilingual and culturally-aware resource created to foster open and honest conversations about racial justice.
- Additional thoughts about why Asian Americans need to talk about anti-blackness in our communities:
<https://www.vox.com/first-person/2020/6/3/21279156/george-floyd-protests-police-brutality-tou-thao-asian-americans>

For Theatermakers & Theatergoers:

- An interview with the former Artistic Director of the Oregon Shakespeare Festival, who argues that art can't be divorced from social justice work:
<https://howlround.com/aligning-values-actions>
- A range of articles that discuss issues of race and representation in theater:
<https://howlround.com/tags/race-representation>
- A list of Black theater companies in the United States:
<https://blacktheatrematters.org/black-theatre-companies/>
- A (non-comprehensive) list of contemporary Black playwrights:
<http://artsboston.org/2018/02/06/10-contemporary-black-playwrights-you-should-know/>