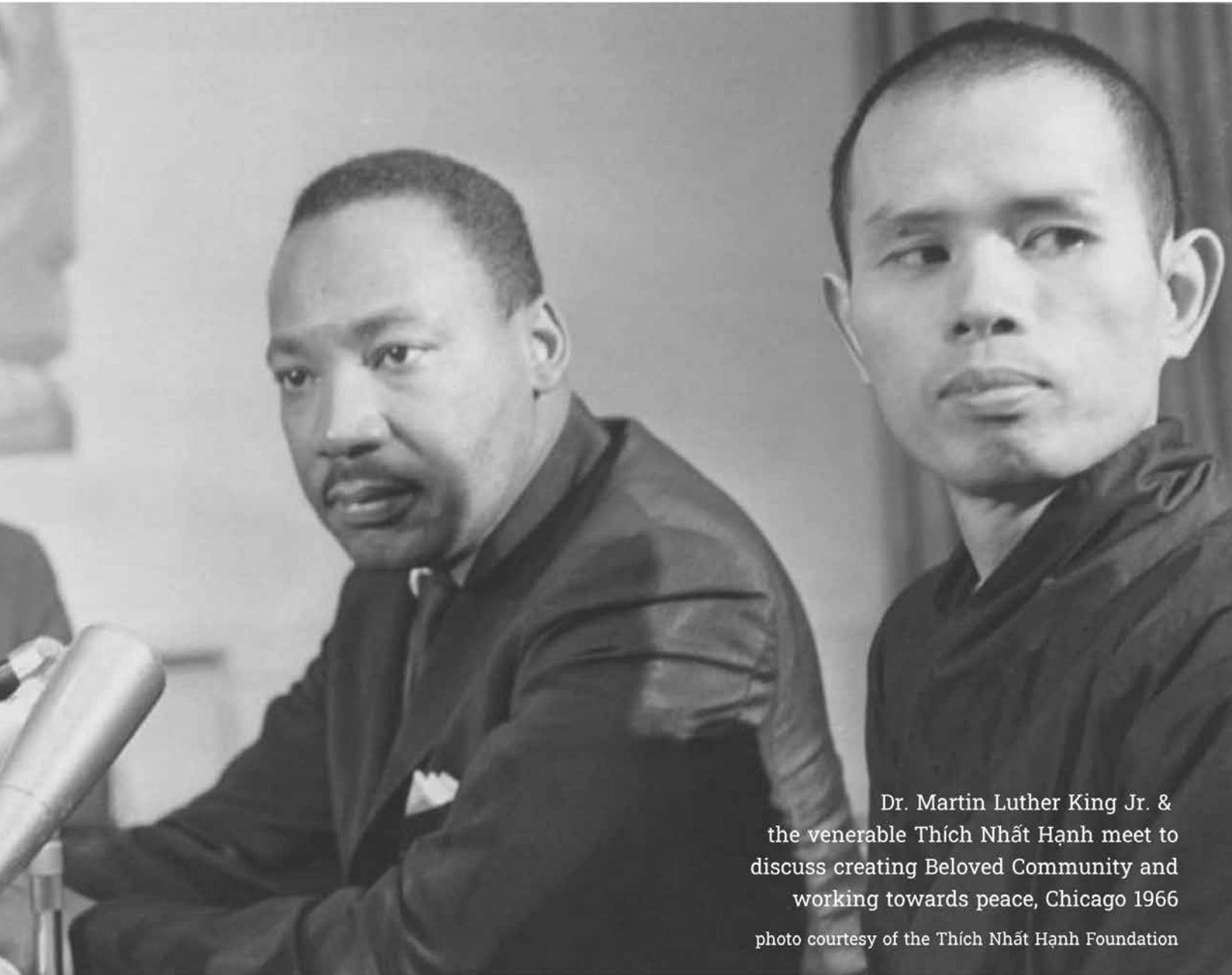


**racial triangulation:  
at the intersection of anti-blackness & asian hate**



Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. &  
the venerable Thích Nhất Hạnh meet to  
discuss creating Beloved Community and  
working towards peace, Chicago 1966

photo courtesy of the Thích Nhất Hạnh Foundation

**Faculty Lecture 23'**  
**By: Ava Phương Thảo Nguyễn**



As a Vietnamese American immigrant, Ava Phương Thảo Nguyễn grew up in a blend of different worlds. After leaving her home country and settling in Southern California in 1993, she was exposed to three languages: Vietnamese at home, Spanish in her neighborhood, and English at school. This early exposure to different ways of describing the world sparked her passion for reading, writing, and learning. She sought to dive deeper into these passions when she attended Cal State Long Beach, double-majoring in journalism and communication studies for her undergraduate degrees and communication studies for her master's. It was in her master's program that she discovered intercultural communication as a perfect summation of the things she loved most about learning: understanding culture, hearing people's stories, and finding the "in-betweenness" of cross-cultural relationships. Both her studies and her life experiences have led her to be deeply invested in conversations about the intersectional experiences of BIPOC (Black, Indigenous, and People of Color) and how to achieve solidarity and justice in oppressive systems.

This love of learning translated into a love of teaching during her time at CSULB as a teaching associate. She pursued teaching at community colleges because of the impact they had on her life early on - her mother attended Fullerton Community College to learn English and major in child development. As a child, Ava would sometimes attend classes with her mother, drawing squiggles to mimic taking notes alongside other students. She is constantly inspired by her mother, who juggled three jobs while attending community college and raising two kids on her own.

Outside of her academic and professional life, Ava is passionate about engaging in mutual aid efforts to support marginalized communities in the greater Los Angeles area.

In recent years, she has helped make 1,000+ hygiene kits for unhoused persons in L.A., put together holiday gifts for Project Kinship (an organization that provides support and training to people who have been impacted by incarceration, gangs, and violence), packed care bags for farmworkers in Coachella Valley, and co-founded a small business with her mother to fund, make, and distribute 1,000+ face masks to unhoused persons in 2020-2021. She continues to cook and deliver meals to her community by volunteering through Home-y Made Meals, an organization that seeks to close the gaps in food equity and access through community. She finds the greatest joy in doing this work by doing it with her mother, Hanh, and her husband, Kevin.

Ava resides in Long Beach with her family, including her infant son, Đạt, and two dogs, Cali and Loki. She teaches courses in intercultural and interpersonal communication studies at Chaffey College, Fontana Campus and aspires to become an abolitionist educator.

She dedicates this talk to her mother, who crossed oceans and withstood years of struggle so that their ancestors' dreams could be realized.

# **Racial Triangulation:**

At the Intersection of Anti-Blackness & Asian Hate

**Ava Nguyen**

*Professor, Communication Studies*

Faculty Lecturer of the Year  
2022-2023

April 18, 2023

With respect and honor for the lands we gather on and the leaders before us, I would like to take a moment to acknowledge the Gabrieleño-Tongva Peoples, the original stewards of these sacred and unceded homelands.

The Tongva people's history, language(s), cultural traditions, and legacy continue to shape this region and it is crucial to recognize their continuing presence in their homelands. I commit to educating myself on Native culture, struggles, and history.

My mother left her homeland in 1993, leaving behind her entire family and everything she knew in the hopes that my brother and I would not suffer through the horrors that she had seen when Saigon fell in 1975. I grew up here in Southern California, learning Spanish from my neighbors and nurturing my native language of Vietnamese at home with my mother. The richness of the cultures that I was embedded in at an early age kindled my love for studying culture. With my mother's blood, sweat, and tears, I was able to cultivate my love for culture into my studies in college. Today, I am honored to stand before you and I am blessed to have a career where I can celebrate knowledge, culture, and human communication with incredible students and colleagues every day.

I am an interculturalist. I am someone who loves studying human culture, communication, narratives, and behavior. During the pandemic, I found myself grappling with not only how much the world had changed, but also how it laid bare the already existing inequities in our world. Food insecurity, housing, healthcare, and racism - issues that our society could easily ignore during our usual hustle and bustle of life, took front and center stage.

It was during the pandemic that I had to really come to terms with anti-Asian hate and anti-Blackness, two issues that I previously thought were separate.

The murder of George Floyd sparked revolutionary protest in our country. We once again had to reckon with the issues of racism, anti-Blackness, and policing.

At the same time, Asian people, particularly our elders, were being harassed, berated, beaten, and killed. Asian Americans became scapegoats for COVID and all its woes. With the rise in Asian American and Pacific Islanders (AAPI) hate came the false narrative that the majority of attackers came from the Black community. Even though there is no evidence to support this, tensions between these two communities began to rise. This wouldn't be the first time false narratives of Black-Asian hostility functioned to pit the two communities against one another. The riots following the Rodney King case in 1992 were another case of Black-Asian conflict rooted in years of community neglect and systemic oppression.

Seeing these two seemingly separate racial issues create conflict forced me to reflect: how do we talk about anti-Blackness? How do conversations on anti-Asian hate progress? How are these processes constrained? What constrains them? I realized that both of these issues had, at their core, white supremacy and its constant replication. The anti-Black policing system we have in America and the violence resulting from unfounded fears of the foreign and diseased Asian are both rooted in white supremacy. Because of the systemic harms inflicted on both these communities, a radical, multiracial approach is needed to address these issues. And so, I set out to read, learn, explore, experience, and reflect on these issues. Today, I am honored and proud to share with you my learnings from this journey.

Before I begin, I want to be open and transparent about my intentions and my positionality in this work. I am approaching this conversation from the perspective of a Southeast Asian immigrant. I grew up in predominantly Latinè and Black neighborhoods in Southern California and this issue is near to my heart and dear to my soul because of the ways it touches my reality and lived experience. However, because I am approaching this topic from my position as a Southeast Asian woman, I cannot speak to the Black experience in America, nor will I attempt to, as I believe it is not my story to tell. I will, however, be speaking from the perspective of an Asian woman who loves and values her Black colleagues, friends, and neighbors and seeks to root out the systemic injustices that they face on a daily basis. Through this talk, I humbly seek to be a bridge between the Asian and Black communities, both which have long been disconnected and disenfranchised from one another through the machinations of white supremacy in this country. I also seek to bring to light the insidious ways in which white supremacy functions to disconnect us all. I want to emphasize that anti-Blackness is in every community,

and it must be rooted out. I hope that after my time with you today, my story and the stories I am about to tell can provide perspective to call out and dismantle anti-Blackness within all of our communities.

It is with this perspective today that I humbly seek to offer this solution: multiracial coalitions and intentional intercultural relationships are the most radical tools we have at our disposal to combat white supremacy.

When I mean radical, I mean that intentional intercultural relationships are radical because white supremacy functions to suppress these types of relationships. For white supremacy to reign supreme, it must hide our histories from one another and disconnect us from each other. I define intentional intercultural relationships as relationships that involve effort, vulnerability, and mindfulness. They are not intercultural relationships that are by convenience or coincidence, but rather a result of meaningful efforts towards understanding one another.

I am going to first define race, anti-Blackness, anti-Asian hate, white supremacy, and other important terms and tools. Then, I will examine how Black and Asian relationships have historically been framed as well as the hidden histories of Black-Asian solidarity. Finally, I will present a solution to combat white supremacy in the form of a powerful story of two incredible activists whose radical intercultural relationship is transforming their communities.

To better understand the intersections of anti-Blackness and anti-Asian hate and how white supremacy plays a role in disconnecting these two communities, we have to first dive into understanding race in America - namely, white supremacy, racial triangulation theory, and their implications.

Race in America is a deeply visual social construction that is rooted in a hierarchy. According to Isabel Wilkerson, Pulitzer-Prize winning journalist and author of “Caste: The Origins of Our Discontents,” “America operates in a hierarchy where access to power and resources, perceived competency and beauty, and standing and respect are determined by the metric of one’s race.”<sup>1</sup> This caste system, Wilkerson explains, can be traced back to the transatlantic slave trade, where a system of people who were less-than and better-than was set up based off their skin color. Because I am using Wilkerson’s hierarchical perspective of race, I will not be using the term “racism” when I refer to the systemic injustices that Black persons face in America. I will be using the term anti-Blackness, as that more specifically calls out the “actions or behaviors that minimize, marginalize or devalue the full participation of Black people in life.”<sup>2</sup> Similarly, when I am referring to anti-Asian hate, I am specifically referring to the xenophobic fears, negative stereotypes, and historical and ongoing discrimination that Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders (AAPI) peoples have experienced in America.

This hierarchy that Wilkerson refers to ultimately reinforces white supremacy, as whiteness has positioned itself at the top of the hierarchy and works to ensure the hierarchy is maintained. I want to take this moment to emphasize that when I refer to “white supremacy,” I am not solely referring to hate groups like the KKK or the Proud boys, although they certainly encompass white supremacy in all its extremes. I am using this term as an intercultural scholar; I am referring to the culture we have in America that whiteness is the norm or standard for living, making Black, Indigenous, and People of Color a deviation from that norm. As explained by the National Education Association, white supremacy “describes a political ideology and systemic oppression that perpetuates and maintains the social, political, historical and/or industrial white domination.” As Tema Okun explains, white supremacy shapes the ways we organize our institutions, make decisions, see ourselves and others, interact with others, and place value on different communities.<sup>3</sup>

White supremacy can be seen in seemingly inconsequential everyday interactions. Here is an example. In a study published by the Journal of Applied Psychology, researchers audited about 6,500 professors at various public and private universities across different disciplines<sup>4</sup>. The researchers sent letters to these professors, pretending to be students expressing interest in research and requesting mentorship. The letters were identical

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<sup>1</sup> Wilkerson, Isabel. 2020. *Caste*. New Delhi, India: Allen Lane.

<sup>2</sup> Unknown Author. “Confronting Anti-Black Racism.” UCI Office of Inclusive Excellence, July 6, 2022. <https://inclusion.uci.edu/action-plan/msi/uci-black-thriving-initiative/confronting-anti-black-racism/>.

<sup>3</sup> Tema Okun, “What Is White Supremacy Culture?,” White Supremacy Culture, 2022, <https://www.whitesupremacyculture.info/what-is-it.html>.

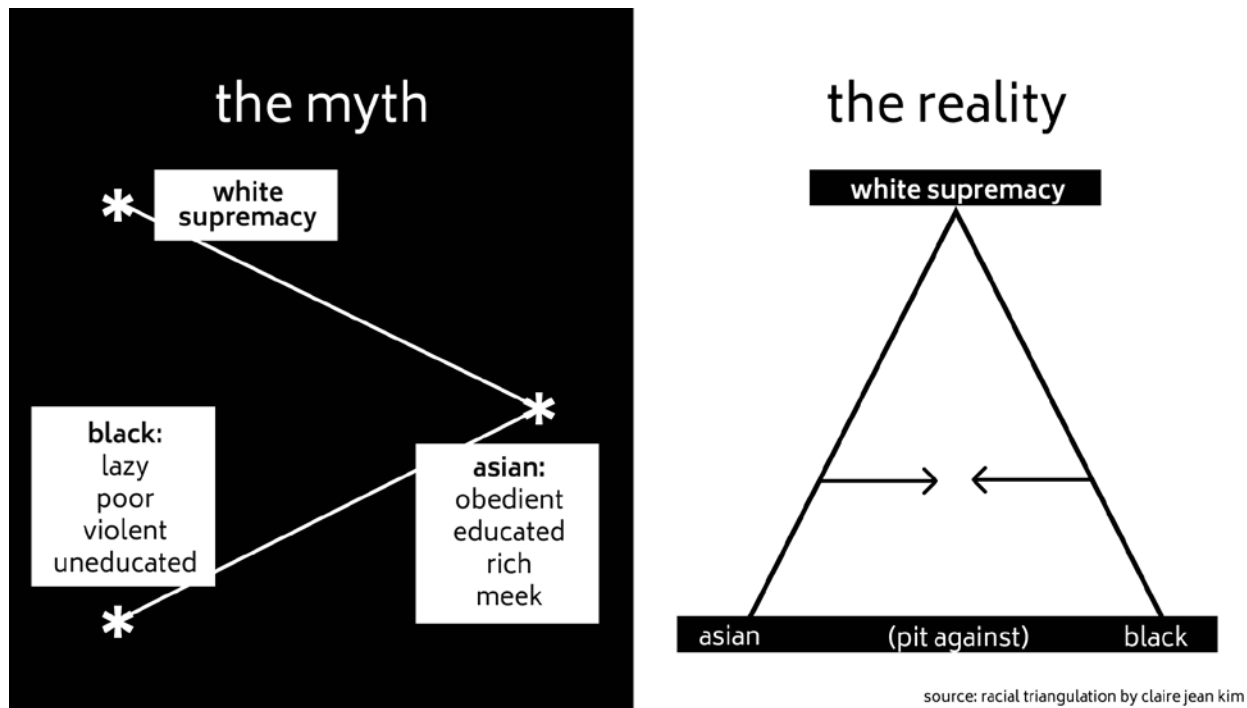
<sup>4</sup> Milkman, K. L., Akinola, M., & Chugh, D. (2015). What happens before? A field experiment exploring how pay and representation differentially shape bias on the pathway into organizations. *The Journal of applied psychology*, 100(6), 1678–1712. <https://doi.org/10.1037/apl0000022>

except for the names, which included names typically associated with racial identities, such as White, Black, Hispanic, Indian, and Chinese. For example, there were names that signaled a white identity, like Brad Anderson, and names that signaled Chinese identity, like Mei Chen. The study found that the letters with the typical white name were more likely to get a response from the faculty members, across every discipline. As demonstrated in this study, the privileging of whiteness in this situation stems directly from the culture of white supremacy, influencing the way we think, value ourselves and others, and make decisions.

Anyone within this hierarchical caste system can reinforce white supremacy. As Wilkerson explains, the police officers who murdered Tyre Nichols, a black man, were acting as “agents of white supremacy” even though they themselves were Black men. All people, including people of color, can act in the interests of white supremacy, knowingly or unknowingly. So how does white supremacy play a role in intersections of anti-Blackness and anti-Asian hate? According to Tema Okun, white supremacy serves to disconnect us all from one another in order to maintain the hierarchy.<sup>5</sup> In particular, it serves to disconnect Black, Indigenous, and People of Color from one another. This is where racial triangulation theory can help us to understand specifically how white supremacy disconnects Asian and Black communities.

Racial triangulation theory, as conceptualized by Claire Jean Kim, posits that Asian Americans are triangulated, or pinned, against Black folks and whites on two different dimensions: racial valorism and civic ostracism.<sup>6</sup>

Here, in this figure, you can see how Kim positions Asian Americans along these 2 dimensions relative to one another.



According to racial triangulation theory, Asians are positioned as foreigners in relationship to whites, yet at the same time are valorized as “superior” in relationship to Black folks by white supremacy.<sup>7</sup>

This simultaneously positions Asians as both the “model minority” while also perpetually being foreign and marginalized as “outsiders.” Whether Asians are treated as a model minority or perpetual foreigners is contingent on contexts that serve to reify racial hierarchy and perpetuate anti-Blackness. When a group is needed to put down Black communities, Asians are touted as the model minority: “The Asians are successful, why can’t you do the same?” However, when xenophobia of the East becomes amplified due to a worldwide pandemic, Asians are dirty, scheming peoples who bring disease.

<sup>5</sup> Okun, “What Is White Supremacy Culture?”

<sup>6</sup> Claire Jean Kim, “The Racial Triangulation of Asian Americans,” *Politics & Society* 27, no. 1 (March 1, 1999): 105–38, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0032329299027001005>.

<sup>7</sup> Kim, “The Racial Triangulation of Asian Americans.”

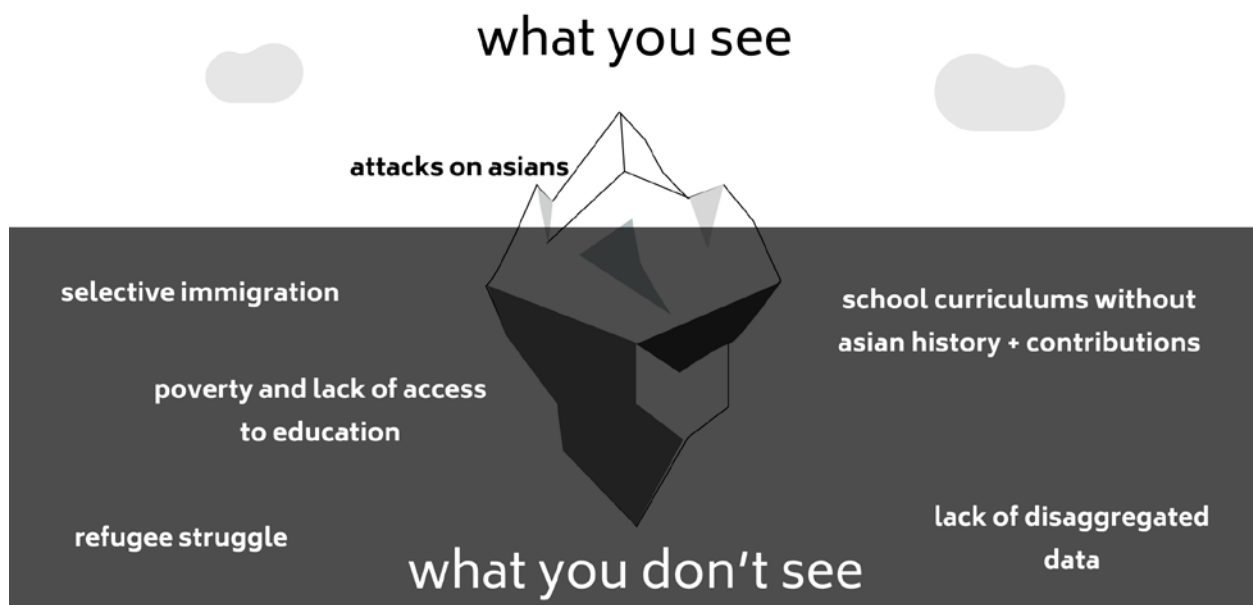
The triangulation of Asian Americans has also stripped them of their identities, placing them in what I call a place of “non-being,” where their racial identity as Asian is very prominent while simultaneously indistinct and subsumed into a large category that can easily be tucked away in demographic data and surveys, disregarded as people of color, and treated as a monolith that does not experience racism in America.

But where did this notion of Asians being the model minority come from? It comes from a twofold attempt to blame Black folks for the oppression they experience while also reinforcing racial hierarchy in America. The term “model minority” was coined by sociologist William Peterson in 1966. Peterson, in his article for the New York Times titled “Success Story: Japanese Americans Style,” attributed Japanese Americans’ family structure and “hard work” as the reasons for why they were able to supposedly overcome discrimination and experience success in the United States. Of course, this is an incredibly oversimplified view of the Japanese American experience, given that the Japanese internment camps of WWII ended only 20 years before he wrote his article and a majority of those that survived the internment would have been alive at this time to remember it.

This myth of Asians being the “model minority” has serious implications for both the Asian community and Black community.

Firstly, because this myth serves to reinforce racial hierarchies in America, it operates as a tool of white supremacy to oppress Black people. Asians are used as a contrast to Black folks, as the model minority myth paints Asians as “meek” in contrast to the stereotypical “violence” of Blackness. It attributes perceived Asian success to simple rugged individualism, painting Asians to be “hard workers,” and distorting and oversimplifying complex Asian cultural values so that it can assert that Asians are somehow more successful simply because of their cultural emphasis on family. This ignores the hundreds of years of systemic injustice brought upon Black people in America and blames Black people for not being “better” or achieving similar levels of success.

The model minority myth also negates the very real systemic barriers that Asians themselves experience in America as well as a sordid history of anti-Asian policies and ideology. To put it simply, the model minority myth functions off the idea that Asians work hard and are successful, so therefore have always been seen as equal to whites and do not experience oppression in America. In reality, U.S. history is rife with anti-Asian policies and practices that continue to sustain modern day barriers for Asian communities. Anti-Asian hate did not suddenly appear in 2020. It has been interwoven into American politics and society for a majority of our history. I want to share some of these hidden histories with you today so that we can challenge the falsified narratives of the model minority myth. Challenging these narratives is necessary for Black and Asian solidarity because it dismantles the hierarchy of white supremacy by revealing the shared experiences of Black and Asian communities in America.





In the late 1800's and early 1900's, it was common for Chinese and other Asian persons to be lynched and harassed by white persons<sup>8</sup>. One notable example of this was the city of Antioch, California. Antioch's bustling Chinatown community was burned to the ground by white residents. In 1851, a county law was passed prohibiting Chinese people from being able to be out after dusk. As a result, Chinese residents built underground tunnels in the city so that they could safely move from place to place. These tunnels are still in existence today. In 1876, Chinatown was set on fire. Newspapers reported the destruction of life and community with celebration. The Los Angeles Evening Express wrote: "Today the remaining houses have been removed and Antioch is now free from this degraded class." The Sacramento Bee wrote: "Antioch has now no Chinese or Chinatown. The Caucasian torch lighted the way of the heathen out of the wilderness."

In the early 1980s, as Vietnamese refugees were settling into Texas, they sought to make a living with a familiar trade: fishing. White fishermen in the area, angry that these new immigrants had come to "take their jobs," escalated to violence to intimidate the Vietnamese community<sup>9</sup>. The KKK got involved, burning Vietnamese boats, riding around in the bay with the display of a fisherman who had been hanged, and burning crosses on Vietnamese fishermen's lawns.

The Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882 blocked Chinese persons from both entering the United States and prevented them from becoming naturalized citizens<sup>10</sup>. Here, you can see the recurring theme of Asians as perpetual foreigners, which is a pillar of the racial triangulation necessary to prop up white supremacy. Wong Kim Ark, the son of Chinese laborers in America, had to sue to be able to reenter the United States after leaving to visit China. His case became the foundation for Chinese and other U.S.-born Asian Americans to be counted as citizens. However, the restrictive policies of the Chinese Exclusion Act would not be completely repealed until the Immigration Act of 1965, 83 years later.

Even so, once the act was enacted, the U.S. was very selective on which Asian immigrants were permitted. The government prioritized Asians who were educated and highly skilled were prioritized, leading to a population that was disproportionately represented in being college educated and highly experienced in their careers. Fifty-one percent of Chinese immigrants in the United States have a bachelor's degree, while only 4% of those living in China have a bachelor's degree.<sup>11</sup> Seventy percent of Indian-American immigrants have a bachelor's degree when they enter the country, while less than 15% of those living in India are enrolled in college. Dr. Jennifer Lee, professor of sociology at the University of California, Irvine and author of "The Asian American Achievement Paradox," states that "some pundits argue that there is something intrinsic about Asian cultural traits or values that explain their exceptional educational outcomes."<sup>12</sup> She explains, "this argument is flawed and reductive," as Latinos also highly value education and Black communities report that they see college education as important. Lee explains that it was actually "the change in U.S. immigration law half a century ago, coupled with the resulting change in selectivity of Asian immigration," that better "explains Asian Americans' educational outcomes" today.<sup>13</sup> The history of Asian American immigration started with Asians being seen as undesirable, foreign, and dirty and then transformed suddenly into a framed narrative of Asians being well-educated, well mannered, model minority citizens. This transformation was made possible through selective immigration policies, but the model minority myth would have us believe that Asians are successful simply because they work hard and value education compared to Latiné and Black communities. This pins communities against one another and reinforces the hierarchy of white supremacy.

In addition, the umbrella term of "Asian American" serves to push a very diverse and large population of people into a monolith, roping them into a category where it is assumed they are well educated, "crazy rich Asians" that are a model minority. In reality, the disaggregation of data of AAPI communities tells a very different tale.

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<sup>8</sup> Anh Do, "White Residents Burned This California Chinatown to the Ground. An Apology Came 145 Years Later.," Los Angeles Times (Los Angeles Times, July 26, 2021), <https://www.latimes.com/california/story/2021-07-26/antioch-chinese-apology>.

<sup>9</sup> John Burnett, "Decades after Clashing with the Klan, a Thriving Vietnamese Community in Texas," NPR (NPR, November 25, 2018), <https://www.npr.org/2018/11/25/669857481/decades-after-clashing-with-the-klan-a-thriving-vietnamese-community-in-texas>.

<sup>10</sup> Xiang Long, "United States v. Wong Kim Ark," Legal Information Institute (Cornell Law School, 1992), [https://www.law.cornell.edu/wex/united\\_states\\_v\\_wong\\_kim\\_ark](https://www.law.cornell.edu/wex/united_states_v_wong_kim_ark).

<sup>11</sup> Jennifer Lee, "Fifty Years of 'New' Immigration," Contexts (American Sociological Association, 2022), <https://contexts.org/articles/fifty-years-of-new-immigration/#lee>.

<sup>12</sup> Lee, "Fifty Years of 'New' Immigration - Contexts."

<sup>13</sup> Lee, "Fifty Years of 'New' Immigration - Contexts."



According to AAPI Data, 75% of Taiwanese immigrants have a bachelor's degree in comparison to 27% of Vietnamese immigrants. The selective immigration policies that favored already highly educated and skilled East Asian immigrants, such as Taiwanese and Koreans, overshadow the struggles of Southeast Asian populations, such as Cambodians and Vietnamese, who overwhelmingly immigrated to the U.S. as refugees of war and genocide. In addition, approximately 16,000 Southeast Asians have received final orders of deportation.<sup>14</sup> According to SEARAC, refugees from Laos, Cambodia, and Vietnam “were often resettled in urban centers of concentrated poverty with few social or economic supports,” resulting in families struggling to help their “children navigate under resourced schools and racialized bullying” and Southeast Asian youth being “disproportionately swept into gangs and violence.”<sup>15</sup> Now, these refugees who were raised or born in the U.S. are at risk of being deported to their native countries. Many have never been to their native countries. This policy demonstrates that if an Asian immigrant is not already educated and skilled, they are not of value because they cannot contribute to the model minority myth of the successful Asian in America. Thus, Southeast Asians and Pacific Islanders are put into the same data group as East Asians, where they can disappear. This lack of data disaggregation preserves the image of the model minority. When Asians are treated as a monolith that is successful, they can be easily weaponized against Black communities. One example where we see this weaponization happening is in education.

Asian populations that face barriers in education do not receive the resources they need to access education equitably. According to Janelle Wong, Director of the Asian American Studies Program at the University of Maryland, “Asian subgroups--like Cambodians, Burmese, and Hmong--have higher high school drop-out rates than any other racial group in the United States. But they are not seen by policymakers because they are made invisible by the model minority stereotype and its assumed cultural advantages.”<sup>16</sup> Moreover, this treatment of Asians as a monolith only serves to further the racial triangulation of Asians vs. Black folks, as it hides the true struggles of Asian communities and pulls all Asians into a stereotype of being smart, successful, and educated in order to blame Black folks for the systemic obstacles they face in education. One such example can be found in a Washington School District's choice in 2020 to remove Asians from the category of “students of color” and place them in the same category as white students. They did this in order to manipulate their data and “boost the growth rate of underperforming groups” in their reports.<sup>17</sup> This placing of Asians in proximity to whiteness is representative of two things. One, it is a real-world example of the racial triangulation of Asians, where Asians are placed closer to whiteness and further away from people of color. Two, it shows the ways in which Asians are used to obfuscate the fact that Black and Brown students are not being served equitably by educational institutions in our country. Moreover, I want to take a moment to point out that they did not include Pacific Islanders in the “Asian” category as they typically are, and instead placed them with the “underserved” populations, continuing the trend of picking and choosing what Asian populations to use to create false narratives about equity and success. In this moment, when it serves a grander narrative, Asians are placed in proximity to whiteness. Yet, in real world, consequential moments, Asians are reminded of their foreign-ness. Remember that study that examined whether or not faculty members would respond to varying students' emails? The student that received the lowest response rate of any of the student populations was Mei Chen, the Chinese student, with the Indian student being second in having the lowest response rate. Moreover, the Public Policy Institute of California reported that from 2015 to present day, there has been a steady decline in enrollment in community colleges. The population with the largest percentage of decline in enrollment was Asian students at 21%, followed closely by Black students at 20%. A majority of students surveyed cited financial instability, family and work responsibilities, and physical/mental health concerns as challenges to maintaining enrollment.<sup>18</sup> When we constantly buy into the model minority myth, we are blind to data that can indicate challenges in the Asian student population.

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<sup>14</sup> Southeast Asia Resource Action Center, “The Devastating Impact of Deportation on Southeast Asian Americans,” SEARAC, March 2, 2022, <https://www.searac.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/04/The-Devastating-Impact-of-Deportation-on-Southeast-Asian-Americans-1.pdf>.

<sup>15</sup> Southeast Asia Resource Action Center, “The Devastating Impact of Deportation on Southeast Asian Americans.”

<sup>16</sup> Janelle Wong, “Editorial: The Source of the ‘Asian Advantage’ Isn’t Asian Values,” NBCNews.com (NBCUniversal News Group, October 13, 2015), <https://www.nbcnews.com/news/asian-america/editorial-source-asian-advantage-isnt-asian-values-n443526>.

<sup>17</sup> Carl Samson, “Washington School District Says Asians Aren’t ‘Students of Color’, Now Counted with White Students,” NextShark (NextShark, December 20, 2021), <https://nextshark.com/students-of-color-washington-asians-with-whites>.

<sup>18</sup> Olga Rodriguez, “Testimony: Enrollment Declines in California Community Colleges,” Public Policy Institute of California (Public Policy Institute of California, November 14, 2022), <https://www.ppic.org/blog/testimony-enrollment-declines-in-california-community-colleges/>

This dangerous rhetoric of Asians as a successful monolith is a narrative that serves the interests of white supremacy, as we can see in a recent case of affirmative action law. Just last year, a group called Students for Fair Admissions brought a federal lawsuit against Harvard, arguing that Harvard's use of race in its admissions process violates the Equal Protection Clause.<sup>19</sup> This group purported to represent Asian American students, arguing that they felt excluded and discriminated against by affirmative action in college admissions. However, it was not Asian American students that filed this lawsuit - it was a man named Edward Blum. Blum is white man with a history of filing lawsuits in an attempt to dismantle affirmative action and other equity-minded social policies. In 2016, he "crafted [an] unsuccessful challenge to race-conscious college admissions programs in *Fisher v. University of Texas*," losing the case after the Supreme Court ruled against his favor.<sup>20</sup> After losing this case, he "strategized that he 'needed Asian plaintiffs'" in order to win.<sup>21</sup> After forming the "Students for Fair Admissions" group, he brought the case against Harvard, arguing that affirmative action discriminates against Asian Americans. The group has no Asian leadership, as it is led by Blum and an all-white leadership. As the ACLU writes, "Blum's cynical attempt to use members of the Asian-American community seeks to pit people of color against one another."<sup>22</sup> Furthermore, if Blum achieves his goal of eliminating race in college admissions processes, "statistical projections show that white applicants will be the primary beneficiaries," not Asian students.<sup>23</sup> Blum is using the Asian community in his efforts to eliminate equitable outcomes for historically marginalized populations.

In addition to policies and practices that reinforce the Model Minority Myth, violence against Asians is downplayed or simply erased from daily conversation. According to an analysis by CSU San Bernardino, overall hate crimes in 2020 decreased by 7%, but hate crimes targeting Asians rose by 149%.<sup>24</sup> Here, we can see that the racial triangulation of Asians is at play - when the conversation is about who is "successful" and most educated, Asians are the model minority. However, all of that "success" did not stop the pandemic from triggering existing stereotypes of Asians being perpetual foreigners who bring disease to America. In March 2020, a man attacked a Burmese family at a grocery store, using a knife to cut the son's face and stabbing other members of the family. The attacker believed them to be Chinese and thought they were infecting people with COVID-19.

Outside of the pandemic, Asians are victims of hate crimes due to existing anti-Asian hate and the perception that Asians are meek, small, and will not fight back. This perception is rooted in the model minority myth, which relies heavily on the stereotype that Asians are a quiet, polite, successful minority.

This violence, according to Melissa Borja, assistant professor of American culture at the University of Michigan, is compounded at "the intersection of race and gender," where "the proliferation of hypersexualized stereotypes make Asian and Pacific Islander women extra vulnerable to racism, sexism, and violence."<sup>25</sup> This is perhaps most exemplified in recent memory by the mass shootings that targeted spas in Atlanta that were operated by Asian women.

In January of this year, an Indiana University student was repeatedly stabbed in the head while riding a public bus. The attacker, a 56 year old white woman, told police that she stabbed the 18-year old student because she was Chinese and that "it would be one less person to blow up our country."<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> Sarah Hinger, "Meet Edward Blum, the Man Who Wants to Kill Affirmative Action in Higher Education: ACLU," American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU, February 27, 2023), <https://www.aclu.org/news/racial-justice/meet-edward-blum-man-who-wants-kill-affirmative-action-higher>.

<sup>20</sup> Hinger, "Meet Edward Blum, the Man Who Wants to Kill Affirmative Action in Higher Education | ACLU."

<sup>21</sup> Hinger, "Meet Edward Blum, the Man Who Wants to Kill Affirmative Action in Higher Education | ACLU."

<sup>22</sup> Hinger, "Meet Edward Blum, the Man Who Wants to Kill Affirmative Action in Higher Education | ACLU."

<sup>23</sup> Hinger, "Meet Edward Blum, the Man Who Wants to Kill Affirmative Action in Higher Education | ACLU."

<sup>24</sup> CSUSB Center for the Study of Hate and Extremism, "Fact Sheet: Anti-Asian Prejudice March 2020 – Center for the Study of Hate & Extremism," CSUSB (CSUSB Center for the Study of Hate and Extremism, 2020), <https://www.csusb.edu/sites/default/files/FACT%20SHEET-%20Anti-Asian%20Hate%202020%203.2.21.pdf>.

<sup>25</sup> Frances Kai-Hwa Wang, "How Violence against Asian Americans Has Grown and How to Stop It, According to Activists," PBS (Public Broadcasting Service, April 11, 2022), <https://www.pbs.org/newshour/nation/a-year-after-atlanta-and-indianapolis-shootings-targeting-asian-americans-activists-say-we-cant-lose-momentu>.

<sup>26</sup> Mirna Alsharif, "Indiana University Student Targeted in Bus Stabbing for Being Asian, Police Say," NBCNews.com (NBCUniversal News Group, January 15, 2023), <https://www.nbcnews.com/news/asian-america/indiana-university-says-student-was-targeted-bus-stabbing-asian-rcna65770>.

From these examples, it is evident that Asian American history has been hidden from our grand narrative in the U.S. These attacks also demonstrate the violence of white supremacist ideologies. This suppression of Asian American struggles and history is crucial to the racial triangulation of Asians, as revealing this hidden history of Asian struggle challenges the Model Minority Myth and use of Asians as a tool to blame Black communities for the inequities they face. The model minority must be a quiet one, not one that experiences violence or has had a history of systemic oppression in America.

Ultimately, this triangulation results in Black and Asian communities being pitted against one another, unable to form multiracial coalitions. But has this always been the case? As I'm sure you can tell from our conversation thus far, history tells us otherwise. Throughout American history, there have been many crucial moments of Black and Asian solidarity that have been hidden from our consciousness.

In 1869, Frederick Douglas condemned anti-Asian hate in his "composite nation" speech and advocated for Chinese and Japanese immigration.<sup>27</sup>

In the 1940's, Chinese American activist Grace Lee Boggs organized alongside Black auto workers in Detroit to protest WWII. It was during this time that she met her husband, James Boggs, a Black auto worker and partnered with him in community activism.<sup>28</sup>

In the 1960's, Malcolm X shared a friendship with Japanese American activist Yuri Kochiyama, who joined as a member of his Black Power movement and was there with him on the day he was assassinated. There is a photo of her cradling his head shortly after he was murdered. Her work to build Asian American political power was directly linked to Black liberation.<sup>29</sup>

In 1969, Black, Asian, Chicano/a, and Native American activists worked together to lead the Third World Liberation front, protesting the Vietnam war and ultimately establishing the field of ethnic studies.<sup>30</sup>

During the 1950's and 1960's, the "Bengali Harlem" was a bustling community of South Asian, Black, and Latiné peoples that arose after South Asians moved into Harlem. There was interracial marriage within communities. Malcom X could be seen debating the tenets of Islam here while Miles Davis was going over Bollywood music when he would visit.<sup>31</sup>

In 1965, the venerable Thích Nhất Hạnh wrote a letter to Dr. Martin Luther King, sharing with him the parallels of the struggles of nonviolent Vietnamese Buddhists during the Vietnam War and the nonviolence that Dr. King was preaching in America as he led the civil rights movement. Moved by this letter, Dr. King would later speak about the war, stating: "Few events in my lifetime have stirred my conscience and pained my heart as the present conflict which is raging in Vietnam."<sup>32</sup> They would later meet two more times to discuss their vision for a beloved community. Thích Nhất Hạnh described the meeting this way: "We had a discussion about peace, freedom, and community. And we agreed that without a community, we cannot go very far."<sup>33</sup>

In 1978, Black leaders wrote to the New York Times, showing their support for taking in Southeast Asian refugees...like me!

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<sup>27</sup> Tony DelaRosa, "TonyRosaSpeaks," *TonyRosaSpeaks* (blog), February 7, 2023, [tonyrosaspeaks.com](https://tonyrosaspeaks.com).

<sup>28</sup> Thomas J. Sugrue, "Postscript: Grace Lee Boggs," *The New Yorker* (The New Yorker, October 8, 2015), <https://www.newyorker.com/news/news-desk/postscript-grace-lee-boggs>.

<sup>29</sup> Hansi Lo Wang, "The Japanese-American Internee Who Met Malcolm X," *KUOW* (KUOW Archive, August 19, 2013), <https://archive.kuow.org/2013-08-19/the-japanese-american-internee-who-met-malcolm-x>.

<sup>30</sup> Sine Hwang Jensen, "Third World Liberation Front Research Initiative (TWLF)," *Third World Liberation Front Research Initiative (twLF) | Center for Race and Gender*, February 2, 2023, <https://guides.lib.berkeley.edu/twlf>.

<sup>31</sup> Vivek Bald, *Bengali Harlem and the Lost Histories of South Asian America* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2015).

<sup>32</sup> Jonathan Greenberg, "Thích Nhất Hạnh and Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.: Spiritual Brothers, Partners in Nonviolence," *Fierce Urgency* (The Institute for Nonviolence and Social Justice, October 12, 2021), <https://usfblogs.usfca.edu/fierce-urgency/2021/10/12/thich-nhat-hanh-and-dr-martin-luther-king-jr-spiritual-brothers-partners-in-nonviolence/>.

<sup>33</sup> Peggy Rowe Ward and An Nghiem, "When Giants Meet," *Thich Nhat Hanh Foundation* (Thich Nhat Hanh Foundation, August 9, 2017), <https://thichnhathanhfoundation.org/blog/2017/8/9/when-giants-meet>.

This is not an exhaustive list of Black and Asian solidarity by any means. There are so many more rich stories of solidarity that have been hidden from our consciousness today.

Nikole Hannah-Jones, Pulitzer Prize-winning reporter and creator of the 1619 Project, discussed the implications of Black and Asian hidden histories: “Us not learning these histories, I mean we do have these suspicions of each other, and I always tell my students: who does the narrative serve? Who does the narrative benefit? And when you question that, then you begin to realize that there are powerful interests that don’t want us to understand that history, that don’t want us to understand our common struggle, and so we are over here fighting for crumbs and respect while the hierarchy is maintained and stays in place.”<sup>34</sup>

Indeed, the racial triangulation of Asian Americans perpetuates anti-Blackness within the Asian community as well as the resulting anti-Asian suspicions within the Black community. The pitting of the two communities against one another through erasure of their shared histories, erasure of Asian struggle, and positioning of Asian identity as the model minority can manifest as Asians harboring anti-Black mindsets, playing into Black stereotypes, pandering to whiteness, and believing they are too privileged to be able to center their own community in conversations. Conversely, for non-Asian persons of color and Black communities, anti-Asian sentiment can manifest as believing all Asians do not experience oppression, failing to interrupt anti-Asian hate acts or speech, and anger or resentment towards Asians. This is a direct result of white supremacy creating narratives about each group, resulting in both groups internalizing messages about themselves and consuming misinformation about each other.

So where do we go from here? What would our society without this racial triangulation of Asian Americans look like? What does uprooting anti-Blackness in our communities look like? What does dismantling white supremacy look like?

I think conversations such as these are always ongoing, so I do not want to end this talk with a catch-all solution to this problem or otherwise frame this issue as a finite issue that can be fixed easily overnight. But, there is an urgency to dismantle white supremacy and undo the damage it has done in disconnecting communities of color. So, I want to end this talk with something radical that we can all do to combat white supremacy.

The solution is building intentional intercultural relationships.

We build intentional intercultural relationships by uncovering hidden histories about ourselves and others. We use our knowledge from these hidden histories to find connection points with other communities, create empathy, and stand in solidarity. We navigate the complicated tensions between our communities while recognizing that it is white supremacy that created the contexts for these tensions to arise. And, we confront anti-Blackness within our communities and ourselves, recognizing the ways in which anti-Blackness serves to reinforce white supremacy, an oppression we all experience. Ultimately, we choose solidarity in the face of a hierarchy that would push us to divide us.

I want to share with you the story of two incredible activists that are living, breathing testaments to the power of intentional intercultural relationships between Black and Asian folks. Their names are Kayo Anderson and Alex Yoon. Both of them are incredible leaders in their communities, where they work to provide mutual aid to the unhoused persons of Los Angeles.

Alex Yoon is Executive Director of Eayikes, a non-profit that runs a mutual aid food program named Homey-Made Meals. Homey-Made Meals was born during the pandemic, when the required quarantine shut down locations that provided unhoused persons food and other services. Homey-Made Meals’ system consists of everyday people like you and I, cooking inside our homes. Drivers, who are also everyday volunteers, pick up meals from the at-home cooks and distribute them to areas of need in the OC and LA counties. Since March 2020, they have served over 110,000 meals to those in need.

I got involved as a Homey-Made Meals chef in 2020 and have been honored to continue to serve my community through this work today.

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<sup>34</sup> MSNBC, *MSNBC*, January 18, 2023, <https://www.msnbc.com/msnbc/watch/watch-full-national-day-of-racial-healing-town-hall-160124997663>.

Kayo Anderson is a long time social activist who has previously experience houselessness and works to serve his community through mutual aid. I sat down with both of them recently to ask them about their journey and the strategies they use to build cross-cultural relationships to serve their communities. I want to bring their voices into this conversation. Please take a look.

Not only is their relationship itself a radical opposition to the racial triangulation of Asians and Black folks, but it also is an incredible tool for attacking a direct result of systemic racism and injustice in America: homelessness and food insecurity. These are two issues that disproportionately affect Black folks in America. By being in connection with one another and by doing mutual aid work, they are dismantling the framed narratives about Asians and Black folks that permeate through our society. Their relationship rebels against the racial triangulation of Asians and the embedded anti-Blackness that stems from racial hierarchies in America. Kayo's use of love as a framework builds bridges and community. Alex's uprooting of internalized anti-Blackness is key to building multi-racial coalitions that can affect systemic change. As Savannah Shange writes, multi-racial coalitions involve non-Black persons of color who are ready to "cede [their] own narrative privilege in order to shift the order of power. This is what solidarity looks like."<sup>35</sup>

I commit myself to honoring Alex and Kayo's example by building intentional intercultural relationships and multi-racial coalitions whenever and wherever I can. For me, this means resisting the racial triangulation of Asians, bringing to light the hidden histories of Asian communities, coming to terms with the anti-Blackness in my communities, and uprooting anti-Blackness within myself. I aspire to build a world where our students can be unapologetically and authentically themselves in our classrooms. I dream of a space where faculty and classified staff can build multiracial coalitions to achieve not only equity in education, but work towards justice and liberation. I want my son to grow up in a world where he is not seen as the model minority, but as the grandchild of an immigrant who gave up everything for him to be whoever he wants to be. I want him to be in a world where China is not treated like a continent and Africa is not treated like a country. I want to confront anti-Blackness within my community and myself so that it does not pass onto him.

I have been honored to spend this time with you, and to be in conversation with you. Let us continue to build intentional intercultural relationships, dismantle white supremacy, and uproot anti-Blackness. Thank you.

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<sup>35</sup> Savannah Shange, *Progressive Dystopia: Abolition, Antiracism, and Schooling in San Francisco* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2019), 150.

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