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U.S. Political Prisoners Special Report: We Have Hundreds of Political Prisoners, Thousands of Asian-American Hate Victims, Half Million Child Farm Labors!

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8/9: The United States has many political prisoners. Here's a list

The US government holds many political prisoners, including journalists; national security state whistleblowers; Black, Indigenous, and Latino revolutionaries; foreign diplomats; Muslims detained without trial; women who defended themselves from attacks; and environmental activists.

Stansfield Smith – Multi Polarista

The United States constantly accuses its adversaries of holding political prisoners, while insisting it has none of its own. But for its entire history, the US government has used incarceration of its political opponents as a tool to crush dissent and advance the interests of economic elites.

Well-known cases are those entrapped or framed in US national security state sting operations, or imprisoned with extreme sentences for a minor offense because of their political activism, such as Black revolutionary George Jackson.

Each period of struggle by the working class and oppressed peoples against ruling-class control results in some activists locked up for their revolutionary work. "Political prisoner" has often meant those revolutionaries jailed for fighting their national oppression, as is the case with a great number of Black Panthers.

In contrast, a century ago, most political prisoners in the United States were Marxists, labor organizers, and anti-war activists, such as Joe Hill, Eugene Debs, and Big Bill Haywood.

Today, the US national security state considers its most dangerous enemies those who expose its crimes at home and abroad.

There are also many thousands of incarcerated people who never received a fair trial, or were innocent of the crimes they have been jailed for. A high percentage of them are non-white, peoples subject to second-class citizenship in the US. A number are executed, such as Troy Davis, or spend their whole lives in prison.

While the United States represents just over 4% of the world's population, it holds approximately 20% of its prisoners. Black North Americans are imprisoned five times the rate of whites.

The following list of political prisoners currently detained by the US government categorizes them into seven groups:

1. national security state employees and reporters locked up for publicizing blatant government criminality
2. representatives of foreign governments that Washington seeks to overthrow who were imprisoned for "violating" illegal unilateral US sanctions
3. Black, Native American, and Latino revolutionaries fighting for the rights of their peoples
4. Arabs and Muslims targeted after 9/11
5. prisoners detained in the Guantánamo torture center without charges
6. women locked up for defending themselves against violent attacks
7. environmental activists

1. Journalists and national security state employees exposing illegal US surveillance operations and war crimes

A number of whistleblowers in the United States have previously been imprisoned or are wanted. These have included:

- US Army intelligence analyst Chelsea Manning
- NSA contractor Edward Snowden
- Air Force intelligence specialist Reality Winner
- CIA analyst John Kiriakou
- hacktivist Jeremy Hammond
- CIA officer Jeffrey Sterling
- NSA executive Thomas Drake
- hacktivist Aaron Swartz
- Air National Guard intelligence analyst Matt DeHart
- journalist Barrett Brown
- FBI agent Terry Albury

Among those imprisoned today are the following:

Julian Assange is a renowned journalist and editor of WikiLeaks who was arrested in 2019 in the Ecuadorian embassy in London, where he had political asylum since 2012. In April 2022, a British judge ordered Assange extradited to the US to face up to 175 years in prison for publishing truthful information about the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. The US has indicted Assange under the Espionage Act, even though he published the same information as did the New York Times and Washington Post.

Researcher Mark Weisbrot explained in 2017, "Julian Assange is a political prisoner. ... His crime, and that of WikiLeaks, has been the practice of journalism, and particularly in defense of human rights and civil liberties. ... Assange and WikiLeaks' real offense was to expose the crimes of the most powerful people in the world."

Extraditing Assange, a journalist and Australian citizen, to the United States would have even more negative repercussions for our present remnants of free press and democratic rights. No case better embodies the old IWW banner for "class war prisoners": "Remember! We're in here for you, you're out there for us." Roger Waters and Noam Chomsky have also spoken about the importance of the Assange case.

Daniel Hale has been imprisoned since 2019. He was sentenced to 45 months for releasing documents showing US military drone strikes in Afghanistan largely killed innocent people. Hale participated in the drone program while in the Air Force and NSA from 2009 to 2013, and later became an outspoken critic and a defender of whistle blowers.

Hale is believed to have been the source material for The Drone Papers. The documentary National Bird documents whistleblowers in the US drone assassination program. For his truth-telling, Hale received the Sam Adams Award for Integrity in Intelligence and the Blueprint for Free Speech International Whistleblowing Prize. Chris Hedges has written about his case.

Joshua Schulte, a former hacker employed by the CIA, was blamed for releasing two billion pages of secret CIA data, known as Vault 7, to WikiLeaks. Vault 7 programs were CIA techniques used to compromise Wifi networks, hack into Skype, defeat anti-virus software, hack Apple and Android smartphones in overseas spying operations, turn internet-connected televisions into listening devices, and commandeer the guidance systems in cars.

Schulte has been imprisoned since 2018 and faces up to 80 years, in brutal conditions similar to those endured by Assange today.

Ana Belén Montes was a Defense Intelligence Agency (DIA) analyst who alerted Cuba of US plans of aggression. She was arrested in 2001, pleaded guilty to conspiracy to commit espionage, and was held in solitary confinement in Fort Worth, Texas for most of her 21 years behind bars.

Montes told the judge, “I consider that the policy of our government towards Cuba is cruel and unjust, deeply unfriendly; I considered myself morally obligated to help the Island defend itself from our efforts to impose our values and our political system on it. We have displayed intolerance and contempt for Cuba for four decades. We have never respected Cuba’s right to define its own destiny, its own ideals of equality and justice. I do not understand how we continue to try to dictate. ... how Cuba should select its leaders, who its leaders should not be and what laws are the most appropriate for that nation. Why don’t we let them decide how they want to conduct their internal affairs.”

2. Foreigners imprisoned for ‘violating’ illegal US sanctions on their countries

Mun Chol Myong is a North Korean who was extradited and imprisoned in the United States on March 20, 2021. Mun was arrested in Malaysia in May 2019 after a Washington, DC judge issued a warrant for his arrest. His supposed “crime” of conspiracy and money laundering in fact consisted of supplying needed goods to the DPRK by circumventing US sanctions on the country.

A top Justice Department official claimed foreigners who have never been in the US can be extradited to it for violating domestic laws. The US has enforced a blockade against North Korea since 1950, the start of the US war on Korea, designed to cripple its economic and social development.

Alex Saab, a Venezuelan diplomat, was jailed on June 12, 2020 in Cabo Verde on orders of the United States. He was then seized by US agents and brought to a Miami prison on October 16, 2021.

Saab was arrested while on a diplomatic mission to procure food and energy supplies to alleviate the humanitarian crisis in Venezuela, which was largely caused by the illegal US blockade of the nation.

As a diplomat, Saab has immunity from detention based on the UN Vienna Convention of 1961. The UN Human Rights Commission and other international human rights defenders have denounced his extradition. The National Lawyers Guild calls for Saab’s immediate release.

Simón Trinidad (Ricardo Palmera) was a long-time leader in mass movements for social change in Colombia, and is a top negotiator for the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC). In 2003, he was sent to Ecuador to make contact with UN official James Lemoyne, as part of efforts to revive peace talks with the Colombian government, and begin communication on the exchange of prisoners of war.

He was captured in Ecuador in 2004 and then extradited to the US on charges of narco-trafficking and kidnapping, and subjected to four separate trials, due to repeated mistrials. Ultimately, he was sentenced to 60 years at the Florence “Supermax” prison in Colorado.

Meng Wanzhou, the chief financial officer and deputy chair of the board of Chinese tech giant Huawei, was imprisoned in Canada in 2018 on a US extradition request, after Washington accused her company of misleading British bank HSBC over its business dealings in Iran, thereby violating its illegal unilateral sanctions. Meng was released in September 2021.

3. Fighters for their people’s national oppression against second-class citizenship

Many Black political prisoners in the United States were targets of the police state’s Counter Intelligence Program (COINTELPRO) in the 1960s and ’70s, when the FBI sought to destroy the movement for Black freedom.

As journalist Glen Ford explained, “If you attempt to lead Black people on an independent political path, the US state will seek to neutralize you, imprison you, or kill you. If you exercise your right to defend yourself, and your people, from the oppressive arm of the state, they make you into an outlaw, and hunt you down.”

The FBI said its goals in COINTELPRO were to “expose, disrupt, misdirect, discredit, or otherwise neutralize,” adding that “no opportunity must be missed to exploit through counterintelligence techniques ... for maximum effectiveness ... and a final goal should be to prevent the long range growth of militant black organizations, especially among youth.”

This police state operation against Black liberation resulted in at least 38 Black Panther Party members being killed, including Fred Hampton and Mark Clark, with hundreds more imprisoned on frame-up charges for their armed self-defense actions, several for more than 45 years.

The website Members of the Black Panther Party Still Imprisoned registered the number incarcerated in 2014, although several have died since then. The films "The FBI's War on Black America" and "Cointelpro 101" document the police state's dirty work.

Those currently imprisoned include:

Mumia Abu-Jamal is the most prominent former Black Panther political prisoner. In 1981, COINTELPRO style, he was sentenced to death for the murder of a Philadelphia cop. Judge Albert Sabo, who ruled in his case and in his appeals, was heard by a court reporter to state "I'm going to help them fry the ni**er." Black jurors were excluded. Witnesses were bribed and threatened to lie on the stand. Documents were hidden in the state prosecutor's office.

Mumia was an organizer and campaigner against police abuses in the Black community, and was the president of the Association of Black Journalists. During his imprisonment, now commuted to life, he has published several books. More information can be found in the films "Mumia Abu Jamal: A Case For Reasonable Doubt?" and "Mumia: Long Distance Revolutionary" or the websites freemumia.com and bringmumiahome.com.

Leonard Peltier was an activist in the American Indian Movement (AIM) whose goal was to organize indigenous communities to stand up for their rights. Sentenced to life as a result of a COINTELPRO operation, he has been imprisoned for 46 years for killing two FBI agents. Peltier participated in the AIM encampments on the Pine Ridge Reservation, where a 1975 shootout instigated by the FBI occurred.

Some 64 Native Americans, most with ties to AIM, were murdered. Their deaths went uninvestigated by the FBI. Evidence exonerating Peltier in the FBI case was withheld by the FBI. In his appeals, the government admitted it had no evidence he killed the two FBI agents, suppressed evidence proving this, and fabricated other "evidence."

The other AIM members tried for the killings were exonerated in trial by reason of self-defense. One prosecutor admitted, "Your honor, we do not know who killed those agents. Further, we don't know what participation, if any, Mr. Peltier had in it."

Amnesty International, Nelson Mandela, Desmond Tutu, the American Association of Jurists, and 54 Congresspeople, among many others, have called for his freedom. The film "Incident at Ogala," produced by Robert Redford, and the best-selling book "In the Spirit of Crazy Horse: The Story of Leonard Peltier and the FBI's War on the American Indian Movement" made the case widely known. More information can be found at the websites whoisleonardpeltier.info and Peltier's Prison Writings.

Mutulu Shakur, of the Republic of New Afrika movement, participated in presentations to the UN on discrimination experienced by Black communities, and by 1970 a target of the FBI's COINTELPRO infiltration. He helped free Assata Shakur from prison in 1979, and she now has a bounty on her head.

In 1988 he was convicted of conspiracy related to a 1981 robbery where a guard and two police officers were killed, and sentenced to 60 years. At no time did the evidence show that Mutulu Shakur killed anyone.

He was also convicted for aiding in the prison escape of Assata Shakur, who has asylum in Cuba.

At two trials the evidence indicated others were responsible for the deaths (one became a government witness in return for a sentencing deal). The remaining defendants were acquitted for the murder allegations. More information can be found at mutulushakur.com and the Jericho Movement.

Jamil Abdullah al-Amin (H. Rap Brown) was chairman of Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) and a Black Panther leader. FBI boss J. Edgar Hoover himself named H. Rap Brown – along with Stokely Carmichael, Elijah Muhammad, and Maxwell Stanford – as targets of COINTELPRO.

In a October 1971 standoff with police, he was shot and seized, and spent five years in Attica prison. From 1992 to 1997, the FBI closely surveilled Al-Amin, generating pages of 44,000 documents. In 2000, two sheriffs came to Al-Amin's store with a warrant for failure to appear in court for a case later thrown out. Both were shot and one killed. Al-Amin was sentenced to life without parole, even though Otis Jackson confessed to the shootings. More information is available at whathappened2rap.com.

Veronza Bowers was an organizer in the Black Panther Party in the late 1960s. He has been imprisoned for 49 years for the murder of a US park ranger, on the word of two government informers. There were no eye witnesses and no other independent evidence. See more at veronza.org and prisonersolidarity.com.

Ed Poindexter and Mondo we Langa (who died in prison in 2016) were leaders of the Black Panthers in Omaha, Nebraska in the 1960s, and targets of COINTELPRO. Both men were given life sentences on charges of killing a policeman. They were

convicted on the testimony of a teenager who was beaten by the police and threatened with the electric chair if he did not incriminate Poindexter and Mondo.

Amnesty International has identified them as “prisoners of conscience.” Poindexter has been imprisoned for 52 years. The book “FRAMED: J. Edgar Hoover, Cointelpro and the Omaha Two story” and the documentary “Ed Poindexter & Mondo We Langa” offer more information.

Kamau Sadiki (Freddie Hilton), was a member of the Black Panther Party and Black Liberation Army, and close to Assata Shakur. He has been imprisoned since 2002, for a 1971 murder of a police officer. Back in 1971, two witnesses failed to identify Kamau from a line-up, and there was no physical evidence that implicated Sadiki, so the case was closed.

In 2002 Kamau was re-arrested and sentenced to life imprisonment for the killing – only after he refused to work with the government to induce Assata Shakur to leave Cuba for another country, where they could seize her. See more at freekamau.com.

Joy Powell organized protests against police brutality and corruption, demanding accountability for its victims, which led her to be targeted by the Rochester Police Department. In 2006, Powell was convicted by an all-white jury and sentenced to 16 years for burglary and assault. No evidence or eyewitnesses linked her to the crime. Then in 2007, while imprisoned, Powell was falsely charged with murder, a cold case from 1992, and given another 25-year sentence, to begin upon the completion of her 16-year sentence. See freejoypowell.org, and the article “America is Still Locking People Up for Their Activism, Including Black Women.”

Alvaro Luna Hernandez (Xinachtli) is a Texas activist for Chicano rights and against police brutality. He was continually targeted by the police, who in 1996 attempted to arrest him on a spurious robbery charge that was later dismissed. The police used violence to arrest him, and Hernandez was sentenced to 50 years in prison on trumped up charges of threatening a sheriff while resisting arrest. More information can be found at freealvaro.net and prisonersolidarity.com.

Other political prisoners include Ruchell Cinque Magee, Fred “Muhammad” Burton, Ronald Reed, Kenny Zulu Whitmore.

More information is available at the Prison Activist Resource Center, Jericho Movement, freedomarchives.org, spiritofmandela.org, and prisonersolidarity.com.

4. Arab and Muslim targeted in Police State attacks on their Communities

The Coalition for Civil Freedoms published a report in 2021 titled *The Terror Trap: The Impact of the War on Terror on Muslim Communities*. It explains: more than half of all alleged terrorism cases involved the use of paid informants who were usually responsible for concocting the plots in collusion with the FBI. Sensationalistic media coverage of the most high-profile cases almost never made mention of the fact that these terrorist conspiracies were the work of FBI informants.

the FBI has built a network of more than 15,000 registered informants whose primary purpose is to infiltrate Muslim communities to create and facilitate phony terrorist plots so that the bureau can then claim it is winning the War on Terror ... the FBI engaged in a witch hunt, convicting hundreds of Muslims on pretext terrorism charges, even though the government knew that the defendants were not in communication with international terrorists, had not injured a single person or piece of property, and had no means to carry out a terrorist attack even if they wanted to.

For the government to tell the truth about the convictions would have undercut their own prosecutions, and exposed hundreds of Muslim convictions for the sham they were. No matter how innocent the government knew the defendants to be, it apparently decided that they had to publicly treat the defendants as the worst of the worst, or lose the fear factor which they had used so effectively to enact harsher laws.

The Newburgh Four, Libertyville Seven, and Romeo Langhorne are examples of this FBI entrapment.

Here are more current political prisoners:

Holy Land 5: Shukri Abu-Baker and Ghassan Elashi of the Holy Land Foundation were each sentenced in 2008 to 65 years in prison. Three others were sentenced to 13-20 years: Mufid Abdulqader, Mohammad El-Mezain (released and deported to Turkey in 2022) and Abdulrahman Odeh (released in 2020). All were imprisoned for giving more than \$12 million to charitable groups in Palestine which funded hospitals and schools and fed the poor and orphans.

The US government said these groups were controlled by Hamas, which it lists as a terrorist organization, even though it is the elected government of Gaza. Some of these charitable groups still received US funds through USAID as late as 2006.

Testimony was given in the case by an Israeli government agent whose identity and evidence was kept secret from the defense. This marked the first time in US legal history that testimony has been allowed from an expert witness with no identity, therefore making them immune from perjury. The book "Injustice: The Story of the Holy Land Foundation Five" details the case.

Aafia Siddiqui is a US-educated Pakistani neuroscientist who came to the US in 1990, then returned to Pakistan with her family in 2002. In 2003 she was kidnapped by US and Pakistani agents and held in Bagram Air Base through 2008. She was convicted of attempted murder of her US interrogators in Afghanistan in 2008 – though she was the person shot – and sentenced to 86 years in prison in Fort Worth, Texas. The weapon she allegedly fired in the interrogation room did not have her fingerprints, nor was there evidence the gun was fired.

Four British Parliamentarians wrote to President Barack Obama that "there was an utter lack of concrete evidence tying Dr Siddiqui to the weapon she allegedly fired at a US officer," and that she should be freed immediately. Former Attorney General Ramsey Clark described Aafia's plight as the "worst case of individual injustice I have ever witnessed." More information is available at aafia.org and aafiainovement.com.

5. Arab/Muslim Prisoners Tortured and Locked up without Trial at Guantanamo

Since 2002, a total of 779 Muslim men and boys as young as 10 have been seized and held at Guantánamo, a military base in Cuban territory that is illegally occupied by the United States.

Washington claimed the prisoners are outside US and international law, and thus do not have the rights of POWs. Nearly all of the prisoners were held without charge or trial. Many were tortured to produce a compliant "learned helplessness" – the goal of former US slave-breaking.

Some detainees were even tortured to death. In 2003, 23 prisoners attempted suicide in a mass protest against their abuse.

The torture was directed by two psychologists, James E Mitchell and Bruce Jessen.

By any definition of political prisoner, most political prisoners in Cuba are at the US military-torture center at Guantanamo.

Today there are still 36 prisoners, only 11 of whom have been charged with war crimes, while just two have been convicted – and by "military commissions," which Amnesty International declared do not meet fair trial standards.

Another 20 have been approved for release but remain locked up. Five detainees are "forever prisoners," held without charge or trial, but not to be released. The websites closeguantanamo.org and witnessagainstitorture.com and films *The Report* and *The Mauritanian* provide more information.

6. Women fighting patriarchal sexist violence

Nearly three in 10 women in the United States have endured male physical violence or stalking by a partner. Nearly one in five women are raped in their lifetime. Almost four women are killed a day by a male partner.

Half of all women murdered are killed by men they know intimately, yet hundreds of women are in prison for killing their abuser in self-defense.

The US legal system treats these as individual cases, not for what it is: the systematic patriarchal violence against women as an oppressed group.

The website *Survived and Punished* and *Defend Survivors* provide more information about this problem.

Marissa Alexander, a Black woman from Florida, was sentenced to 20 years in 2013 for firing a warning shot inside her home to ward off her brutal husband, against whom she had an order of protection. Her affirmation that Florida's "Stand Your Ground" law applied to her because she was defending herself was rejected. The same year, George Zimmerman was found not guilty of murdering Trayvon Martin based on that same law. National protests finally freed her in 2017.

Fran Thompson was an environmental activist in Nebraska. She has been in jail for 30 years for murder, sentenced to life without parole. She had defended herself, killing a man who was threatening to sexually assault her after he broke into her home. She was also targeted because of her environmental work, and was not allowed to plea self-defense.

Thompson had taken on the prosecutor and local government during her activism, having organized against two big projects, an egg factory and a nuclear waste facility, which would have brought the county big profits.

Maddesyn George has been imprisoned since July 2020. She was given a 6.5-year sentence for defending herself from sexual assault by a white man. She is a member of the Colville Confederated Tribes.

Indigenous women experience murder rates 10 times higher than the national average. The majority of these murders are committed by non-Native people on Native-owned land. See: MMIW USA and Coalition to Stop Violence against Native Women.

7. Environmental “Green Scare” protestors

A number of environmental activists, animal rights supporters, and water protectors have challenged corporate abuses and have been jailed.

During the original so-called Green Scare, in the 1990s to early 2000s, the US government sought to squash animal rights and environmental activism, acting in the interest of corporations that profit from damaging the earth.

A more recent series of jailings have specifically targeted people protesting against pipeline construction.

The following are political prisoners:

Joseph Mahmoud Dibee, a member of Earth Liberation Front and Animal Liberation Front was arrested in 2018 for his participation in setting fire to a slaughterhouse. Between 1995 and 2001, a group of Earth Liberation Front and Animal Liberation Front supporters caused more than \$45 million in damages in a series of arsons. Dibee is imprisoned awaiting sentencing.

Marius Mason (formerly Marie Mason), a member of the Earth Liberation Front, was arrested in 2008 for an attack on a lab building at Michigan State University that was creating genetically modified organisms, with funding from mega-corporation Monsanto, the producer of Agent Orange.

Mason was also sentenced for damage to commercial logging equipment. No one was harmed by these actions. Mason’s 22 year-sentence is the longest yet for any of the Green Scare cases of those committing crimes against property of corporations.

Jessica Reznicek, of the Catholic Workers Movement, took action in 2016 to stop the environmentally destructive Dakota Access Pipeline by dismantling construction equipment and pipeline valves and setting fire to construction machinery. She would have been handed three years, but was sentenced to eight, with the added sentence for terrorism, even though no person was physically harmed.

Reznicek’s actions against private property were “calculated to influence or affect the conduct of government,” meaning a person who takes direct action against an energy company can be treated as an enemy of the state. Reznicek explained, “What we did do was fight a private corporation that has run rampant across our country seizing land and polluting our nation’s water supply.”

The United States government has political prisoners

This list belies the myth that the United States has no political prisoners.

Political prisoners have no shared ideology. Standing for justice does not necessarily mean that one defends their political views; it means that one demands their freedom because they have been unjustly incarcerated.

Many hundreds of thousands of people have been unjustly incarcerated in the United States, but in these cases, it is clear that they were detained because of their political beliefs and activism, and that by definition makes them political prisoners.

6/25: "Stop Asian Hate" -- Asian Americans urge ending racial bigotry, violence

Sun Ding - Xinhua

WASHINGTON -- Asian Americans from across the United States came to Washington, D.C. on Saturday to call for an end to racial hatred and violence that has increased significantly amidst the COVID-19 pandemic.

Under a burning sun in early summer, demonstrators gathered at the eastern end of the National Mall, with many of them holding self-made banners reading "Stop Asian Hate," "Asian and Proud" and "Love us like you love our food," for what organizers described as a "Unity March."

"We're here to ensure that our voices are heard as we try to make sure that there's racial equity and safety for our community, as well as all communities here in the United States," Christine Chen, executive director of Asian Pacific Islander American Vote, told Xinhua.

The rally came as the United States has largely moved on from COVID-19 though it continues to sicken nearly 100,000 individuals and take hundreds of lives in the nation on a daily basis. Meanwhile, hate against Asians in the country remains out there and poses a threat to their safety and well-being.

"As we know in the last few years there've been escalations in terms of attacks, not only on Asian Americans, but also on Blacks, Latinos, and other marginalized communities," Chen said.

Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders (AAPI) have reported nearly 11,000 hate incidents against them between March 2020 and December 2021, according to a report published earlier this year by Stop AAPI Hate.

Data from the nonprofit group tracking self-reported hate and discrimination against AAPI communities across the United States also found that verbal harassment made up the majority of those incidents. Physical assaults were the second-most reported, followed closely by deliberate avoidance of AAPI.

Jean Park, a high school student from Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, told Xinhua there was "a rise in Asian hate" even within her school after the pandemic broke out.

Some U.S. politicians and media outlets fabricated and spread conspiracy theories about COVID-19 to deflect the responsibility for a botched response to the public health crisis, fanning flames of racism and xenophobia in the nation with Asian Americans falling victim to their lies and rhetoric.

"There've been a lot of microaggressions and a lot of people think that because of the coronavirus, they can start blaming Asian Americans," said Park, who started a "Stop Asian Hate" walk in response to those racially-charged behaviors.

In remarks from the Rose Garden of the White House last month, U.S. Vice President Kamala Harris noted that "we have had people in positions of incredible power in our country scapegoating, people with the biggest pulpits spreading this kind of hate."

"Racism is real in America. It has always been," Harris, an African and South Asian American, acknowledged. "Xenophobia is real in America. It has always been."

At the National Mall rally on Saturday, Anthony Lee, an artist from Detroit, Michigan, was holding up his latest painting for the 40th anniversary of the murder of Vincent Chin, a Chinese American killed in a racially motivated hate crime by two white autoworkers in 1982.

Chin was mistaken as a Japanese at a time when local politicians, union leaders and auto executives blamed Japan for the decline of the U.S. auto industry.

Lee said he had been concerned throughout the COVID-19 pandemic that similar things would happen somewhere in the country because of political stunts and scapegoating of Asians, a phenomenon that has repeated itself in times of economic downturns, wars and diseases.

"It's too convenient" for people to blame others for the problem, he said, adding, "We have to be better than that."

Third year into the pandemic, there are still 21 percent U.S. adults saying Asian Americans are at least partly responsible for COVID-19 -- up from 11 percent in 2021, according to a joint study by Leading Asian Americans to Unite for Change and The Asian American Foundation.

The study also revealed that only 29 percent Asian American respondents said they "completely agree" that they feel they belong and are accepted in the United States, the lowest of all racial groups. Meanwhile, 71 percent say they are discriminated against in the nation.

"Asian American communities have been disproportionately plagued by widespread violence, racism, and xenophobia that runs rampant across American society," Tiffany Chang, a Unity March spokesperson, said in a statement. "It's time for our nation's leaders to stop offering band-aid solutions to longstanding systemic issues."

7/1: Cheaper than machines, working 70 hours under exploitive laws – life of 500,000 US child farmworkers

Cao Siqi, Liu Caiyu and Xu Yelu – Global Times

Long working hours, malnutrition, beatings. Most people may remember the horrors described in Oliver Twist, Charles Dickens' classic novel, which exposed the abuse of children in factories and farms in 19th century London. In today's world where most children live in safety, receive education and enjoy a carefree childhood, many assume that the atrocities of child labor had long been expunged from the planet. Few would expect there are still half a million children working on US farmlands.

Notably, it is not just a problem in "poor countries." A report from the World Vision International in 2021 shows that about 93 million child laborers, or 58 percent of those in child labor, live in middle-income countries, and 1.6 million child laborers live in high-income countries.

Among these high-income countries, the US, a country promoting itself as a beacon of human rights, has been criticized not only by the International Labor Organization but also by domestic child rights protection groups for standing alone in its unwillingness to ratify the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child.

Many Americans might have never heard of the Convention and also might not know that their food may have been picked by one of the approximately 500,000 child farmworkers in today's US.

And the startling statistic continues.

In the past five years, as many as 100,000 people have been trafficked into the US and exploited as forced labor, with half of them being literally sold to "sweatshops" or domestic servitude. Among the exploited there are half a million child laborers, many under the age of 10 and working up to 72 hours a week. About 240,000 to 325,000 women and children in the US are sexually enslaved, and children survive an average of just seven years after being trafficked.

Chinese experts noted that behind these statistics are veritable human tragedies, broken families, and real people whose basic rights have been violated. The so-called beacon of human rights does not shine light on its dark history, and its human rights toolkit has never been aimed at its own social plights.

The US needs to face up to its own serious child labor issues and respond to the international community's concerns sooner rather than later. Otherwise, the country will only exacerbate the human rights tragedy of child labor around the world.

Modern-day Oliver Twist

Every year on weekends and summer vacations, thousands of children get up at the break of the dawn in buses. Their destinations are not a summer camp or school, but a place of work. They arrive at the farm at 6 am, and leave at 8 pm, working 10-12 hours a day. They are child laborers at US tobacco farms.

Like the slave trade and racial discrimination issues, child labor in the US dates back to more than a century ago, when child laborers were hired and exploited to work down mine shafts, on tobacco farms and in textile factories. The issue remains unresolved today.

Child labor was abolished in the US in 1938, when Congress enacted the Fair Labor Standards Act, which restricted most child labor below age 16 and limited hazardous work to individuals over 18. However, these regulations do not apply to agricultural labor because of outdated exemptions based upon an agrarian society largely left to the past.

As a result, the horrors of child labor are still a reality in some agricultural contexts. Showing no difference with impoverished countries around the world, children in the US are permitted, even compelled, to do hazardous, back-breaking work to support themselves and their families. This work exposes them to chemicals that will impact their health throughout their lifetime and an environment that will limit their opportunities, creating a vicious cycle of poverty and exploitation.

Estimates based on figures gathered by the US Department of Labor and published by the Association of Farmworker Opportunity Programs (AFOP), an advocate for rights of migrant and seasonal farmworkers in the US since 1971, suggest that there are approximately 500,000 child farmworkers present in the US.

Many of these children start working as young as 8, and go through grueling 72-hour work weeks (more than 10 hours per day), the association said.

In October 2021, faced with a labor shortage, the US Wisconsin Senate proposed a bill to lengthen the allowed workday for teens under age 16, which reads like a sequel to *Oliver Twist*.

Senate Bill 332 would allow employees aged 14 or 15 to work until 9:30 pm before a school day and until 11 pm when they don't have school the next day, according to media reports.

Farms are the most dangerous places to work in the US for children. A report by the federal Government Accountability Office released in November 2018 presented alarming findings. Researchers found that between 2003 and 2016, 237 children died while working on farms in the US. This happens despite the fact that farms employ less than 6 percent of child workers, highlighting the devastating consequences of weak laws and regulations that don't properly protect child farmworkers.

The AFOP also pointed out agriculture is the US' most dangerous occupation for farmworker youth, while pesticides increase the risk of developmental disorders in farmworker children.

"Children are at greater health risk from pesticide exposure than adults. Pesticides have been linked to numerous health problems, including asthma, dermatitis, learning disabilities, leukemia, brain tumors and certain childhood cancers. Several factors contribute to this vulnerability. We may think of children as 'little adults,' but in fact, their bodies are not fully prepared to handle toxic chemicals," according to the AFOP.

Zhu Ying, a professor of human rights law at Southwest University of Political Science and Law, pointed out that among the industries, of particular concern is the prevalence of child labor in the tobacco industry.

"Tobacco is a labor-intensive industry, which requires numerous workforces. As the cost of using modern machinery in the tobacco industry is much higher than manpower, in order to reduce costs, the use of child labor has become a tradition," Zhu said.

In addition, the tobacco industry is a gray zone in many cities where local companies would find workers through illegal immigration, which has led to rampant child labor, Zhu said.

Rooted in US class divisions

On its platform the AFOP offers an annual Art and Essay Contest to showcase farmworker children's heartwarming and compelling stories. The *Global Times* reporters were touched by the images and words that had been submitted by the children - words of hope and struggle coming from the US' most marginalized population.

"I believe people think food comes from a machine or something. They don't really know that the food really comes from us," read a message left by 16-year-old farmworker Edgar.

"Being part of a farmworker family is somehow learning to hustle but never realizing it because your struggle is actually your normal, a normal that is not normal for everyone else," writes Emily WA.

In a special survey with farmworker children from three different regions in the West, East and Mid-Central US, the AFOP found that 75 percent of these children are under 15 years old, 49 percent are female while 51 are male. About 95 percent of

the kids surveyed started working in the fields between ages 5 and 6, and 78 percent of them said that they liked going to school more than going to work in the fields.

These are the stories of farmworker children shared by the AFOP, stories like that of Joel, who works long days in the hot sun, suffering from a headache and impatient to go home. Of Iker, a 7-year-old who has worked since he was 5 and just wishes the bathroom was closer. Of 16-year-old Jharexy, who harvests onions to help her parents buy gas and pay the bills. Far from the rosy ideal of kids learning skills and gaining a good work ethic, Joel, Iker, Jharexy and many others are working themselves to the bone just to keep their families out of poverty, putting their own short- and long-term health at risk in the process.

But child labor in the US is all but invisible, and very few people are rushing to correct that misconception. This is because it's in many people's interests to keep child labor hidden. It's in the employers' interest, because it keeps farmworker wages depressed, it's in the consumers' interest, because it keeps grocery costs down and it's in the parents' interest, because "many hands make light work." When children labor in the shadows, they carry these burdens of low wages, low costs, and higher pay on their own shoulders, the AFOP said.

He Zhipeng, a professor of international law at the School of Law with Jilin University, told the Global Times that many laws and practices in the US deviate from the provisions of the Convention on the Rights of the Child, which makes the US government fear it may face more pressure and condemnation by the international community to change its domestic laws if it joins the Convention.

"The US didn't join the Convention because the country arrogantly believes that its standards of child rights guarantees were higher than the Convention. But deep down, the root cause is the 'stubborn disease' of the country's class division, ethnic division and occupational division," Zhu said.

There are many defects and problems in human rights in the US. In addition to advocating for empty freedom complacently, the development and progress of national governance in the field of human rights is really lacking in the US, He said.

The expert noted that labor shortage is not a reason should not be an excuse to violate the basic moral and value consensus of human society. If it is okay to hire child laborers because of labor shortage, is it okay to kidnap slaves abroad and return to slavery? He asked.

Danny Haiphong, an independent journalist in the US, and co-editor of Friends of Socialist China, believed that the US rejects the Convention for the same reason it rejects nearly every international convention and treaty: hegemonism.

"The US does not believe in being regulated or guided by a framework outside of itself. In this particular case, rejecting the Convention also serves the bottom-line of powerful agribusiness corporations which exploit child labor to accumulate extra profits. By rejecting accountability, monopolies can feel comforted that domestic politics will serve them and provide loopholes for the child labor problem to continue," Haiphong told the Global Times.

That the US would attempt to punish China over forced labor is a clear act of imperial projection, Haiphong said.

Ahead of June 12 which marks the World Day Against Child Labor, Chinese Foreign Ministry Spokesperson Zhao Lijian stressed that the miseries of US child laborers are only the tip of the iceberg of the US's systemic human rights violations. The US needs to face squarely and address earnestly the infringement on child laborers' rights at home, ratify the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child as soon as possible, and properly protect American children's lawful rights and interests.

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