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Tragedies at Monterey Park and Half Moon Bay



At a time when the Asian American communities and the rest of America were celebrating the lunar new year, two senseless mass shootings in California shook first Monterey Park on January 21, 2023, and then Half Moon Bay on January 24, 2023.

According to media reports, 11 persons, five Asian men and six Asian women age between 57 and 76, died in a dance studio in Monterey Park, about seven miles east of the Downtown Los Angeles civic center. Nine other people were injured. The suspect, a 72-year Asian man, died of a self-inflicted gunshot wound after he was prevented from attacking another dance club in Alhambra.

Three days later, five men and two women, all reportedly either Asian or Hispanic, were shot and killed at two mushroom farms in Half Moon Bay, about 30 miles south of San Francisco. The suspect, a 66-year old man of Chinese origin, was arrested after driving to a police station. He had worked at one of the mushroom farms and was formally charged with premeditated murder.

Motives for both mass shootings are being investigated at this time.

Monterey Park is a city of about 60,000 people on the eastern edge of Los Angeles and is composed of 65% Asians - mostly immigrants from China, Taiwan, and Hong Kong, or first-generation Asian Americans. A 1994 book by Professor **Timothy P. Fong** at Sacramento State University describes Monterey Park as the "First Suburban Chinatown." In recent years, several publications have named the city as one of the U.S.'s [best places to live](#). **Lily Lee Chen** was

the first female Chinese American mayor in the United States when she became mayor of Monterey Park in 1983.



Rep. **Judy Chu** 赵美心, Chair of the Congressional Asian Pacific American Caucus, represents the 28th congressional district which includes Monterey Park. She previously served as mayor for three terms and city council of Monterey Park. [Yahoo News](#) reported that Rep. Chu spoke to the media outside the Monterey Park Civic Center and was at a candlelight vigil to honor the victims of the mass shooting.

In [a statement released](#) by her office, Rep. Chu said, "This shooting in my hometown of Monterey Park has torn a hole through all of our hearts. My thoughts and condolences go to the victims of this horrific crime, and to their families and loved ones who woke up this morning to the worst news imaginable. I can't even comprehend the pain and suffering they are going through.

"While there is so much we do not yet know, we do know this occurred at a time that should have been very special to Asian Americans in this country and around the world. Lunar New Year is the highlight of the year for Asian American communities, and a time of celebration and of being with our families. In fact, it is horrific to think that only hours before, and only one block away, I joined with thousands of people and many elected officials at the opening of the Lunar New Year Festival. But now, Asian Americans in the Monterey Park community and nationwide are in mourning and are terrified instead of celebrating.

"If there is one thing I know, it is that Monterey Park is resilient. Our community is strong, and we will get through this terrible event together."



On January 22, 2023, President **Joe Biden** [issued a statement](#) on the mass shooting in Monterey Park and directed U.S. flags to be flown at half-staff as a mark of respect for the victims of the senseless attack. "I directed my Homeland Security Advisor to mobilize full federal support to local and state authorities as they continue to respond and investigate this shooting. As we await more crucial information from law enforcement, I want to assure the community of Monterey Park and the broader area that we will support you in every way we can," according to the statement.

On January 24, 2023, *PBS News Hour* [interviewed Erika L. Moritsugu](#), Deputy Assistant to the President and Asian American and Pacific Islander Senior Liaison, who was in Monterey Park. "It's important to show up, in the first instance, when there's a crisis and a tragedy that befalls the community that's already felt under siege and in terror, to be present. And that's one of the reasons why the president asked me to come here immediately in the wake of the tragedy, even as it was still unfolding, to be with the community, to deliver his messages of healing and condolences on behalf of him and Dr. Biden, but also because I am a member of the community. This is my community too." said Moritsugu.



According to [USA Today](#) and [NBC News](#), Vice President **Kamala Harris**, a former California senator, arrived outside of the dance studio in Monterey Park on January 25, 2023, stopping to take a look at each of the victims' names and pictures from the deadly mass shooting before placing a bouquet in front of the memorial. Harris told reporters the nation is mourning the loss of the 11 people killed and nine others injured, while also advocating for stricter gun control laws. "Tragically we keep saying the same things," Harris said. "Congress must act. Should they? Yes. Can they? Yes."



In a [report by Ding Ding TV](#) (video 21:44) on January 24, 2023, AAPI community leaders in California gave their reactions and statements on the mass shootings. They included **Joel Wong 黄锦航** (Chairman of National Asian Americans United), **Maeley Tom 唐美梨** (Founding President, Joint California Legislative Caucus Institute), **Ken Fong 方瑞贤** (Founder and Chairman of Kenson Ventures), **Dennis Wu 伍宗德** (Chairman of SF Cause), **Wilson Chu 苏元吉** (Board member of SF Cause), **Carmen Montano** (Mayor of Milpitas), **Anthony Ng 吴柱梁** (Executive Director of CLUSA), and **Carl Chan 陈锡澎** (President of Oakland Chinatown Chamber Foundation).

Maeley Tom said: "I do agree that these past years of living under the threat of anti Asian violence has taken its toll on the mental health of the Asian community, especially the elders, though not condoning this as a reason for the two tragic incidences. But our community is really on edge, angry and frustrated."

Ken Fong stated: "It reminded us of the serious emotional trauma of the APIs that we are facing now. Not that we are condoning this kind of desperate action, you and I have to pay close attention to it and let our elected representatives know about the seriousness. It is most likely other ethnic groups have similar problems, but these two side by side API mass killings have brought this long simmering mental instability to the surface."

AASF Webinar Postponed to February 2. Due to the two mass shootings leading to the deaths and injuries of multiple Asian Americans and immigrants, the Asian American Scholar Forum is moving the "Know Your Rights on Airport Enforcement and Border Harassment" webinar to Thursday, February 2, 2023 at 8:00 pm ET. Register to attend: <http://bit.ly/3ZMVUhX>

Protests Grow Against Texas Senate Bill 147 and New Related Bills



On January 29, 2023, two Anti-Asian Bill Rally will be held in Austin and Dallas, Texas, respectively. Read more at <https://bit.ly/402IG1w>.

On January 23, 2023, Texas Representative **Angie Chen Button** 陳筱玲 announced that she has joined State Representatives **Cody Harris** and **Jacey Jetton** in support of [House Bill 1075](#), recently filed legislation that would prohibit foreign governments or any entity owned or controlled by a foreign government from purchasing agricultural land in Texas.

"Like so many other Texans who immigrated here for a better life, I came to America because it afforded me new opportunities, including the right to own property and freely purchase a safe and stable home in which to raise my family. This is a right that all Texans, regardless of race, color, or creed, should have," stated State Representative Angie Chen Button.

Under HB 1075 by Rep. Harris, all individuals and American-owned businesses will maintain their right to purchase ag property in the State of Texas. As filed, the legislation applies to all foreign governments or government-controlled entities equally.

On January 23, 2023, [Texas Senate Bill 552](#) was introduced. The title of the bill is "Relating to prohibiting contracts or other agreements with certain foreign-owned companies in connection with agricultural land."

On January 23, 2023, a rally was held at the Houston City Hall to protest against the discriminatory Texas Senate Bill 147.

According to multiple media reports, Houston Mayor **Sylvester Turner** said during the press conference that with Houston being a very diverse city, the bill would affect a lot of individuals who immigrated here from those targeted countries. "Senate Bill 147 is just down right wrong," he said. "It is more divisive than anything else. Houston, the most diverse city in the United States, stands as one to say that we all should stand against 147 – this is not the way to start 2023."

"After an unprecedented rise in anti-Asian hate around the nation, our communities continue to struggle against not only violence within our society, but with political persecution as well," State Representative **Gene Wu** 吳元之 said in a statement. "SB 147 is discriminatory, hateful, and brings back painful reminders of laws passed a hundred years ago that specifically prevented Chinese individuals from owning property, starting businesses, or even marrying the person they love." Wu is an Asian-American who immigrated from China as a child. He said his family moved here to have a better life for themselves, not to be targeted.

Congressional members **Sheila Jackson Lee** and **Al Green** also spoke at the rally. The Anti-Defamation League, the NAACP, CAIR-Houston, and other leaders were also at the press conference.

Texas SB147 would affect people like **Niloufar Hafzi** who was born in the U.S. but also has citizenship in Iran. "I shouldn't have to choose between being able to visit my family

and having that citizenship and being able to have property rights here," said Hafzi. Many are worried this bill would bring along more racism.

APA Justice is monitoring the continuing development of Texas SB147, community responses, and media reports at: <https://bit.ly/402IG1w>. It includes a link to Immigration History's "[Alien Land Laws In California \(1913 & 1920\)](#)" and the text of California's original 1913 Alien Land Law.

Franklin Odo, who served as the director of the Asian Pacific American Program at the Smithsonian Institution from the program's inception in 1997 until his retirement in 2010, wrote the following commentary:

California led the way for fifteen states to pass legislation preventing "aliens ineligible to citizenship" from owning land. Although occasionally used against other Asians, these laws were directly aimed at Japanese immigrants, who were perceived as gaining undue economic power through agricultural holdings. Legislation using the words "Asian" or "Japanese" would clearly be unconstitutional, hence the circumlocution. Violators would have their property revert to control by the state. But at least some Japanese manage to evade the law, and the legislature moved in 1920 to strengthen its provisions as well as prohibit the practice of immigrant Japanese (as guardians) placing land in the legal hands of their citizen children. The Supreme Court declared such laws constitutional in 1923, and California's law remained on the books until 1956, although court cases had invalidated the 1920 and 1913 Alien Land Laws in *Oyama v. California* (1948) and *Fuji Sei v. State of California* (1952).
Excerpt from: Odo, F. (ed.) (2002). *The columbia documentary history of the Asian American experience*. New York, NY: Columbia University Press.

Sign-on Letter to Honor Fred Korematsu



Demand Justice has prepared an open letter to Senators **Mazie Hirono** and **Tammy Duckworth** and Representatives **Mark Takano** and **Jill Tokuda**, in support of following legislation to recognize **Fred Korematsu's** legacy as a civil rights hero:

1. **Fred Korematsu Congressional Gold Medal Act**, which would prohibit detention or imprisonment based solely on an actual or perceived protected characteristic of an individual.
2. **Recognizing the importance of establishing a national "Fred Korematsu Day of Civil Liberties and the Constitution,"** which will help to ensure that Fred Korematsu's legacy is remembered and honored, and that the lessons of the internment are not forgotten.
3. **Korematsu-Takai Civil Liberties Protection Act**, which will honor Fred Korematsu for his decades-long fight for justice, and will serve as a powerful reminder of the importance of protecting civil liberties for all Americans.

According to the *Smithsonian Magazine*, on Memorial Day 1942, Fred Korematsu was walking down a street in San Leandro, California, with his girlfriend when police arrested him on suspicion that he was Japanese.

On February 19, 1942, President **Franklin D. Roosevelt** signed Executive Order 9066, which authorized the forced relocation and internment of Japanese Americans. In all, more than 120,000 Japanese Americans were detained and forcefully removed from their homes without charges or due process for years. The lawsuit brought by Fred Korematsu, an American citizen of Japanese descent, fought the implementation of that order, challenging the mass violation of civil liberties on the basis of race.

Korematsu stood against these unfounded and racist actions. At the time, our institutions — our democracy — failed him. The Supreme Court, intended as a bulwark against Executive power run amok, upheld Korematsu's detention in *Korematsu v. United States* in 1944, with a 6-3 majority. However, the dissent by Justice **Frank Murphy** spoke the truth that the United States, grudgingly and slowly, would come to recognize through executive, judicial, and legislative action. Justice Murphy declared the order to detain Japanese Americans the "legalization of racism."

The imprisonment of Americans of Japanese ancestry, and its legal sanction, is now recognized as a grave injustice and a violation of civil liberties. Its basis was rank racism and xenophobia combined with undue deference to the Executive branch, not facts. While the racist basis of the internment decision was discovered in the early 1980s, leading to Korematsu's conviction being overturned after 40 years, the decision remains a dangerous precedent used to justify discrimination against other communities.

Sign on to the Demand Justice open letter by noon Friday, January 27, 2023: <https://bit.ly/3JgDq3o>.

If there are questions, please contact Hajar Hammado, policy advisor, Demand Progress Action, at hajar@demandprogress.org.

Read about the Fred Korematsu story at

- Fred T. Korematsu Institute: [Fred Korematsu's Story](#)
- 2017/01/30 Smithsonian Magazine: [Fred Korematsu Fought Against Japanese Internment in the Supreme Court... and Lost](#)

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