



**Solidarity Stories from Asian American and Pacific Islander
Community Leaders, Asian American Leaders Table**

Curtis Muhammad, Civil Rights Movement Veteran

Introduction

“If Asians would cast their lot with Black folks, there would be revolution.”

[Curtis Muhammad](#) is a life-long freedom fighter who has been organizing for the liberation of Black people since he started out in the [Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee](#) (SNCC) in 1961. As a leading force in the Civil Rights Movement, the young people of SNCC put their lives on the line through sit-ins, marches, and freedom rides, and they also supported their community by teaching literacy classes, helping people register to vote, and more. This movement led to the end of the Jim Crow Era and the passage of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, which directly paved the way for the Immigration and Nationality Act of 1965. In other words – without the sacrifice and leadership of the Black community, many Asian Americans would not be here today.

After his time with SNCC, Mr. Muhammad fought for the independence of Liberia, organized in the U.S. Labor Movement, co-founded the Quality Education as a Civil Right Campaign, led the People’s Hurricane Relief Fund after Katrina, and established the International School for Bottom Up Organizing. Today, Mr. Muhammad supports [House The Unhoused: Next Wave of Civil Rights](#) in New Orleans, Louisiana.

He has long believed that if people of color unite forces, there would be a worldwide movement that would guarantee the human rights of quality housing, education, health care, food, clothing, communication, transportation, and environment.

Takeaways

1. Bottom-up organizing is key to racial justice for all communities.

When he first got involved with SNCC, one of Mr. Muhammad's mentors, [Ella Baker](#), told organizers to go ask the people what they wanted them to work on. By "the people," Baker meant those most affected by systems of oppression. In the civil rights movement, "the people" were low-income Black folks in the rural South, and they prioritized actions that would secure their voting rights.

Today, as Asian Americans work to address rising anti-Asian hate, racism and white supremacy, we must center the needs of the people – low-income folks, undocumented folks, queer folks, women, elders. Their grounded expertise must guide our solutions. Our racial justice work must also be in solidarity with Black folks, who have been relegated to the "bottom" of a violent and baseless racial hierarchy.

2. Building unity requires real, long-term relationships.

We show our solidarity with other communities by issuing educational statements, attending rallies and marches, speaking out on social and mainstream media, and donating money to organizations. These actions often occur in the immediate aftermath of a crisis or tragedy, and they are important ways to express support and alignment with other communities.

Mr. Muhammad highlights that while these individual acts of solidarity are critical, building long-term unity requires consistent, deep solidarity with other communities. From his perspective, unity occurs when different communities build real relationships, trust and love for one another. Unity requires people coming together often on a regular basis and developing shared vision, goals, and agreements for working together.

3. The moment is now.

Mr. Muhammad's message to us as Asian Americans seeking solidarity is: If we engage the most marginalized members of our communities in unity building at the community level, we can change the world right now. The time for Asian and Black folks to build unity is now. While Mr. Muhammad is not a believer in electoral politics, he lifts up the 2020 elections as an example of the power of collective action and multiracial organizing.

Your Turn

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How can we address anti-Blackness in the Asian American community through multilingual, multi-generational and sustaining practices? What examples exist to guide this work?

In thinking about colorism and privilege, what does it mean for Asians to “cast our lot” with Black folks?

How do we as Asian Americans go beyond solidarity and achieve real unity with the Black community?

In addition to bringing together “leaders” from our communities, how do we bring Asian American community members together with Black community members on a consistent basis for relationship and community building?
