

Teaching a History that I Never Learned

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Part One

When my eldest child, Maddy, was four, she asked me a question about U.S. history. At the time, I was a graduate student at Emory University experiencing the highs and lows of working on my dissertation. Some days, I came home from my study carrel on the sixth floor of the campus library feeling victorious after a day in which my fingers typed persuasive arguments and penetrating insights. Other days, my daughter encountered a desolate father who struggled to make sense of his copious notes and staggered about in a maze of confusion.

I don't remember how I was feeling when Maddy approached me with her question. But I have not forgotten our conversation. Maddy was learning in her preschool about Rosa Parks and the Montgomery bus boycott from 1955. Her teacher's lesson helped her understand that racial segregation was wrong because of the concrete and visual example of a bus with white passengers in the front and Black passengers in the back. Maddy shook her head and frowned when she told me that Black passengers on crowded buses were often forced to give up their seats to white passengers. She then asked, "Where would we have sat on the bus?" As a third-generation Korean American, my daughter has always been proud of her Korean heritage. But she has also been puzzled at times, wondering how she fits into the larger American story of racial discrimination and white privilege. I tried to explain to her that restrictive immigration laws made it unlikely that a family like ours would have been in Alabama in 1955. But if we were there, I told her that I honestly did not know where we would have sat. If we were working-class immigrants like her grandparents, we probably would have sat in the back. If we belonged to a family of financial means or elite social standing, some white bus drivers and passengers may have let us sit in the front. I ended our conversation sharing that maybe the best answer is to hope that we would have sat in the back alongside African Americans and joined in their struggle for equality even if some white people allowed us to sit in the front with them.

In the 1880s, one of the first Korean immigrants to study in the

United States, Yun Chi-ho, was startled when the white-owned hotels in Kansas City refused him lodging during an overnight stop on his train from San Francisco to Nashville. Yun was a bright young intellectual and a well-traveled polyglot with transnational experiences across Korea, Japan, and China before coming to the United States in his early twenties. In China, Yun converted to Christianity at a college founded by white American missionaries. He was celebrated as the first Korean convert of the missionaries' denomination, the Methodist Episcopal Church, South, and some of them saw in him a mighty Methodist leader because of the young Korean's academic prowess and religious sincerity. In 1888, one of these missionaries paved the way for Yun to study theology as the first international student at Vanderbilt University. But on his way to Vanderbilt, an ocean away from his missionary mentor, Yun endured a long and humiliating night as an anonymous Asian immigrant sleeping uncomfortably with his luggage in a railroad station because of his skin color.

In 1914, Wu Tingfang, a Chinese diplomat in the United States, recounted his discomfort on public transportation across the southern states in his memoir, *America through the Spectacles of an Oriental Diplomat*. Unlike Yun, Wu was welcomed to sit with white passengers. At one railroad station with segregated waiting rooms, the porter assisting Wu with his luggage led him without hesitation into the whites-only area. As Wu looked at the two rooms, one with white travelers and the other with Black travelers, he could not help but feel like he did not belong. At that moment, Wu remembered his conscience whispering that he was in the "wrong place" because there was no designated area for "people of my complexion."

Maddy's grandparents were neither theology students nor diplomats. Approximately twenty years after the Montgomery bus boycott, they emigrated from South Korea to the United States. Her mother's parents resided in Richmond, Virginia, and her father's parents went to Long Island, New York. They worked in small Korean-owned businesses, lived in crowded apartments

with other recently arriving family members and friends, and endeavored to learn English to better communicate with their customers and neighbors. After a few years, they combined their earnings with additional money they had borrowed from informal lending services in Korean American immigrant networks to open their own small businesses. When Maddy's father was a teenager, his mother took him to the busy Long Island Rail Road (LIRR) station where she worked selling cigarettes to passengers commuting to and from Manhattan. She fondly told him that this was one of their first jobs together when he was a toddler. Every weekday morning, he accompanied his mother to work and sat on the counter to collect the money and give the cigarettes to the customers. It was also where Maddy's father learned the English language. Whereas Maddy's first words were *mama* and *shoe*, *Marlboro* and *Winston* were among the earliest words in her father's English lexicon.

Maddy's grandparents also started to go to church in the United States. Her mother's parents joined a Presbyterian congregation in Virginia and her father's parents attended a Methodist church in New York. None came from Christian families, but they, like other Korean American immigrants, found that their churches were important hubs for cultural, religious, and social community. The church offered spiritual refuge, racial solidarity, and human dignity in their new country. Worship presented occasions to express one's deepest desires, hopes, and dreams in the mother tongue. For many worshipers, Sundays were also the one day each week they could wear formal attire to look and feel like their best selves. Their blue-collar jobs at grocery stores, construction sites, laundromats, and other small businesses did not afford them opportunities to dress respectably. Church members referred to one another with honorifics and were careful to use titles, such as *jipsanim* (deacon) or *janglonim* (elder), even in casual conversation.

Sometimes, power struggles between church members overrode the principles of the gospel in Korean American immigrant churches. One charge against Korean and Korean American Christianity is the ubiquity of infighting and division within local congregations. The accusation is that Korean American Christians care more about the business of the church than the witness of Jesus Christ. One white Presbyterian, Samuel Hugh Moffett, was critical of what he saw as the Korean propensity toward rancorous and egotistical conflict in church life. He once bitterly asked where else would Christians find "a Jesus Presbyterian Church and a Christ Presbyterian Church" but among Koreans. My counterargument is twofold. I do not believe that ecclesial schism is unique to Christians of Korean descent because it is in fact a common thread throughout world Christian history, especially in the West. By the early 1970s, white Presbyterians in Moffett's own tradition divided into at least three different denominations called the United Presbyterian Church in the United States of America (UPCUSA), the Presbyterian Church in the United States (PCUS), and the Presbyterian Church in America (PCA). And while the internecine disputes in Korean American churches are indeed harmful and not at all admirable, what they also reveal is how much the church matters as a religious and social institution in the Korean American community. People fight over treasure, not trash.

Worship programs from the earliest Korean American immigrant churches in Hawai'i from the 1920s and 1930s illustrate the importance of the church as a center for religious worship, cultural belonging, and economic networking. On the front page of one program from the First Korean Methodist Episcopal Church in Honolulu, the names of several lay leaders, such as the Sunday school superintendent, organist, and church treasurer are listed (see figure

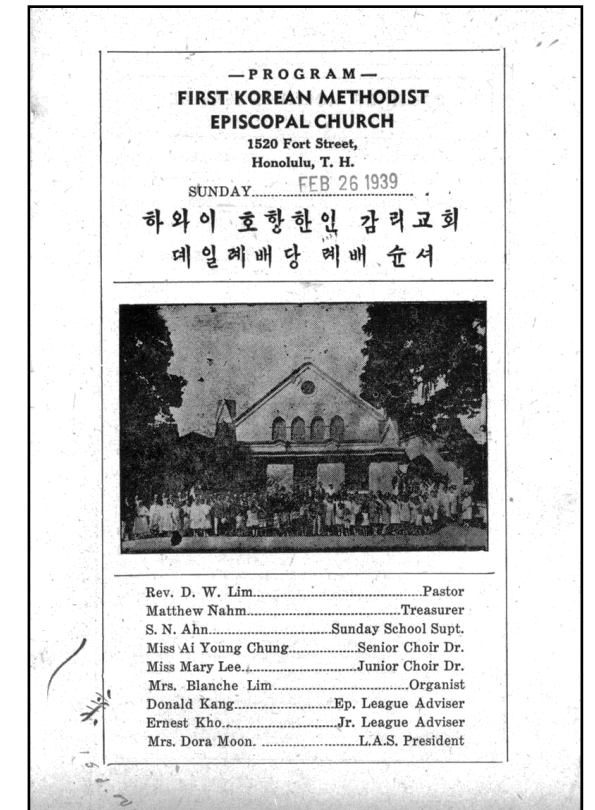


Figure 1: First Korean Methodist Episcopal Church: Program (used with permission from The Reverend Soon Hyun Collected Works, University of Southern California Digital Library Korean American Digital Archive)

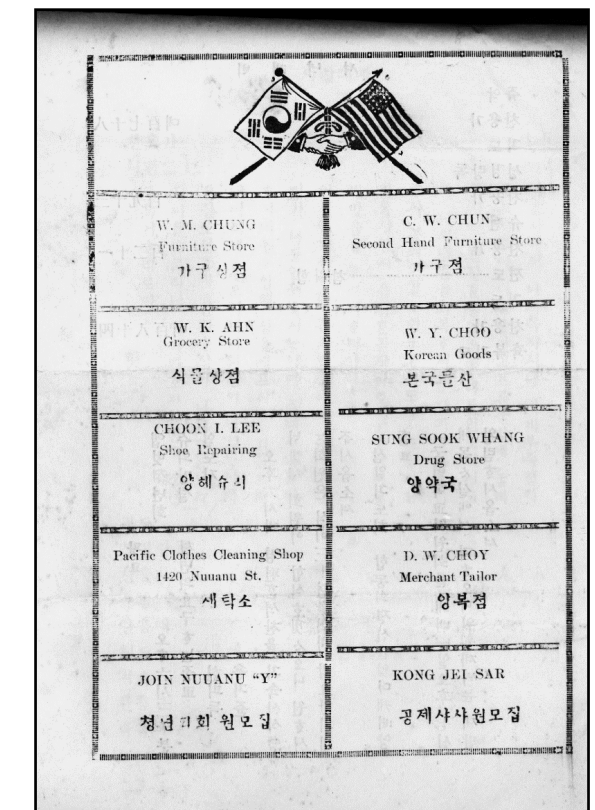


Figure 2: Program for Service, Korean Methodist Episcopal Church, Pastor Soon Hyun (used with permission from The Reverend Soon Hyun Collected Works, University of Southern California Digital Library Korean American Digital Archive)

1). A different program includes the names of several local Korean small business owners on one of its pages, including two furniture stores, a grocery store, a drug store, and stores for dry cleaning and shoe repair (see figure 2).

The program in figure 2 also displays two shaking hands beneath interlocking flags from Korea and the United States. This image represents multiple layers of identity and points to a larger story and struggle of immigration, race, nationality, belonging, and faith. It is a story of exclusion and inclusion in which one encounters the broken promises as well as the hopeful possibilities of Christian theology and American democracy. With delight and conviction, I relish teaching the histories of Korean American Christians, alongside the histories of other Christians of color, in my seminary classroom. But I am teaching a history that I never learned.

Across North America and Asia, Koreans, like other Asians, were simultaneously treated like a fertile harvest for white missionary conversion abroad and dirty weeds to be excised from the white-dominant republic at home. Asian women were also fetishized as alluring sexual objects. In 1920, the Missionary Review of the World, a popular Protestant magazine about U.S. world missions, published articles about the Asian “mission fields” with titles such as “The Problem of China” and “The Burden of India” (figure 3) The cover of one monthly issue features a young Asian child in traditional garb enacting the Macedonian call in Acts 16:9–10. With outstretched arms, the child’s message is, “Come Over into Asia and Help Us” (figure 4).

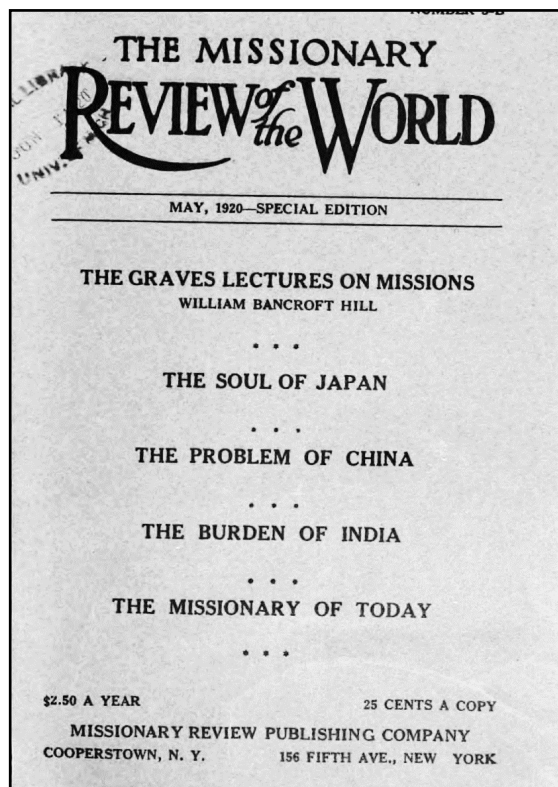


Figure 3: “Mission Fields.” (public domain, downloadable from The Missionary Review of the World, May 1920, Special Edition)



Figure 4: “Come Over Into Asia And Help Us” (public domain, downloadable from The Missionary Review of the World, Volume 43, May 1920)

In 1891, Yun Chi-ho attended gatherings in Nashville promoting U.S. missions in Asia. Yun was invited to speak briefly after several addresses from white missionaries working in China, Korea, and Japan. He publicly expressed sincere gratitude for their ministry, but Yun privately disliked the racially and spiritually condescending undertones and overtones within some of their remarks, which depicted Koreans as hapless heathens and benighted brutes. Yun also abhorred the phrase, “Come over and help us,” because it robbed Koreans and the people from the other foreign nations where the missionaries labored of their agency and presented them as inferior human beings. But Yun grew to hate the racial epithet, “Chinaman,” even more than illusions to the Macedonian call. In his diary, he complained of being called a “Chinaman” throughout the southern towns and cities he visited. White women, men, and even children shouted the derogatory term to abuse, antagonize, and assail him. In 1886, one manufacturing company in Illinois advertised their new laundry detergent with an image of Uncle Sam kicking a Chinese man in the buttocks, with the words “The Chinese Must Go,” to signify that their product made the presence of Chinese American launderers obsolete (figure 5).

But this is all a part of a history that I never learned. In high school, Asian Americans were not featured in my classrooms and other people of color made occasional appearances. In comparing my high school education to a play on a stage or a television sitcom, I remember Indigenous persons from the Wampanoag Nation as background actors in lessons about

early European settler colonialism in North America. Nameless Black persons served as extras in lessons about slavery and the Civil War. A few other Black persons, such as Shirley Chisholm, Martin Luther King Jr., and Thurgood Marshall made memorable entrances and shone brightly for one or two scenes. There was no fullness, nuance, and complexity in these scripts. The barely sketched stories of people of color evinced dim outlines defined by the anonymous forces of racial oppression. Racism was tragic and real, but it was also a mysterious and unexplained evil. Black people suffered from racism, but white people were somehow not responsible.



Figure 5: “The Magic Washer, manufactured by Geo. Dee, Dixon, Illinois” (downloadable image is in the public domain from The Library of Congress)

My Christian education was no better and maybe even worse. I grew up in the shadow of white evangelical teachings that positioned racism as a spiritual sin that could only be eradicated by spiritual means according to reductive scriptural interpretations about prayer, forgiveness, meekness, and divine illumination of the individual human heart. But as racially minoritized persons in predominantly white neighborhoods in Long Island, my church-going friends and I mostly rejected this approach as teenagers because it seemed too simplistic to only pray about the racist bullying we were subjected to in our schools. When the pastor’s son was suspended from his high school for punching a white student who was verbally abusing his younger sister, the members of my church praised his courage and confrontation. The pastor proudly preached about his son’s act of self-defense and retribution. My mother exulted when giving me a (literal) blow-by-blow recounting of the incident after the worship service.

But Christianity was separated from the sinful realities of U.S. history in my journey of faith. Christians were responsible for much of everything that was good, such as the abolition of slavery and immigration reform. However, Christians were never the perpetrators of settler colonialism, sexism, racism, and other injustices. The pedagogical approach was not necessarily one of willful disinformation. Rather, the lessons were evasive and utilized the methods of absence and silence rather than outright falsehood and denial. There is no need for a reckoning when you never learn the truth.

Part Two

What is historical truth? Who determines the topics and subjects that really matter? In *The Writing of History*, Michel de Certeau makes an argument that is both provocative and obvious. Certeau states that historians are powerful individuals because they control the past. Historians claim for themselves an authority derived from their academic status and research access to primary sources, such as archival records, and make interpretations that may illumine or distort communities, events, institutions, nations, and persons. Certeau observes that the past has no agency when it is conjured into the present in an historian’s writing or teaching. The dead cannot speak apart from the historian. They have no ability to challenge or correct what the historian says about them. Certeau traces the advent of Western history in the Americas to the Italian navigator Amerigo Vespucci’s arrival in South America (figure 6). The moment is remembered in one sixteenth-century allegorical painting as an encounter between an intrepid explorer wearing a suit of armor, bearing the “European weapons of meaning,” and an almost nude Indigenous woman reclining in a hammock with “a body which awakens a space of exotic fauna and flora” for colonization and exploitation.



Figure 6: “Allegory of America, ca. 1587–89,” by Jan van der Straet, called Stradanus (in the public domain, from the Metropolitan Museum)

Although the subjectivity of history is apparent in this painting, Certeau's proposition about the power of the historian over the dead runs counter to some traditional understandings of church history. My introduction to church history as a teenager entailed a brief overview of a few notable individuals, such as the vigorous prayer life of John Wesley and the sacrifices of those white Protestant missionaries who ministered in what was depicted to me as the wilds of a premodern Korea, but the educational experience was like watching a highlight reel of isolated moments devoid of context and light on content. Church history was presented to me as an objective retelling of the facts with inspirational lessons to spur believers on toward love and good deeds. Historians were neither mighty nor malicious. They were simply conduits who taught and wrote about what happened. But the goal of history was to identify uplifting examples of heroism from faithful Christians in the past and imitate them as much as possible. Historians had no ability to make the dead speak or come back to life. Only Jesus had resurrection power.

The church history that I learned had set strict boundaries that prohibited any criticism of Christianity as responsible for oppression. One explanation for why some professing Christians committed terrible acts of hatred and violence was to offer the claim that they were not really Christians anyway. Another conclusion conceded that they were nominal Christians who had misconstrued scriptural teachings due to a lack of education or the pernicious influence of their respective cultures. And there was an immediate pivot to the "real Christians" who boldly pursued justice and bravely defied cruel authority figures. The persecution of Protestants in the Americas was rare, and when it did occur it was often an internecine phenomenon, such as when the Puritans banished their church members, Anne Hutchinson and Roger Williams, from Massachusetts in the seventeenth century, but the topic of persecution against Christians nonetheless was frequently overemphasized. One enduring lesson was that white Protestants from England were among the first immigrants in the "New World" and they had risked their lives to freely practice their faith away from what they deplored as the nefarious reach of the Roman Catholic Church and deemed as the unacceptable theological compromises within Anglicanism.

Yet there was little mention of the Indigenous communities that lived on the land where these immigrants arrived. The history lesson skipped over how the Pilgrims, upon disembarking from the Mayflower, plundered food from meticulously prepared Indigenous stockpiles to survive their first winter in "New England." The Pilgrims were prepared to worship, but they did not know how to produce their own crops. They had limited capacities for fishing and none for farming in what was strange and foreign terrain. After one armed group of Pilgrims returned with ten bushels of maize and a large metal kettle, all of which they had stolen, Edward Winslow, a leader within the Plymouth colony, attributed this haul as a sign of divine favor and conceded: "And sure it was God's good providence that we found this corn, for else we know not how we should have done." Just as they had "found" the food by thievery, white Protestants would come to own Indigenous lands through coercive, unjust, and violent

means, but these realities did not appear in my history books and lessons.

Instead, my learning experience in church history focused almost exclusively on doctrine. I did not learn about the annihilation of Indigenous communities, such as the Pequots across Connecticut and Massachusetts with violent warfare in 1636 and 1637, but I spent many hours deciphering Puritan debates on soteriology and their concerns about antinomianism. In the same year that a militia of white Puritans killed nearly every person in a Pequot village, including children, women, and the elderly, Anne Hutchinson was put on trial for her Christian teachings that the Puritan authorities denounced as heretical. In seminary, my classmates and I scrutinized accounts of this trial to precisely identify the differences between Hutchinson's strict emphasis on God's saving grace and how the Puritan clergy preached about good works as evidence of one's divine election. We invested many hours tracing the various ways that Puritans understood justification, sanctification, and how these two doctrines related to one another.

But I never learned about the massacre of the Pequots and the Puritans who killed them. One legal scholar, Steven M. Wise, argues that this wicked act of violence was "a critical part of the Puritans' genocidal 1636–37 Indian war," in which the militia leader, John Underhill, ordered the slayings of approximately one thousand Pequots with the rationale that he had "sufficient light from the Word of God for our proceedings" with the assurance that "sometimes the Scripture declareth women and children must perish with their parents." Perhaps it is more accurate to state that my education in church history entailed a selective focus on some doctrines. We isolated the writings of a few white Protestant clergypersons and placed ourselves in a hermeneutical space with them that was indeed like a hermetic seal. Our study of the theological works of Jonathan Edwards needed to be preserved and protected. There was simply no use, and certainly not enough time in an academic semester, to consider the beliefs and doctrines that white Protestants employed to justify their wanton abuse and cruel mistreatment of Indigenous persons. I learned that every church history professor makes difficult pedagogical decisions. Church history professors cannot possibly cover everything, so they determine which dead persons to bring back to life in their classrooms.

When Maddy first encountered the history of racism in the United States at four years of age, her moral sensibilities intuited that something was wrong. The simple image of racial segregation on a bus, with white passengers granted access to the front seats and Black relegated to the rear seats, was reprehensible. Maddy would later see in middle school other obvious images illustrating the inequities and injustices of racial segregation, such as pictures of water fountains and schools for white persons that were vastly superior to those for Black persons. It is likely that all the students in Maddy's classrooms joined her in shaking their heads in disapproval. But I wonder how many children also questioned how the "yellow race," as Asian Americans

were often designated in the United States, fit within a world of white supremacy and anti-Black discrimination.

In 1968, the president of San Francisco State College, Samuel Ichiye Hayakawa, a Canadian-born Japanese American, attempted to divide a coalition of students of color demanding more racial inclusion and ethnic representation at their school. These students were in the middle of the longest strike on an academic campus in the history of the United States when Hayakawa pointed to the Asian American students as an example of a "model minority" for the other students of color to follow. In touting Asian Americans as a diligent people who were too busy focusing on achieving success to devote their energies toward protesting racism, Hayakawa sought to differentiate the students of Asian descent from their Black, Indigenous, Hispanic, and Latina/o peers and perhaps cause ferment and discord among the student activists. The Asian American students were enraged, but their fury was solely directed at Hayakawa. The college president was derided as a "banana" (a derogatory term accusing an Asian American of being yellow on the outside and white on the inside) and the entire coalition resolved to remain united until they achieved their goal. It took approximately five months, but the students ended the strike when the college agreed to form the first department of Ethnic Studies in the nation.

Hayakawa retired from the presidency at San Francisco State College in 1973, but his decisive actions against the student protest, including his evocation of Asian Americans as a "model minority," were remembered for many years. Some Asian Americans continued to publicly decry Hayakawa's usage of the "model minority" as a deleterious wedge separating Asian Americans from other persons of color. Yet other Asian Americans quietly agreed with Hayakawa and thought the best approach to overcome racial discrimination was to work so hard that there was no time to think about the oppressions afflicting their community and other communities of color. The most important color was not black, brown, red, white, or yellow, but green. Earning money was understood as the fastest and surest pathway to freedom and stability. Three years after his retirement from higher education, Hayakawa was the Republican Party candidate for the U.S. Senate in 1976 and won a tightly contested election in California.

In the Senate, Hayakawa lambasted bilingual initiatives in public school education and proposed a constitutional amendment to make English the official language of the United States. His rationale underscored how English proficiency was a crucial factor that helped immigrants succeed. Hayakawa believed that learning English was imperative for immigrants to flourish and so he urged his senatorial colleagues to establish the centrality and primacy of the English language at the federal level. The proposal failed, but other lawmakers have taken the baton from Hayakawa and continue to seek similar legislation. In 2021, a Republican member of the House of Representatives from Texas, Louie Gohmert, sponsored a bill, "H.R. 997 – English Language Unity Act," that sought "to declare English as the official

language of the United States" and "establish a uniform English language rule for naturalization." The bill was not passed, but twenty-seven other Republican members of the U.S. Congress agreed to be cosponsors in support of it.

Hayakawa is a notable Asian American. Although he is not a household name, the legacy of his efforts to position Asian Americans as a "model minority" endures. In 1970, the New York Times featured an article on its front page that explained how Chinese Americans and Japanese Americans were "an American success story" with the audacious claim that these communities of color no longer experienced racial discrimination in the United States. One of the persons interviewed for the story was J. Chuan Chu, an immigrant from China who arrived during the Second World War and initially struggled to find housing because of his race. But Chu eventually graduated from the University of Pennsylvania and climbed the corporate ladder to an executive position in a large information systems company. Chu reflected on his journey from impoverished migrant to the Ivy League and promised, "If you have the ability and can adapt to the American way of speaking, dressing, and doing things, then it doesn't matter any more if you are Chinese." Racism was real, but Asian Americans could overcome it through hard work and assimilation.

I did not learn about Hayakawa and I do not remember hearing the phrase, "model minority," during my childhood, but the lessons about the importance of diligence and academic achievement were paramount. My parents did not necessarily see my education, such as learning English and history, through the lens of assimilation. But they viewed it as transactional. My education was the pathway to economic success and social elitism. In the summer months beginning when I was nine years old, I regularly walked 1.2 miles to the local library and stayed there for several hours in the company of books and magazines about animals, sports, famous people (especially U.S. presidents), foreign countries, and science fiction. While I fell in love with reading and my mind was growing in curiosity and critical thinking, my parents were enamored with the outstanding grades on my report cards. As first-generation immigrants, they had dreams of whiteness for their eldest son. But their aspirations were more closely connected to class, not race. They yearned for me to have a white-collar job. With their small dry-cleaning business, they were intimately familiar with the attire of white-collar professionals. They laundered, pressed, starched, and tailored the blouses, dress shirts, skirts, suits, and ties of their white-collar customers. They envisioned their son would one day join the ranks of their clientele.

There was a time in my life, during my collegiate studies, when I was embittered toward my parents for what I criticized as their myopic vision. I detested their wishes for my life. I told them that what matters most in life is not material wealth or social prestige. I had a higher calling. I wanted to be a pastor who helps people. My parents were devastated with this new disruptive development. They had only thought in the binary of

blue-collar and white-collar. The introduction of a third collar, the clerical collar, caught them completely unaware. My mother's fervent prayer life intensified. She went to church daily to participate in the early morning worship services. At her church, as in many other Korean American congregations, there were daybreak gatherings with singing, scripture reading, preaching, and praying aloud in a practice known as *tongseonggido* (united vocal prayer). My mother wept and beseeched God to change her son's mind so that he would not enroll in seminary after college. Other church members offered my mother their emotional and spiritual support. They prayed alongside her and hoped that the cries of the faithful would be heard in the heavens. One time, when I returned home from college to worship with my mother, an elderly woman pulled me aside and rebuked me in the sanctuary for breaking my mother's heart.

But two decades later, as I reflect now upon these tumultuous years of familial conflict, I confess that I was the narrow-minded one. I had spent many Saturdays of my childhood at the dry cleaners with my parents and witnessed firsthand their hard labor. I saw my father press garments in the sweltering heat and my mother hunched down tailoring clothes at a sewing machine. They were always busy, but they also made sure to drive me to tennis matches, violin lessons, and SAT prep classes. When I was a teenager, my mother accompanied me to our local Marshalls and TJ Maxx stores to buy the designer clothing I wanted. My parents were always stressed about money, but somehow there was enough for the Vuarnet t-shirt I just had to have and the countless courses to prepare for this and that standardized exam. What did all this cost my parents? How many blouses did my father have to press? And how many pants did my mother have to alter? They rejoiced when I received my acceptance letter to an Ivy League institution, but three years later I had returned home to deliver news that absolutely crushed them. When I shared my plans to enroll in seminary, it felt to them like a wrecking ball was destroying the most precious building they had built. In the Harry Potter novels, there exists a magical device called a pensieve that allows one to store and access one's memories with precision. Whenever I recall these sad conversations and angry fights from many years ago, it is as if I am in possession of a pensieve, because I remember these episodes with near perfect accuracy and a frightening lucidity. When I access these memories, all I want to do is apologize to my parents. I do not regret the decision I made, but I am deeply sorry for the pain that it caused.

When Maddy visits her grandparents, she is unaware of this history. I have yet to tell her these stories. But Maddy is interested in learning more. One of her history assignments in middle school required students to interview a person who was born at least seventy years ago and give a report about the interviewee's childhood. Maddy chose one of her grandmothers. After completing her assignment, which included an oral presentation in her class, Maddy proudly told me that several fellow students found her project among the most fascinating because it was about a person who grew up in another country.

I am hopeful because Maddy is learning that her grandmother's Korean American story matters. And Maddy is discovering more about Asian American history within and beyond the experiences of persons of Korean descent. One of her ongoing queries is about Asian American activism in support of African Americans. In the summer months of 2020, during the protests seeking racial justice and policing reform in response to the killings of Ahmaud Arbery, Breonna Taylor, and George Floyd, my spouse and I introduced Maddy to Grace Lee Boggs and her courageous advocacy alongside African Americans in Detroit's Black Power movement in the 1950s. In some of the Federal Bureau of Investigation's files on Lee Boggs, who is Chinese American, she was listed as "probably Afro Chinese" because of her marriage to a Black man, James Boggs, and her ubiquitous presence on the frontlines in struggles for civil rights and labor justice.

Approximately four hundred miles from Detroit, Syngman Rhee, a Korean American Presbyterian pastor, was a campus minister at the University of Louisville in the 1960s. Rhee joined Black students from the university and other Black activists in the city in their protests opposing racial segregation. Rhee supported the civil rights movement, but he was nonetheless surprised when a small group of African American university students approached him to serve as the faculty advisor for a Black Student Union. Rhee responded, "Why are you asking me to be your faculty advisor? You know I am not black." The students shared, "Yes, we know you are not black, but we saw you out on the street demonstrating together with us for our civil rights." Rhee then agreed to be the first faculty advisor for the Black Student Union at the University of Louisville.

In Angie Thomas's award-winning young adult fiction novel, *The Hate U Give*, there is a poignant moment of racial allyship between the main character, a sixteen-year-old Black woman named Starr Carter, and one of her closest friends from school, an Asian American woman named Maya Yang. Starr and Maya are among the few students of color at their predominantly white school, and they pledge to support one another after they each experience racial discrimination from a white student.

Thomas's book is on Maddy's summer reading list. I am delighted that Maddy wants to read a novel in which a Black author brilliantly captures a young Black woman's painful plight, intricate processing, and bold pursuit of racial justice after she witnesses the killing of a young Black man at the hands of a white police officer. Starr encourages Maya to speak up when a white student ridicules Maya with the barb that Asian Americans like to eat cats. Maya backs Starr when this same white student questions Starr's increasing public activism against police brutality. Maya reminds Starr, "We minorities have to stick together, remember?" But ultimately, Thomas's novel is about African American childhood and therefore Starr Carter's story. Maya Yang is only a supporting character in this tale. Maddy must therefore seek other resources to learn about the beauty, depth, wonder, and complexity of Asian American life.

The testimonies of Grace Lee Boggs and Syngman Rhee provide counternarratives to the legacy of Samuel Ichiye Hayakawa and the weaponizing of the notion that Asian Americans are a "model minority" for other communities of color to imitate. Maddy still wants to know how Asian Americans navigated the racialized binary of white supremacy and anti-Black discrimination, but she also has other rich, hard, and profound questions about Asian American history. As Maddy matures, she seeks to learn more about Asian American cultures and transpacific journeys from East Asia, South Asia, and Southeast Asia to the United States. In addition to contemplating where a family like hers would have sat on an Alabama bus in 1955, Maddy yearns to read works from Asian American authors, engage Asian American artistry, and glean the creative resilience of first-generation Asian American immigrants. Black allyship is an important part of the Asian American story, but it is one of many lessons that Maddy wants, and needs, to learn. Maddy is more than a supporting character. I desire for Maddy to know that she, and we, are main characters, with our own worthy histories to claim and wondrous futures to forge.

I am teaching a history that I never learned. It is a history that is both more complicated and more beautiful than I encountered. The search for heroes is one component of teaching history, but too many classrooms stop there. The fullness of the Asian American story can only be found when excavating many layers of conflict and courage as well as stumbling and striving. It is a story of dreams deferred, dreams denied, and dreams come true. Teaching Christian history also demands an honest confrontation with the past. In my classroom, I present the stories of Christians in both the margins and mainstreams of their denominations, societies, and traditions. It is a joy to analyze how some Christians interpreted the Bible to lead faithful congregations in proclaiming good news to the poor and enacting liberation for the oppressed. But we also must confront the deep wounds of racism, sexism, classism, nativism, and heterosexism as well as the responsibility of other Christians in propagating and exacerbating these terrible injustices. I am learning that history can only illumine when it inspires and infuriates us. Hopefully, my students are also understanding this truth. As the semesters go by, I can never be sure what exactly my students remember from my teaching. But I think Maddy is getting it.

Notes & Bibliography

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¹⁰Wu, *The Color of Success*, 1.

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¹³Angie Thomas, *The Hate U Give* (New York, NY: Balzer + Bray, 2017).

¹⁴Thomas, *The Hate U Give*, 295.



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