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Asian and American and Always Becoming: The (Mis)Education of Two Asian American Teacher Educators.

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Abstract

This self-study of two Asian American teacher educators traces the coming-to-consciousness about their Asian American identities and subsequent efforts to teach Asian American histories in social studies methods courses. Using the frame of Asian American critical race theory (AsianCrit), the teacher educators describe their explorations of Asian American hybridity in their personal and professional lives. Given the near invisibility of Asian Americans in the dominant narrative of U.S. history and in PK-12 curriculum broadly, these teacher educators' stories articulate the experience of never seeing oneself in history and the struggle to add stories to a history that leaves little room for the racial Other.

Disciplines

Bilingual, Multilingual, and Multicultural Education | Curriculum and Instruction | Educational Assessment, Evaluation, and Research | Higher Education | International and Comparative Education

Comments

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Asian and American and Always Becoming: The (Mis)Education of Two Asian American Teacher Educators

Noreen Naseem Rodríguez, & Esther June Kim

This self-study of two Asian American teacher educators traces the coming-to-consciousness about their Asian American identities and subsequent efforts to teach Asian American histories in social studies methods courses. Using the frame of Asian American critical race theory (AsianCrit), the teacher educators describe their explorations of Asian American hybridity in their personal and professional lives. Given the near invisibility of Asian Americans in the dominant narrative of U.S. history and in PK-12 curriculum broadly, these teacher educators' stories articulate the experience of never seeing oneself in history and the struggle to add stories to a history that leaves little room for the racial Other.

Are you Chinese?
"Yes."
American?
"Yes."
Really Chinese?
"No,... not quite."
Really American?
"Well, actually, you see..."
But I would rather say
Yes.
Not neither-nor,
Not maybe,
But both, and not only.
The home I've had,
The ways I am
I'd rather say it
twice,
yes.
(Chang, 1974)

This self-study describes how two Asian American teacher educators trace our coming-to-consciousness and subsequent efforts to teach Asian American histories in social studies methods courses. We use Asian American critical race theory (AsianCrit) as a frame to describe the hybridity we experienced in our personal and professional lives, and how our emerging consciousness reframed those experiences as we adopted sociopolitical Asian American identities. Our stories articulate the experiences of never seeing oneself in history, the impact of such experiences on our teaching practices as social studies

educators and teacher educators, and our ongoing struggle to add historically marginalized voices to exclusionary historical narratives.

Asian American History

Asian American history is rarely addressed in U.S. history standards and textbooks (An, 2016; Harada, 2000; Wolf, 1992; Zuercher, 1969), with the few standards that attend to Asian Americans focused solely on the Chinese in the 1800s and/or Japanese American incarceration during World War II. The emphasis on these two groups relegates depictions of Asian Americans to unwanted immigrants, anti-Asian legislation, and potential enemies of the state, which reinforce perceptions of Asian Americans as forever foreigners (Tuan, 1998) in contradistinction to white American citizens (Rodríguez, 2018b). Moreover, the lack of attention to Asian American history in the last century neglects the wide diversity of contemporary Asian America and disregards the historical and ongoing activism of Asian American communities (Nie & Rodríguez, 2018). In elementary schools, Asian American perspectives are even more invisible, often solely mentioned in regard to holiday celebrations and food (Hartlep & Scott, 2016) and identified as Asian rather than Asian American, perpetuating misnomers, foreignness, and exotic stereotypes (Rodríguez, 2018a; Pang, Colvin, Tran, & Barba, 1992).

Denying Asian American histories to center Eurocentric history, argues historian Ronald Takaki (1998), "serves no one. It only shrouds the pluralism that is America and that makes our nation so unique, and the possibility of appreciating our rich racial and cultural diversity remains a dream deferred" (p. 7). However, the inclusion of marginalized histories is difficult to implement in practice; many pre- and in-service elementary teachers lack substantial historical content knowledge (Bisland, 2011; Vogler, 2011), history at the secondary level is too often centered around exclusionary, Eurocentric historical narratives (Marino & Bolgatz, 2010; Sleeter & Carmona, 2017), and social studies professional development opportunities are rarely offered to teachers (Zhao & Hoge, 2005).

Asian American Teachers

Although Asian Americans are the fastest growing racial group in the United States (Taylor, 2013), Asian American teachers comprise only 2.3% of public school teachers in the United States (National Center for Education Statistics, 2017). Scholarship on Asian American teachers finds they are often perceived as cultural representatives and Asian experts, foreigners, sexualized Others, and hypervisible (Endo, 2015; Goodwin, Genishi, Asher, & Woo, 1997; Lee, 2018; Morita-Mullaney & Greene, 2015; Sheets & Chew, 2002; Subedi, 2008). Popular studies of teaching illustrate the pivotal role of socialization in the lives of white teachers (Cattani, 2002; Lortie, 1975) but omit the influence of race, ethnicity and language, which often drastically impact the experiences of Asian American educators (Gordon, 2000; Nguyen, 2012; Rodríguez, 2019; Rong & Preissle, 1997; Sheets & Chew, 2002; Su, 1996).

Current research leaves largely unattended the experiences of Asian Americans who teach in racial isolation, outside of regions with a critical mass like the West Coast, where they may be racialized and understood in distinct ways (Endo, 2015; Morita-Mullaney & Greene, 2015; Rodríguez, 2018b). Particularly significant to this study, yet absent from extant scholarship, is the exploration of teachers' use of Asian American as a political-racial identity (Philip, 2014). Although the term originated during the height of the Civil Rights

Movement, its history is often unknown as it is now often utilized as a de-politicized racial label. Asian American educators who are conscious of their political-racial identities may be more inclined toward social justice teaching and may engage in culturally relevant (Ladson-Billings, 1994, 1995) and culturally sustaining (Paris, 2012; Paris & Alim, 2017) pedagogies that value *all* students' cultural and linguistic differences (Branch, 2004; Choi, 2013; Goodwin et al., 1997; Pang, 2009; Rodríguez, 2018, 2019).

Theoretical Framework

Asian American critical race theory (AsianCrit)

Asian American critical race theory (AsianCrit) draws from the well-established traditions of critical theory, critical legal studies, and critical race theory (CRT) which center on the understanding of the impacts of societal oppression in order to achieve societal and individual transformation (Tierney, 1993). Critical race theory is based on the premise that racism is a normal part of U.S. society (Delgado, 2013) and embedded in all major U.S. institutions, including the educational system (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995; Yosso, 2002). Chang (1993) called for an Asian American legal scholarship in recognition of the failure of civil rights work and CRT scholarship to address Asian American issues, and two decades later, Iftikar and Museus (2018) delineated seven tenets of an AsianCrit framework.

In this article, the tenet of *(re)constructive history* is most essential to the self-study that follows. *(Re)Constructive history* recognizes, and aims to transcend, the racial exclusion of Asian Americans from U.S. historical narratives. Central to this work is the inclusion of Asian American voices and experiences in the past and present to construct a collective Asian American historical narrative and to foster Asian American identity and consciousness (Iftikar & Museus, 2018). In the sections that follow, we illustrate how the erasure of Asian American history impacted our Asian American identities in P-12 schooling and as classroom teachers; we also detail our efforts to reconstruct the Asian American histories that were missing from our educational experiences, confronting both the challenges and possibilities of such work.

Method of Study

This paper is a self-study of two Asian American social studies teacher educators. Bullough and Pinnegar (2001) describe self-study researchers as standing at the intersection of biography and history. Self-study researchers, they argue, ask questions about "the interaction of the self-as-teacher educator, in context, over time, with others whose interests represent a shared commitment to the development and nurturance of the young and the impact of that interaction on self and other" (Hamilton, 1998, as cited in Bullough & Pinnegar, 2001, p. 15). We began introducing Asian American histories to our students after learning about them in our doctoral program at the same large public university in the South. Esther, a doctoral candidate, is in her fourth year of preparing prospective elementary and secondary social studies teachers in undergraduate and Master's programs. Noreen, an assistant professor of elementary social studies at a large public university in the Midwest, teaches early childhood and elementary social studies methods to undergraduate students.

Regarding self-study among teacher educators, Dinkelman (2003) emphasizes that "the work of preparing teachers for initial practice always takes place in a particular

location shaped by a unique set of personal, institutional, and social characteristics" (p. 13). Our context was Texas and the large public institution we attend(ed). Our institution's teacher preparation program - like programs across the country - was majority-white, although the secondary program less so than the elementary program. Our doctoral program was also majority-white. Unlike other programs and departments in our institution, however, the social studies program area consisted of two faculty of color and one white faculty member. The faculty of color pursued scholarship that forefronted race and the histories of communities of color and encouraged us to pursue similar work. Noreen was the first Asian American student to join the doctoral program and Esther became the second two years later.

As Noreen focused her research on Asian American teachers and histories and engaged with her peers and professors about these topics, social studies faculty and doctoral student instructors began to integrate more Asian American content into the elementary social studies methods courses. While these changes did not alter the purpose or philosophy of the methods courses, they demonstrated a programmatic shift across all social studies course to be more cognizant of the omissions regarding Asian Americans and Asian American histories, particularly in regard to the topics of immigration, language, and culture. As a senior doctoral student, Noreen mentored newer students, like Esther, and invited her into conversations and ongoing research that encouraged her to more deeply consider Asian American history and representation. This growing awareness has been both a personal and academic journey for Esther. As she found opportunities to learn more about her racialized identity, she began to incorporate what she learned about Asian American history and critical race theory into her work with secondary social studies pre-service teachers. At first, she included Asian American content as isolated events that were often misrepresented or missing in U.S. history. As her content knowledge grew, however, she wove Asian American history into more discussions by connecting the history of Asian Americans with those of other communities of color using historical collective action, and shared themes or "racial scripts" (Molina, 2014).

Over the last three years, we have engaged in many conversations about our lived experiences, Asian American historical content, and the neglect of Asian American scholarship and histories in the field of social studies education. Some of these conversations were private while others occurred at the helm of classes, and many of these stories are described here. Our stories are reminiscent of LatCrit *testimonios*, or politicized personal narratives (Anzaldúa, 1990; Latina Feminist Group, 2001) which are increasingly used as a pedagogical, methodological, and activist approach (Chang, 2017; Huber, 2009, 2010; Rodríguez & Salinas, in press) that transgresses traditional academic paradigms and challenges objectivity "by situating the individual in communion with a collective experience marked by marginalization, oppression, or resistance" (Delgado Bernal, Burciaga, & Carmona, 2012, p. 363). As Asian Americans, our *testimonios* overlap and diverge to illustrate our shared and distinct racialized experiences. We also draw from written works composed during graduate school, such as educational autobiographies, personal statements, and descriptions of our researcher positionalities.

Coming to Consciousness: Naming Our Asian Americanness

Esther's Story

I once identified myself as Korean American to a high school friend in passing. Visibly upset, he responded, "You're just American! I don't go around calling myself German American or English American." I explained that as long as I "looked different," my national identity would always be a hyphenated-American. In my teenage years, I allowed that label to be imposed on me as a mark of otherness, as a badge marking me the eternal eager initiate, never a full member. For many years I was ashamed anytime my "otherness" was acknowledged. I feared school "cultural appreciation days" when I was asked to dress up in a *hanbok* and to bring *mandoo* for my classmates. Or even worse, when my grandma would make *kimbap* and I would have to explain to my classmates that the black wrapping was seaweed, or when non-Asian friends would come to my house and, upon seeing the fermenting blocks of soy bean paste in the yard, would ask, "is that poo?" "No, it's something we eat." "You eat poo?!"

I have a vague recollection of learning about Korea in the context of South Korea being freed from communist North Korea by the American soldiers we honor on Veterans Day. During President George H.W. Bush's visit to Japan in the 1990s, my teacher explained that belching is rude, but in Japan (hence all of Asia), a burp is an expected sign of appreciation. I can still hear the laughter of my classmates. Six years later, my twelfth grade Humanities teachers assigned *Snow Falling on Cedars* for our summer reading, introducing - for the first time in official curriculum - characters who looked like me. We had an essay test the first day back, and afterwards the book was never mentioned again. The prompt may have directed us towards themes of racism, but I remember taking away only two lessons from the assignment: 1) I never finished the book and accidentally replaced the female Japanese character's name with that of a local Japanese grocery store and I still received an A. 2) The Asians in the story were isolated, stoic, and sad characters who never truly belonged in American society. In my memories, that was the extent to which my identity was recognized by the Orange County, CA curriculum.

I interpreted the amount of recognition as equal to the amount of approval. With the near absence of East Asia and East Asians in the curricula and elsewhere, I learned that the West was the only source of progress, enlightenment, beauty. The Greeks, the Romans, Medieval Europe, the Italian Renaissance, the Enlightenment, and on the curricula went setting standards for worth that I chose to adopt wholeheartedly. Everything logical, progressive, and beautiful was Western, and I wanted desperately to be Western: to claim a heritage that I could be proud of. I understand there are a number of factors that inspire racial self-hatred, but I believe it fairly safe to claim that school curriculum played a part in its development.

I cannot speak for the intentions or desires of my teachers or curriculum writers, I can only speak for how I read and interpreted the curriculum and its implementation. I saw absence in the curriculum as the fault of the absentees. Years later, I am finally coming to understand how powerful a hold this had on me. The curriculum guaranteed my identity as an American who could share in the triumphs of the past and the shaping of the future, yet for most of my life this promise was consistently broken. Coming back to graduate school in my mid-30s was the first time I was able to express and give form to this experience through shared theories and stories. Embracing this collective identity of Asian American, I

became determined that my P-12 experience would not be repeated for younger generations of Asian Americans.

Noreen's Story

Until recently, I considered myself Asian. As the U.S.-born child of Pakistani and Filipina immigrants, I was acutely aware of my “Americanness” and how being native-born distinguished me from my parents - particularly in terms of my understanding (and their lack thereof, as I perceived it) of public schools, social norms, popular culture, and race. Yet I was not like the other students who surrounded me in my P-12 education in Texas. I was *Asian*: used to a mosaic of languages spoken at home, regularly visited family abroad, spent weekends with my parents’ Asian friends and their families, *always* took my shoes off before we walked inside their homes, and *never* ate all-American meals like meatloaf or casserole. Moreover, I was a different kind of Asian; not like the Filipino and South Asian families we spent time with on the weekends, where the household had one common non-English language and a single Asian culture. As a Pakipina, my hybridity was more unusual: I was neither fully Filipina nor Pakistani American, belonging to both cultures yet somehow ethnically ambiguous, inside and out. Perhaps because of the complex nature of my ethnic identity, it was easier to describe myself as Asian than to be specific and face the barrage of questions that would undoubtedly follow.

This perspective followed me into adulthood. I learned Spanish in college and became a bilingual elementary teacher in central Texas. I discovered that, due to my brown skin and black hair alongside my Spanish fluency, I presented as Latina to the students and families I interacted with each day. I soon realized that I was likely to be the only Asian teacher that my students had in their P-12 careers. As I heard my students use the word “chino” to describe any and all things Asian, it became apparent that clarifying the term was my responsibility as an Asian educator. I found more opportunities to share stories about my family, but these stories were often limited to the writing of personal narratives and discussions about immigration and culture. The closest I came to describing connections to my heritage in history was when I taught about Columbus: “My father was born here, in India. People born in India are called *Indians*.” I would point to India on the globe, then twirl it around to trace Columbus’ route to the Americas. “This is where Columbus landed. Is this India?” Aside from this anecdote, I found no other opportunities to discuss Asia in class. I never questioned this.

Many years later, I faced an identity shift. After nearly a decade of teaching, I was enrolled in a doctoral class on qualitative research. There, seated among international students who often relied on me to repeat or explain the instructions given by our fast-talking instructor, it became clear: *they* were Asian, from Indonesia, China, and Korea, struggling to comprehend the slang and rapid-fire delivery of our professor. *I*, on the other hand, understood every word with no difficulty whatsoever. I was *Asian American*. After over thirty years claiming my Asianness, it suddenly became apparent that I was not nearly as Asian as the graduate students who solicited my help in class; I was something in-between, and *they* viewed *me* as American as the apple pie that I saw on television but never consumed at home.

A semester later, I decided I needed to learn more about Asian immigration to the United States. After all, I was pursuing a specialization in social studies education; although I knew my parents’ individual immigration stories and those of our family friends, I didn’t know if those examples were the exception or the norm. As I began my research, I

encountered an historical event that I return to time and again: In 1587, the first Filipinos landed in Morro Bay, California. Fifteen eighty-seven. Before the arrival of the Pilgrims, my countrymen came to what was to become the United States. Why didn't I know this? Why didn't anyone teach me this? It would have made me feel less foreign, less Other, more American, more situated among my peers who claimed more generations in this country than I could. A simple fact, a single date, changed what I knew about my history and my people. *We were here. We've **been** here. But no one tells us, and we're made to feel like invaders who don't belong because of the shape of our eyes, the color of our hair, the languages we speak, and the foods we eat.*

Reclaiming Our Asian American Stories

When the experiences and narratives of different racial groups are unacknowledged, erased, or marginalized, students of color perceive that they and their stories do not matter. Kohli's (2014) case study revealed that the internalization of implicit and explicit racism and silencing by teachers of color during their K-12 education manifested in shame, loss of ethnic culture, and the desire to be white. Further, the repercussions of silencing multicultural narratives from students "create environments where not only are white students miseducated, but students of color feel as if their very identities are under attack" (Au, 2009, pp. 84-85). As we began to tease out the parts of our identity shaped by the silencing of our narratives, we were able to reclaim our own stories as Asian American women. A part of this reclamation was the need to write our narratives into the system that had erased them in the first place.

(Re)Constructing Asian American History as Teacher Educators

As teacher educators, we lament that little has changed since our own educations in the '80s and '90s, at least in Texas. Asian American history is still invisible and, according to state social studies standards (Heilig, Brown, & Brown, 2012), there are no Asian American individuals who merit required inclusion. Recently, the Texas State Board of Education approved an ethnic studies course (Texas Education Agency, 2018) and at least one large Texas public school district has designated the inclusion of Asian American history in a high school ethnic studies course. However, as one ethnic studies teacher has related to us, the challenge of such courses is her own lack of content knowledge as well as an uncertainty of how to address the stereotypes of Asian Americans that many Black and Latinx students believe. With the growing population of Asian and Asian American residents of different ethnicities and socioeconomic statuses in Texas, teachers in both elementary and secondary schools should ensure the inclusion of their stories and work to foster solidarity among communities of color.

Esther: Struggles in Secondary Social Studies Education

The process of addressing this marginalization in secondary social studies methods has revealed a number of challenges for pre-service teachers and for myself as an instructor. Towards the beginning of the semester, every activity in which students would list or consider missing stories (e.g., the short Civil Rights Movement) would require me (usually the only person of Asian descent in the room) to point at myself before students would realize that they never included an Asian American narrative. When the dominant narrative is heroification, linear progress, or a sanitized and non-threatening version of a person or event, there is often an access point that we can use to disrupt, to build upon, to

complicate. But when the dominant narrative is almost non-existent in both official and unofficial curriculum, where might we start?

An effective way for students to uncover this gap (in both curriculum and in their own historical constructions) and its underlying ideology is to use the topic of immigration. When I ask students to call out everything they could remember about Ellis Island, they list several key points: “Europeans,” “diseases” (e.g. medical exams), “immigration,” “fancy” (the current museum), “American dream,” etc. Without any support, students were able to come up with only one word for Angel Island: “California.” With very little prompting, they connected the elevation of Ellis Island, and the omission of Angel Island, to the perpetuation of Asian Americans as “perpetual foreigners.” To paraphrase a student, *by studying immigration only through the Europeans at Ellis Island, it’s like Asians were never a part of U.S. history.*

As I attempted to incorporate more Asian American history, the challenge became how to teach content in a methods course without overly simplifying a complex and multifaceted history. Using Asian American history to model methods in class allows for moments of content building: for example, discussing the history of Chinatowns in critical geography, or Aziz Anzari’s *Master of None* during our session on critical media literacy. Projects such as the Student as Historian website (Salinas, Bellows, & Liaw, 2011) and journey boxes (Labbo & Field, 1999) alongside critical media analysis, current events, and graphic novels have provided more flexible spaces for students to learn teaching methods while building the content knowledge necessary to disrupt dominant narratives. While there is excitement and joy in seeing students discover Asian American history for the first time, the common counter narratives generally do not attend to the issues that create obstacles for current collective action among Asian Americans and with other communities of color.

Noreen: Struggles in Elementary Social Studies Education

Preparing elementary social studies teachers presents a number of challenges. First, in the age of standardized testing, social studies as a content area has faced decreased funding and instructional time (Au, 2009; Halvorsen, 2013; VanFossen, 2005). Second, unlike their secondary counterparts, many elementary educators do not have discipline-specific majors, typically take a single course in social studies methods, and lack substantial historical content knowledge; therefore, they often rely heavily on problematic textbooks to guide instruction (Bolick, Adams & Willox, 2010; Russell, 2009). Third, the lack of content knowledge often manifests in the reduction of social studies to teaching about heroes and holidays (Kohl, 1994; Loewen, 1995) and “food, fun, families, festivals, flags and films” (National Council for the Social Studies, 2009), particularly in primary grades.

As an elementary social studies teacher educator, I must strike a balance between teaching my students content, particularly related to the many groups and histories absent in textbooks, and teaching pedagogical content knowledge (Shulman, 2004) and instructional strategies. As Esther described in her account, immigration is often the easiest way to expose prospective teachers to the topic of neglected Asian American histories. We review Ellis Island, typically the only instance of immigration history students recall from their own academic careers, then I ask if students know how or when Asians began coming to the United States. I present a range of children’s literature, from Chinese immigration in the late 1800s to contemporary stories of Southeast Asian and Afghani refugees, to offer

perspectives from this oft-ignored aspect of the immigrant experience, and supplement picture books with scholarly articles and resources (Rodríguez, 2015, 2018; Takaki, 1998).

As a former elementary school teacher, I consider children's literature to be a powerful resource in an era when there is always dedicated literacy time, but rarely any time allotted for social studies. In my view, integrating social studies into daily instruction through language arts and other subjects is essential to maintaining the regular presence of the social studies in elementary schools. Consequently, no matter what topic I focus on in my methods course, children's literature is always present. As I began to learn more about the Asian American experience, both historically and contemporarily, my library of Asian American children's literature expanded exponentially. While I was initially interested in picture books about Asian American histories, my interests shifted to books with Asian American characters without an overt emphasis on characters' ethnoracial identity. That is, books where the characters *happened to be Asian American*, but the focus was not their Asian ethnicity or culture. Instead, the focus was characters' everyday adventures (Bahk, 2015) and emotions regarding major life events (Ling, 2015), not cultural or linguistic differences distinct from what is perceived as "normal" Americanness. The more of these books I discovered, the more I realized how much I longed for these texts as a child. I use this recognition as a point of conversation with my students, and urge them to have books in their classroom libraries that serve as mirrors (Bishop, 1996) for all their students - books that allow children to see themselves represented, as capable of any number of things, and able to participate in a wide range of adventures and occupations.

However, children's literature alone is not the solution to exclusionary social studies curriculum and limited teacher content knowledge. Culturally diverse texts in P-12 classrooms are frequently used as momentary detours from the main curriculum (Derman-Sparks, 1993), and the slurs, stereotypes, and assumptions that have historically been a part of children's literature can perpetuate dominant ideologies (Au, Brown & Calderon, 2016; Banfield, 1985). If Asian American children's literature is only present when teaching about dragons and noodles on Lunar New Year, children will continue to regard Asian Americans as exotic and different, focusing on their Asianness rather than their Americanness. Moreover, relegating Asian Americans to their celebrations and foods situates Asian culture as something to be enjoyed for consumption without needing to be understood or seen as legitimately American. Thus, we urge educators to incorporate a multiplicity of stories and experiences that attend to the diversity of Asian America and to consider the impact of such narratives on Asian American students (Rodríguez & Kim, 2018).

Our Common Challenge: Teaching What We Never Learned in School

Perhaps our biggest challenge is the reality that we, as instructors, began learning about Asian American history and theory for the first time as doctoral students and are still in the process of learning foundational narratives. This journey towards finding our own histories has led us to look outside the field of education and to connect with professors in history, Asian American studies, and African and African Diaspora Studies whose guidance has been integral to our academic work and personal growth. In studying and working with scholars who share not only an Asian American identity, but also a commitment to ensure Asian American history spaces in P-12 classrooms, we are able to collaborate on projects and professional development that bridge their content expertise with the needs of in-service and pre-service educators.

Although our journeys hold immense individual value to our personal becoming, we see our stories as a part of a collective that can

empower us to free ourselves from the ‘categories and prescriptions of our specific order and from its ‘generalized horizon of understanding.’ The reason is phenomenological... The group-categories consigned to the role of Others, as Liminals, experience the ‘injustice inherent’ in the structuring of each human order. (Wynter, 1992, p. 27)

Once “discovered,” the liminal status of Asian Americans and our history in the U.S. (and specifically in social studies education) can expose systemic injustice that begins in the classroom. Mere “discovery” and inclusion, however, is an initial step towards addressing internalized racism as well as preventing representation of “Other history as merely a secondary add-on and supplement to the real, i.e., the generic history of America” (Wynter, 1992, p. 32). Exploring the relationships between “Other” histories in the U.S. exposes the ways that groups have been positioned against the other (e.g. model minority myth as a tool to discipline), but also reveals instances of solidarity between communities of color in the face of injustice and oppression.

As students, the marginalization of our voices and histories was often felt but rarely exposed. We share our stories to reclaim what has been erased and to recognize a common educational experience among students of color in which we, as teachers, were often complicit. The centering of European and Anglo histories and individuals in our teaching illustrates how pervasive these narratives are among educators, and we must acknowledge how deeply these narratives impact communities of color. In our ongoing effort to rectify these flawed (hi)stories in our classrooms, we make transparent our continued learning and growth toward the educations we dreamed of but never realized, in hopes that together we can work toward better futures of recognition, reclamation, and resilience.

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