

5-30-2018

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### Recommended Citation

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## **“Caught Between Two Worlds”: Asian American Elementary Teachers’ Enactment of Asian American History**

### **Abstract**

Traditional narratives of U.S. history largely exclude Asian American histories, particularly at the elementary level. This qualitative case study examines how three Asian American elementary school teachers included Asian American histories in their social studies curriculum and scaffolded student understanding by sharing their own hybrid identities and experiences. The teachers (re)framed the purpose of the historical narrative and confronted the dominant narrative of Japanese American incarceration, while making connections between Japanese American incarceration and contemporary events. Through this work, the teachers illustrated the complexity of race in the United States and presented discrimination and racism as enduring issues worthy of discussion with young learners.

### **Comments**

This accepted article is published as Naseem Rodríguez, N. (2019). Caught between two worlds: Asian American elementary teachers' enactment of Asian American history. *Educational Studies*, 55(2), 214-240. doi: [10.1080/00131946.2018.1467320](https://doi.org/10.1080/00131946.2018.1467320). Posted with permission.

**“Caught between two worlds”:**

**Asian American elementary teachers’ enactment of Asian American history**

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**Introduction**

The version of U.S. history taught in schools is generally a story of progress, exceptionalism, and freedom with the assumption of a unified society and a deemphasis on racial, ethnic, class, and gender distinctions (Levstik & Barton, 2011; Loewen, 1995; VanSledright, 2008; Zimmerman, 2002). However, for the majority of U.S. history, American laws declared at least two-thirds of the domestic adult population legally ineligible for full citizenship based on race, nationality, or gender (Haney-López, 1996; Smith, 1997). Even as legal citizenship and naturalization became accessible to various groups over time, widespread political and economic disenfranchisement greatly affected (and continue to affect) the ability of many individuals to engage in full democratic participation (Dunbar-Ortiz, 2014; San Miguel, 1999; Tillet, 2012). Although the preparation of students for participation in a pluralist democracy is often cited as a primary purpose of social studies (Dewey, 1916; Parker, 2003), school curricula often mask the fact that the history of civic identity in the United States does not reflect the American creed of inclusion and equality (Myrdal, 1944). This paper describes how three Asian American<sup>1</sup> elementary teachers disrupted exclusionary U.S. historical narratives through the inclusion of Asian American histories and by sharing their own marginalized

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<sup>1</sup> In this study, I use Asian American in lieu of Asian American Pacific Islander (AAPI) in recognition of Pacific Islanders as a panethnic group distinct from Asian Americans with their own histories, development, problems, and respective research and policy agendas (Kauanui, 2015) tied to discrete issues of colonialism, land, sovereignty, and political decolonization (Hau'ofa, 1994). As this study's teacher participants did not identify as Hawai'ian or Pacific Islander nor did the teachers' instruction of historical content include the Pacific Islands, I use "Asian American" for specificity in this study rather than more widely used terms such as AAPI.

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experiences with students to establish Asian American as a hybrid identity that illuminates the complexity of race in the United States. Their work demonstrates the importance of centering groups traditionally marginalized in U.S. history and how attention to ethnoracial identities and experiences can add nuance to such instruction.

### **Asian American Panethnicity**

Espiritu (1992) defined a panethnic group as “a politico-cultural collectivity made up of peoples of several, hitherto distinct, tribal or national origins” (p. 2) that is largely a product of categorization. Panethnic terms like Latinx<sup>2</sup> and Asian American are widely used but mask immense in-group diversity in class, language, ethnicity, culture, religion, education, historical experiences, and reasons for immigration (Espiritu, 1992; Lee, 2015). As Asian Americans do not share a common culture, language, or other readily identifiable symbols of ethnicity, there is no singular or uniform Asian American experience. Tuan (1998) noted that Asians typically *define themselves* in ethnic terms but may find themselves *defined by others* in generically racial terms like Asian American. Thus, ethnicity may be an expression of personal choice for European Americans but not for nonwhite<sup>3</sup> groups in the United States, for whom ethnicity can be coercively imposed, multi-tiered, and situational.

Although panethnic grouping can be problematic in its essentialization, it can also result in subgroup members acting collectively “to protect and to advance their interests... In a political system in which numbers count, this political strength is derived from a unified front rather than from the separate efforts of individual subgroups” (Espiritu, 1992, pp. 13-14). Activists Emma

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<sup>2</sup> The gender-neutral Latinx will be used to describe people of Mexican, South American, and Central American ancestry rather than the less gender inclusive Latino/a or the externally-imposed category of Hispanic

<sup>3</sup> Critical race legal scholar Neil Gotanda (1991) states that the term white has historically and contemporarily summarized racial domination and “is better left in lower case, rather than privileged with a capital letter. ‘Black,’ on the other hand, has deep political and social meaning as a liberating term, and, therefore, deserves capitalization” (p. 4). Thus white appears in lowercase throughout this paper and is only capitalized when used in direct citation.

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Gee and Yuji Ichioka are credited with creating the term Asian American in 1968 during the formation of the Asian American Political Alliance (AAPA), a political organization composed of multiethnic Asians from a variety of geographical, socioeconomic, class, and immigrant backgrounds. For the AAPA, the term Asian American was designed to unite diverse individuals and advocate for anti-racist and anti-imperialist politics (Nie & Rodríguez, in press; Maeda, 2012). Despite this history, Asian American is no longer widely used as a political-racial identifier and is instead relegated to a racial category (Philip, 2014). Park (2008) attributed this decline to factors such as the increasing ethnic diversity of Asian Americans, the role of religion in identity formation, and the second-generation experience of the children of immigrants. However, research on Asian Americans can provide opportunities to compare and contrast diversity of experience (Hune, 1995) and examine commonalities (Paik, Kula, Saito, Rahman, & Witenstein, 2014). In this study, Asian American captures the similar historical experiences and current issues faced by Asian immigrants and their children, particularly regarding the prejudice, discrimination, and racism that hinder their full and open participation in American society (Fong, 2008).

### **LITERATURE REVIEW**

This study examines how Asian American teachers enacted Asian American histories with their elementary school students. The section that follows describes the extant research on the teaching of Asian American history in schools and examines Asian American hybridity. Next, a summary of the scholarship on Asian American teachers is provided, followed by a brief explanation of some ways educators approach the teaching of U.S. history.

#### **Asian American History in School Curriculum**

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Asian Americans have a contentious civic history as the first and only immigrant group for whom legislation was crafted for their specific exclusion, in addition to long-standing bans on naturalization and ownership of property. Thus Ancheta (1998) argued that anti-Asian American subordination in the United States has historically been, and continues to be, centered on citizenship, making race a “site of struggle for cultural, economic, as well as political membership in the United States” (Lowe, 1996, p. ix). However, in official school curriculum and the dominant narrative of American history, this struggle is often hidden (Rodríguez & Ip, 2018).

In a review of ten states' K-12 U.S. history standards, An (2016) found minimal attention paid to Asian American history, results that echo analyses of U.S. history textbooks (Harada, 2000; Suh, An, & Forest, 2015; Wolf, 1992; Zuercher, 1969). The few standards that did address Asian Americans revealed an almost exclusive attention to Chinese in the 1800s or Japanese Americans during World War II. This limitation of curricular coverage to Japanese and Chinese Americans reiterates common connotations of all Asian Americans as East Asian and neglects the wide diversity of contemporary Asian America. Moreover, these standards depicted Asian Americans as victims of anti-Asian laws and sentiment or as immigrants, often reinforcing perceptions of Asian Americans as forever foreigners (Tuan, 1998) and disregarding Asian American activism and resistance (Nie & Rodríguez, in press). In elementary schools, Chinese immigration and Japanese American incarceration are rarely addressed and Asian Americans may only be mentioned in regard to holiday celebrations and food (Hartlep & Scott, 2016). Such depictions generally represent Asians rather than Asian Americans and often perpetuate exotic stereotypes that emphasize difference and continue to situate Asian Americans as foreign Others (Pang, Colvin, Tran, & Barba, 1992).

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The invisibility of the Asian American experience in school curriculum sends a message that Asian Americans are not legitimate members of the nation and have little place in the country's history (An, 2016). As Asian American historian Takaki (1998) argued, denying Asian American histories and solely focusing on Eurocentric history serves no one and only shrouds America's pluralism. In particular, it leaves students ill-equipped to empathize and thrive with diverse peoples in a democratic society and globalized world. However, although the inclusion of more diverse histories is absolutely necessary, it is difficult to implement in practice as many pre- and in-service elementary teachers often lack substantial historical content knowledge (Bisland, 2011; Vogler, 2011) and social studies professional development opportunities are rarely offered to in-service teachers (Passe, 2006; Zhao & Hoge, 2005). Furthermore, social studies as a content area continues to face significant declines in dedicated instructional time, particularly at the elementary level (Halvorsen, 2013; Russell, 2009).

### **Asian American Hybridity**

Asian Americans' complicated immigration history and positioning in "the racial middle" (O'Brien, 2008), as neither Black nor white, results in a lived ambiguity. Drawing from Bhabha's (1990) notion of hybridity as living "in-between" spheres of life and social experience, Goodwin (2003) explained, "as a community, Asian Americans have been named and defined by others; we have found ourselves in between, belonging neither to the majority nor minority" (p. 22). Hybridity is thus well-suited to the complexity of identities to which Asian Americans answer, as it not only recognizes but embraces their multiple positionings and the unique space in-between that they occupy.

Ang (2001) argued for "the importance of hybridity as a means of bridging and blurring the multiple boundaries which constitute 'Asian' and 'Western' identities as mutually exclusive

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and incommensurable" (p. 193). In regard to elementary social studies education, hybridity is particularly significant in broadening understandings of civic identity and civic membership among young learners who might otherwise conflate Americanness with whiteness (Harris, 1993; Ladson-Billings, 2004). As the process of becoming American may be fraught, complex, and uncomfortable in its lack of linearity (Chattarji, 2010), an understanding of hybridity helps articulate the complexities of "becoming" and "being" American and may disrupt common stereotypes of Asian Americans that position them as immigrants rather than citizens, and foreigners rather than Americans.

### **Asian American Teachers**

Asian American teachers hold a unique position in school spaces. Comprising less than two percent of the teaching force (Boser, 2011), they are underrepresented in the field (Boser, 2011; Poon, 2014; Rong & Preissle, 1997), rarely appear in scholarship about teachers of color (Achinstein & Ogawa, 2012; Quirocho & Rios, 2000), and may be viewed as foreigners by students and colleagues (Endo, 2015; Morita-Mullaney & Greene, 2015; Nguyen, 2008). However, current research revealed that Asian American teachers may demonstrate greater cultural and linguistic understanding with diverse students and their parents (Goodwin et al., 1997; Pang, 2009; Ramanathan, 2006) and can serve as agents of change by developing more culturally relevant curriculum (Branch, 2004; Choi, 2013; Goodwin et al., 1997; Morita-Mullaney & Greene, 2015; Sheets & Chew, 2002).

Sheets and Chew (2002) and Nguyen (2012) critiqued popular studies of teaching by Cattani (2002) and Lortie (1975), which illustrated the pivotal role of socialization in the lives of white teachers but did not address the entry-into-teaching stressors such as race, ethnicity and language faced by Asian American educators (Gordon, 2000; Rong & Preissle, 1997; Su, 1996).

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In some cases, Asian American teachers' racial and cultural distinctiveness compared to mostly white faculty was seen as an asset: teachers felt more aware of cultural values and difference (Kiang, 2004; Morita-Mullaney & Greene, 2015; Pang, 2009; Sheets & Chew, 2002). Goodwin et al. (1997) discovered that regardless of the languages spoken by the teachers, Asian parents expressed greater comfort with Asian American teachers while Latinx parents seemed to relate to the teachers *through* language, suggesting that the teachers' "membership in minority groups has sensitized them to the role of language as a barrier to entering mainstream society and as a key to unlocking children's potential" (pp. 230-231). In these instances, Asian American teachers provided unique interpersonal, cultural, and linguistic supports to students and their families. Most commonly, studies exposed faculty and student perceptions of Asian American teachers as cultural representatives and experts on all things Asian (Endo, 2015; Goodwin et al., 1997; Morita-Mullaney & Greene, 2015; Ramanathan, 2006; Sheets & Chew, 2002) who were also often perceived as foreigners (Endo, 2015; Morita-Mullaney & Greene, 2015; Nguyen, 2008). Schools can be spaces rife with racial microaggressions (Endo, 2015; Kohli & Solórzano, 2012), and in some cases Asian American teachers felt silenced (Sheets & Chew, 2002), isolated or invisible to their peers (Endo, 2015; Nguyen, 2008), and viewed as less competent due to nonstandard English accents (Morita-Mullaney & Greene, 2015; Nguyen, 2008, 2012).

Some Asian American teachers found opportunities to develop curriculum around their own and other Asian American histories (Goodwin et al., 1997; Morita-Mullaney & Greene, 2015; Rodríguez, 2017; Rodríguez, in press; Sheets & Chew, 2002). For example, Branch (2004) examined the practices of a Japanese American sixth grade social studies teacher who facilitated students' ethnic identity development through self-created curriculum, including places and events traditionally omitted in the official narrative of American history, such as the Angel

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Island immigration station in California and Japanese American incarceration during World War II. In Choi's (2013) study, a Korean American high school social studies teacher shifted the curricular focus from typical Eurocentric narratives to global/multicultural citizenship to better address the needs and interests of his newcomer immigrant students.

The paucity of research on Asian American teachers leaves at least three considerations unresolved. First, most studies of Asian American teachers took place in areas with a critical mass of Asian Americans, predominantly in California and the Pacific Northwest (Nguyen, 2008; Pang, 2009; Sheets & Chew, 2002). East of the West coast, Asian American teachers may be the only Asian American or teacher of color on the school faculty; indeed, they may be the only Asian American teacher that students encounter in their K-12 careers (Nash, 2008). Second, the majority of research on Asian American teachers concentrated on female teachers of East and Southeast Asian descent. This focus marginalizes and excludes both male and South Asian American experiences (Shankar & Srikanth, 1998). For example, several studies pointed to the role of Confucian ideals in Asian American teacher identity (Pang, 2006; Rong & Preissle, 1997; Sheets & Chew, 2002), ignoring the fact that such claims are not culturally relevant for South Asian Americans and East/Southeast Asian religious minority groups. Further, Asian Americans are generally associated with traditional "Eastern" religions such as Buddhism, Hinduism, and Islam, ignoring the growing presence of Protestant evangelicalism and other branches of Christianity among Asian Americans (Park, 2008). Research that continues to essentialize Asian American educators fails to recognize the diversity of Asian Americans and succumbs to the pitfalls of panethnicity.

Third, most studies of Asian American teachers have not delved into teachers' use of Asian American as a political-racial identity (Philip, 2014). Due to the invisibility of Asian

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Americans and their (hi)stories in the curriculum, Asian American teachers may be unaware of their racialization in the United States and/or to the invisible norms of whiteness that are pervasive in society (Philip & Curammeng, 2015). By acknowledging Asian American racialization and “[r]eturning to the roots of the API movement” (Philip & Curammeng, 2015, p. 34), Asian American educators can explore political identities for social justice teaching. Such notions of transformative praxis foster solidarity among people of color and can ultimately lead to anti-racist and more truly democratic education. This study addresses these gaps in the research on Asian American teachers by focusing on three religiously, ethnically, and linguistically diverse Asian American elementary educators (two women and one man) in the U.S. South who intentionally brought Asian American histories to the fore in their social studies instruction.

### **Teaching American History & Social Studies**

In the pursuit of teaching history for the common good, Barton and Levstik (2009) identify four stances that describe the combination of purpose and practice of history education, two of which are most relevant in this study of Asian American teachers. First, the identification stance may manifest through the imagined community of nation (Anderson, 1983/1991) and stories of the nation's origin and development. Second, the analytic stance, drawn from Bloom's (1956) taxonomy, involves identifying connections, relationships, and structures across individual events or pieces of historical evidence. This stance may result in the teaching of history "to understand how present-day society came to be" (Barton & Levstik, 2009, p. 70), to learn lessons from the past, or to understand and analyze how historical accounts are created.

As teaching is undoubtedly a political act (Apple, 2004), educators approach social studies curriculum in various ways. For the Asian American elementary educators in this study,

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their hybrid ethnoracial identities and histories informed the ways they viewed citizenship and American history as well as their approaches to teaching these topics. Chang (1999) maintained that racial minorities know that the metaphor of the U.S. as a melting pot is "a fundamental contradiction at the heart of American exceptionalism... as the welcome mat is removed and racial minorities are denied full and equal membership in the family that is America" (p. 102).

Thus it is important to examine how these three teachers viewed the purpose of history education in general, and the inclusion of Asian American narratives in particular.

### **Theoretical Framework**

#### **Asian Critical Race Theory (AsianCrit)**

Asian Critical Race Theory (AsianCrit) draws from scholarship in critical theory, critical legal studies, and critical race theory which attempt "to understand the oppressive aspects of society in order to generate societal and individual transformation" (Tierney, 1993, p. 4). Critical race theory (CRT) begins with the premise that racism is a normal part of U.S. society (Delgado, 2013). In the field of education, the application of CRT can deepen understanding of the educational barriers faced by people of color (Taylor, 2009), from inequality in school funding to issues related to assessment and curriculum (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995; Yosso, 2002).

AsianCrit, Lat(inx)Crit, TribalCrit, and other branches of CRT are based on the same theoretical principles but address distinctive community needs with those unique histories and experiences at the forefront (Solorzano & Yosso, 2001). Frustrated by the inattention paid to Asian American issues in civil rights work and CRT, Chang (1993) called for an Asian American legal scholarship to recognize that the discrimination faced by Asian Americans "is quantitatively and qualitatively different from that suffered by other disempowered groups" (p. 1247) given the specific immigrant and racialized history of Asian Americans as neither white

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nor Black. Two decades later, Museus and Iftikar (2014) applied AsianCrit to education, detailing seven tenets of an AsianCrit framework. This paper focuses on two tenets of AsianCrit: *Asianization* and *(re)constructive history*.

*Asianization* refers to the particular ways in which Asian Americans are racialized in the U.S. and often lumped into a monolithic group (Museus, 2014), such as the discursive productions of Asian Americans as foreigners and a model minority (Chang, 1999). Anti-Asian American subordination in American history has been and continues to be centered on citizenship through an "outsider racialization" that positions Asian Americans as both unassimilable foreigners and immigrants, disregarding their actual citizenship status (Ancheta, 1998). *Asianization* also attends to portrayals of Asian Americans as a monolith, devoid of intergroup diversity and distinction. Coloma (2006), Lee (2006) and others have called for the use of intersectional frameworks to examine how Asian American identity goes beyond ethnicity, intersecting with English language proficiency, gender, class, sexuality, and generational status, in institutions that regularly position Asian Americans as Others (Lei, 2006). For Asian immigrant communities in particular, articulations of immigrant generation, language, religion, and histories of colonialism and domination (among others) are essential to critically understand their life conditions (Coloma, 2006; Lowe, 1996).

*(Re)Constructive history* seeks to recognize and transcend the racial exclusion of Asian Americans from the historical narrative by including the voices and experiences of Asian Americans in both past and present narratives of the United States (Museus, 2014). Asians have historically been subjected to institutionalized racial discrimination through public policies, and were the first and only group excluded from immigrating to the United States on the basis of nationality (Takaki, 1998). Asian American histories therefore trouble traditional narrative arcs

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of American progress due to their highly racialized nature, presenting what Salinas and Alarcón (2016) consider *difficult histories*:

By difficult histories we mean those historical accounts that minimize the accounts of conflict between dominant groups and those that would favor a more equitable political, social and economic landscape. We further characterize the teaching of difficult histories as those practices that expose the enduring presence of racism, classism, sexism and so forth that define the struggle for citizenship as continual. (p. 69)

Asian American experiences of prolonged detention at Angel Island, exploitation of labor, purposeful exclusion of “Mongolian” children from public schools, and forced relocation and incarceration<sup>4</sup> in deserts during World War II complicate mainstream notions of America as a land of opportunity and melting pot of immigrants (Hawkins & Buckendorf, 2010; Jahng, 2013; Lee & Yung, 2010; Takaki, 1990, 1998). The influx of Southeast Asian refugees in the 1970s and 1980s as a direct result of U.S. military interventions calls into question the purposes and effects of American military aggression. These difficult Asian American histories often conflict with traditional U.S. narratives of progress and freedom (VanSledright, 2002).

As these topics have long been missing from textbooks and curriculum, teachers may be uncomfortable teaching them and/or unfamiliar with age-appropriate resources to scaffold instruction and student learning. Moreover, researchers have found that teachers are often afraid to discuss issues of racism and discrimination in the classroom (Copenhaver-Johnson, Bowman, & Johnson, 2007; Wills, 1996); when they do broach these topics, they are often presented through a Black/white binary (Bolgatz, 2005; Salinas, Fránquiz, & Rodríguez, 2016) and as conflicts relegated to the past rather than ongoing challenges (Wills, 2001). However, to limit official history only to those familiar narratives which depict the United States in a positive light furthers Pinar’s (2004) critique of the miseducation of the American public and fails to explain

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<sup>4</sup> For legal and historical accuracy, I use the term *incarceration* to describe the forced removal and imprisonment of 120,000 Japanese and Japanese Americans during World War II rather than the common euphemism *internment* (see Rodríguez, 2016; Daniels, 2005)

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the racial hierarchy that remains entrenched in American society today. *(Re)Constructive history* is necessary to combat the invisibility of Asian Americans in the curriculum (An, 2016; Hartlep & Scott, 2016) and to give voice to Asian American narratives in the past and present as part of the larger anti-racist and anti-oppression projects of including diverse counterstories in U.S. history.

### **Method of Study**

This qualitative, instrumental case study took place in an urban school district in Texas. Stake (1995) defines a case as a specific, unique, bounded system. The Asian American elementary teachers involved in this study were bounded by their Asian American identities and employment in the same school district, which had a low but growing percentage of Asian American students and even lower representation of Asian American teachers. The American South (as defined by the U.S. Census) is the area experiencing the fastest growth in Asian American populations (Hoeffel, Rastogi, Kim, & Shahid, 2012), demonstrating the need for research beyond the West Coast where Asian Americans may be racialized and understood in distinct ways (Endo, 2015; Morita-Mullaney & Greene, 2015).

All teacher participants were the children of Asian immigrants or refugees, and their experiences as 1.5/second generation (Portes & Rumbaut, 2011), bi/multilingual children of immigrants were distinct from the majority of white, native-born, monolingual teachers who are farther removed from the immigrant experience (Gutierrez & Orellana, 2006). The teachers were purposefully selected due to their Asian heritage, immigrant generation, and their willingness to diverge from the official curriculum in order to teach lessons about Asian American history. This paper draws from a larger study of Asian American elementary teachers and highlights the work

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of three veteran educators, Claudia, Hannah, and Arjun (see Tables 1 & 2), who were observed teaching lessons about Asian American history during the spring 2016 semester.

Although all three teachers identified as Asian Americans who were educated in the United States, they were quite distinct in terms of their ethnic heritages, linguistic repertoires, religious beliefs, and cultural upbringings, reflecting the extraordinary diversity of Asian America. Claudia was a Vietnamese American born in Germany. Her parents fled Saigon on a German naval ship during the Vietnam War and chose a popular German name for her when she was born. Claudia grew up speaking German and Vietnamese and learned English after arriving in Texas in the first grade. Claudia obtained her teacher certification through a post-baccalaureate program and spent her first few years teaching as a Vietnamese dual language specialist before moving to a traditional all-English elementary position.

Hannah was Chinese American and born in Texas. She grew up in a suburb with an active Chinese American community which, like her family, was from Hong Kong and Southern Baptist. Hannah was bilingual in Cantonese and English and holds bachelor's and master's degrees in education. Arjun was Indian American and born in Kenya to parents of Indian descent. His father, a doctor, moved to the northeastern United States for his residency when Arjun was a toddler. By the time Arjun was old enough to attend school, he had mastered English and the family moved to Texas. In the absence of a Jain temple and community, his family joined the local Hindu community. Arjun received his teaching certification through an alternative certification program but left public school teaching after a few years to join the PeaceCorps in Central America. The 2015-2016 school year was his second year back in Texas after three years spent volunteering and teaching abroad.

*Table 1: Teacher Participants, Ethnic & Cultural Diversity*

<b>Pseudonym</b>	<b>Ethnicity</b>	<b>Birthplace</b>	<b>Immigrant</b>	<b>Languages</b>	<b>Religion</b>
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		<b>Generation</b>		<b>Spoken</b>	
Claudia Pham	Vietnamese American	Germany	1.5	English, Vietnamese	Christian
Arjun Desai	Indian American	Kenya	1.5	English, Hindi, Gujarati, Spanish	Hindu/Jain
Hannah Shen	Chinese American	U.S.A.	2	English, Cantonese	Southern Baptist

*Table 2: Teacher Participants, Professional Experience*

<b>Pseudonym</b>	<b>Grade(s)/Subject(s) Taught</b>	<b>Years Teaching</b>	<b>Degrees/Teacher Preparation</b>
Claudia Pham	3rd Grade, All Subjects	10	B.A. in Sociology, Post-baccalaureate in Elementary Education
Arjun Desai	3rd & 5th Grade, Spanish Language Arts, Social Studies & Science	6	B.A. in Architectural Studies, Texas Teaching Fellows
Hannah Shen	2nd Grade, All Subjects	8	B.S. in Elementary Education, M.Ed. in Language & Literacy

Multiple sources of data were collected for the three Asian American teachers during social studies and related language arts instruction, including video- and/or audio-recordings and observations of classroom lessons, semi-structured interviews, and collection of teacher and student artifacts. Interviews and classroom observations were transcribed and provided to the participants for member checks. Data was analyzed using descriptive, en vivo, and axial coding (Saldaña, 2009) to determine emerging themes that provided insight into the research question, How do Asian American elementary teachers enact Asian American history?

### **Findings**

History textbooks and curriculum packages are produced for particular purposes; in 2010, the Texas Board of Education approved a decidedly conservative and Anglocentric overhaul of the social studies curriculum (McKinley, 2010) which influenced curricular adoptions throughout the state. However, the three teachers in this study did not use the district-provided social studies curriculum during the semester in which data was collected, and instead, with principal approval, opted to create their own social studies units using picture books, media,

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primary sources, and other resources. The analysis of data revealed two themes in the elementary teachers' enactment of Asian American history. First, the teachers (re)framed both the purpose of the historical narrative and the way in which they approached historical narratives through their pedagogical practices. Although each teacher recalled learning traditional Anglocentric history in her/his own schooling, in their classrooms they approached history education as a means to learn important lessons from the past. Second, the teachers varied in their approaches to (re)constructing Asian American narratives, yet engaged in a common confrontation of the dominant narrative of Japanese American incarceration. Additionally, the three elementary educators were explicit in making connections between Japanese American incarceration and contemporary events, presenting discrimination and racism as enduring struggles rather than issues that have been overcome and resolved.

### **(Re)Framing the Historical Narrative**

Barton & Levstik (2009) describe “doing history” as inclusive of multiple actions or stances; in this study, the Asian American elementary educators used the *identification* and *analysis* stances in their enactment of American and Asian American histories. In their own educations, Claudia, Arjun, and Hannah recalled learning history through the identification stance; in their interviews and observed classroom practice, however, they most embodied the analytic stance at various points during the spring 2016 semester. Their perceived lack of national identification in K-12 schooling seemed to pivot them toward analytic stances (Barton & Levstik, 2009) which drew from their own experiences and confronted the complex ethnoracial diversity of their classrooms and the contemporary United States.

**National Identification in Their Own Schooling.** The teachers' enactment of Asian American history was influenced by their own experiences and understandings of history as well

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as their objectives for student learning and discussion (Barton & Levstik, 2009). One of the determinants for participant selection was an expressed eagerness to begin teaching Asian American histories in the elementary classroom; although the participants had varying knowledge of their own family histories and the histories of their ancestral homelands, each teacher was educated in the United States and recalled scant attention to Asian Americans in their own K-12 schooling. The lack of personal relevance and general disconnect from American history content were deeply felt by Claudia and Hannah, who both conveyed a desire to teach social studies differently to their own students.

Claudia began her American education in the first grade after immigrating from her birthplace of Germany, and the connection between the content of her social studies coursework and its relevance to her family and life experiences was unclear. In an interview, she recounted, "Coming from another country, you're like, 'Why am I learning about this?' I don't know, I just didn't connect with it." As a recent immigrant, Claudia described feeling "caught between the two worlds... too Asian to hang out with these white people" and too white to hang out with other Vietnamese. Reminiscent of the identity work of Gloria Anzaldúa (1987), Claudia felt neither from here nor there. Hannah, born and raised in a Texas suburb in a tight-knit Chinese American community, recalled, "I really didn't like history growing up. Maybe because I didn't feel like it was something that I could connect to, that was relevant to me. It was mostly white males." Despite being a native-born American, Hannah also felt detached from a subject area that seemed foreign to her and her family's experiences, particularly as a woman of color.

These memories of disconnect and disinterest positioned the teachers outside the Anglocentric, male-dominated narrative of American history presented in school, a peripheral Othering common in the Asian American experience (Ancheta, 1998; Chang, 1999; Young,

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2004). Barton and Levstik (2009) and Epstein (2010) identify such feelings as one of the problems of teaching history from a national identity stance: sheer exposure to stories of nation does not guarantee personal connection. The absence of Asian American narratives, historical figures, and events in Claudia and Hannah's schooling left them without reflections of self and family in the curriculum and led to their disengagement with history.

Thus when they became educators, Claudia and Hannah were critically conscious of the exclusionary nature of traditional historical narratives and sought to teach their students in ways that diverged from their own educational experiences. Hannah, who taught at a school that was 90% Latinx and 8% Black, rationalized,

It was important to not teach this white male perspective. Most of my (school)children are not white males, so I'm not going to teach them this whitewashed American history. In my mind, I feel like there are a lot of things I didn't learn or that I didn't know, and so now I'm learning about it. Whereas my kids have the potential to learn about it now, and then by the time they get to middle school, high school, they're going to have so much more knowledge about issues.

In contrast to her own schooling, Hannah wanted her students of color to learn historical renditions in which they saw themselves and people like them. Rather than regurgitate the litany of landed white men she learned about in school, Hannah carefully selected texts with female, Black, and Brown protagonists and dedicated several weeks to instructional units about the long Civil Rights Movement (Hall, 2005) and school segregation. Claudia, too, chose historical narrative texts featuring famous individuals of color, such as Mahatma Gandhi, Nelson Mandela, César Chavez, and Rosa Parks. These instructional choices, inspired by their own hybrid schooling experiences as Asian Americans, disrupted traditional national identification through a singular, mostly white male history and presented students with a more diverse historical cast of characters. As Chang (1999) reminded us, "Exclusion has many faces" (p. 76); Hannah and

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Claudia's efforts to represent an array of individuals outside of the dominant narrative of American history were an important step in combatting the invisibility of the non-white Other.

In contrast to Claudia and Hannah, Arjun reported that he enjoyed the Eurocentric history he was taught in school. In college, however, he described developing "an awareness of the narrow-mindedness of how social studies and American history was taught" as he was exposed to postcolonial and subaltern histories. Born in Kenya to Indian parents who grew up during Partition, Arjun's family history was deeply embedded in British colonialism (see Gregory, 1971; Mangat, 1969) but until college, those (hi)stories were only shared informally by his family and Indian community and lacked the sense of validation that accompanies the official narratives taught in school (Epstein, 2010; Wertsch, 2000). He reflected, "We didn't have alternative ideologies presented to us until I got to college. It can start a lot earlier." Like Claudia and Hannah, Arjun recognized not only the importance of counterstories (Delgado, 1989) but also the transformative power of learning more complex perspectives of history earlier in life.

In sum, these three Asian American educators drew from their own hybrid experiences as they mastered but resisted exclusionary mainstream historical narratives (Wertsch, 2000) and recognized the potential for children to learn about multiple perspectives at an early age. Further, they recognized that Asian American histories *could* and *should* be taught to elementary students. Consequently, the goal of troubling narrow conceptions of what it means to be American was an important influence on their curricular enactment, particularly in their selection of children's literature, primary sources, and the narrative voices they privileged.

**Teaching History to Learn Lessons from the Past.** While the teachers rejected the national identification approach used in their K-12 schooling, they had a shared rationale for studying history: learning lessons from the past, which Barton and Levstik (2009) refer to as an

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analytic stance of teaching history. In an interview, Claudia explained, "As citizens, we should look back on history and be able to look at it and learn from it, and look at the positive and negative effects. We can't really move forward without understanding the past." Similarly, Arjun rationalized, "The history of our recent past - and not even that, for the past 500 to 600 years - directly influences what our values are in society." Philosopher George Santayana (1906) famously stated, "Those who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it" (p. 284), a sentiment echoed on multiple occasions by Hannah in both interviews and classroom observations.

The "Santayanan purpose" (VanSledright, 1997) of social studies expressed by the three teachers are common public expectations for history and in elementary schools in particular (Barton & Levstik, 2009), but are heavily critiqued by some historians. Geyl (1955) argues that "history is not to be searched for practical lessons" because the applicability of such lessons "will always be doubtful in view of the inexhaustible novelty of circumstances and combination of causes" (p. 84). There are too many possible lessons to be learned, all of them ambiguous, such that knowing when to apply particular lessons to contemporary situations would be unclear - essentially, no two situations in human history are ever identical or even close (Barton & Levstik, 2009). However, the teachers in this study did not receive formal training in history nor did they take extensive coursework in the social studies that might have indicated these issues with the Santayanan purpose of teaching history. Hannah's traditional teacher education program, Arjun's alternative teacher certification program, and Claudia's post-baccalaureate program provided only a single course on social studies methods, not historical content. Their limited social studies/history content knowledge and minimal understanding of historical interpretation are typical of most elementary educators (Russell, 2009; Stanley & Longwell, 2004) who, unlike

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their secondary counterparts, often complete teacher education programs with little emphasis on social studies without discipline-specific majors (Bolick, Adams & Willox, 2010).

In spite of historians' critiques of analytic approaches to teaching history, Gounari (2008) contended that when history is taught for the purposes of knowing and creating spaces rather than simply commemorating events of a disconnected past, it opens possibilities for transformative learning and discourse. Although the analytic stance has its disciplinary shortcomings, there is transformative potential that lies in the teachers' interest in learning and teaching about groups and historical moments typically overlooked, and asking students how those lessons can inform the ways they understand their sociocultural present and the role of agency. For Asian Americans who have long been obscured, blamed and forgotten in history (Chang, 1999), such work can "reconstruct the pedagogical role of history, moving beyond the limits of the discipline and creating a discourse that underlines the importance of keeping dangerous historical memories alive as a requirement for a substantive democracy" (Gounari, 2008, p. 112).

In order for such transformative enactment to occur, educators must be prepared to reveal histories that may be wholly unknown to students, that they themselves may have never learned about in formal school settings. The notion of enacting traditionally omitted historical narratives in order to learn lessons from the past was particularly salient as all three Asian American teachers (re)constructed transformative narratives about the domestic incarceration of Japanese and Japanese Americans during World War II, a topic rarely discussed in elementary schools.

### **(Re)Constructing Asian American Narratives**

The teachers' recognition of and indignation at the invisibility of Asian Americans in historical narratives was essential to their participation in this study, as was their determination

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to transcend this historical silencing by creating and implementing multiple lessons dedicated to the teaching of Asian American history. The topic of Japanese American incarceration during WWII was taught in all three classrooms for multiple days and serves as the focus of the remainder of this paper. Based on interviews and observations of the teachers' instruction of this moment in American history, the teachers confronted the dominant narrative of incarceration, which viewed Executive Order 9066 (EO 9066) as a justifiable wartime act, in different ways and connected Japanese American incarceration to contemporary events and enduring issues.

**Confronting the Dominant Narrative of Japanese American Incarceration.** The official narrative of U.S. history describes EO 9066 as a necessary national security response to the bombing of Pearl Harbor. This order resulted in the expulsion of 120,000 Japanese Americans from the West Coast between 1942-1946 to sixteen assembly centers and later to ten prison camps. Critical interpretations that question the rationale and constitutionality of incarceration are conspicuously absent from the dominant narrative, as they directly contradict the premise that EO 9066 was a judicious rejoinder to a legitimate military threat posed by enemy aliens (Rodríguez, 2017). On the rare occasions when textbooks do contain official narratives of the domestic aspects of World War II, they tend to emphasize Japanese American compliance with EO 9066 or may highlight the military accomplishments of the all-Japanese 100th Battalion and/or 442nd Regimental Combat Unit as examples of Japanese American patriotism and military participation rather than include acts of resistance (An, 2016).

As the teachers in this study planned and executed their lessons on Asian American history, they each confronted the dominant narrative of Japanese American incarceration differently. Arjun and Hannah were particularly interested in fostering conversations that complicated and resisted the official history of Japanese American incarceration. For instance,

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fifth grade teacher Arjun disrupted the official narrative of Japanese American incarceration during WWII by recognizing the presence and contributions of Japanese Americans prior to WWII. Arjun's three-day unit started with early Japanese immigration to America to provide context for the presence of Japanese Americans. His self-created slideshow opened with a map demonstrating migration routes from Japan to the United States and continued with images of Japanese farmworkers as he described how Japanese immigrants established communities, cultivated land using innovative techniques from their homeland, and were instrumental in the development of West Coast agriculture in the early 1900s. Arjun's approach portrayed Japanese Americans as immigrants who, like many other groups before and after them, contributed to American society in multiple ways.

Arjun addressed the complexity of Japanese American incarceration during World War II as he pushed his students, many of whom were quite knowledgeable about World War II but unfamiliar with incarceration, to consider why this content was often absent from history books. "Because they don't want to show the U.S. as the bad guys!" a student named Neil exclaimed. When asked afterward what he wanted students to take away from these lessons, Arjun explained that he wanted to pique student interest and critically question them on big issues, such as, "What does it mean to be an American? What does it mean that a lot of people have this unfallible [*sic*] idea of America but there's these parts of history that are not really talked about?" Through this deeper interrogation of the mainstream narrative of Japanese American incarceration, Arjun was able to trouble his students' perceptions of the U.S. as a country that always protects its citizens and makes the "right" decisions in times of war.

Hannah pushed back against common depictions of Japanese and Japanese Americans as suspicious "enemy Others". As she read the picture book *The Bracelet* (Uchida, 1996) with her

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second graders, Hannah emphasized that the book's main character was Japanese *American*, born in the United States, not in Japan, but nonetheless viewed as the enemy and sent to camp. A few pages into *The Bracelet*, a student named Lyric uttered a thought aloud as Hannah read to the class. Hannah asked Lyric to repeat what she said.

**Lyric:** The government made them go to the camp... Maybe because they were bad, I think?

**Hannah:** So the government made them go to the camp because they were...

**Lyric:** Japanese...

**Hannah:** Was there something else?

**Lyric:** And they look like the enemy!

With support from Hannah, Lyric identified the role of ethnicity and phenotype in wartime perceptions of citizen versus enemy, building on her emerging understanding of the main character's Japanese American identity.

Minutes later, Lyric's peer Roderick suggested that the family was taken to the camp "because they look different from other people." "What do you mean by they looked different from other people?" Hannah probed. "Because they're from another place?" Roderick volunteered. Hannah asked the class where the main character Emi and her family were from. Students shouted, "Japan!" Hannah reread a line from the text to address her students' misunderstandings: "The government was sending them to a prison camp because they were Japanese American and America was at war with Japan" (Uchida, 1996, p. 1). A chorus of students changed their answers to "America!" "Does it say anything there about them being from another place?" Hannah reiterated. "No! America," her students repeated. Similar conversations arose as the class continued reading and grappled with how to define an American (citizen).

*The Bracelet* provided several opportunities for Hannah to guide her students in complicating the official narrative of Japanese American incarceration. For example, the main character's family reports to the center where they will be loaded onto buses destined for a

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temporary camp at the Tanforan racetracks. A vivid illustration accompanied the text, "When they got to the center, Emi saw hundreds of Japanese-Americans everywhere. Grandmas and grandpas and mothers and fathers and children and babies" (Uchida, 1996, p. 11). As Hannah read these words, a student interjected incredulously, "But the babies have to go?" A flurry of conversation erupted as students exclaimed, "Even the grandma and grandpa!" "They're taking them to camp!" "They don't even know what they're doing!" Hannah's students recognized that many people sent to camps were both American *and* innocent, disrupting the traditional narrative that anyone of Japanese descent posed a threat to national security.

These examples from Hannah and Arjun's classrooms illustrate how the teachers confronted the dominant narrative of justified Japanese American removal and incarceration. Their class discussions fostered conversations and historical understandings about the contributions and citizenship of Japanese Americans as well as how injustice is overlooked and even omitted entirely from historical narratives. Although the teachers did not possess in-depth knowledge of Japanese American history, their pedagogical choices were informed by their personal understandings of the hybrid nature of Asian American identity. In particular, Arjun fostered important understandings of transnationalism and immigration while Hannah pushed her students to reconsider what it meant for someone to be and look "American," instructional decisions directly related to their own family histories of immigration and being viewed as foreigners rather than American citizens. Together, the teachers and their students confronted, complicated, and resisted master narratives (Wertsch, 2000) of Japanese Americans as enemy Others whose presence put the nation at risk during wartime.

**Connecting to Contemporary Events & Enduring Themes of Discrimination.** Wu (2002) cited the incarceration of Japanese Americans during WWII as "the obvious precedent for

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the treatment of Arab Americans and Muslim Americans in the aftermath of the September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks" (p. 52). During the spring 2016 semester during which data was collected, media coverage frequently spotlighted anti-immigrant and anti-Muslim rhetoric by then-presidential candidate Donald Trump. The teachers reported hearing their students informally discuss Trump in class and used their lessons on Japanese incarceration to connect student understandings to broader issues of discrimination and contemporary American Islamophobia.

For instance, Arjun shared a video of Muslim children reading letters written by Japanese American youth imprisoned in camps (Chi, 2016). Near its conclusion, an elderly Japanese American woman tearfully read aloud a letter composed when she was a girl: "But I'm sure when this war is over, there will be no racial discrimination and no one will have to doubt for a minute the great principles of democracy" (Ogawa quoted in Chi, 2016). After the video ended, a student named Anna observed, "That's really sad!" Another student, Esther, added, "You could even hear in her voice that she was crying!" Arjun asked his students why these two groups were interacting. "Because some people think Muslims are horrible, that they're terrorists," Esther replied. By comparing the treatment of Japanese Americans during World War II to the contemporary treatment of Muslims and those perceived-as-Muslims, Arjun's fifth graders recognized the ongoing need for people to "respect each other" and even acknowledged that "some of us are racist to Muslims" due to stereotypes and misunderstandings.

Arjun's students' recognition that the United States remains an imperfect pluralist democracy whose citizens are capable of treating each other better demonstrates initial steps toward transformational understanding and social justice. Weeks later, Arjun reflected, "these kids are ready for it... we need to teach about great inequalities that have existed and continue to exist and try to dismantle them, think critically about why they've happened, and think about

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how we as individual human beings can be agents of change.” Thus creating connections between the past and present to foster critical consciousness among his students became central to his teaching of Asian American history and was reflective of his analytical stance on teaching history to learn lessons from the past.

Claudia described a student-initiated comparison between the domestic events of WWII and contemporary treatment of Muslims in her classroom. In an interview, she recounted an instance when her student Todd made a connection to *Heroes* (a book about Japanese Americans after WWII), interjecting, "We shouldn't be treating Muslims this way!" Claudia explained, "Some of them are just in shock that, you know, it's more than just Black people that were treated that way." Her comment highlights the narrow scope of traditional civil rights narratives through a Black/white binary and the minimal inclusion of diverse peoples of color in the official narrative (Vickery, 2017; Wills, 1996). Through the representation of multiple groups whose voices are typically omitted in American history, Claudia's third graders began to recognize acts of discrimination and injustice across time and racial groups without teacher prompting.

For these three teachers, simply including Asian American historical narratives was not enough; they created opportunities and supportive spaces for students to understand connections to present-day discrimination and racism. Much of this purpose, as reflected in the teachers' interviews after teaching these lessons, stemmed from a desire for their students to defend difference in the interest of social justice. As Arjun explained, "part of perfecting a democracy is acknowledging things that have been done in the past... if you're not willing to do that, then you're doing a huge disservice to your students because you're only presenting part of the truth." Race relations are often taught as an issue that was a source of conflict in the past but not the present - as something that has been resolved (Wills, 2001). Lessons that address racism and

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discrimination generally have happy, uncomplicated endings that allude to racial harmony in the present; the most common elementary example of this is the typical representation of the civil rights movement, often introduced through segregation and Rosa Parks and culminating with Martin Luther King, Jr.'s "I Have a Dream" speech, after which schools became integrated and injustice was overcome through nonviolent means (Busey & Walker, 2017; Wills, 2001).

Moreover, these common narratives focus on the Black/white binary, limiting people's understanding and willingness to engage with Asian American histories and experiences (Chang, 1999). By connecting the civil rights violations of Japanese Americans in the 1940s to ongoing discrimination, violence, and hateful rhetoric directed at Muslims and perceived-as-Muslim groups, the teachers and their students explored various unresolved tensions of difference that continue to exist in America today. Gounari (2008) considered such rearticulations of the past "with a view to making the present political" (p. 110) a great teaching challenge that offers possibilities to make the relationship between the past, present, and future more meaningful.

### **Discussion**

While the Anglocentric historical narrative of progressive nation-building has been critiqued for the last century, little has changed as the themes of freedom and American progress told from the perspectives of those in power remain at the core of U.S. elementary social studies curriculum (Barton & Levstik, 2009). Communities of color are largely nonexistent in history textbooks and school curriculum (Au, Brown & Calderon, 2016); on those rare occasions when they are present, it is through marginal inclusion that does not modify the dominant historical narrative and depicts individuals or communities of color only as they are relevant to the actions or experiences of whites (Cornbleth, 1997), glossing over ethnoracial conflicts and violence (VanSledright, 2008). This study demonstrates how AsianCrit perspectives can provide a useful

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curricular framework through which educators can disrupt the problematic dominant narrative by centering Asian American voices, experiences, and historical narratives.

First, the AsianCrit tenet of *Asianization* examines the distinct ways that Asian Americans are racialized in U.S. society, attending to representations of Asian Americans as a single monolith as well as pervasive historical and contemporary stereotypes (Hsu, 2015), such as the yellow peril (Takaki, 1990), forever foreigner (Tuan, 1998), and the model minority (Hartlep & Scott, 2016). Teachers and students wrestled with what it meant for someone to be Asian *and* American (Rodríguez, in press; Rodríguez & Ip, 2018), and students' emerging understandings were supported as the teachers drew from their hybrid experiences as first- and second-generation immigrant children in predominantly white school settings. Asian American teachers, like other teachers of color, are often "constructed by a dominant culture that tries to assign specific meanings... in order to account for their presence" (Young, 2004, p. 83). An understanding of the legal and political restrictions that have historically positioned Asian Americans as outside Others is essential to the disruption of the perpetual foreigner trope (Lowe, 1996), and elementary classrooms are ideal spaces to begin these conversations. Educators who attend to the complex, hybrid diversity of Asian American identity through the lens of *Asianization* can elicit more critical understandings of race, immigration, citizenship, and power while disrupting pervasive stereotypes about Asian Americans that would otherwise be unquestioned, and thereby reinforced and perpetuated, by young children.

Secondly, the AsianCrit tenet of *(re)constructive history* forefronts the invisibility of Asian American historical narratives and advocates for a transcendence of this invisibility and silence (Museus, 2014). More complex understandings of race and citizenship in U.S. history expose the fact that racism and discrimination are enduring issues in our society rather than

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problems of the past. Through the teaching of Japanese American incarceration, teachers can interrogate issues of justice (i.e., forcing families to leave their homes, friends, and businesses), fairness (i.e., jailing babies and children who posed no security threat), patriotism (i.e., imprisoning American citizens for supposed national security), and discrimination (i.e., being denied civil rights because of one's appearance). As students in this study recognized similarities between the (mis)treatment of Japanese Americans during WWII, African Americans during the Civil Rights Movement, and Muslim Americans today, the idyllic notion of the United States as the land of the free, with liberty and justice for all, was disrupted. However, as illustrated here, elementary teachers can push their students to consider how to move forward by learning from the mistakes in our nation's past so that America can someday live up to its ideals.

While the teaching of histories that educators themselves did not learn in school is understandably difficult, it is also undeniably important. As educators begin to (re)construct and make visible Asian American history with their students, it is essential to heed Takaki's (1998) reminder that Asian Americans "are entitled to be viewed as subjects - as men and women with minds, wills, and voices... as actors in the making of history" (pp. 7-8), not simply as passive victims (Kohl, 1994; Wills, 1996). Therefore, (re)constructive history must include the experiences of Asian Americans in their own words and voices. For elementary students, the increasing body of Asian American children's literature presents an age-appropriate and easily available resource for educators, with the caveat that teachers use such literature critically and with a commitment to provide historical context and contemporary connections.

### **Recommendations & Implications**

As the teachers in this study endeavored to teach Asian American historical narratives for the first time, they often struggled with content knowledge as they did not learn Asian American

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history in their own schooling. With a stronger foundation in American history that includes the perspectives of marginalized groups (see Takaki, 1993; Zinn, 1980), educators can work more strategically to interrogate the dominant narrative and present students with opportunities to engage with histories and narratives that more accurately depict the true diversity of the United States. Unfortunately, elementary educators often lack substantial social studies and/or history content knowledge (Russell, 2009; Stanley & Longwell, 2004), resulting in the teaching about heroes and holidays (Kohl, 1994; Loewen, 1995) and “food, fun, festivals, flags and films” (National Council for the Social Studies, 2017).

These problematic approaches to elementary social studies must be addressed in teacher preparation as well as with teachers already employed in schools. For traditional teacher education programs, supporting pre-service teachers' historical content knowledge may be difficult as they often have little control over the content provided in required history and government coursework prior to students' entry in the teacher preparation program. Additionally, teacher preparation generally focuses on educational theory and pedagogical methods rather than subject area content, making the possibilities for programmatic changes (e.g., the addition of history coursework) challenging and unfeasible. With these challenges in mind, teacher educators can infuse historical examples of social (in)justice and agency into their methods courses that encourage critical approaches in the social studies. Within social studies methods, opportunities for pre-service teachers to engage in projects focused on critical historical inquiry (Salinas, Fránquiz, & Rodríguez, 2016) and how to teach difficult histories can later be applied in classrooms.

As social studies professional development opportunities are rarely offered to in-service teachers (Passe, 2006; Zhao & Hoge, 2006), schools and districts can team with museums,

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colleges, universities, and community organizations to provide ongoing professional development support that furthers not only pedagogical content knowledge (Shulman, 2004) but critical pedagogical content knowledge-- focused on traditionally marginalized perspectives that actively counter the dominant narrative. Many collaborations between ethnic studies departments and K-12 settings have occurred across the country and demonstrate how links between academia and public schools can result in transformative pedagogy and curriculum (Cammarota, 2016; de los Ríos, 2013; Kiang, 2004; Tintiangco-Cubales et al., 2015). Additionally, as demonstrated by the teachers in this study, Asian American children's literature can serve as an important curricular resource given the absence of Asian American narratives from textbooks.

For white teachers, professional development opportunities like those described above are especially important (Putnam & Borko, 2000). "To even begin to comprehend the bicultural experience requires that teachers from the dominant culture invest time and energy into establishing critical dialogues with people of color if they wish to understand their communities better," stated Darder (2012, p. 290). She continued, "teachers must recognize and respect that their process of learning and knowing is inherently situated *outside* that cultural context and is therefore different from the knowledge obtained from living *within* a particular cultural community" (pp. 290-291). As white, native-born monolingual teachers comprise the vast majority of classroom teachers (Boser, 2011), their understanding of hybrid and marginalized identities in addition to their participation in critical social studies professional development (and subsequent critical application of counternarratives) is vital to the development of more diverse historical narratives in schools.

## **Conclusion**

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Asian Americans are the fastest growing group in the United States (Taylor, 2012), yet are underrepresented in the teaching field (NCES, 2013, 2015; Poon, 2014) and are nearly invisible in narratives of American history (An, 2016; Hartlep & Scott, 2016). Research and popular discourse about teachers and students of color often pays negligible attention to Asian Americans, focusing instead on African American and Latinx experiences. Furthermore, those studies that have attended to Asian American teachers largely took place in West Coast areas with a critical mass of Asian Americans and in secondary contexts. This paper explored how racially isolated Asian American teachers in Texas enacted Asian American histories in elementary classrooms, and how their pedagogy was specifically informed by their racialized, hybrid experiences, moving Asian American experiences from the margins to the center in an effort to no longer leave Asian Americans hidden in history (Rodríguez, in press).

The final paragraph of Takaki's (1998) *Strangers from a Different Shore*, one of the first mainstream collections of Asian American history, begins, "These struggles of Asian Americans have been a continuous rebellion against the exclusive constructions of 'we, the people' and a constant resolve to help make this 'a more perfect union,' an ethnically diverse yet united society" (p. 509). Hannah, Arjun, and Claudia demonstrated how ethnoracial and immigrant experiences can inform a more pluralistic enactment of history with our youngest students in powerful and transformative ways. By drawing on the AsianCrit tenets of *Asianization* and *(re)constructive history* as they (re)constructed Asian American narratives long made invisible in the official curriculum of schools, they revealed both the complexity and enduring aspects of race that continue to challenge our nation. While many scholars call for changes to make curriculum more inclusive, these Asian American elementary teachers exemplified how it can be done.

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