

Five Years After the Atlanta Spa Shootings, Historian Scott Kurashige Says the Story Is Still Being Misframed

American Peril author reflects on how anti-Asian violence was depoliticized after the 2021 attacks—and why the U.S. still hasn't reckoned with what happened.

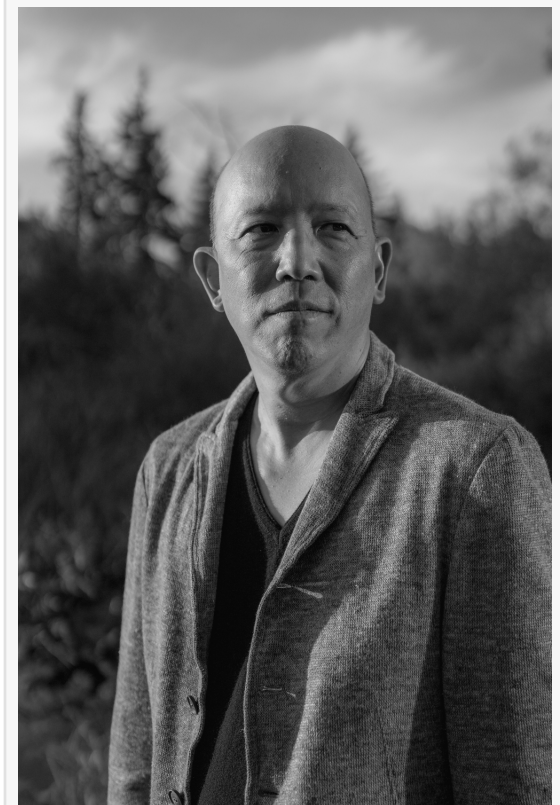
ATLANTA, GA, UNITED STATES, March 12, 2026 /EINPresswire.com/ -- When Scott Kurashige heard breaking news of mass shootings at Atlanta-area spas on March 16, 2021, he knew there was more to the story than first reports suggested. The names of the businesses sounded like Asian-owned establishments. Soon after came confirmation that six of the eight people murdered were Asian women. Yet despite these facts, the sheriff's spokesman quickly and cavalierly stated that the shootings were [“not racially motivated.”](#)

Five years later, Kurashige argues that framing remains part of the problem.

“Five years after the Atlanta spa shootings, we still haven't fully reckoned with what happened—or with what it revealed about how anti-Asian racism functions in the United States,” said Kurashige. “The rush to declare the murders ‘not racially motivated’ wasn't just a mistake; it was part of a long-standing pattern of erasure. When violence against Asians is stripped from historical and political context, we fail to see how systems of power and oppression made that violence possible in the first place.”

For Kurashige, the mass murders served as a national wake-up call, though in disparate fashion.

“It is telling to examine why the spa shootings served as national wake-up call. For much of the country, the event seemed unprecedented—a signal that anti-Asian xenophobia had reached new and deadly heights. But for millions of Asian Americans, it was an opening to speak out—to



Scott Kurashige, director of James and Grace Lee Boggs Foundation and author of *American Peril*

the public and to each other—about the racism and violence that have been central to the lives of our ancestors and ourselves.”

In [American Peril: The Violent History of Anti-Asian Racism](#), Kurashige situates the Atlanta shootings within a much longer history—one that the sheriff’s office and much of the initial media coverage failed to confront. He directs readers to several critical realities that were overlooked in the immediate aftermath:

- The shooter, Robert Aaron Long, cast the massage parlors and the women who worked there as sources of sin that corrupted him—temptations that needed to be eliminated. These beliefs emerged from a “purity culture” deeply entangled with Christian nationalist ideology, one that centers the dominance of white, heterosexual American men.
- For more than a century, American elites have systematically erased or minimized war crimes and racial violence against Asians. When such acts are too blatant to ignore, they are repeatedly framed as “not racially motivated.”
- Dating back to the era of Chinese exclusion, Asian women have been stigmatized through discriminatory laws and sexualized stereotypes, rendering them especially vulnerable in U.S. workplaces and subject to violence—particularly in contexts shaped by U.S. military presence in Asia and its aftermath.

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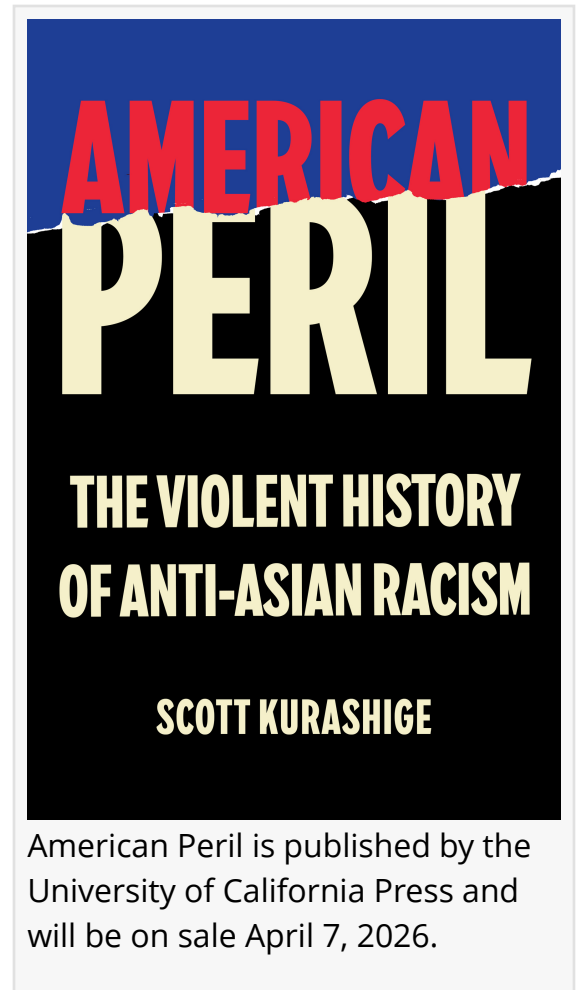
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Scott Kurashige

Taken together, these patterns reveal how violence against Asian women has been normalized, obscured, and depoliticized across generations. In tracing this history of abuse and erasure, Kurashige also documents how Asian communities have broken the silence—naming these harms and organizing to resist racism, sexism, and imperial power.

Crucially, Kurashige insists that Atlanta must also be understood within the present political moment.

“The Atlanta shootings didn’t happen in isolation,” he said. “They unfolded amid rising nationalist rhetoric, anti-immigrant violence, misogyny, and resurgent ideologies that police gender, sexuality, and belonging in the name of moral purity. If we situate Atlanta within the broader



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landscape of social justice struggles—against racism, patriarchy, and authoritarian politics—we can see it not as an aberration, but as a warning about where unchecked systems of dehumanization lead.”

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