

**THE LAURA FLANDERS SHOW**  
**RISING AGAINST ASIAN HATE: TURNING VIOLENCE INTO ACTION**

**LAURA FLANDERS:** "Rising Against Asian Hate: One Day in March" explores the upsurge violence against Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders, or AAPI people that surged during the COVID pandemic and explores the toll of that violence on people, its origins, and most dramatically what those assaults, especially the March 2021 murder of eight people in three spas in Atlanta, Georgia, sparked in the way of organizing in the AAPI community. Some call it a watershed moment. The film premieres this month on PBS. It is part of the WNET group's series, "Exploring Hate: Antisemitism, Racism and Extremism." "Rising Against Asian Hate" features narration by Emmy nominated actress Sandra Oh and original music by Grammy and Academy Award-winning musician Jon Batiste. It's directed by Titi Yu, and my guest today, Gina Kim, served as executive producer. Gina is an Emmy nominated producer with a long career working with broadcasters, including Phil Donahue, Bill Moyers, most recently Christiane Amanpour, and yours truly. She was supervising producer and leader of the pack at "GRITtv with Laura Flanders" the daily show that preceded this program for three years, from 2008 to 2011. I am excited to welcome Gina Kim to this side of the camera. Thanks for joining me, Gina. Welcome back.

**GINA KIM:** Thanks, Laura, it's great to be here.

**LAURA FLANDERS:** Well, congratulations, Gina, on an important film. Important in part, I think because so many of us remember the violence of that time. It populated our social media feeds, but we didn't ever hear much about what happened since. You probably have a unique recall of that day, March 2021, when the attacks in Atlanta happened. Can you recall where you were, how you found out the news, and when it was that you decided to make "Rising Against Asian Hate?"

**GINA KIM:** It would be helpful if we took a moment to just sort of go back in time to that period at the height of the pandemic, when we were all receiving one video after another on our social media feeds of elderly Asian Americans being brutally attacked, you know, on the streets of, you know, on the streets of all across the country. And it was really shocking and disturbing. And so when Atlanta, when the murders in Atlanta happen, of course, absolutely horrific. But at the same time, I wasn't entirely shocked. You know, like we saw this ramping up. We heard the rhetoric from, you know, President Trump. We heard how Asian Americans were being blamed for the pandemic. So when, you know, the murders took place, we sort of said, you know, we saw this coming. I remember just being in, you know, just feeling incredibly sad when I heard about the eight people who are murdered and the six women of Asian descent. It was just, you know, I know those women, you know, they're my mom, they're our neighbors, they're people

that, you know, are part of our community. And to see them gunned down like that, the most vulnerable people in our society gunned down like that, it's devastating.

**LAURA FLANDERS:** Well, let's play a clip from the documentary. Here we meet Robert Peterson, the biracial son of one of those killed in the spa attacks in Atlanta, Georgia in March 2021, as he heads out to try to find out what's happened to his mother. Then we get a taste of some of the violence that's been directed at AAPI people in these times. And we hear from Charles Jung, who is the executive director of the California Association, who is the executive director of the California Asian Pacific Bar Association. He talks a bit about the history of this kind of violence. Check it out.

**ROBERT PETERSON:** That was when I started to hunt and search for my mother. I remember calling the sheriff's office, trying to identify the women. I don't think some of them believe that it was my mother when I was calling. They were like, yeah these are Asian women. And I'm like, yes my mother's Asian. My brother called me to get an update. Have I heard anything? What's going on? At that moment, I had just gotten off the phone with the medical examiner, and she told me that yes, they did have a body downtown of a woman named Yong Yue. That was my mother.

**CHARLES JUNG:** Violence and bias against our community is nothing new. It becomes inflamed whenever there's something that Americans don't like about Asia. So whether it's World War II and Pearl Harbor. Or whether it's increased competition from Japan during the '80s. Or whether it's 9/11. Americans are suffering and they feel pain and fear, and I think it's acutely manifesting the symptom of Asian hate.

**LAURA FLANDERS:** So Gina, so much there, for one thing, the impact on Robert Peterson and his family is a running theme throughout your film. You combine that with some of the history, which gives us a sense of how long this has been going on. Did you discover things in the making of this film that you didn't know before?

**GINA KIM:** As a Korean American who grew up in this country, I have to say that I didn't, I haven't, I didn't really know that much about Asian American history. I was never taught this in the schools. Like I learned about the 1882 Chinese Exclusion Act where, you know, Chinese, people from China were barred from coming to this country, and then the internment camps in World War II and Vincent Chin, who was killed, you know, a man who was killed in Detroit, sort of doing the height of the anti-Japanese, you know, they were taking our job sort of that sentiment that was taking place in this country in the '80s. And so these are all things that I've come to sort of learn through the years. And in this film, we just wanted to recognize the fact that

this violence isn't new. You know, it didn't just come out of nowhere. You know, it's been something that's plagued the Asian American community for centuries.

**LAURA FLANDERS:** You also drew out the history of connecting Asian Americans to disease in the U.S. and plague. That's brilliantly done right here.

**GINA KIM-** I did not know that until I made this film. I had no idea that even happened in the 1800s, 1900s. And that's something we learned from, you know, the community members in Atlanta.

**LAURA FLANDERS-** Was there a distinction when we talk about the response in the AAPI community between the community you looked at in Atlanta after the spa killings and the one you studied in the San Francisco Bay area after an elderly gentleman was similarly killed there?

**GINA KIM-** I think that for Atlanta and San Francisco it was so different because San Francisco has this long history of Asian Americans in that community for decades, for, you know, for centuries, for generations where for Atlanta, I think a lot of Asian Americans, it's somewhat new. The Asian American community in Atlanta is growing. I mean, it's growing at the fastest pace out of any ethnic group. I mean, that's actually the case across the country. Asian Americans are the fastest growing ethnic group in the country. And so they were very different. I think that maybe in San Francisco there's a history of speaking out and there's a history of Asian Americans holding political office and having a lot of political power. I think Atlanta and Georgia is sort of recognizing that and starting to build that and speaking out more and being, you know, really impactful members of their community.

**LAURA FLANDERS-** Well, we'll come back to Georgia in a second, and that constituency that plays a big part of your film. But before we do that, I wanna go to one more clip from the documentary. Here we'll hear from former U.S. Attorney, BJay Park who speaks to the unique challenges of prosecuting hate crimes against Asian Americans. Now, not everywhere has a hate crimes law, but even where they are in existence, it is hard to get them applied to attacks on Asian Americans. Here's some of what "BJay" Pak has to say.

**[Narrator]** The shootings in Atlanta reveal that prosecuting hate crimes aimed at Asian Americans presents unique challenges compared to other targeted groups.

**BYUNG JIN PAK-** We had a lot of instances where there were nooses found in a workplace. We know what that means. It was geared towards intimidating Black workers. In the Jewish community, there is the Nazi symbol. But towards Asian American community, we don't have one symbol or multiple symbols that really solidify the

ideology against Asian Americans. So it makes it a little bit tougher, so you have to really look and dig to find evidence of that motive.

**LAURA FLANDERS-** There are obviously many opinions about hate crimes legislation and many opinions right now about incarceration, calling for the death penalty, all of these things. But just putting that aside for a moment, the nature of our carceral state and the desire to transform it to something else, why has it been so hard to get the hate crimes laws that exist applied to Asian Americans? And is that changing now?

**GINA KIM-** In our film, we say that I believe out of the hate crimes that were being prosecuted against Asian Americans, only 3% ended in a conviction, which is incredibly low. BJay, who is a Republican, he was appointed a U.S. Attorney by Donald Trump, he spells it out very clearly in the film. And I found that fascinating. I never thought about that. You know, like it's very easy to see a swastika on a building and say that is, you know, an attack on our Jewish, you know, brothers and sisters. And for Asian Americans, I mean, there isn't one symbol, which I thought was a very interesting point. I think it's changing now, but they have been reticent to speak out and to report attacks. And it could be because they're reticent or they're afraid, you know, of, you know, the police or there's a variety of reasons. But you know, a lot of times Asian Americans haven't spoken out about being victims of racial bias and hate crimes. And so we see things changing, you know, but it's taken a while.

**LAURA FLANDERS-** There are many stereotypes of the Asian American community, which is not a monolith. Can you talk about what some of them are and the ways in which they are or are not changing, that might be reflected in some of those statistics?

**GINA KIM-** I think the biggest myth is the, you know, model minority stereotype of Asian Americans. That, you know, we put our head down, we just work really hard and that's, you know, just keep silent and just, you know, keep working. I just, I don't think that's a fair assessment of Asian Americans. And it's also that proximity to whiteness, right, that Asian Americans are, you know, as close to, you know, being white and so therefore we have it easier or, you know, or are, you know, we're not always included in conversations about race in this country. Asian Americans, the income gap, you know, for Asian Americans is the largest out of any ethnic group. So you have people you know, absolutely who are, you know, leaders in different industries doing very well, but you have people, you know, who live in abject poverty. So many of the attacks were, I think 73% were against women and the elderly. And you know, this country, Asian women are sometimes thought of as, you know, demure and sort of, you know, these like hypersexualized and sort of, you know, submissive. And I think that has been harmful to Asian women. And so these stereotypes have to be broken down and only with education and only with, you know, films and other, you know, media depictions are gonna be able to do that. And I think that's a challenge and a big fight for the community.

**LAURA FLANDERS-** Is that disinclination to report crimes changing today, being as it is part of the kind of assimilation model of how to get along in the United States? A model that's been a stereotype, but not, you know, but fairly well embraced in the Asian American population.

**GINA KIM-** Activists have been on the ground speaking out. I mean, you and I know Helen Zia and so many other, you know, incredible activists who've been fighting the fight for many, many decades. And what we did see in Atlanta and in San Francisco, and I think San Francisco maybe has a longer history of it, but in Atlanta we saw just extraordinary, you know, people on the ground doing the hard work who don't get the kind of attention that they deserve to get and who are speaking out. And you know, when you hear it in the film, the chants "break the silence, break the silence" I think that's absolutely happening. And you saw, you know, with hate crimes the reporting went up. I mean, there were a lot more hate crimes that were taking place, but then also many more people were starting to report and not, you know, sit back and just take it, but actually, you know, fight back and bring attention to this violence against Asian Americans.

**LAURA FLANDERS-** We keep talking about Asian Americans, the group encompasses, what is it, 55 different, you know, different groups coming from something like 45 different countries. I mean, it's a huge bucket that Asian Americans, AAPI people have been put into. And part of their film shows the challenges for organizers and bringing people together. One of the things that's so exciting, but then troublesome, is what happened in Georgia around electing the first Asian American state senator and what happened to her district. Can you talk about that and bring us up to date on where that stands now?

**GINA KIM-**Michelle Au was the first Asian American state senator elected in Georgia. She is from the district that was the former, you know, the home of New Gingrich and Brad Raffensperger. And so it was predominantly white, conservative, and that district, Gwinnett County is changing very, very quickly, very rapidly, and a large Asian American community has moved in that district from, you know, South Asia and Korean American, Chinese American, Thai, Vietnamese, you know, just a very, very diverse community of Asian Americans. And when they, when Georgia, when the Georgia State Legislature decided to redraw the district maps, they redrew her district and made it majority white. So they took it from a majority minority district and turned it majority white. And so the chances of her winning, being reelected to that district was probably pretty slim, and so Michelle decided to withdraw her candidacy and run for a house seat instead of the senate seat. When you grab that power, when you sort of ascend, there's gonna be people who used to have that power who are gonna, you know, try to grab it back. And Asian Americans in, Asian Americans in 2020, they came out to vote in historic numbers. I mean, it was, it's unbelievable how many Asian Americans came out to vote. And I think that's gonna happen again in the midterms. And I think more and more Asian Americans are gonna be coming to the polls. And it's gonna be interesting to see how the

Democratic party and Republican party react to that voting block. And, you know, Asian Americans are gonna impact a lotta swing districts. I mean they, a lotta people think that, you know, Asian Americans are the ones that tipped the voting, the balance in Georgia, voting in Senator Warnock and Senator Ossoff in the runoff election. So it's gonna be interesting to just watch, to see, you know, the Asian American voting block grow and what the reaction will be.

**LAURA FLANDERS-** Well, your film talks about changes in the law, talks about the electoral strategies that people have taken. It also talks about grassroots initiatives to keep AAPI Americans safer. Can you talk about some of those perhaps? I think I saw a glimpse of self defense classes.

**GINA KIM-** You know we did see that people were saying, you know, we need to take this issue into our own hands and we need to figure out how to protect the community on our own. And so we saw a lot of groups popping up across the country where they were, Asian Americans would go out in the evenings or other times when, you know, Asian American shop owners were sort of closing up shop and they would patrol the streets and they would just make sure that people weren't in harm's way. They were calling, you know, elderly men and women were able to call a hotline and, you know, people would come and escort them if they needed to go shopping. I mean, I just, you know, it was, it's, you know, not that the crime has reduced any, I'm sure there's so many attacks still taking place. You know, I remember that time period and my mother was possibly gonna move to New York City, and she came to New York City and just felt so vulnerable and so scared walking through the streets on her own that she decided that she wasn't gonna move here after all. And so, you know, we saw the most vulnerable and the weakest, you know, mostly women and elderly being attacked. And so it was really remarkable and encouraging to see the community come together to protect their own.

**LAURA FLANDERS-** Have you been affected by doing this piece? I mean, you have worked for so many years helping reports get made about, among other topics, movement groups. I mean, there is much movement organizing that was only covered in our media because you were a producer in the back room making sure that that was the case. You are now a film executive producer working with Titi, working on getting a story very close to home front and center. Has that affected you?

**GINA KIM-** Our crew was almost entirely made up of Asian Americans. We had a very, very diverse, right, diverse crew from, you know, PAs all the way to the producers and writers and editors. And we were told over and over again how working on this film was incredibly difficult, for the editors to sit there and watch those attacks over and over and over again, it really messes with your head. It was very, very difficult to make this film. Titi and I truly felt as Asian American filmmakers that we have to tell the story. We really wanted to be the ones to tell the story. And it hits, you know, close to home for both of us. And, you know, we all know people

who have changed the way that they live their lives. You know, I have friends who will never take the subway again. I have friends who don't go out, you know, late at night anymore because of what's been happening to Asian Americans. And so it has profoundly changed us. And I think it's different than any other project that I've ever worked on because it is so close to home. And it is the stories that we heard of. You know, every single person we spoke to for the film told the exact same story. I was walking down the street and someone started screaming at me and they said, "Go back to your country. Go back home. You don't belong here." And it's so amazing how much that, the pain you get to see it bubbling, bubbling at the surface, the pain that inflicts on people. I don't know how to explain it. Like I don't know why it's that painful, but just that feeling of being a perpetual foreigner of not belonging, of saying that this is my country. I, you know, love America and this is my home, and having people tell you, you know, on a daily basis that you don't belong here and this isn't your home. And so it was, you know, a very personal film and eye-opening film, and I learned a lot. And I just think that what I, you know, just being able to showcase the community, to show what the work that they're doing, I think that's the most important part of the film. That, you know, that people aren't just lying down and saying, oh well, you know, this is what it is. They're fighting back and they're protecting their communities.

**LAURA FLANDERS-** We often end these interviews by asking our guests what they think the story will be that the future tells of this moment. Do you have a sense of what that might be in this context, Gina?

**GINA KIM-** When this tragedy occurred, I knew we had to document it. Like, I knew that this was an unprecedented time in our history and that we had to tell the story. And so I made this film for not just, you know, the community, but I made it for my son, you know, who's 16 years old. I made it for his generation, that 20 years from now, when they watch this film, they get a sense of what it was like during this time. You know, I just wanna remind people just, you know, just remember at the height of the pandemic when you were just scrolling your phones and just seeing one attack after another, seeing, you know, women being pushed in front of subways, being followed into their homes and brutally murdered. It just shouldn't happen, you know, it shouldn't happen and people need to be aware of it. And I think if we don't teach our history, we will make those mistakes again. And so we want, we hope that this will just, you know, be a document of what happened so that people can revisit it and see what happened and learn from it.

**LAURA FLANDERS-** Appreciate everything you've done, Gina, and it's wonderful to see you again, and very fun to see you on that side of the camera, and I look forward to the next project.

**GINA KIM-** Thank you Laura.

**LAURA FLANDERS-** Does racist and hateful rhetoric from the most powerful people in our country play out in actual racist and hateful acts against the most vulnerable here? Yes, it does.

We saw it under Donald Trump. We saw it under Ronald Reagan. In 1982, young Vincent Chin, a Chinese American engineer in Detroit, was battered to death by two white auto workers who mistook him for Japanese and blamed all people Japanese for what was happening in the auto industry. They were convicted of manslaughter, but sentenced only to a \$3,000 fine. And in part, that kind of treatment of hate crimes against Asian Americans has contributed to a situation where crime is spiking and 30% of Asian Americans fear violence every day in their lives, while 1/3 of the rest of us seem entirely oblivious to the problem. Helen Zia, the reporter who took on Chin's case, has created a legacy project that the Smithsonian is making available. It was the centerpiece of a project this year in Detroit trying to re-educate folks about the reality of Asian American and AAPI people's lives, and we'll make it available through a link in our resource packet, the packet that's made available to all subscribers to our podcast. You can subscribe for free at our website, check it out. Till the next time, stay kind, stay curious. I'm Laura, for the Laura Flanders Show. Thanks for joining me.

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