

## JACL Chapter Liaisons

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 Japan, John Ino  
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 Marysville, Neelam Canto-Lugo  
 Monterey, Larry Oda  
 New Mexico, Sei Tokuda  
 New York, Ron Uba  
 Olympia, Reiko Callner  
 Omaha, Sharon Ishii-Jordan  
 Philadelphia, Joyce Horikawa  
 Placer County, Bill Tsuji  
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 Riverside, Junji Kumamoto  
 Sacramento, Genevieve Shiroma  
 St. Louis, Wendy Roll  
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 San Diego, David Kawamoto  
 San Fernando, Brian Moriguchi  
 San Francisco, Les Hata  
 San Gabriel, Bruce Haines  
 San Jose, Kenzo Kimura  
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 Seattle, Joy Shigaki  
 SELANOCO, Nicole Inouye  
 Sequoia, Mike Kaku  
 Snake River Valley, Janet Komoto  
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 Sonoma County, Carol Kawase  
 Southeast, Sam Wakasugi  
 South Bay, Wilbur Sato  
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 Torrance, Alayne Yonemoto  
 Tri-Valley, Alan Teruya  
 Twin Cities, Jamie Cork  
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 UC San Diego, Kim Shintaku  
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## “He killed and died as one of us” VTech shooter was Asian – and American

By Elaine Low

The year 2007 bore witness to no scarcity of hate incidents—swastikas cut into cornfields, the Jena Six case and heightened racial tensions, Asian American fishermen shoved into Lake Michigan by a white supremacist, and noose hangings seemingly everywhere, including on the doorknob of a black professor at Columbia University.

But arguably, the most notorious crime motivated by hate from 2007 was not one that involved nooses or swastikas, but a quiet Korean American student and an otherwise peaceful mountainside college in southwest Virginia.

On April 16, 2007, Seung-Hui Cho, a 23-year old senior at Virginia Tech, massacred 32 students and faculty in the most deadly school shooting since the Columbine killings in 1999. In materials he sent to NBC right before his rampage, Cho is seen on video wielding pistols and mumbling incoherent strands of violence and anger, saying “Do you know what it feels to be spit on your face and to have trash shoved down your throat? Do you know what it feels like to dig your own grave? [...] You had a hundred billion chances and ways to have avoided today.”

Mental illness and lax gun sale laws have now been blamed for his descent into murder, but those were not the details reported in the days following the shootings. Instead, reports of a “South Korean gunman” surfaced on newspaper after newspaper, on television and on the web. An ABC news anchor referred to Cho in a televised report as “a Korean living in the United States.” In print, Reuters identified him as “the South Korean gunman,” and The New York Times made special effort to note in one article that the Centreville, VA, native was “a legal permanent resident, not a citizen,” and in another, that he was in fact “a South Korean immigrant who Americanized his name and preferred to be known as Seung Cho.”

**In other words, he was Asian American.**

What, exactly, these references had to do with his psychiatric problems or the premeditated killings was never made clear in the news stories, though they led one to wonder how much Cho’s apparent status as an foreigner—despite having moved to the United States with his family in 1992, at age eight—contributed to his building anger at society. His videotaped rants included jabs at “rich kids” and “brats” who indulged in “debaucheries,” repeating “you had everything” but “it wasn’t enough.” If his disturbing tirades seemed to pour out from

someone who felt like an outsider, the subsequent media reports didn't serve to help much.

What those continual references to the “Korean living in the US” did amount to was an intense fear of backlash against the Asian American community. In a telling column by New America Media's Andrew Lam entitled, “Let It Be Some Other ‘Asian’,” Lam recounts the hours before the “Asian” killer's exact ethnicity was known, and how he and his friends were all praying that the shooter wouldn't turn out to be Chinese/Pakistani/Vietnamese/Indian, for fear of reprisal from the mainstream.

“To be a minority in America, even in the 21st century, is to be always on trial,” writes Lam in the column. “An evil act by one indicts the entire community. Whoever doubts this need only look at the spike in hate crimes against Muslims and South Asian communities after 9/11.”

Even native South Koreans were afraid of the potential backlash, many bending over backwards to apologize on behalf of one of their citizens who had left 14 years ago as a child. The South Korean ambassador to Washington went so far as to suggest that South Koreans fast for 32 days in memorial of the 32 victims. Ironically, by trying to prevent retaliatory violence, such statements seem to only invite backlash by implicitly assuming responsibility for Cho's actions.

His killing spree on the Virginia Tech campus, filled with so much lacerating rage and hatred, indirectly provokes a few uneasy questions about where Asian Americans stand in the mainstream today. Cho was like so many others of the “1.5 generation,” having immigrated to the United States as young child and grown up amid American culture. But the ease with which he was dismissed as an American unwittingly exposes a latent xenophobia in the mainstream consciousness, and raises a legitimate concern about what other kinds of hatred simmer beneath the surface, and against whom.

Cho was a mentally disturbed individual, someone whose hatred was misdirected at innocent students and teachers; he was also an American. As National Public Radio's Robert Seigel said in a thoughtful commentary the day after the shootings, “like the kids who murdered at Columbine, Seung-Hui Cho killed—and died—as one of us.” □

## 2006 FBI Hate Crimes Report Shows 8% Spike

Incidents of hate crimes have spiked by 8% in 2006, according to the latest FBI hate crime report. 7,722 hate crimes were reported in 2006, over half of which were racially motivated, and almost a fifth of which were based on religious bias. Bias attacks against Muslims increased by 22% to 156 incidents and against gay men and women by 18% to 1,195 incidents in 2006. Almost 70% of all attacks motivated by religious bias were anti-Semitic, with attacks against Jews up by 14% to 967 incidents. Almost 5% of all racially motivated hate crimes were attacks against Asian Americans.

In addition to the surge in hate crimes, there has been an increase in reports of noose hangings and swastika vandalism, which may be attributed to the Jena Six incident in Louisiana, in which six African American students were accused of attacking a white student at the school.

Full statistics of the FBI hate crime report can be found here: <http://www.fbi.gov/ucr/hc2006/index.html> □

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crime based on race and sexual orientation. Six men approached 26-year old Satender Singh and his friends, reportedly harassing them with racial slurs and homophobic epithets, before one of the men punched Singh, causing him to fall and hit his head. His family decided to pull him from life support after he was left in a coma from the blow. Police are in the midst of investigations.

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**New York City, NY** – July 2007: Two Asian American men fell victim to a racially-motivated beating in New York's Chinatown the evening of July 2, leading to the arrest of the two offenders. As a 22-year old man crossed Canal Street, a white sedan pulled up and its passengers inside yelled, “This is for the Korean War!” as they climbed out of the car and began to beat him and another Chinese American man nearby. Police nabbed both offenders several days later. □

# JACL Chapter and Staff Activities

**JACL Midwest Office** – December 2007: A television spot from a local suburban Chicago car dealership has ignited the outrage of many local Asian Americans who find the ad offensive and racist. Featuring an exaggerated, fake sumo wrestler with the words “Import Dealer” stamped across his chest, the ad’s antagonist is depicted by a white male costumed in what can only be described as yellowface. Sporting a pseudo-Asian accent, he is seen being chased around by a white car salesman in a Superman outfit. In a letter to South Oak Dodge, JACL Midwest Director William Yoshino says he is “appalled and disappointed that such a blatant use of xenophobia would be exhibited in a television spot on major local networks.” So far, the dealership has not responded to complaints.

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**JACL Midwest Office** – December 2007: A Florida auto shop with the name “Jap Tech” has offended locals in Naples, FL with its racist name. The shop caters to Honda and Acura car owners, though it is unclear as to whether the shop’s owners are aware of the slur in their company’s title. In a letter to the company, JACL Midwest Director William Yoshino states that “You may see the term as a shorten form of the word “Japanese” without taking into account its historical use. Be assured that Japanese Americans and an enlightened public understand the shameful history and vile meaning that this term carries.” No response has been heard from the auto shop as of yet.

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**JACL National Office** – November 2007: Over Thanksgiving weekend a Sikh cab driver in Seattle was brutally attacked in what is being charged as a hate

crime. On Nov. 24, two Seattle police officers asked Sukhvir Singh, 48, to escort home an intoxicated football fan who had been kicked out of Husky Stadium. In the cab, the 20-year old man began to attack Singh, pulling off his turban and yanking out clumps of his hair, all the while hurling racial slurs at him, calling him “an Iraqi terrorist.” Even when Singh pulled over the cab on the interstate and stepped out of the car, the man continued to beat him until Washington state troopers arrived. Floyd Mori, National Executive Director of the JACL, stated, “Japanese Americans know well how war time hysteria can lead to the sting of hatred. Loyal Americans come in diverse ethnic cultures, each individual American, regardless of religion and ethnicity should have the right to practice their faith without fear of violence or discrimination.” Singh’s assailant is currently under investigation for third-degree assault and malicious harassment.

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**JACL Midwest Office** – October 2007: An update on the murder trial for the death of DU Doan, the 62-year old Vietnamese American fisherman who drowned after being shoved off Montrose Harbor: Since Doan’s death, local Asian American advocacy groups have met up with local police and detectives working on the case, who concluded that insufficient evidence existed to call the drowning death a hate crime. However, William Yoshino, Midwest Director of the JACL, said in a statement that “The meeting with the police detectives, while candid and forthcoming, didn’t completely dispel notions that this was a hate crime. If Haley is convicted, it will be up to prosecutors to push for hate-related factors during the sentencing phase.”

John Haley, the “anti-racist skinhead” who pushed Doan, is currently awaiting trial.

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**JACL National Office** – October 2007: A slew of racist graffiti and vandalism has surfaced on the East Coast over the past month in what police suspect may be a series of copycat incidents following the Jena Six case in Louisiana. Incidents include 22 swastikas chalked on the walls of a Manhattan high school, a giant swastika cut into a New Jersey field, and noose hangings in Long Island, at the University of Maryland, and on the door of an African American professor at Columbia University. In a release, National Director Floyd Mori stated, “The hangman’s noose and the swastika, just like the slur ‘jap’, have historically been symbols of hate, and they will not be tolerated, whether as a prank or threat.” No one has been arrested yet for any of these incidents.

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**JACL National Office** – October 2007: Political pundit Ann Coulter has offended yet again. In an Oct. 8 appearance on CNBC’s “The Big Idea” with Donny Deutsch, Coulter claimed that Christians “want Jews to be perfected, as they say. [...] That’s just what Christianity is.” In a release responding to the remark, National Director Floyd Mori said, “Coulter’s remarks on CNBC exhibit a profound ignorance of Judaism and the Jewish people. She misspeaks on behalf of Christians everywhere who do not share her warped belief that Jews need to be converted to Christianity in order to be ‘perfected.’” Coulter has not apologized for her remark.

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**JACL National Office** – September 2007: Amid the controversy surrounding the “Jena Six,” a group of black teenagers charged with the beating of a white youth in Louisiana, the JACL National Youth Student Council issued a statement expressing the apparent biased treatment given to the youth. “As student and youth representatives of the JACL, we empathize with the black students in Jena as we have also been the target of discrimination and racism on school playgrounds and inside classrooms. We hope that this incident sheds light on the critical state of race and youth in our society,” said Brandon Mita, a representative from the Youth Student Council. The incident followed a series of other racially-charged incidents in which white perpetrators were allegedly not disciplined as harshly, if at all. The Jena Six were initially charged with attempted second-degree murder, but the charges have since been reduced.

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**JACL Midwest Office** – September 2007: Following the drowning death of a Vietnamese American fisherman off Montrose Harbor in Chicago, local Asian American advocacy groups have raised concern over the possibility that 62-year old Du Doan was the victim of a hate crime. John Haley, 31, has been charged with first-degree murder and is an alleged member of the “anti-racist skinhead” group. The drowning followed an incident in which another Asian American was harassed earlier that morning, and another man with allegedly “Asian features” who was shoved into the harbor a month prior. Bill Yoshino, Midwest Director issued a statement warning, “If, as it appears from this pattern of violence, Asian Americans are being targeted, members of our community should exercise all due caution by not putting themselves at risk in situations similar to that of Mr. Doan.”

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**Cincinnati Chapter** – August 2007: Outraged responses are coming in from all sides to an AM radio station’s controversial parody ads, “How to Spot an Illegal Alien,” which features tips, such as how to say “Be careful with those hedge clippers around the garden gnome” in Spanish. Betsy Sato, president of the JACL’s Cincinnati chapter, issued a letter to the general manager of WLW 700 AM, stating “The recent ‘Talk to an Illegal Immigrant’ spots WLW ran were tasteless and offensive to more than just the Latin American community. ... Since it is clear that the diversity training recommended after the previous incident either wasn’t taken seriously or folks at WLW are slow learners, maybe economic sanctions will reinforce the lesson.” Latino American communities have not yet forgotten the “Big Juan” billboards the same station recently posted (and subsequently took down after protest) which featured a picture of a Mexican man in a sombrero and a donkey in the ad.

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**JACL National Office** – August 2007: In response to Rob Schneider’s use of yellowface—resulting in his character looking like a caricature of Asian features—in the recent film, “I Now Pronounce You Chuck and Larry,” the JACL issued a letter to Universal Pictures and a press release stating, “Schneider’s characterization offends the community by furthering the emasculation and degradation of Asian American males in the media, promoting the outright ridiculing of Asian Americans, and inadvertently admitting that some members of Hollywood would still rather put actors in yellowface than hire qualified Asian American actors—of which there are many—to play roles in a dignified manner.” Schneider’s character sports oversized teeth, thick glasses, and speaks heavily accented, broken English, and has been called

the “most offensive Asian caricature since Mickey Rooney’s notorious yellow-face performance in Breakfast at Tiffany’s” by some film critics.

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**Portland Chapter** – July 2007: A local Portland newspaper has published a series of articles in which the derogatory term “Jap” is used repeatedly and unabashedly. The St. John’s Review writer, Jim Spiers, claims that “it’s far better to be historically accurate than to fold under the pressures of today’s nonsensical notion of changing names to protect the innocent and not-so-innocent.” John Kodachi, JACL Portland Chapter President, responded in a letter to the editor that “It’s not about changing names to protect the innocent, but rather, understanding the negative and dehumanizing effect caused by racial epithets today.”

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**JACL Midwest Office** – May 2007: A Japanese web magazine based in Los Angeles adopted the moniker “Jappy Girl” in its marketing campaign, unaware of the racially negative connotation the term holds for Japanese Americans. In a statement to the magazine’s editors, JACL Midwest Director Bill Yoshino, wrote, “You should be aware that the term “Jap” and its derivatives such as “Jappy” are racial slurs. [...] Racial slurs such as “Jap” or “Jappy” have been used to dehumanize and demean Japanese Americans for over a century,” urging them to desist in using the term to promote the magazine, which was supposed to be a portmanteau for “Japanese” and “happy”. The magazine has since acknowledged the slur and changed its name to JPy. □

# Hate Crimes and Hate Incidents

**Seattle, WA** – November 2007: Over Thanksgiving weekend a Sikh cab driver in Seattle was brutally attacked in what is being charged as a hate crime. On Nov. 24, two Seattle police officers asked Sukhvir Singh, 48, to escort home an intoxicated football fan who had been kicked out of Husky Stadium. In the cab, the 20-year old man began to attack Singh, pulling off his turban and yanking out clumps of his hair, all the while hurling racial slurs at him, calling him “an Iraqi terrorist.” Even when Singh pulled over the cab on the interstate and stepped out of the car, the man continued to beat him until Washington state troopers arrived. Singh’s assailant is currently under investigation for third-degree assault and malicious harassment.

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**National** – October 2007: An anti-Filipino remark on the popular ABC primetime show, “Desperate Housewives” led to outrage from the Asian American community, who found a line from Teri Hatcher’s character to be both demeaning and racist. In a Sept. 30 airing of an episode, Hatcher’s character questions her doctor’s credibility by asking, “Can I check those diplomas? Because I would like to make sure that they’re not from some med school in the Philippines.” Since then, ABC and the show’s producers have apologized for the remark, claiming “There was no intent to disparage the integrity of any aspect of the medical community in the Philippines.”

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**Maryland** – September 2007: Two elderly Sikhs were beaten and badly bruised in what police are investigating as a hate crime attack. The two men, Darshan Sarang, 75, and Bhupinder Nibber, 77, were attacked by a group of

six young men in a Maryland suburb one afternoon, in which the men hit one victim in the face and assaulted the other when he tried to call the police from his cell phone. The attackers then fled, leaving the first victim partially unconscious. Police are currently investigating.

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**Chicago, IL** – September 2007: A Filipino-American woman has filed suit against H&M, the corporate clothing retailer, for anti-Asian verbal harassment that she endured after visiting the downtown Chicago store in mid-September. Allegedly, two H&M sales representatives called Frannie Richards a “mail-order bride” and continued to make derisive racial comments (e.g. “ching chong chang”) even after the nurse and retired U.S. Air Force Staff Sergeant approached them to stop. H&M has not yet formally responded to Richard’s charges.

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**Lake Tahoe, CA** – August 2007: Following a racist verbal and physical attack on a man of South Asian descent and his family in July, two perpetrators are being charged for their crimes. Joseph and Georgia Silva are to answer to hate crime charges and felony aggravated assault for attacking the San Francisco native and yelling slurs at his fiancée and cousin, calling them “Indian sluts and whores” and “relatives of Osama Bin Laden.” The Silvas then assaulted a nearby elderly South Asian American couple by throwing sand at them and calling them derogatory names before being arrested on the scene. The victim of the initial attack was seriously injured and had to be taken to the hospital.

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**Chicago, IL** – August 2007: Two hate crime victims have been awarded \$1.3 million by a Cook County judge after a November 2002 attack in Chicago’s West Loop, which left one victim with a facial blowout fracture and the other with a three-inch gash on his head. Both victims were of South Asian descent. Their two attackers shouted racial slurs, including, “Are you Taliban? Go back to your country!” before becoming physically violent. The judge awarded the victims \$1 million in punitive damages and \$300,000 in compensatory damages.

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**Bay Area, CA** – August 2007: After posting an ad that raised eyebrows among members of the Chinese community, the FBI has issued an explanation for an announcement in local Chinese newspapers asking “to speak with individuals who have information about any intelligence service whose intent is to harm the U.S. We especially welcome anyone who has information about the Chinese Ministry of State Security to contact our office.” The FBI later explained that the ad was not meant to ask the Chinese community to spy on their neighbors or the Chinese government, though legal advocates say the ad was open to interpretation. According to Malcolm Yeung of the Asian Law Caucus, “For the FBI to post an advertisement—asking Chinese to spy on their neighbors is absolutely patronizing,” he said. “For the FBI to be doing something like this, frankly, I’m not sure of what kind of message they’re sending.”

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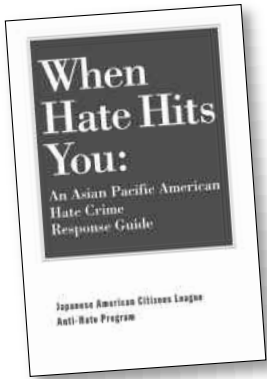
**Sacramento, CA** – July 2007: A lakeside picnic turned tragic when a man of South Asian descent was bludgeoned to death in what has been called a hate

## JACL Anti-Hate Materials Available to Chapters

**Words Can Kill the Spirit** – a brochure to combat the use of racial slurs directed against Asian Americans. This brochure is intended to inform the public that the use of slurs and other forms of defamation must not be tolerated.



**Anti-Asian Sentiment on Campus** – a brochure that highlights the increase in anti-Asian sentiment on our college and university campuses. The brochure provides examples of actual incidents and steps to take if similar incidents occur.



**When Hate Hits You** – a comprehensive handbook that provides a historical look at anti-Asian sentiment in our country, along with recent examples of anti-Asian violence and a section on how you and your community can respond to hate incidents.

These materials can be ordered free of charge to JACL chapters. Contact the nearest JACL office and please give at least two weeks notice. □

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# JACL Network Update

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Japanese American Citizens League Anti-Hate Program



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