

# *The Project on Allyship to Combat Antisemitism*

## *Allyship Between Jewish Americans and Asian Americans*

*Helen Kim*

On June 19, 1982, a Chinese American man named Vincent Chin was brutally murdered, beaten to death by two White men, Ronald Ebens and his stepson Michael Nitz. On the night of his death, Chin, a draftsman by day at an engineering firm in the Detroit area and a waiter at a Chinese restaurant by night, decided at the last minute to go out with a few friends to a local nightclub, the Fancy Pants Club, for a celebration bachelor party before his wedding to Vikki Wong nine days later. Ebens and Nitz, autoworkers in the Detroit car manufacturing industry, had recently been laid off as a result of the drastic decrease in American auto production and closing of many Michigan car factories due to intense competition from the Japanese auto industry. Like Chin and his friends, Ebens and Nitz went to the Fancy Pants Club looking for some fun and a good time. A tense verbal and physical exchange, including racial epithets, took place between Ebens and Chin. Ebens was also heard shouting at Chin, "It's because of you little motherfuckers that we're out of work!" The bar fight quickly escalated and turned into a chase on foot and by car. By the end of the night, Chin's skull had been crushed from multiple blows to the head from a baseball bat swung by Ebens. Chin died four days later on June 23, 1982

Ebens and Nitz were arrested on the scene but released the same night. They were able to plead down a second-degree murder charge to manslaughter, resulting in a sentence of three year's probation and a \$3,000 fine. Judge Charles Kaufman, who gave the sentence, offered the following explanation: "These aren't the kind of men you send to jail... You fit the punishment to the criminal, not the crime."

Chin's brutal murder and Kaufman's lenient sentence resulted in outrage amongst the Asian American community, both in Detroit and nationwide. Asian American ethnic groups who had primarily been disparate and kept to their own communities banded together under a larger pan-Asian umbrella to lobby for a federal trial for Ebens and Nitz and to seek equal justice from the U.S. legal system. Bringing together different Asian ethnic groups across language, class background, immigration experience, and culture, [American Citizens for Justice \(ACJ\)](#) was formed to advocate for Chin's family and the Asian American community.

The aftermath of Chin's murder was also a turning point for the Asian American community to unite with other communities to stand against racism and discrimination in the fight for equality and justice. Significantly, the ACJ and the Asian American community garnered wide support and allyship, including from the Jewish American community. For example, when ACJ opened up its office in Detroit with no furniture, the Anti-Defamation League of Michigan donated its office furnishings. As a result of these and other multiracial, multiethnic, and multifaith collective efforts, justice sought from Chin's death resulted in various legal and legal process changes including, changes to manslaughter sentencing in

Michigan, requirements that prosecutors be present at all hearings, and permission for victims' families to deliver victim impact statement to judges at hearings.

Over 35 years after Vincent Chin's murder, on October 27, 2018, Robert Bowers, opened fire during Shabbat services and a bris at the Tree of Life Synagogue in the Squirrel Hill neighborhood of Pittsburgh, killing 11 congregants and wounding 4 police officers and 2 other individuals. Bowers, who was 46 years old at the time, was armed with an AR-16 style assault rifle and at least three handguns. In what is referred to as the deadliest attack on Jews in the United States ever, Bowers was charged in federal court with hate crimes and the obstruction of free exercise of religious beliefs.

Moments before Bowers' shooting rampage, he apparently posted a final rant on social media, targeting the Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society (HIAS), a Jewish organization that provides services to refugees, asylum seekers and forcibly displaced and stateless individuals in the U.S. and worldwide. Bowers, who regularly posted on social media antisemitic such as "Jews are children of satan," posted on Gab, "HIAS likes to bring in invaders that kill our people. I can't sit by and watch my people get slaughtered. Screw your optics, I'm going in." Two and a half weeks earlier, Bowers had also posted about a HIAS project called National Refugee Shabbat, "Why hello there *HIAS*! You like to bring in hostile invaders to dwell among us?" Yet another post which very likely referred to HIAS stated, "Open your Eyes! It's the filthy *EVIL* jews Bringing the Filthy *EVIL* Muslims into the Country!!"

As Jewish Americans stood alongside Asian Americans after the murder of Vincent Chin to denounce anti-Asian racism and discrimination, Asian Americans stood in solidarity with Jewish Americans, to denounce antisemitism and the hatred of Jews so clearly visible in the Tree of Life Synagogue killings. The United Chinese Americans [delivered a letter of support and solidarity](#) on behalf of more than 100 Chinese American organizations. Numerous Asian American organizations publicly expressed their support for the Jewish community and condemnation of Jewish hate through statements in letters, social media posts, and participation in events to support in the American Jewish Committee's "Show Up for Shabbat" campaign.

The aftermath of Vincent Chin's murder and the Tree of Life Synagogue massacre demonstrate the possibility of "allyship" between Jewish Americans, Asian Americans, and other groups to fight hate. With significant increases simultaneously in antisemitism and anti-Asian hate, especially with the COVID-19 pandemic, alliances between these two groups to combat discrimination would seem logical yet, perhaps, unexpected given what many might see as stark differences between these populations. At the same time, this possibility may raise insights about what allyship means and how it is understood and realized by members of two groups that are, indeed, tremendously multifaceted and diverse.

This piece aims to highlight some of the shared history, points of connection, and opportunities for these two groups when considering current and future possibilities for

allyship. In particular, while there is great demographic diversity and lived experience amongst Jewish Americans and Asian Americans the place they have occupied in the American imagination and, in some geographic locations, the physical space they have occupied together are, perhaps, starting points of important overlap and commonality, providing some thrust for forging connections to counter discrimination. Given the author's proximity to the Pacific Northwest and her personal connections, this piece draws on numerous conversations with Jewish American and Asian American communal leaders and provides some specific examples of alliances for these groups that center both relationship-building, education, as well as actions that specifically combat antisemitism and other forms of hate. However, with changes in waves of immigration, a growing population of Asian American Jews, and the post-October 7 historical moment we currently occupy, what allyship potentially looks like in the immediate and long-term future also provides some food for thought for the trajectory and the possibilities of these important connections in the immediate and long-term future.

### **Jewish Americans and Asian Americans in the American Imagination**

While Jews have been present in the United States since the mid-1600s, the large-scale immigration waves of Jews from Eastern Europe during the late 1800s to early 1900s deeply shaped the place that Jews occupied in the American imagination. In pursuit of economic opportunity, Jews arrived in the U.S. bringing skills that aligned with the country's economic and labor force needs. Combined with a value system that emphasized education and tzedakah (righteousness or charity), Jews were by-and-large able to rapidly assimilate and gain upward socioeconomic mobility after immigration to America. In his discussion of sociologist Robert E. Park's analysis of Jewish immigrants and assimilation, [Jonathan Karp](#) notes “ ‘In

the case of the Jewish group,’ Park observed, ‘we find spontaneous, intelligent, and highly organized experiments in democratic control which may assume the character of permanent contributions to the organization of the American state.’ Though not widely publicized or immediately impactful, Park and his disciples had thus championed Jews as a model minority *avant la lettre*” (93).

Yet, in these time periods of Jewish immigration en masse, beliefs of Jews as biologically inferior and simultaneously a threat also began to rear their ugly heads. During the era of scientific and technological progress in the late 1800s, scientific racism's position that the “white race” was superior to other “inferior races” quickly seeped into public perception, public policy, and American law. In his 1916 book, *The Passing of the Great Race*, American eugenicist Madison Grant espoused the superiority of the “Nordic race,” described as having “certain unique specializations, namely, wavy brown or blond hair and blue, gray or light brown eyes, fair skin, high, narrow and straight nose, which are associated with great stature ... .” Significantly, he pits Jews as a threat against the Nordic race, claiming “The man of the old stock is being crowded out of many country districts by these foreigners just as he is to-day being literally driven off the streets of New York City by

the swarms of Polish Jews... These immigrants adopt the language of the native American (white American), they wear his clothes, they steal his name and they are beginning to take his women, but they seldom adopt his religion or understand his ideals and while he is being elbowed out of his own home the American looks calmly abroad and urges on others the suicidal ethics which are exterminating his own race." This thinking laid the foundation for federal legislation in the 1920s that drastically limited immigration to the U.S., with a preference for individuals of the "Nordic race." Adolf Hitler also referred to *The Passing of the Great Race* as "my Bible" and referenced it in his manifesto, "Mein Kampf."

Similar to the back-and-forth between conditional acceptance and vilification that has and continues to mark much of the Jewish American experience, we see a similar pendulum swinging for Asian Americans. Jonathan Karp's observations of Jews being championed as a model minority *avant la lettre*, primes a connection and a distinction between these two groups in American public perception. In the title of a [1996 article](#) published in Slate Magazine, Nicholas Lemann posed the question, "When Asian-Americans become the 'new Jews,' what happens to the Jews?" Roughly 30 years later, the idea of Asian Americans as the "new Jews" has often been invoked in mainstream media outlets and popular news pieces that discuss socio-economic advancement and attendance at top-ranked colleges among Asian Americans. For all of the seemingly positive associations attributed to Asian Americans and Jewish Americans evidenced through relatively rapid socioeconomic ascendancy in the face of great adversity, these connections reinforce the noxious stereotype and myth of Asian Americans and Jewish Americans as "model minorities" - hardworking, law-abiding, and assimilated peoples who have succeeded in the U.S. despite originally being outsiders. Model minorities keep their heads down and do not cause any trouble.

The model minority label and stereotype originate in the Civil Rights Era. Stemming from the effects of the 1882 Chinese Exclusion Act, Asian Americans were largely seen as "aliens" and "unassimilable" before the 1960s. However, during the Civil Rights era, Asian Americans began to be depicted in a manner which, on the surface, appeared at odds with the stereotype of foreignness. Less than 25 years after Japanese internment, sociologist William Peterson coined the term "model minority" in 1966 a New York Times Sunday Magazine article titled, "[Success Story: Japanese American Style.](#)" Peterson argued that Japanese Americans were able to overcome their history of racial and ethnic discrimination in the U.S., most notably with recent internment, because of a cultural emphasis on hard work and strong family values. In addition, Peterson implied that Japanese Americans saw economic and educational success so soon after internment not only due to these values but also due to the fact that they did not complain or voice their opinions about previous discrimination. Other popular press articles followed Peterson's, attributing the economic and educational success of Asian groups as rooted in cultural or inherent traits such as strong Confucian values, work ethic, tight knit families, and other "natural" attributes of Asians such as intellect. In a [1986 Fortune Magazine article](#), Anthony Ramirez called Asian Americans "America's Super Minority," stating "They are smarter and better educated and make more money than everyone else." A [1987 Time](#)

[Magazine cover](#), titled “Those Asian American Whiz Kids” further cemented the stereotype of Asian Americans as highly intelligent, high achieving, and hardworking individuals who need very little support or attention, academic or otherwise.

Combined, these reports painted an exaggerated, false, and monolithic narrative of Asian Americans that in the [words of ACL co-founder, Helen Zia](#), acts as a “two-headed hydra: the stereotype of being the evil invader, or the model minority... The conclusion of both is the same. Asian-Americans are too foreign - from the outside, being an invader, or on the inside, being so bland and so good.”

For many Asian Americans, the model minority label is a myth and an inaccurate characterization of a demographic group that is vastly diverse, socioeconomically and in terms of lived experience. Disaggregated data on measures of economic well-being evidence [vast differences among Asian ethnic groups](#). For example, Burmese Americans have significantly lower household incomes than Indian Americans (\$44,400 vs. \$119,000) and Asian Americans overall (\$85,800). Also, in 2019, Indians ages 25 and older have the highest level of educational attainment among U.S. Asians, with 75% holding a bachelor’s degree while only 15% of Bhutanese adults have a college degree. Jewish Americans are also a diverse group, especially along political and religious affiliation. Also, like the general American population, the Jewish American population is growing more racially and ethnically diverse over time. According to the Pew Research Center’s report, [Jewish Americans in 2020](#), 97% of Jews ages 50 and older identify as White and non-Hispanic. However, for Jewish adults under age 30, 85% identify as White and non-Hispanic with 15% identifying with all other categories including 7% Hispanic, 2% Black (non-Hispanic) and 6% other or multiple races.

For Jewish Americans and Asian Americans, the model minority myth impacts other racial and ethnic groups in specific ways. Arguably, this stereotype has been used to downplay the role of racial discrimination and discriminatory policies that have particularly impacted other non-White racial and ethnic groups, especially Black Americans. “Success” and overcoming racism and discrimination are seen as achievable because of inherent attributes, strong cultural values, and hard work attributed to Jewish Americans and Asian Americans. Social and economic advantages afforded to members of these groups are not explained by favorable attitudes or structural factors. Ultimately, such a flattening of Jewish Americans and Asian Americans through the model minority myth also functions to [create a racial wedge](#) in a U.S. racial hierarchy that positions whites at the top and blacks at the bottom of the social and economic ladder.

### **Antisemitism and Anti-Asian Hate**

Rooted in historical patterns of scapegoating, the murder of Vincent Chin, the Tree of Life Synagogue shooting and countless additional examples of antisemitism and anti-Asian hate are certainly not new and have also risen significantly over the past 5-10 years. When it comes to instances of hate and discrimination, the parallels between anti-Asian hate and antisemitism seem eerily connected. The utterances from Ronald Ebens and Robert

Bowers are examples of the historical scapegoating, wrapped up in the model minority stereotype, that underlies violence against Asian Americans and Jewish Americans. Commemorating the 30th anniversary of Chin's death, Queens College CUNY President Frank Wu in a [New York Times article](#) reflects on the significance of the murder and the legal case that followed: "The Chin case showed the power of the saying 'You all look the same,'...history also teaches us that before Asian-Americans were seen as model minorities, we were also perpetual foreigners. Taken together, these perceptions can lead to resentment. And resentment can lead to hate." Similarly, the Tree of Life synagogue massacre revealed antisemitism as the [core of white-nationalist thinking](#). Jews have disproportionate power over our political, economic, and social structures, fueling a worldview held by Bowers and others whereby antisemitism undergirds anti-immigrant sentiment, Islamophobia, and other reactionary viewpoints.

Relatedly, the stereotype of "dual loyalty" is frequently invoked to harass and discriminate against Jewish Americans and Asian Americans. Accusing Jews of being excessively loyal to Israel vs. the U.S., accusing Jews of putting "Zionist interests" over those of their home countries, or requiring Jewish students on American college campuses to denounce the actions of the Israeli government to participate in college groups or activities cast Jews as inherently disloyal and untrustworthy. Asian Americans have also been vilified based on similar accusations of dual loyalty. From [questions of dual loyalty](#) which contributed to U.S. internment of Japanese Americans during World War II to [accusations of espionage](#) leveled against Chinese American scientist Wen Ho Lee, these false charges fuel [public attitudes toward Asian Americans](#), anti-Asian sentiment, scapegoating, and acts of anti-Asian hate.

Prior to COVID-19, the U.S. saw parallel increases in antisemitism and anti-Asian racism. According to a [UCLA November 2022 report](#) on hate crimes targeting Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders, from 2012-2022 there was a 283% increase in the number of AAPI-targeted hate crime victims. More specifically, hate crimes in which suspects are reported to have used anti-immigrant slurs or show other explicit indications of anti-immigrant motivation rose 266% between 2012 and 2020. The [Anti-Defamation League's 2022 audit of antisemitic incidents](#) showed an increase from 751 incidents in 2013 to 3,697 incidents in 2022. The ADL report indicates increases during this time period in the following major categories: antisemitic harassment increased 29% to 2,298; antisemitic vandalism increased 51% to 1,288 and antisemitic assaults increased 26% to 111.

Dramatic increases in antisemitism and anti-Asian hate were especially pronounced during COVID-19. Drawing on time-honored antisemitic tropes that label Jews as "dirty" and disease spreaders, [antisemitic hate speech and racist tropes](#) blaming Jews or Israel for engineering and spreading the coronavirus permeated social media and the internet. Relatedly and particularly after former President Donald Trump in 2020 labeled COVID-19 as the "Chinese virus" and the "kung flu," incidents of racism against Asian Americans during the pandemic were closely correlated with anti-China or anti-Chinese rhetoric. [A 2020 Stop AAPI Hate report](#) identified specific examples such as scapegoating, anti-



immigrant nationalism, and virulent racist language used in incidents of racism and hate toward Asian Americans who reported these experiences. Tragically, Robert Aaron Long's murder of 8 women, including 6 Asian American women, in the 2021 Atlanta spa shootings, was rooted in the intersection of racism and sexism, culminating in a violent and deadly act of hate and one is [part of a pattern of Asian women in the U.S. being disproportionately targeted in hate incidents](#).

### **Allyship - Action and Change Second, Friendship First**

The coming together of Asian Americans and Jewish Americans in the aftermath of the Vincent Chin murder and the Tree of Life Synagogue killings are two key moments in a long and, perhaps, not-so-well known history of allyship between these two groups whose expressions were accompanied by specific actions and changes. In 1903, the Chinese community in New York City's Chinatown organized a performance for the victims of the Kishinev pogrom which had killed 49 Jews, damaged 1,500 Jewish homes, and included over 600 Jewish women who were raped. Historian Scott Seligman [writes of this event](#) as an expression of "strong sympathy between Jews and Chinese" rooted in historical persecution and anti-immigrant targeting in the U.S. The [American Jewish Committee](#) has a longstanding relationship with Asian American groups who have worked toward federal legislation and resolutions including the [Civil Liberties Act of 1988](#) that granted reparations to Japanese Americans who were wrongly interned during World War II and [Senate and House resolutions expressing regret](#) for Chinese Exclusion Laws of 1879 and 1904.

More recently, especially with alarming spikes in anti-Asian hate and antisemitism during COVID-19 and after, partnerships between Jewish Americans and Asian Americans, specifically related to improving hate crimes reporting and hate crime-related legislation, seem to be proliferating. In New York State, the ADL, State Senator Brad Hoylman-Sigal, and Assembly Member Grace Lee have jointly called for the passage of the [Stop Hiding Hate Act](#). If passed, this legislation would require large social media companies to be more publicly accountable about how they police their content and to submit yearly reports to the attorney general describing the amount of hate content posted and actions that were taken to remove and moderate online hate. In July 2023, the New York State Bar Association launched a [Task Force on Combating Antisemitism and Anti-Asian Hate](#) charged with making "recommendations for the analysis and development of laws, policies, and best practices to enhance education on, and awareness of antisemitic and anti-Asian violence and hate and to prosecute and deter hate crimes against these minority groups." This task force has focused on internet hate speech, responses to underreporting of hate crimes, educational initiatives to combat racial harassment and discrimination in schools, and statutory changes to address hate crimes.

Aside from these incredibly important legislative and policy actions, allyship between these two groups can also be realized in different but equally meaningful ways. Spearheaded in 2022 by leaders from the American Jewish Committee

Philadelphia/Southern New Jersey and the Pennsylvania Governor’s Advisory Commission on Asian Pacific American Affairs, the Pennsylvania Asian Pacific American Jewish Alliance (PAPAJA) identifies itself as the first Asian and Jewish alliance organization in the U.S., whose main focus is to build understanding between these two communities in order to stand up against hate. Two years after the Atlanta spa shootings and with continued increases in anti-Asian hate, PAPAJA [has worked to bring awareness to continued racial injustices](#) experienced by Asian American communities within Pennsylvania. Such an alliance serves as a potential model for similar partnerships at the state level.

Other examples of partnerships prioritize relationship building, learning, and understanding across differences, first and foremost. Founded in 2006 in Los Angeles, the [Asian Jewish Initiative](#) exists as a partnership between the regional ADL and area Asian American organizations to advance alliances and partnerships between Asian and Jewish communities through constructive dialogue, exploration of common ground, joint community projects, and coalition building. Numerous programs ranging from [shifting attitudes on multicultural families and intermarriage](#), a [panel discussion on the diversity of Asian immigrant stories](#), [film screenings on overlapping histories](#), prioritize learning and education as a foundation for building understanding between these two groups. Further north in Seattle/King County, in 2022, the ADL Pacific Northwest and [CISC](#) convened over a dozen Asian and Jewish organizations to bring these communities together over shared concerns about increases in antisemitism and anti-Asian hate and violence during this time. Initial conversations within the newly formed [Asian Jewish Initiative](#) focused on a common sense of exclusion of Asian and Jewish identity in the current progressive political climate, a diversity of perspectives and viewpoints within these communities, and concerns about the erosion of U.S. democracy in the current political climate. Currently, commitment to coming together, learning, and increasing awareness and understanding has taken place through programs such as “[Stories in the Sukkah](#)” providing background information on Sukkot alongside storytelling and food and [learning about the history of redlining in Seattle](#) that included prohibitions on the sale or rental of property to Asian Americans, Jews, and Blacks.

As the U.S. demographic landscape continues to shift in significant ways, the question of what allyship means and looks like may feel differently textured when considering the experiences of individuals who occupy both identities at the same time - Asian American Jews. In this historical moment of increasing antisemitism alongside anti-Asian racism, what does allyship look like for individuals who intensely feel the effects of both forms of discrimination simultaneously?

In the wake of the Atlanta spa shootings, various news outlets asked prominent Asian American Jews how they were responding to this incident and the spike in anti-Asian hate. Yoshi Silverstein, the founder of [Mitsui Collective](#) remarked in [an article](#) in *The Forward*, “Jews of all backgrounds are all too familiar with the rapid growth of a conflagration sparked by violent rhetoric and scapegoating by those in power, set against a backdrop of desperation and anger. As I write this the day after the Atlanta massacre of Asian women,



today for me feels exactly how the day after the Tree of Life massacre felt. Exactly the same. It is visceral. It is personal. It is heartbreaking.” Yet, also in this moment and in moments stained with antisemitism, many Asian American Jews remarked on how painfully alone and isolated they felt. Sumie Okazaki, Professor of Applied Psychology at NYU, remarked on these emotions in a [Union of Reform Judaism blog piece](#):

“As a Jewish Asian American woman, there have been moments in the past when my loyalties and allyship were questioned and challenged, and I felt torn between the opposing views of my Jewish and Asian American communities. Yet, at the present moment, it feels like my two identities - as a Jew and as an Asian American - are in parallel spaces that do not seem to cross. But why should that be, when both antisemitic and anti-Asian hate and violence are on the rise? Why are Jews largely silent about the rise in anti-Asian hate? Why are Asian Americans largely silent about the rise in antisemitism?”

These reactions, emotions, and experiences shed light on the way that race plays out in Jewish spaces, which have historically [felt exclusionary for many Jews of Color](#), including Asian American Jews. Asian American Jewish leaders whom I talked to in early 2024 emphasized a continuing sense of isolation, and a dynamic whereby white Jews center themselves and participate in tokenizing, thinking that they are being supportive during times when Asian American Jews need them to take a back seat to their needs. Gen Xia Ye Slosberg, a co-founder of the [LUNAR Collective](#), emphasizes that white Jews, especially, can actively listen and learn as a first step toward building necessary trust. But it is not only in moments of darkness that these reciprocal relationships are necessary. Rabbi Mira Rivera [remarked](#) after the Atlanta spa shootings, “There are many Jews for whom Asian heritage is woven into our identities, so what should the Jewish community do? No. 1, be in relationship. Hopefully it is not only during tragedy. It’s terrible that we have to meet this way. For me, this is a call to action. Who are we in relationship with? Whom do we count as Jewish community? As someone who’s dedicated my life to the service of Jewish community, we want to contribute to Jewish community, not only when we have to talk about our pigmentation or about the size of our eyes, or about whether we stand with Black Lives Matter.”

What might allyship between Jewish Americans and Asian Americans look like, in a post-October 7 era and before a national election where Donald Trump may be elected as U.S. President? Certainly, we can look to the afore-mentioned examples and numerous others forged between these two groups for models based on shared histories and experiences, and organizational structures that support these relationships. And of course, coalitions, legislative and policy actions, and standing up in other ways against all forms of hate have always mattered and matter now.

On an organizational level, however, the possibilities for allyship around antisemitism and anti-Asian hate seem a bit unclear. Local and state relationships and coalitions are certainly important and matter for the individuals and communities within a particular

town, city, county, or state. However, what are the possibilities that exist for allyship at a much larger level, especially if we consider national umbrella organizations that represent Jewish Americans and Asian Americans? While not as longstanding as Jewish national organizations such as the Anti-Defamation League and the American Jewish Committee, a couple of relatively new national AAPI organizations pose some possibilities for allyship between Jewish Americans and Asian Americans toward stemming antisemitism and hate. Founded in 2020 during the pandemic, [Stop AAPI Hate](#), focuses on data and research, education, community capacity building, and policy and advocacy work regarding anti-Asian hate and violence. Similarly, [The Asian American Foundation](#), was founded in 2021, specifically in response to the rise in anti-Asian hate and violence during the COVID-19 pandemic. While fairly new, these national organizations partner with or could potentially partner with other national and local organizations, specifically around allyship surrounding antisemitism and anti-Asian hate.

Yet, what happens and will happen to such alliances or potential alliances when the ground arguably shifts so substantially with events such as the Hamas massacre of October 7, the ensuing conflict in Israel/Palestine, and mounting concerns with the state of American democracy in 2024? How does one hold onto a [diversity of opinions within these communities](#) and continue to work together toward a supposedly common goal like stemming antisemitism and anti-Asian hate? An [April 2024 New York Times article](#) details the internal organizational tensions that one of oldest U.S. civil rights organizations, the [Japanese American Citizens League](#) has faced post-October 7. While endorsed in the 1970s by the American Jewish Committee in its fight for reparations from incarceration during World War II, particularly during a time when other preeminent civil rights organizations were focused on other inequalities, internal divisions within JACL, primarily along generational lines, pertaining to the war in Gaza and pressure to denounce Israel and Jewish organizations who support Israel is putting a long-standing relationship between these two organizations to the test. It is not difficult to imagine that other local, state, and national Asian American organizations whose membership and staff straddle generational lines are currently or will soon experience similar tensions, internally and externally.

As the New York Times story on the impact of the war in Gaza on the JACL paints a very tense picture of conflicts within the organization, it also presents a hopeful picture. JACLs Executive Director, David Inoue acknowledges that the organizations membership is the most divided it has been in decades. And yet, he notes the willingness of members to engage in practices so central to a democracy: coming together to actively listen and try to understand the views and perspectives of those with whom one may vigorously disagree.

In my conversations with Jewish American and Asian American communal leaders, I posed the question, “What is allyship? How do you define allyship?” Everyone I talked to emphasized that allyship is fundamentally about friendship: seeing each other’s shared humanity, which assumes difference from the start. Coming together and committing to coming together to learn about our stories, our histories, our commonalities and our differences starts with fully seeing our shared humanity. As one individual I spoke to

emphasized, friendship is a form of “resistance” because the power structures that create and perpetuate antisemitism, anti-Asian hate and other forms of discrimination rely on separation and isolation.

In [her comments](#) after the 2021 Atlanta spa shootings, Rabbi Angela Buchdahl, a Korean American Jew and leader in the Reform Movement emphasized, “The greatest religious mandate of this holiday (Passover) is to remember, in every generation, what it feels like to be a stranger. And the force of that memory commands empathy and even love for the stranger, for we know the soul of a stranger.” Perhaps allyship, then, is about this essence, and can be interpreted to be fundamentally about [radical friendship](#) between and among all groups who experience discrimination and hate, no matter what the situation and period of time we are in. In a world where antisemitism, anti-Asian hate and other forms of discrimination chip away and rob us of our humanity, the mere act of coming together serves as the fundamental ingredient to friendship and allyship that empower resistance against these forces that tear us apart.