ETHNIC STUDIES

COURSE READER / 2022

Student Name: ____

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Ethnic Studies: Born in the Bay Area from History's Biggest Student Strike

Asal Ehsanipour, July 30, 2020

Earlier this summer, education advocates scored a major win in the California state Assembly.

Legislation passed requiring all California State University students to take courses in ethnic studies, including African American, Asian American, Latinx and Native American studies. Gov. Gavin Newsom is expected to sign the bill later this summer.

Bay Curious received a question about ethnic studies from 23-year-old Michael Viray: "I've heard from one of my professors of ethnic studies at UC Davis that there was actually a revolution in the Bay Area for an ethnic studies field. Is this true? And how did it happen?"

Viray minored in Asian American Studies, fascinated by coursework that revealed the history and contributions of Filipino Americans, Asian Americans and Latinx Americans.

"It's not being taught in classrooms," he said. "I didn't know my own history."
Michael's professor was right. Ethnic studies was born from a revolution that began at San Francisco State in 1968. How it happened, is a fascinating story.

The Origins of Black Activism on Campus

November of 1968 was a tumultuous time. The United States was 13 years into the Vietnam War, Martin Luther King Jr. had been assassinated and the Black Panther Party was demanding systemic change for Black communities plagued by poverty and police brutality.

"There were members of the Black Student Union who were also members of the Black Panther Party," said Nesbit Crutchfield, who started his studies at San Francisco State as a business school student in 1967. Crutchfield — who considered himself an "aspiring revolutionary" — soon joined San Francisco State's Black Student Union, the very first in the country.

Nesbit Crutchfield in a crowd at a San Francisco State College strike. (Courtesy of Labor Archives and Research Center, San Francisco State University)

"I felt very privileged to be a member of the Black Student Union," Crutchfield said. "It was clear to me that the Black Student Union represented a very progressive energy and thought among Black students in the Bay Area."

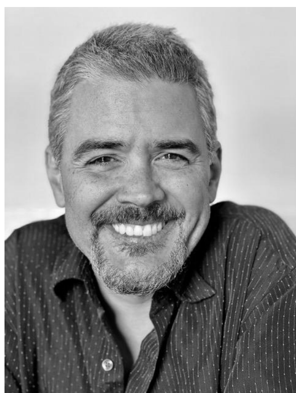
However, just a small percentage of Black students attended San Francisco State. Enrollment rates for minority students had dwindled down to just 4%, even though 70% of students in the San Francisco Unified School District were from minority backgrounds. Black students were just a fraction of that 4%. Crutchfield remembers it as a time when “white supremacy was the norm of the day.”

“It was very unusual to see Black people in any positive positions,” Crutchfield said. “As a Black person, you expected to be one of the very few Black people in any classroom, laboratory or auditorium. [The campus] was overwhelmingly white.”

Meanwhile, Black students were hungry to study their own history. The Black Student Union had been pushing the university to create a Black studies department for nearly three years, but administrators resisted the idea.

“Even though ethnic studies was not validated by the university, it doesn't mean that that study wasn't taking place,” said Jason Ferreira, a professor in the Department of Race and Resistance Studies at San Francisco State’s College of Ethnic Studies.

Ferreira has spent years collecting oral histories on the student strike. Back in 1968, he said, students had to create their own spaces to learn about their history.



Historian Jason Ferreira. (Courtesy of Jason Ferreira)

“There was something called the Experimental College, which was a student-run initiative for them to teach their own classes,” Ferreira said. “The Black Student Union had its own classes, so that was another space.”

But students didn't just learn untold histories, they connected them to the ongoing struggle against systemic issues plaguing their communities, including poverty, police brutality and lack of affordable housing.

"It was an era of young people asking questions and wanting to transform their communities,” Ferreira explained. “That impulse, that hunger to transform one's community is actually what forms the basis of ethnic studies.”

Students of Color Create the Third World Liberation Front

In fall 1968, Penny Nakatsu — originally from San Francisco’s Western Addition neighborhood — was grappling with her own questions about race and identity. At San Francisco State, she pursued a self-directed degree in Asian American studies.

“We weren't ‘Asian Americans’ then, we were ‘Orientals,’ ” Nakatsu said. “ ‘Oriental’ is a term that was imposed on us by the larger society. Starting to use the term ‘Asian American’ was a way of taking back our own destiny.”

At San Francisco State, Nakatsu found herself gravitating toward people with like-minded values and who were involved in the anti-war movement. She became a member of a student organization called the Asian American Political Alliance, which was one of many ethnic student organizations on campus. In early Fall of 1968, these organizations banded together and formed a coalition called the Third World Liberation Front.

“At that particular time, ‘Third World’ referred to the nonaligned countries or cultures in Asia, Africa and Latin America,” Nakatsu explained.

Though students in the Third World Liberation Front came from different cultures, they believed they were united in their shared history of colonial and imperial oppression. The students saw parallels between their tension with the school and what they viewed as the oppression of the Vietnamese by the United States military.

The Firing of a Beloved Teacher Sparks Protest

George Murray, Minister of Education for the Black Panthers, teaching English at San Francisco State College. (Courtesy of the California State Library)

One of San Francisco State’s most influential anti-Vietnam War organizers was a popular English instructor named George Mason Murray. He also happened to be the minister of education for the Black Panther Party. Students loved Murray, but his outspoken politics were not tolerated by San Francisco State administrators.

“The war in Vietnam is racist,” Murray said in a televised press conference. “It is the war that crackers like Johnson are using Black soldiers and poor white soldiers and Mexican soldiers as dupes and fools to fight against people of color in Vietnam.”

The board of trustees forced San Francisco State’s president, Robert Smith, to fire Murray on Nov. 1, 1968. Five days later, the Black Student Union and the Third World Liberation Front joined together and went on strike.

Murray’s suspension was like setting fire to kindling.

Student strikers wanted the right to define their own educational experience. Together they drafted 15 demands, including a school of Third World studies, and a Black studies degree and department.

“In 1968, the vast majority of white people, a whole lot of Black people, and other people of color did not feel that it was reasonable to know more about themselves,” Crutchfield explained.

He disagreed. He and the other strikers felt it was vital.

“We knew that geniuses were falling by the wayside,” he said. “I’m talking about geniuses in education, in literature, in drama, in art ... geniuses, in politics.”

The strikers also wanted to raise admission rates for students of color. At the time, a special admissions program intended to prioritize marginalized students continued to allocate spots to white students. Meanwhile, the United States military was disproportionately drafting Black and brown men to fight in the Vietnam War. They weren’t eligible for student exemption if they weren’t in school, which meant that their right to an education was a matter of life or death.

Strikers vowed to boycott all classes until the school met their demands.

“We wanted to find out and be educated about ourselves,” Crutchfield said. “If we could not get that, then nobody could get an education.”

Five Months of Striking

Initially, strikers engaged in acts of disruption known as the “War of the Flea,” a campaign to disrupt the normal operations of the school. Students put cherry bombs in toilets and checked out huge quantities of books to overwhelm the school's library system.

Almost immediately, administrators invited police on campus. They swarmed San Francisco State, dressed in full riot gear and armed with five-foot batons. Students responded by throwing rocks and yelling obscenities at police and administrators.

Police officers in riot gear marching in formation. (Courtesy of University Archives, J. Paul Leonard Library, San Francisco State University)

By this time, Crutchfield had become a leader of the strike, often speaking to huge crowds of protesters. He said his involvement put a target on his back.

“I'm quite sure they wouldn't have cared if some of us had died. They definitely wanted some of us to go to prison. Some of us went to prison,” he said.

One day early on in the strike, police surrounded the Black Student Union office. Crutchfield said police were looking to arrest its members.

“I volunteered to leave the Black Student Union first,” Crutchfield said. “The police started running at me. I got beat up with nightsticks and boots and fists.”

The police arrested Crutchfield and escorted him off campus. He faced charges for illegal assembly, resisting arrest and intent to injure and maim, resulting in more than a year in jail. At 80 years old, Crutchfield, now a mental health administrator in Richmond, said he is still dealing with the trauma of that time.

"I don't think you can talk to anyone who was at S.F. State, who participated [in the strike], who ran from the police and can say that they're the same person," he said.
He said he has no regrets.

“I was the great, great grandson of Africans who were made slaves,” he said. “I realized the things I got arrested for were really important to me.”

Many white students, especially white radicals, followed the lead of strike leaders like Crutchfield. They believed that without ethnic studies, they themselves had been denied a proper education. Their support intensified as the strike dragged on and the violence continued.

About a month into the strike, teachers joined with demands of their own. As tensions escalated, President Smith shut down the school indefinitely. However, Gov. Ronald Reagan and the California State University Board of Trustees demanded he reopen the campus. Smith resigned in December 1968.

In his place, the board appointed S.I. Hayakawa, an English professor.

Hayakawa was popular with conservatives in Sacramento, but extremely unpopular with strikers. Their confrontations were heated and frequent.

Early on in his role as interim president, Hayakawa famously climbed aboard a sound truck and yanked the wires from a loud speaker during a student protest. Strikers, in return, called Hayakawa "The Puppet."

San Francisco State College acting-President S. I. Hayakawa holds press conference after violent demonstrations in December 1968. (Courtesy of San Francisco State University Photographic Timeline Project)

In early January, Hayakawa declared an end to student gatherings on campus. In a press conference he said he believed in the right to free speech, but that "freedom of speech does not mean freedom to incite riot."

The Mass Bust

Strikers ignored Hayakawa's ban on gatherings. Penny Nakatsu was protesting on Jan. 23, 1969 in what many call “the mass bust.”

"Two lines of police came up," Nakatsu said. "They surrounded over 500 people who were there for the rally and trapped all of the individuals who were caught within a human net."

Police charged at the students. Nakatsu said it was one of the bloodiest and most frightening days of the entire strike.

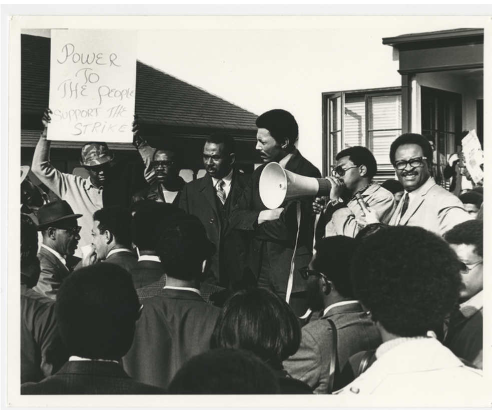
“The power of the state was trying to literally beat down the strike and strikers,” she said. “It was literally a practiced, orchestrated, military movement.”

Hundreds of protesters were arrested, backing up San Francisco's court system for months. Students, faculty and members of the community were affected, Nakatsu said.
“Many people suffered. Virtually all of the individuals who were arrested had to spend some jail time. A lot of those folks were blacklisted. University lecturers or teachers lost their jobs. There were real consequences to having participated in that event," she said.

Strikers Prevail

After two more months of striking, Hayakawa and strikers negotiated a deal on March 20, 1969.

The school agreed to accept virtually all nonwhite applicants for the fall 1969 semester, and establish a College of Ethnic Studies, the first in the country, with classes geared towards communities of color. Hayakawa gave Nakatsu and her peers the job of designing a curriculum from scratch in a matter of months.



Protesters in action during the San Francisco State College strike. (Courtesy of San Francisco State College Strike Collection)

"I have a feeling that one of the reasons why the administration agreed to that was I don't think they thought we could pull it off,” Nakatsu said.

The College of Ethnic Studies was ready by fall of 1969. Today, Nakatsu is a civil rights lawyer in San Francisco and believes in the importance of ethnic studies as much as ever.

“Ethnic studies is a way of embracing all of the cultures that make up the world,” she said. “If we don't understand each other, how are we going to get along? Ethnic studies is something that’s important, not just for people of color so we know about our histories and cultures and destinies, but for all people.”

Like many strikers, Ferreira believes ethnic studies should be required in K-12 schools, as well as universities.

“The demand for ethnic studies is as important today as it ever was, if not more,” he said. “The inability of this country to come to terms with the ongoing practices of racism and white supremacy speaks to the demands of the Third World Liberation Front and the Black Student Union for an education that was relevant and transformative. It's still an uphill battle. But we'll win."

The Concept of Race

Overview

In the previous lesson, students began the “We and They” stage of the Facing History scope and sequence by examining the human behavior of creating and considering the concept of *universe of obligation*. This lesson continues the study of “We and They,” as students turn their attention to an idea—the concept of *race*—that has been used for more than 400 years by many societies to define their universes of obligation. Contrary to the beliefs of many people, past and present, race has never been scientifically proven to be a significant genetic or biological difference in humans. The concept of race was in fact invented by society to fulfill its need to justify disparities in power and status among different groups. The lack of scientific evidence about race undermines the very concept of the superiority of some “races” and the inferiority of other “races.”

Race is an especially crucial concept in any study of Nazi Germany and the Holocaust, because it was central to Nazi ideology. However, the Nazis weren’t the only ones who had notions about race. This lesson also examines the history and development of the idea of “race” in England and the United States.

Context

For at least 400 years, a theory of “race” has been a lens through which many individuals, leaders, and nations have determined who belongs and who does not. Theories about “race” include the notion that human beings can be classified into different races according to certain physical characteristics, such as skin color, eye shape, and hair form. The theory has led to the common, but false, belief that some “races” have intellectual and physical abilities that are superior to those of other “races.” Biologists and geneticists today have not only disproved this claim, they have also declared that there is no genetic or biological basis for categorizing people by race. According to microbiologist Pilar Ossorio:

> Are the people who we call Black more like each other than they are like people who we call white, genetically speaking? The answer is no. There’s as much or more diversity and genetic difference within any racial group as there is between people of different racial groups.

As professor Evelynn Hammonds states in the film *Race: The Power of an Illusion*: “Race is a human invention. We created it, and we have used it in ways that have been in many, many respects quite negative and quite harmful.”

When the scientific and intellectual ideals of the Enlightenment came to dominate the thinking of most Europeans in the 1700s, they exposed a basic contradiction between principle and practice: the enslavement of human beings. Despite the fact that Enlightenment ideals of human freedom and equality inspired revolutions in the United States and France, the practice of

slavery persisted throughout the United States and European empires. In the late 1700s and early 1800s, American and European scientists tried to explain this contradiction through the study of “race science,” which advanced the idea that humankind is divided into separate and unequal races. If it could be scientifically proven that Europeans were biologically superior to those from other places, especially Africa, then Europeans could justify slavery and other imperialistic practices.

Prominent scientists from many countries, including Sweden, the Netherlands, England, Germany, and the United States, used “race science” to give legitimacy to the race-based divisions in their societies. Journalists, teachers, and preachers popularized their ideas. Historian Reginald Horsman, who studied the leading publications of the time, describes the false messages about race that were pervasive throughout the nineteenth century:

> One did not have to read obscure books to know that the Caucasians were innately superior, and that they were responsible for civilization in the world, or to know that inferior races were destined to be overwhelmed or even to disappear.

Some scientists and public figures challenged race science. In an 1854 speech, Frederick Douglass, the formerly enslaved American political activist, argued:

> The whole argument in defense of slavery becomes utterly worthless the moment the African is proved to be equally a man with the Anglo-Saxon. The temptation, therefore, to read the Negro out of the human family is exceedingly strong.

Douglass and others who spoke out against race science were generally ignored or marginalized.

By the late 1800s, the practice of eugenics emerged out of race science in England, the United States, and Germany. Eugenics is the use of so-called science to improve the human race, both by breeding “society’s best with the best” and by preventing “society’s worst” from breeding at all. Eugenicists believed that a nation is a biological community that must be protected from “threat,” which they often defined as mixing with allegedly inferior “races.”

In the early twentieth century, influential German biologist Ernst Haeckel divided humankind into races and ranked them. In his view, “Aryans”—a mythical race from whom many northern Europeans believed they had descended—were at the top of the rankings and Jews and Africans were at the bottom. Ideas of race and eugenics would become central to Nazi ideology in the 1920s, 1930s, and 1940s.

Despite the fact that one’s race predicts almost nothing else about an individual’s physical or intellectual capacities, people still commonly believe in a connection between race and certain biological abilities or deficiencies. The belief in this connection leads to racism. As scholar George Fredrickson explains, racism has two components: difference and power.

> It originates from a mindset that regards “them” as different from “us” in ways that are permanent and unbridgeable. This sense of difference provides a motive or rationale for using our power advantage to treat the...Other in ways that we would regard as cruel or unjust if applied to members of our own group.

The idea that there is an underlying biological link between race and intellectual or physical abilities (or deficiencies) has persisted for hundreds of years. Learning that race is a social concept, not a scientific fact, may be challenging for students. They may need time to absorb the reality behind the history of race because it conflicts with the way many in our society understand it.

Schools and the New Jim Crow

An interview with Michelle Alexander

■ BY JODY SOKOLOWER

As Rethinking Schools began to explore the school-to-prison pipeline, we searched for a construct that would help us understand how the criminalization of youth fits into the larger social picture. At just that moment, we discovered *The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in the Age of Colorblindness* by Michelle Alexander.

Alexander poses a thought-provoking and insightful thesis: Mass incarceration, justified and organized around the war on drugs, has become the new face of racial discrimination in the United States. Since 1970, the number of people behind bars in this country has increased 600 percent.

What is most striking about these numbers is the racial dimension. The United States imprisons a larger percentage of its black population than South Africa did at the height of apartheid. In Washington, DC, for example, it is estimated that 75 percent of young black men can expect to serve time in prison.

Equally disturbing is Alexander's description of the lifelong civil and human rights implications of being arrested and serving time in prison, and the implications for what many call our "post-racial" society. As she explains in her introduction:

> What has changed since the collapse of Jim Crow has less to do with the basic structure of our society than with the language we use to justify it. In the era of colorblindness, it is no longer socially permissible to use race, explicitly, as a justification for discrimination, exclusion, and social contempt. So we don't. Rather than rely on race, we use our criminal justice system to label people of color "criminals" and then engage in all the practices we supposedly left behind. Today it is perfectly legal to discriminate against criminals in nearly all the ways that it was once legal to discriminate against African Americans. Once you're labeled a felon, the old forms of discrimination—employment discrimination, housing discrimination, denial of the right to vote, denial of educational opportunity, denial of food stamps and other public benefits, and exclusion from jury service—are suddenly legal. As a criminal you have scarcely more rights, and arguably less respect, than a black man living in Alabama at the height of Jim Crow. We have not ended racial caste in America; we have merely redesigned it.

We asked Alexander to share her thoughts about the implications of her work when applied to education and the lives of children and youth. She spoke with *Rethinking Schools* editor Jody Sokolower on Sept. 1, 2011.

RS: What is the impact of mass incarceration on African American children and youth?

MA: There is an extraordinary impact. For African American children, in particular, the odds are extremely high that they will have a parent or loved one, a relative, who has either spent time behind bars or who has acquired a criminal record and thus is part of the under-caste—the group of people who can be legally discriminated against for the rest of their lives. For many African American children, their fathers, and increasingly their mothers, are behind bars. It is very difficult for them to visit. Many people are held hundreds or even thousands of miles away from home. There is a tremendous amount of shame with having a parent or other

Jody Sokolower is policy and production editor of Rethinking Schools.

We're not going to provide meaningful education opportunities to poor kids, kids of color, until and unless we recognize that we're wasting trillions of dollars on a failed criminal justice system.

family member incarcerated. There can be fear of having it revealed to others at school.

But also, for these children, their life chances are greatly diminished. They are more likely to be raised in severe poverty; their parents are unlikely to be able to find work or housing and are often ineligible even for food stamps.

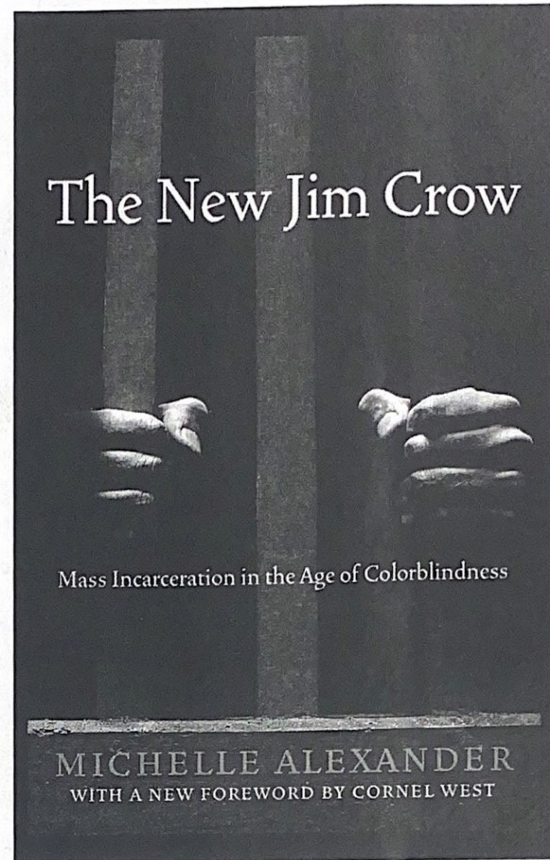
For children, the era of mass incarceration has meant a tremendous amount of family separation, broken homes, poverty, and a far, far greater level of hopelessness as they see so many of their loved ones cycling in and out of prison. Children who have incarcerated parents are far more likely themselves to be incarcerated.

When young black men reach a certain age—whether or not there is incarceration in their families—they themselves are the target of police stops, interrogations, frisks, often for no reason other than their race. And, of course, this level of harassment sends a message to them, often at an early age: No matter who you are or what you do, you're going to find yourself behind bars one way or the other. This reinforces the sense that prison is part of their destiny, rather than a choice one makes.

A Birdcage as a Metaphor

RS: At one point in *The New Jim Crow*, you refer to the metaphor of a birdcage as a way to describe structural racism and apply that to mass incarceration. How does what is happening to African American youth in our schools fit into that picture?

MA: The idea of the metaphor is there can be many bars, wires that keep a person trapped. All of them don't have to have been created for the purpose of harming or caging the bird, but they still serve that function. Certainly youth of color, particularly those in ghetto communities, find themselves born into the cage. They are born into a community in which the rules, laws, policies, structures of their lives virtually guarantee that they will remain trapped for life. It begins at a very early age when their parents themselves are either behind bars or locked in a permanent second-class status and cannot afford them the opportunities they otherwise could. For example, those with felony convictions are denied access to public housing, hundreds of professions that require certification, financial support for education, and often the right to vote. Thousands of people are unable even to get food stamps because they were once caught with drugs.



The cage itself is manifested by the ghetto, which is racially segregated, isolated, cut off from social and economic opportunities. The cage is the unequal educational opportunities these children are provided at a very early age coupled with the constant police surveillance they're likely to encounter, making it very likely that they're going to serve time and be caught for committing the various types of minor crimes—particularly drug crimes—that occur with roughly equal frequency in middle-class white communities but go largely ignored.

So, for many, whether they go to prison or not is far less about the choices they make and far more about what kind of cage they're born into. Middle-class white children, children of privilege, are afforded the opportunity to make a lot of mistakes and still go on to college, still dream big dreams. But for kids who are born in the ghetto in the era of mass incarceration, the system is designed in such a way that it traps them, often for life.

RS: How do you define and analyze the school-to-prison pipeline?

MA: It's really part of the large cage or caste that I was describing earlier. The school-to-prison pipeline is another metaphor—a good one for explaining how children are funneled directly from schools into prison. Instead of schools being a pipeline to opportunity, schools are feeding our prisons.

It's important for us to understand how school discipline

The mythology of colorblindness takes the race question off the table. . . . It makes it difficult to see that the backlash against the Civil Rights Movement manifested itself in the form of mass incarceration, in the form of defunding and devaluing schools serving kids of color.

policies have been influenced by the war on drugs and the "get tough" movement. Many people imagine that zero tolerance rhetoric emerged within the school environment, but it's not true. In fact, the Advancement Project published a report showing that one of the earliest examples of zero tolerance language in school discipline manuals was a cut-and-paste job from a U.S. Drug Enforcement Administration manual. The wave of punitiveness that washed over the United States with the rise of the drug war and the get tough movement really flooded our schools. Schools, caught up in this maelstrom, began viewing children as criminals or suspects, rather than as young people with an enormous amount of potential struggling in their own ways and their own difficult context to make it and hopefully thrive. We began viewing the youth in schools as potential violators rather than as children needing our guidance.

The Mythology of Colorblindness

RS: In your book, you explain that the policies of mass incarceration are technically "colorblind" but lead to starkly racialized results. How do you see this specifically affecting children and young people of color?

MA: The mythology around colorblindness leads people to imagine that if poor kids of color are failing or getting locked up in large numbers, it must be something wrong with them. It leads young kids of color to look around and say: "There must be something wrong with me, there must be something wrong with us. Is there something inherent, something different about me, about us as a people, that leads us to fail so often, that leads us to live in these miserable conditions, that leads us to go in and out of prison?"

The mythology of colorblindness takes the race question off the table. It makes it difficult for people to even formulate the question: Could this be about something more than individual choices? Maybe there is something going on that's linked to the history of race in our country and the way race is reproducing itself in modern times.

I think this mythology—that of course we're all beyond race, of course our police officers aren't racist, of course our politicians don't mean any harm to people of color—this idea that we're beyond all that (so it must be something else) makes it difficult for young people as well as the grown-ups to be able to see clearly and honestly the truth of what's going on. It makes it difficult to see that the backlash against the Civil Rights Movement manifested itself in the form of mass incarceration, in the form of defunding and devaluing schools serving kids of color and all the rest. We have avoided in recent years talking openly and honestly about race out of fear that it will alienate and polarize. In my own view, it's our refusal to deal openly and honestly with race that leads us to keep repeating these cycles of exclusion and division, and rebirthing a caste-like system that we claim we've left behind.

RS: We are in the midst of a huge attack on public education—privatization through charters and vouchers; increased standardization, regimentation, and testing; and the destruction of teachers' unions. Much of it is justified by what appears to be anti-racist rhetoric: Schools aren't meeting the needs of inner-city children, so their parents need choices. How do you see this?

MA: People who focus solely on what do we do given the current context are avoiding the big *why*. Why is it that these schools aren't meeting these kids' needs? Why is it that such a large percentage of the African American population today is trapped in these ghettos? What is the bigger picture?

The bigger picture is that over the last 30 years, we have spent $1 trillion waging a drug war that has failed in any meaningful way to reduce drug addiction or abuse, and yet has siphoned an enormous amount of resources away from other public services, especially education. We are in a social and political context in which the norm is to punish poor

folks of color rather than to educate and empower them with economic opportunity. It is that political context that leads some people to ask: Don't children need to be able to escape poorly performing schools? Of course, no one should be trapped in bad schools or bad neighborhoods. No one. But I think we need to be asking a larger question: How do we change the norm, the larger context that people seem to accept as a given? Are we so thoroughly resigned to what "is" that we cannot even begin a serious conversation about how to create what ought to be?

The education justice movement and the prison justice movement have been operating separately in many places as though they're in silos. But the reality is we're not going to provide meaningful education opportunities to poor kids, kids of color, until and unless we recognize that we're wasting trillions of dollars on a failed criminal justice system. Kids are growing up in communities in which they see their loved ones cycling in and out of prison and in which they are sent the message in countless ways that they, too, are going to prison one way or another. We cannot build healthy, functioning schools within a context where there is no funding available because it's going to building prisons and police forces.

RS: And fighting wars?

MA: Yes, and fighting wars. And where there is so much hopelessness because of the prevalence of mass incarceration.

At the same time, we're foolish if we think we're going to end mass incarceration unless we are willing to deal with the reality that huge percentages of poor people are going to remain jobless, locked out of the mainstream economy, unless and until they have a quality education that prepares them well for the new economy. There has got to be much more collaboration between the two movements and a greater appreciation for the work of the advocates in each community. It's got to be a movement that's about education, not incarceration—about jobs, not jails. A movement that integrates the work in these various camps from, in my view, a human rights perspective.

Fighting Back

RS: What is the role of teachers in responding to this crisis? What should we be doing in our classrooms? What should we be doing as education activists?

MA: That is a wonderful question and one I'm wrestling with myself now. I am in the process of working with others trying to develop curriculum and materials that will make it easier to talk to young people about these issues in ways that won't lead to paralysis, fear, or resignation, but instead will enlighten and inspire action and critical thinking in the future. It's very difficult but it must be done.

We have to be willing to take some risks. In my experience, there is a lot of hesitancy to approach these issues in the classroom out of fear that students will become emotional or angry, or that the information will reinforce their sense of futility about their own lives and experience. It's important to teach them about the reality of the system, that it is in fact the case that they are being targeted unfairly, that the rules have been set up in a way that authorize unfair treatment of them, and how difficult it is to challenge these laws in the courts. We need to teach them how our politics have changed in recent years, how there has been, in fact, a backlash. But we need to couple that information with stories of how people in the past have challenged these kinds of injustices, and the role that youth have played historically in those struggles.

I think it's important to encourage young people to tell their own stories and to speak openly about their own experiences with the criminal justice system and the experiences of their family. We need to ensure that the classroom environment is a supportive one so that the shame and stigma can be dispelled. Then teachers can use those stories of what students have witnessed and experienced as the opportunity to begin asking questions: How did we get here? Why is this happening? How are things different in other communities? How is this linked to what has gone on in prior periods of our nation's history? And what, then, can we do about it?

Just providing information about how bad things are, or the statistics and data on incarceration by themselves, does lead to more depression and resignation and is not empowering. The information has to be presented in a way that's linked to the piece about encouraging students to think critically and creatively about how they might respond to injustice, and how young people have responded to injustice in the past.

RS: What specifically?

MA: There's a range of possibilities. I was inspired by what students have done in some schools organizing walkouts protesting the lack of funding and that sort of thing. There are opportunities for students to engage in those types of protests—taking to the streets—but there is also writing poetry, writing music, beginning to express themselves, holding forums, educating each other, the whole range. For example, for a period of time the Ella Baker Center in Oakland, Calif., was focused on youth engagement and advocacy to challenge mass incarceration. They launched a number of youth campaigns to close youth incarceration facilities in northern California. They demonstrated that it is really possible to blend hip-hop culture with very creative and specific advocacy and to develop young leaders. Young people today are very creative in using social media and there is a wide range of ways that they can get involved.

The most important thing at this stage is inspiring an awakening. There is a tremendous amount of confusion and denial that exists about mass incarceration today, and that is the biggest barrier to movement building. As long as we remain in denial about this system, movement building will be impossible. Exposing youth in classrooms to the truth about this system and developing their critical capacities will, I believe, open the door to meaningful engagement and collective, inspired action. ■

“The Hill We Climb” - Amanda Gorman

When day comes we ask ourselves, where can we find light in this never-ending shade? The loss we carry, a sea we must wade. We’ve braved the belly of the beast, we’ve learned that quiet isn’t always peace and the norms and notions of what just is, isn’t always justice. And yet the dawn is ours before we knew it, somehow we do it, somehow we’ve weathered and witnessed a nation that isn’t broken but simply unfinished.

We, the successors of a country and a time where a skinny black girl descended from slaves and raised by a single mother can dream of becoming president only to find herself reciting for one. And, yes, we are far from polished, far from pristine, but that doesn’t mean we are striving to form a union that is perfect, we are striving to forge a union with purpose, to compose a country committed to all cultures, colors, characters and conditions of man.

So we lift our gazes not to what stands between us, but what stands before us. We close the divide because we know to put our future first, we must first put our differences aside. We lay down our arms so we can reach out our arms to one another, we seek harm to none and harmony for all.

Let the globe, if nothing else, say this is true: that even as we grieved, we grew, even as we hurt, we hoped, that even as we tired, we tried, that we’ll forever be tied together victorious, not because we will never again know defeat but because we will never again sow division.

Scripture tells us to envision that everyone shall sit under their own vine and fig tree and no one should make them afraid. If we’re to live up to our own time, then victory won’t lie in the blade, but in in all of the bridges we’ve made.

That is the promise to glade, the hill we climb if only we dare it because being American is more than a pride we inherit, it's the past we step into and how we repair it. We've seen a force that would shatter our nation rather than share it. That would destroy our country if it meant delaying democracy, and this effort very nearly succeeded. But while democracy can periodically be delayed, but it can never be permanently defeated.

In this truth, in this faith, we trust, for while we have our eyes on the future, history has its eyes on us, this is the era of just redemption we feared in its inception we did not feel prepared to be the heirs of such a terrifying hour but within it we found the power to author a new chapter, to offer hope and laughter to ourselves, so while once we asked how can we possibly prevail over catastrophe, now we assert how could catastrophe possibly prevail over us.

We will not march back to what was but move to what shall be, a country that is bruised but whole, benevolent but bold, fierce and free, we will not be turned around or interrupted by intimidation because we know our inaction and inertia will be the inheritance of the next generation, our blunders become their burden. But one thing is certain: if we merge mercy with might and might with right, then love becomes our legacy and change our children's birthright.

So let us leave behind a country better than the one we were left, with every breath from my bronze, pounded chest, we will raise this wounded world into a wondrous one, we will rise from the golden hills of the West, we will rise from the windswept Northeast where our forefathers first realized revolution, we will rise from the lake-rimmed cities of the Midwestern states, we will rise from the sunbaked South, we will rebuild, reconcile, and recover in every known nook of our nation in every corner called our country our people diverse and beautiful will emerge battered and beautiful, when the day comes we step out of the shade aflame and unafraid, the new dawn blooms as we free it, for there is always light if only we're brave enough to see it, if only we're brave enough to be it.

Dolores Huerta

Edited by Debra Michals, PhD | 2015

Co-founder of the United Farm Workers Association, Dolores Clara Fernandez Huerta is one of the most influential labor activists of the 20th century and a leader of the Chicano civil rights movement.

Born on April 10, 1930 in Dawson, New Mexico, Huerta was the second of three children of Alicia and Juan Fernandez, a farm worker and miner who became a state legislator in 1938. Her parents divorced when Huerta was three years old, and her mother moved to Stockton, California with her children. Huerta's grandfather helped raise Huerta and her two brothers while her mother juggled jobs as a waitress and cannery worker until she could buy a small hotel and restaurant. Alicia's community activism and compassionate treatment of workers greatly influenced her daughter.

Discrimination also helped shape Huerta. A schoolteacher, prejudiced against Hispanics, accused Huerta of cheating because her papers were too well-written. In 1945 at the end of World War II, white men brutally beat her brother for wearing a Zoot-Suit, a popular Latino fashion.

Huerta received an associate teaching degree from the University of the Pacific's Delta College. She married Ralph Head while a student and had two daughters, though the couple soon divorced. She subsequently married fellow activist Ventura Huerta with whom she had five children, though that marriage also did not last. Huerta briefly taught school in the 1950s, but seeing so many hungry farm children coming to school, she thought she could do more to help them by organizing farmers and farm workers.

In 1955 Huerta began her career as an activist when she co-founded the Stockton chapter of the Community Service Organization (CSO), which led voter registration drives and fought for economic improvements for Hispanics. She also founded the Agricultural Workers Association. Through a CSO associate, Huerta met activist César Chávez, with whom she shared an interest in organizing farm workers. In 1962, Huerta and Chávez founded the National Farm Workers

Association (NFWA), the predecessor of the United Farm Workers' Union (UFW), which formed three year later. Huerta served as UFW vice president until 1999.

Despite ethnic and gender bias, Huerta helped organize the 1965 Delano strike of 5,000 grape workers and was the lead negotiator in the workers' contract that followed. Throughout her work with the UFW, Huerta organized workers, negotiated contracts, advocated for safer working conditions including the elimination of harmful pesticides. She also fought for unemployment and healthcare benefits for agricultural workers. Huerta was the driving force behind the nationwide table grape boycotts in the late 1960s that led to a successful union contract by 1970.

In 1973, Huerta led another consumer boycott of grapes that resulted in the ground-breaking California Agricultural Labor Relations Act of 1975, which allowed farm workers to form unions and bargain for better wages and conditions. Throughout the 1970s and '80s, Huerta worked as a lobbyist to improve workers' legislative representation. During the 1990s and 2000s, she worked to elect more Latinos and women to political office and has championed women's issues.

The recipient of many honors, Huerta received the Eleanor Roosevelt Human Rights Award in 1998 and the Presidential Medal of Freedom in 2012. As of 2015, she was a board member of the Feminist Majority Foundation, the Secretary-Treasurer Emeritus of the United Farm Workers of America, and the President of the Dolores Huerta Foundation.

The backlash against In the Heights, explained

The new film adaptation of Lin-Manuel Miranda's Broadway show relegated its Black Latinx community to the background and sparked a debate about colorism.

By Aja Romano@ajaromano Jun 15, 2021, 6:00pm EDT

Corey Hawkins and Leslie Grace in In the Heights. Macall Polay/Warner Bros.

Despite an early onslaught of critical praise, the highly anticipated film adaptation of Lin-Manuel Miranda's first Broadway musical *In the Heights* failed to draw crowds to movie theaters over its premiere weekend. Instead, a wave of backlash surfaced over the film's lack of visibly dark-skinned Afro Latinx characters — the very community the film purports to represent.

The Tony-winning hit musical that made Lin-Manuel Miranda a Broadway name half a decade before *Hamilton* debuted depicts a struggling but vibrant neighborhood on Manhattan's upper Upper West Side. But while the new film is a celebration of Washington Heights, it's very easy to come away from it thinking that the community is entirely made up of mostly light-skinned Latinx migrants and immigrants. Though a large portion of the neighborhood's real-life population is Black Latinx, in the movie, all but one of the main cast members are light-skinned — and many viewers immediately noticed what seemed to be the erasure of the Black Latinx community.

Discussion on social media about the film quickly focused on its perceived colorism — prejudice against darker-skinned Black people and positive bias toward those who are lighter-skinned. Conversation centered on an interview released June 9 between the film's director, Jon M. Chu (*Crazy Rich Asians*), and the Root's Felice León, in which she asked a clearly unprepared Chu, "What are your thoughts on the lack of Black Latinx people represented in your film?"

"That was something that we talked about and that I needed to be educated about," Chu acknowledged. "In the end, when we were looking at the cast, we tried to get the people who were best for those roles."

According to cast member Melissa Barrera in a separate group interview with the Root and a few of her fellow cast members, the audition process did include “a lot of Afro Latinos” — which raised questions about why none of “the right people for the roles,” as she put it, happened to be darker-skinned. Roles for Black actors mainly went to background dancers and extras.

In response to the backlash, Miranda posted a statement to Twitter Monday night to apologize for the film’s erasure of Washington Heights’ Black Latinx population. “I can hear the hurt and frustration over colorism, of feeling unseen in the feedback,” he wrote. “In trying to paint a mosaic of this community, we fell short. I’m truly sorry ... I promise to do better in my future projects, and I’m dedicated to the learning and evolving we all have to do to make sure we are honoring our diverse and vibrant community.”

***In the Heights* is vibrant, but is it authentic?**

Although *In the Heights* is semi-autobiographical, Miranda didn’t actually grow up in Washington Heights; he spent most of his early life in the adjacent neighborhood of Inwood, experiencing Washington Heights as a frequent visitor but not really an inhabitant.

That difference may have eventually registered to some of the movie’s audience as inauthenticity. On June 13, a viral Twitter thread from filmmaker Numa Perrier (*Jezebel)* in which Perrier reposted the Root interview, describing the conversation as “painful,” sparked discussion from author Roxane Gay and some Black Latinx viewers about colorism. Colorism has long been an issue for Black Latinx community members who say they all too frequently get erased in depictions of Latinx communities, especially Caribbean cultures.

“These discussions are ones we end up having to have because there’s such an atmosphere of scarcity when it comes to these stories,” culture critic Soraya McDonald told me. “If there were multiple tentpoles starring and directed by people of color, and it didn’t feel like such a big deal and such an event, then it wouldn’t matter as much.”

Miranda has faced backlash over perceived Black erasure before, particularly during debates over whether *Hamilton*, despite having a mainly Black cast, erases Black people from America’s historical narrative. It might be easy to attribute the issue of *In the Heights*’ predominantly light-skinned casting to the way the Broadway show’s story was originally written by Miranda and Quiara Alegría Hudes (who also co-authored the movie script). But it’s important to note that as director, Chu also faced a similar backlash in 2018 over how *Crazy Rich Asians*, about affluent Chinese diaspora communities living in Singapore, all but erased the Malay, Indian, or other ethnic populations from its depiction of the island.

Given that this isn’t Chu’s first time being confronted with the question of colorism, then, his lack of a real answer when León pressed for one was baffling. Instead, he said repeatedly, “That’s a good conversation to have” — but didn’t appear to actually have it.

“Everyone talks about the need to have ‘difficult conversations’ about race, systemic racism, racial and cultural representation, and then as soon as it feels slightly difficult, folks who have

the option to opt out, opt out," Rebecca Carroll told me. A culture critic and author of *Surviving the White Gaze: A Memoir*, Carroll says she felt the casting for *In the Heights* couldn't have been entirely unconscious. "How can it be, given what's going on in the national dialogue?"

She referred to Miranda's admission earlier this year that the film's producers originally thought the movie would have to star Jennifer Lopez to be successful as evidence that "this movie was going to be financed for a cast of light-skinned Latinos only." (Lopez's ex-husband, powerhouse Latin musician Marc Anthony, has a small but pivotal role in the film and appears on the soundtrack, arguably bolstering the film's appeal to many Latinx viewers.) According to Miranda, the creative team pushed back against that impulse until they got executives to understand that the movie had to feel authentic. "It has to be people who look like they belong on 175th Street," he told IndieWire.

But Carroll doubts authenticity was the whole objective. "I simply don't believe that Jon Chu was not cognizant of the casting choices," Carroll said. "I don't think the creative team could have considered the Black audience reaction and still make the film they did."

McDonald told me she kept thinking back to the title of Ava DuVernay's *When They See Us* as a reminder of how seldom Black people are seen. "Did you just not see these people? Did they just fade into fuzzy background? How do you not notice? But there are so many ways that people just don't *see* Black people. They don't consider us."

Colorism is a form of racism — and it's still a major onscreen issue

Colorism has deep roots in the United States. The "paper bag test" (to ensure skin color was whiter than a paper bag) or the "blue vein society" (limited to people who could see their blue veins through light skin) were historical apocryphal examples of this discrimination, dating back to slavery and playing out within complex social castes. Today, colorism still visibly impacts Black representation onscreen. "The paper-bag test is still very much alive and kicking," Oscar-winning actress Viola Davis said in 2015. "I hear these stories from friends of mine who are dark-skin actresses who are always being seen as crack addicts and prostitutes."

During their interviews with the Root, instead of addressing *In the Heights*' lack of Black leads, both Barrera and Chu brought up the movie's background dancers as an example of Black Latinx representation. Given that the dancers are rarely seen onscreen and never have spoken lines, trying to hold them up as meaningful representation rather than set dressing may have driven the colorism point home: As McDonald said to me, "Black people are not visual furniture."

Black actors have been used as window dressing for white stories in Hollywood for decades — think of "white savior" narratives like *To Kill a Mockingbird* or *The Help,* where racism is framed as a white person's educational experience; or movies like *The African Queen* or *Out of Africa,* where the entire continent plays second fiddle to a white person's adventures. And even though Hollywood is diversifying, racist casting patterns continue to play out, as lighter-skinned actors are cast more frequently than darker-skinned ones. One study conducted in 2019 and released

in 2021 found that, of Black women cast in leading roles within the past decade, only 19 percent had dark skin.

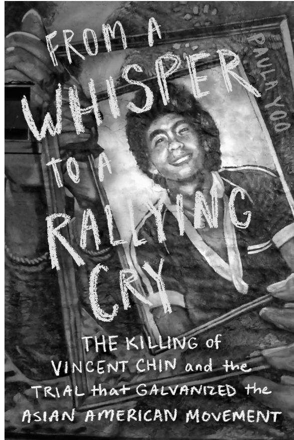
That framework ultimately reinforces a lens of white privilege and maintains an inequitable view of the world that simultaneously fails to challenge audiences to see things any differently. “Here’s where the damage hits the hardest,” Carroll told me. “For the folks who may not even notice the erasure — white audiences — their willful ignorance is not merely validated but cemented. For the people who see the Black background dancers as sufficient representation and/or progress, that remains progress. And for those of us who find the erasure absolutely glaring, we have to start all over again with why it matters.”

All of this may make *In the Heights* a bittersweet film in the end — a reminder that when there’s so little representation to be had, the stakes become high for everyone potentially impacted by that representation. *In the Heights* has won praise for its loving depiction of a Latinx diaspora experience, particularly in songs like “Paciencia y Fe,” which depicts the struggle of immigrant and migrant workers arriving in New York, battling racism and economic hardship and the pain of struggling to fit in. While the story of *In the Heights* holds great meaning for many of its viewers, however, widespread recognition of the film’s flaws might ultimately overshadow its better efforts.

“I’m trying to hold space for both incredible pride in the movie we made,” Miranda wrote in his apology, “and be accountable for our shortcomings.” Hopefully, Hollywood will take note.

How Vincent Chin's Death Gave Others A Voice

March 27, 20217:00 AM ET / KAREN GRIGSBY BATES



The cover of Paula Yoo's forthcoming book From A Whisper To A Rallying Cry */ Courtesy of W.W. Norton*

Writer Paula Yoo was 13 years old and finishing up seventh grade when Vincent Chin was killed. Chin was a 27-year-old draftsman who was celebrating his impending wedding at a strip club in Detroit, when he was bludgeoned to death by a pair of white men. Those men were apparently upset by their perception that American auto jobs were disappearing as a result of Japanese success in the auto industry. (Chin was Chinese.)

Yoo didn't learn much about Chin's killing when it actually happened — let alone imagine that it would eventually become the subject of one of her books. But as an adult, she became fascinated by Chin's story and how it spurred a new generation of Asian Americans into political action. She started doing some reading and research, which eventually turned into her latest non-fiction book, geared toward young adults, which will be published next month: *From A Whisper to A Rallying Cry: The Killing of Vincent Chin and the Trial That Galvanized the Asian American Movement*.

Full disclosure — Paula and I first met in the 90s when we both worked for *People* magazine in Los Angeles — so I've known her for years. She's now a TV writer and producer in addition to being the author of several children's books about famous Asian Americans.

Sonya Sones

Our conversation has been edited for length and clarity.

Tell us a little bit about who Vincent Chin was, and what happened to him.

Vincent Chin is famous in the Asian American community; his name has resurfaced recently due to the spike in anti-Asian racism. His was the first federal civil rights trial for an Asian American. On the night of June 19, 1982, the night of his bachelor party, Vincent Chin was beaten to death with a baseball bat by two white auto workers in Detroit. Ronald Ebens was a foreman at Chrysler at the time, and his stepson, Michael Nitz, was a recently laid-off auto worker. The reason I mention that is because this happened during the height of anti-Japanese sentiment. The American auto industry was reeling, due to increased competition from Japanese import cars and mass layoffs happening across the country. Things were especially bad in Michigan, home to the Big Three: Ford, Chrysler and GM.

Vincent was beaten in the head so badly, he lapsed into a coma and died four days later. Before he lost consciousness, he whispered three words to one of the friends who'd been out with him that night: "It's not fair." He was buried the day after what should have been his wedding day.

What happened after Vincent's death? Was there a trial?

More than one. The first was presided over by Judge Charles Kaufman. He gave both Ebens and Nitz three years' probation, fined them $3,000 and court costs and released them. He later said that they "weren't the kind of men you send to jail." Citing the fact that neither man had a previous record, Kaufman said that he just didn't think putting them in prison would do any good for them or for society. That "you don't make the punishment fit the crime; you make the punishment fit the criminal."

What was the public's reaction?

Judge Kaufman's lenient sentencing angered not just Vincent Chin's family, but the entire Asian American community. Led by activist Helen Zia, several Asian American lawyers and community leaders banded together to create American Citizens for Justice. This grassroots advocacy organization rallied with several diverse groups—churches, synagogues, Black activists—to protest Kaufman's sentencing.

This inspired other Asian Americans across the country to hold their own demonstrations. These protests resulted in the first federal civil rights trial for an Asian American. In 1984, Ronald Ebens and Michael Nitz were indicted on two counts of conspiracy and violating Vincent Chin's right to be in a place of public accommodation because of his race, and sentenced to 25 years. In the trial that followed the indictment, Nitz was cleared of all charges. Ebers (who held the baseball bat) was convicted of violating Chin's civil rights, and sentenced to 25 years.

But due to accusations of alleged witness coaching, Ebens was acquitted in a second trial held in 1987, in which his guilty conviction was reversed. He would ultimately be found not guilty, and he never spent a day in jail.

You started this book before this most recent surge in anti-Asian violence. Why did you want to write it, and why write it for a young adult audience?

My whole life I always kept thinking one day I'd love to write a non-fiction adult book, like *In Cold Blood*. And I remember everybody that I talked to about Vincent, everybody that I worked with, they all responded with, "This is an incredible story. We know nothing about it." So that's why I think it's a special book not just for adults, but also for teenagers, because I hope that it gives them a firsthand understanding of what this was like.

When I was offered a job at *The Detroit News*, for instance, I remember the first thing my Asian American journalist friends said to me was, "Are you afraid to go live in Detroit because of Vincent Chin?" You know, being Asian American in this country, we're often alone. We're often the only one in our high school or the only family on our block because for many, many decades, we have been a very small part of the percentage of the population. So being an Asian American in this country is very lonely. I've been very lonely my whole life.

Did you do first-person interviews for this book, or rely mostly on archival information?

I have thousands of pages of transcripts from 1982 to 1984; I read every single motion, all the boring stuff. I read *everything.* I have primary sources. I've actually talked to people who have refused to talk about this case for almost 40 years. And I have exclusive new information.

I'm one of the first and only people to have met Ronald Ebers in person in his house. And it was an off-the-record informal visit. So I can't talk about what we talked about, but that was one of the most profound, deep and very disturbing moments in my life.

One of the interesting things about this book is you show all sides of this tragedy. Even Ebens and Nitz. You actually had some compassion for these white men who killed someone who looked like you...

You can have compassion, but compassion is not mutually exclusive from justice. At the end of the day, now that I know the humanity behind these two men, I can have compassion for them. But I can still think, *"You still should have gone to jail. What you did was wrong. Justice was not served."*

Many people believe that Vincent Chin did not receive justice in the legal sense. But some important things emerged from his death. Tell us what some of those things are.

His death had a tangible effect; he's not just a symbol. It changed manslaughter sentencing in Michigan. Because of Vincent Chin and other cases very similar to his, victims' families are now allowed to deliver a victim impact statement to the judge at a hearing. At Vincent's first trial, the prosecutors were just overwhelmed with cases and they didn't appear in court. Now, because of this, prosecutors have to be at all hearings.

His case also inspired Asian baby boomers. They came of age [about standing up for themselves and other people of color]. This was part of their civil rights education.

Aside from the tangible legal changes that happened in the court system, Vincent's case inspired a younger generation to get involved as activists, as writers, as lawyers going into politics, trying to effect policy change. There are so many Asian American politicians out there now, which is so wonderful! So I think our voice has been raised, our stories, our history, our contributions have been raised. So we've got to go out there and fill in the blanks, because if we don't, who will?

Debunking the Model Minority Myth

Asian Americans are often stereotyped as studious, successful, smart — a model minority who excel in education and accomplish the “American Dream.” Despite its positive overtones this stereotype is damaging for Asian Americans and other students of color. The model minority myth pits students of color against each other and ignores the reality of systemic racism that Asian Americans continue to encounter.

In response, USC Pacific Asia Museum has partnered with the USC Asian Pacific American Student Assembly (APASA), to collect stories from Asian and Pacific American students that deal with this stereotype everyday. Below are individual stories, told *anonymously*, to help debunk, the model minority myth.

Student Narratives

I just learned recently that a white man created the term “model minority” to describe Japanese Americans as a way of pitting them against Black Americans. Japanese Americans were terrified that they would be put in concentration camps again and thus went through life as quietly as they could. My ancestors had to go through hell and then pretend it didn’t happen. Now Asian Americans have to deal with this term unfairly and act a certain way (studious, quiet, smart, nerdy) or else they’re looked down upon. This term and its history must be publicized so that people can be educated that its purpose is to divide POC and pit us against each other when we should be banding together and uniting to fight our oppression.

The model minority myth invalidated my feelings of otherness. In high school I did the stereotypical “Asian” things I thought I was supposed to do–play violin in orchestra, take as many AP classes as possible even at the expense of my mental health, and replace friends with columns of A’s on my report card. I thought my deteriorating mental health and overall feelings of unhappiness were normal and even expected, because as an Asian American person I wasn’t entitled to have problems. Up until now I couldn’t even consider myself a person of color because my heritage seemed so marginalized that I should just be grateful for my “privilege” and gaslight my own experiences with racism. The model minority myth taught me how to code switch from elementary school onward–act white enough that I wouldn’t make my white classmates uncomfortable, and tokenize my Asian-ness when it was deemed socially acceptable. I learned self-hatred through the model minority myth. I couldn’t understand why all my effort to be the perfect student in school ultimately couldn’t stop my neighbor from calling my parents “Chinese

virus" at the first opportunity for socially acceptable racism. Since coming to USC I've been able to begin embracing my culture through support from APASS and other empowered Asian American students, but I wish I had been able to recognize earlier that my self-hatred didn't stem directly from myself, but rather the white supremacist society that taught me that my "privilege" could and should simultaneously oppress me as well.

I think there's something really off-putting about the model minority myth being framed as a "positive" stereotype. Before, I associated the model minority with individual achievement. It definitely took a huge toll on my mental health in high school. My peers expected me to always be on top of things because I fit the mold of the perfect Asian American student. When I got rejected from colleges during my senior year, the whole school found out within seconds and I was ridiculed by strangers who barely knew me personally. I think in the realm of education, seeing an Asian student not succeeding was a fall from grace. There was definitely a time in my life where I thought I didn't deserve help. I thought I would be mocked if I did since I was expected to be doing well. I was expected to be above racism. It was only after I almost took my own life that I realized that it wasn't my fault. There's a reason why APIDA students have one of the highest suicide rates in the country, and it all loops back to the model minority. In college, I learned that the term model minority was coined by a white man who tried to posit that Japanese Americans were "above racism" because they were doing better than other people of color. This could not be any further from the truth. Not only does the model minority myth continue to push down Asian American youth using what's basically an institutionalized back-handed compliment, it alienates us from other people of color. I'm thankful that I hold leadership positions in college. It grants me more visibility for advocacy, and I hope that this visibility can communicate to other APIDA students that our "privilege" (in big air quotes) should not be used to oppress us or others.

One of the most dangerous implications of the model minority myth is the internalized racism that comes with it. It's terrifying because it means that young APIDA individuals take it to be true.

My parents never "believed in'' mental health. I thought that was kind of a side effect of growing up in China and coming to America with nothing more than a few hundred dollars. This never really bothered me until I got diagnosed with major depressive disorder and an anxiety disorder in my junior year of high school.

When I told my parents that I would like to start therapy, they were furious. My mom said that "nothing looks wrong," brushing it off like it was some disease. My dad erred more on the disappointed side, and I think that hurt me more than my mom. He told me (and I won't ever forget this for the rest of my life), "You're so smart, there's no way your brain could be bad.

You're Chinese. You endure. You can't ask for help like white people. That's just how it is for an Asian American."

And the sad thing was, I believed him. I believed him for two years until the volunteer on the other end of the suicide hotline talked to me for over an hour, telling me that it wasn't my fault. And it was then that I learned that the model minority can be revoked any time, whenever America wants. When we're successful, America takes our achievements as its own. When we're struggling, America abandons us. It has abandoned us for so long that we start thinking that we deserve to be thrown aside, because we weren't "good enough Asian Americans." But that's not true. If America wants us at our best, it better accept us at our worst.

Growing up in a Japanese household in America, I had limited opportunities to become familiar with English. For a long time, my Asian background seemed like a linguistic and cultural obstacle that prevented me from making friends, and I resented having parents who came from a foreign country. Despite the large Asian population in Hawaii, I was a foreigner who spent his Saturdays at Japanese school and left recess on weekdays for the English as a Second Language program. My unfamiliarity with American customs isolated me from my friends, and I felt lonely when people avoided mentioning my hard-to-pronounce name. As a result, I wrongfully accepted that society expected me to be a "typical" Asian who stayed silent during class and studied all day. Although my parents never encouraged me to pursue a career in a STEM field, I believed until very recently that becoming a doctor was the only way for me to succeed due to common Asian stereotypes. Despite my lack of interest, I forced myself to take difficult classes and ironically retreated into my shell because I believed that people would accept me if I acted a certain way.

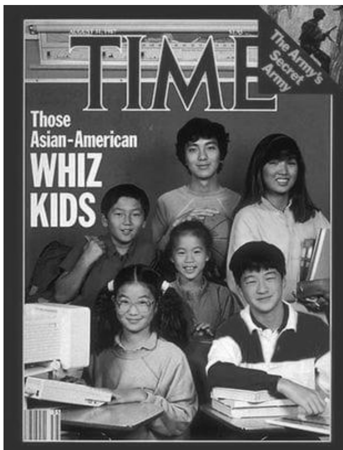
Although my performance in high school was the result of many sleepless nights, I often felt discouraged and unaccomplished when people associated my achievements with my race. Similarly, the way some of my teachers grouped all of the Asian students together diminished my cultural identity and established a stigma that I was a part of a foreign entity. Fortunately, realizing that I wanted to study business and finance has helped me overcome the psychological burden of the model minority myth. By shifting the focus of my life away from the labels placed on me by society, I have been able to defy common Asian stereotypes through my own actions and unique perspective. Only when I embraced my passions and celebrated my accomplishments did I begin to appreciate my cultural heritage and come to terms with my Asian American identity.

When I first began becoming aware that some of the "lighthearted" bullying and jokes made at the younger me's expense were actually motivated by racism, it was a complete shock to me. To me, those experiences felt like the norm, that it couldn't be racism because that would mean that I was somehow less than or weak. Internally, I fought hard against the idea that Asian Americans could experience racism because I believed that we were the example of "success" in immigrant standards, and racism needed a weakness to exploit in order to exist. That toxic mentality was fed by the overwhelmingly loud rhetoric that Asian immigrants in America are the model minority, that we should be the example for other minority groups for socioeconomic success and integration into American society. I didn't realize that by internalizing that concept, I was invalidating my own experiences, as well as the discrimination faced by others. Racism has no foundation, no rhyme, no reason other than pride-fueled ignorance. Taking my eyes off the idea of a model minority made me realize that.

When I came to Boston College as an Asian at a PWI, I was afraid I would struggle to find a group that would accept me for who I was. I auditioned for a dance team because that was what I had been passionate about throughout my high school career, but I definitely was intimidated because when I scrolled through Facebook pictures and watched Youtube videos, mostly everyone looked white. I decided to give it a shot anyways, and since I got in, I've been able to choreograph for the team and even gain a leadership role on the team (I'm the only Asian on the e-board)! I'm excited to use this opportunity to break through the model minority myth that we are complacent and follow the majority blindly, and be able to provide a friendly face for the dance community at BC so other minorities will be more motivated to find their passion with people who look like them and people who do not!

The privilege that comes with the model minority is so conditional. One second we're loved because we're so "smart and hardworking," but another second we need to go back to our countries because we brought the virus. If you want our labor, you need to want all of us. We're Asian, AND we're American. Our appearance shouldn't decide our American-ness. This really made me reconsider how other marginalized groups are treated and viewed in America.

I was in an honors orchestra in high school and we did competitions a lot. There was one competition where we got to play at Disney Hall, and we were all really proud of our achievement because it wasn't easy to get there as a high school group. After a really successful performance, I overheard a (white) man in the audience say to his wife, "They're only good because they're all Asian." His wife laughed at that and agreed with him. I remember that it made me really upset. It wasn't because we were Asian that we played well. It was because we worked hard and we practiced well. It felt like they just blew off our efforts. My parents didn't understand why it made me angry, but I think I should be angry that associating success with my race just discounts and discredits any hard work that I've put in.



Individual: It's hard educating immigrant parents how the "model minority" concept impacts other marginalized groups. For them, it's just work ethnic. "Oh, Asians work harder. We value education." Is that true? Or, is it a matter of limitations from society? Personally, I think it's a little both, but who knows? Plus, the idea of Asian American has the concept of East Asians (Chinese, Korean, Japanese), which is okay since they compose the majority of Asian Americans, but there's also South Asians and SE Asians. Asian American is a term that makes us recognized but also prevents other ethnic identities from shining through. (I recommend this article by Viet Thanh Nguyen: https://time.com/5859206/anti-asian-racism-america/)

Not only does the model minority myth push towards the assumption that there are "good minorities" and "problem minorities," but it also pushes a narrative of "good Asian Americans" and "bad Asian Americans." It invalidates so much of our diverse experiences, and it dismisses our equally diverse struggles. The model minority myth sweeps struggles with education, financial stability, etc. under the rug when they should be taken seriously. I feel like the model minority myth offers only a caricature of what the Asian American experience is.

Personally I think that the model minority myth just normalizes anti-Asian racism. It assumes that Asian Americans are "past" racism when in fact, we're not. It also assumes that we just keep our heads down all the time. That's not true. Asian Americans have fought in the civil rights movement and labor movements alongside other marginalized communities. We don't see that in history books. And there's a reason that it's been taken out. There's a greater, more sinister narrative that's being asserted about the APIDA community that perpetuates these stereotypes, and it's dangerous for both us and other POC communities.

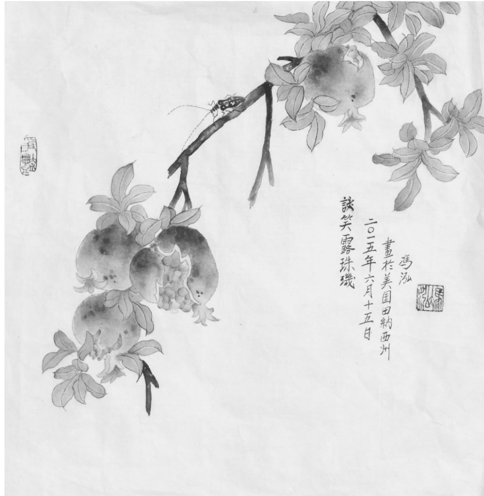
The thing that probably annoys me the most about the model minority myth is how it puts a wedge between the APIDA community and other POC communities. It implies that struggling socioeconomically is a choice, which is not true at all. Unfortunately, for many Americans, simply "working hard" won't guarantee success. The implications of this are really severe. It puts down other marginalized groups at the same time it shames Asian Americans who don't live up to such a lofty ideal that only a few people are able to reach. It ignores the systemic oppression that prevents marginalized groups from reaching success and instead gaslights them.

I think it's so easy to be APIDA and fall into the trap of identifying with the Model Minority Myth, especially when you're younger and your parents are projecting their expectations upon you, and you're overworked and overcommitted and exhausted. Your sense of agency in society is not so solid yet—or rather your sense of agency in relation to other communities. You grow up being taught this narrative that hard work is everything, so you don't think about the role of opportunity and societal footing in your life. You just keep doing what you know. But the truth of the matter is: it's not that simple. Deconstructing and unlearning your biases is tough but necessary work, but I like to believe that only the best of us get that chance. Recognizing this myth as something extremely dangerous to our communities is going to be the turning point for minority solidarity. I'm glad we've begun to internalize the amount of work that needs to be done.

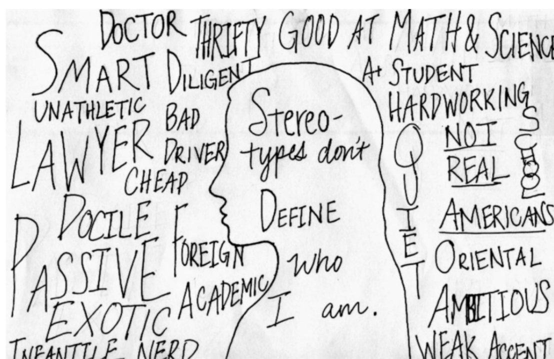
The model minority myth omits a lot of APIDA groups. It assumes that things like lack of access to education, financial insecurity, home insecurity, and inadequate access to health care are not “Asian American” problems. Growing up low income, I’ve noticed that when an APIDA individual does face these situations, they’re often written off as a “bad Asian American.” No matter what the model minority myth tries to imply, Asian Americans aren’t exempt from systemic inequalities. Unfortunately, the American dream doesn’t work out for most. The model minority myth asserts that success is a choice when more often than not, it isn’t.

Growing up in Hawaii, where there is a predominant Asian population, I was “lucky” that I never (really) experienced outward racism, discrimination or fell victim to the Model Minority Myth. Frankly, I never quite knew what the Model Minority Myth was until coming to college. Upon learning about its (negative) impact on both the Asian American community and other minorities, I’ve realized that both racial and social inequality are still condoned and ingrained in society. The Model Minority Myth erases individual diversity and places us in stereotypical “boxes” through the power of social construction. It’s a large scale issue that is being tackled with currently, and my goal/dream would be to see POC breaking into industries (i.e. film, media, corporate, etc.) to dismantle it.

I only found out about figures like Yuri Kochiyama and Vincent Chin in college. I’m glad that I know who they are now, but I can’t help feeling like there was a reason why I never learned about them in high school. Yuri Kochiyama showed me that Asian Americans have been important in the civil rights movements, and Vincent Chin’s death showed me that the APIDA community doesn’t get a free pass from racial violence. I think the omissions of APIDA figures like these are slowly driving home a version of history that the model minority myth was exactly designed to uphold. I’m glad that more people are becoming more aware that the model minority myth is a different kind of racism than what we’re used to. It’s disguised as a compliment, but it can still be dangerous.



The model minority myth creates unrealistic expectations for APIDA individuals. On one hand, those who pursue the stereotypical medical, law, or engineer fields may feel like they are accomplishing some goal set by society or their parents (this is a broad generalization as many individuals genuinely want to pursue these fields, but the model minority myth has set some sort of internalized expectation). On the other hand, those who pursue other careers or do not perform as well in school are judged as failures "different" from who they are supposed to be. This creates tensions both inside and outside the APIDA community by dividing groups and making them believe that they are "too good" or "not good enough" for others. Not all APIDA individuals are the same, but being different should not stop us from supporting each other just because of an expectation fabricated by others. I constantly feel like a failure because of this internalized mindset. Even if I earn all A's, I never feel like I am doing enough to meet the "model minority" standard. However, I have to remember to take a step back and focus on my own goals. I want to help those around me instead of always trying to "beat" someone else at a nonexistent competition.



Before I knew what it really was, I didn't see any problem with the model minority myth. If people thought of me as smart and capable for being Chinese American, I wasn't going to correct them. It wasn't until the term was really defined for me that I saw its harmful effects. The pressure that it puts on APIDA students to continuously excel can be really toxic, and the generalization of APIDA's into a single category and stereotype negates the individual stories of each person. Not all APIDA's are quiet and passive. Not all APIDA's want to go into a STEM field. Not all APIDAs have high-paying jobs and a steady income. This is something that the world needs to realize if the model minority myth is truly going to be deconstructed.

I don't think I had ever heard of the term "model minority" before coming to college. Perhaps it was because I grew up in a city with an Asian American plurality, maybe it was because nobody ever documented any hate crimes against Asians, maybe it was because I thought that Asian students excelled due to cultural factors alone. Although I never heard the term used explicitly until I went to college, the first time I was ever really exposed to the concept of a group of people just inherently outperforming others was in high school orchestra, where over 80% of the students were Asian. My orchestra director recalled a time when his orchestra went to Carnegie Hall and was approached by another group from Chicago. They said that the only reason my

school's orchestra was able to participate in the prestigious festival was because everyone was Asian. My orchestra director was furious that after all the work his students put in to be able to play at one of the most prestigious concert halls in the world, they were reduced to their race, and their hard work was discredited. After hearing this, I began to realize that somewhere outside of the bubble I lived in, I was only regarded as a model when people wanted me to be one, and insulted and degraded when they didn't.

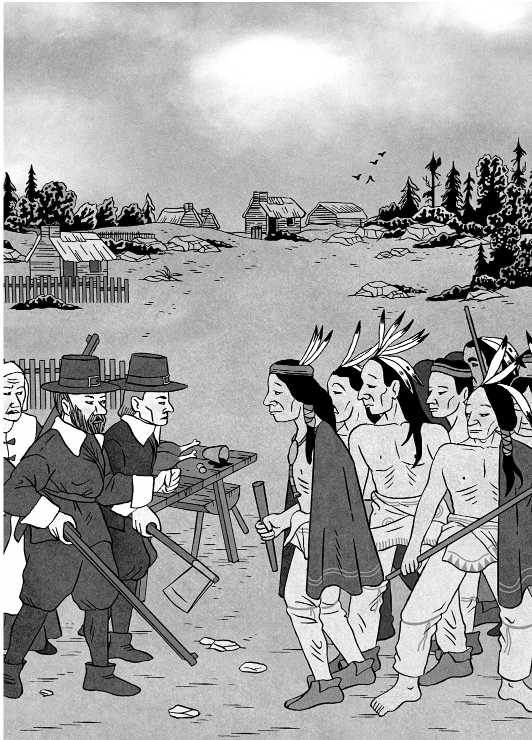
The model minority myth is much more harmful than just one snide comment from a high schooler. It means Asian American students are more likely to commit suicide and less likely to seek mental health treatment. It means being viewed as a perpetual foreigner while being praised only when convenient. It means holding other marginalized peoples to an impossible standard that APIDA individuals are struggling to attain themselves. It means disregarding the wide income disparity between different groups of APIDA individuals, segregating APIDA individuals into the "good" and "bad", normalizing anti-Asian discrimination, and refusing to charge perpetrators of anti-Asian hate crimes. It means that most people don't know who Vincent Chin is, a Chinese man who was brutally murdered by auto workers who took out their bitterness for the growing Japanese auto industry on him just days before he was going to be married. It means driving a wedge between marginalized people and taking APIDA individuals as "basically white" only to put down others.

But I do think there is much more to the APIDA experience than the model minority myth, even when discourse today centers a lot around it. There is so much diversity, power, and resilience that the APIDA community holds that can never be encompassed by a label a non-APIDA individual cast on it. I hope that one day, we don't need to discuss how APIDA individuals are being oppressed by the model minority myth but instead how we have overcome it.

The Invention of Thanksgiving

Massacres, myths, and the making of the great November holiday.

By Philip Deloria / November 18, 2019



The Indians who joined the mistrustful Pilgrims, Wampanoag tradition suggests, were honoring a mutual-defense pact.

Illustration by Rui Tenreiro

Autumn is the season for Native America. There are the cool nights and warm days of Indian summer and the genial query "What's Indian about this weather?" More wearisome is the annual fight over the legacy of Christopher Columbus—a bold explorer dear to Italian-American communities, but someone who brought to this continent forms of slavery that would devastate indigenous populations for centuries. Football season is in full swing, and the team in the nation's capital revels each week in a racist performance passed off as "just good fun." As baseball season closes, one prays that Atlanta (or even semi-evolved Cleveland) will not advance to the World Series. Next up is Halloween, typically featuring "Native American Brave" and "Sexy Indian Princess" costumes. November brings Native American Heritage Month and tracks a smooth countdown to Thanksgiving. In the elementary-school curriculum, the holiday traditionally meant a pageant, with students in construction-paper headdresses and Pilgrim hats reënacting the original celebration. If today's teachers aim for less pageantry and a slightly more complicated history, many students still complete an American education unsure about the place of Native people in the nation's past—or in its present. Cap the season off with Thanksgiving, a turkey dinner, and a fable of interracial harmony. Is it any wonder that by the time the holiday arrives a lot of American Indian people are thankful that autumn is nearly over?

Americans have been celebrating Thanksgiving for nearly four centuries, commemorating that solemn dinner in November, 1621. We know the story well, or think

we do. Adorned in funny hats, large belt buckles, and clunky black shoes, the Pilgrims of Plymouth gave thanks to God for his blessings, demonstrated by the survival of their fragile settlement. The local Indians, supporting characters who generously pulled the Pilgrims through the first winter and taught them how to plant corn, joined the feast with gifts of venison. A good time was had by all, before things quietly took their natural course: the American colonies expanded, the Indians gave up their lands and faded from history, and the germ of collective governance found in the Mayflower Compact blossomed into American democracy.

Almost none of this is true, as David Silverman points out in “This Land Is Their Land: The Wampanoag Indians, Plymouth Colony, and the Troubled History of Thanksgiving” (Bloomsbury). The first Thanksgiving was not a “thanksgiving,” in Pilgrim terms, but a “rejoicing.” An actual giving of thanks required fasting and quiet contemplation; a rejoicing featured feasting, drinking, militia drills, target practice, and contests of strength and speed. It was a party, not a prayer, and was full of people shooting at things. The Indians were Wampanoags, led by Ousamequin (often called Massasoit, which was a leadership title rather than a name). An experienced diplomat, he was engaged in a challenging game of regional geopolitics, of which the Pilgrims were only a part. While the celebrants might well have feasted on wild turkey, the local diet also included fish, eels, shellfish, and a Wampanoag dish called *nasaump*, which the Pilgrims had adopted: boiled cornmeal mixed with vegetables and meats. There were no potatoes (an indigenous South American food not yet introduced into the global food system) and no pies (because there was no butter, wheat flour, or sugar).

Nor did the Pilgrims extend a warm invitation to their Indian neighbors. Rather, the Wampanoags showed up unbidden. And it was not simply four or five of them at the table, as we often imagine. Ousamequin, the Massasoit, arrived with perhaps ninety men—more than the entire population of Plymouth. Wampanoag tradition suggests that the group was in fact an army, honoring a mutual-defense pact negotiated the previous spring. They came not to enjoy a multicultural feast but to aid the Pilgrims: hearing repeated gunfire, they assumed that the settlers were under attack. After a long moment of suspicion (the Pilgrims misread almost everything that Indians did as potential aggression), the two peoples recognized one another, in some uneasy way, and spent the next three days together.

No centuries-long continuity emerged from that 1621 meet-up. New Englanders certainly celebrated Thanksgivings—often in both fall and spring—but they were of the fasting-and-prayer variety. Notable examples took place in 1637 and 1676, following bloody victories over Native people. To mark the second occasion, the Plymouth men mounted the head of Ousamequin’s son Pumetacom above their town on a pike, where

it remained for two decades, while his dismembered and unburied body decomposed. The less brutal holiday that we celebrate today took shape two centuries later, as an effort to entrench an imagined American community. In 1841, the Reverend Alexander Young explicitly linked three things: the 1621 “rejoicing,” the tradition of autumnal harvest festivals, and the name Thanksgiving. He did so in a four-line throwaway gesture and a one-line footnote. Of such half thoughts is history made.

A couple of decades later, Sarah Josepha Hale, the editor of *Godey’s Lady’s Book*, proposed a day of unity and remembrance to counter the trauma of the Civil War, and in 1863 Abraham Lincoln declared the last Thursday of November to be that national holiday, following Young’s lead in calling it Thanksgiving. After the Civil War, Thanksgiving developed rituals, foodways, and themes of family—and national—reunion. Only later would it consolidate its narrative around a harmonious Pilgrim-Wampanoag feast, as Lisa Blee and Jean O’Brien point out in “Monumental Mobility: The Memory Work of Massasoit” (North Carolina), which tells the story of how the holiday myth spread. Fretting over late-nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century immigration, American mythmakers discovered that the Pilgrims, and New England as a whole, were perfectly cast as national founders: white, Protestant, democratic, and blessed with an American character centered on family, work, individualism, freedom, and faith.

The new story aligned neatly with the defeat of American Indian resistance in the West and the rising tide of celebratory regret that the anthropologist Renato Rosaldo once called “imperialist nostalgia.” Glorifying the endurance of white Pilgrim founders diverted attention from the brutality of Jim Crow and racial violence, and downplayed the foundational role of African slavery. The fable also allowed its audience to avert its eyes from the marginalization of Asian and Latinx labor populations, the racialization of Southern European and Eastern European immigrants, and the rise of eugenics. At Thanksgiving, white New England cheerfully shoved the problematic South and West off to the side, and claimed America for itself.

The challenge for scholars attempting to rewrite Thanksgiving is the challenge of confronting an ideology that has long since metastasized into popular history. Silverman begins his book with a plea for the possibility of a “critical history.” It will be “hard on the living,” he warns, because this approach questions the creation stories that uphold traditional social orders, making the heroes less heroic, and asking readers to consider the villains as full and complicated human beings. Nonetheless, he says, we have an obligation to try.

So how does one take on a myth? One might begin by deconstructing the process through which it was made. Silverman sketches a brief account of Hale, Lincoln, and the marketing of a fictionalized New England. Blee and O'Brien reveal how proliferating copies of a Massasoit statue, which we can recognize as not so distant kin to Confederate monuments, do similar cultural work, linking the mythic memory of the 1621 feast with the racial, ethnic, and national-identity politics of 1921, when the original statue was commissioned. One might also wield the historian's skills to tell a "truer," better story that exposes the myth for the self-serving fraud that it is. Silverman, in doing so, resists the temptation to offer a countermyth, an ideological narrative better suited to the contemporary moment, and renders the Wampanoags not simply as victims but as strugglers, fighting it out as they confront mischance and aggression, disagreeing with one another, making mistakes, displaying ambition and folly, failing to see their peril until it is too late.

In the story that many generations of Americans grew up hearing, there were no Wampanoags until the Pilgrims encountered them. If Thanksgiving has had no continuous existence across the centuries, however, the Wampanoag people have. Today, they make up two federally recognized tribes, the Mashpee Wampanoag Tribe and the Wampanoag Tribe of Gay Head, and they descend from a confederation of groups that stretched across large areas of Massachusetts, including Cape Cod, Martha's Vineyard, and Nantucket.

In the years before the Pilgrims' landing, trails and roads connected dozens of Wampanoag communities with gathering sites, hunting and fishing areas, and agricultural plots. North America's defining indigenous agriculture—the symbiotic Three Sisters of corn, beans, and squash—came late to the region, adopted perhaps two hundred years before Europeans appeared. That's when the Wampanoags, who moved seasonally between coastal summer residences (not unlike Cape Cod today) and protected winter homes inland, took up farming. Cultivation and cropping created a need for shared-use land management and an indigenous notion of property. That led in turn to the consolidation of a system of sachems, leaders who navigated the internal needs of their communities, established tributary and protectorate relationships with nearby communities, and negotiated diplomatic relations with outsiders. When the Pilgrims encountered Ousamequin, they were meeting a paramount sachem, a Massasoit, who commanded the respect necessary to establish strategy for other groups in the region.

The Pilgrims were not the only Europeans the Wampanoags had come across. The first documented contact occurred in 1524, and marked the start of a century of violent encounters, captivity, and enslavement. By 1620, the Wampanoags had had enough,

and were inclined to chase off any ship that sought to land. They sent a French colonizing mission packing and had driven the Pilgrims away from a previous landing site, on the Cape. Ousamequin's people debated for months about whether to ally with the newcomers or destroy them. When they decided to begin diplomacy, they were guided by Tisquantum (you may recall him as Squanto) and Epenow, New England natives who had been captured, held in bondage in Britain, and trained as interpreters by the English before eventually finding their way back across the Atlantic.

Why would Ousamequin decide to welcome the newcomers and, in 1621, make a mutual-defense pact with them? During the preceding years, an epidemic had struck Massachusetts Bay Indians, killing between seventy-five and ninety per cent of the Wampanoag and the Massachusett people. A rich landscape of fields and gardens, tended hunting forests, and fishing weirs was largely emptied of people. Belief systems crashed. Even survival did not mean good health, and, with fields unplanted and animals uncaught, starvation followed closely behind. The Pilgrims' settlement took place in a graveyard.

Wampanoag people consolidated their survivors and their lands, and reëstablished internal self-governance. But, to the west, the Narragansetts—traditional rivals largely untouched by the epidemic—now outnumbered the Wampanoags, and that led to the strengthening of Ousamequin's alliances with the surviving Massachusett and another nearby group, the Nipmucks. As the paramount sachem, he also had to contend with challenges to his leadership from a number of other Wampanoag sachems. And so, after much debate, he decided to tolerate the rather pathetic Pilgrims—who had seen half their number die in their first winter—and establish an alliance with them. That history, understood through Wampanoag characters and motives, explains the "rejoicing" that Americans later remembered as a pumpkin-spiced tale of Thanksgiving conciliation.

This rejoicing arrives about a third of the way through Silverman's four-hundred-plus-page book. What follows is a vivid account of the ways the English repaid their new allies. The settlers pressed hard to acquire Indian land through "sales" driven by debt, threat, alliance politics, and violence. They denied the coequal civil and criminal jurisdiction of the alliance, charging Indians under English law and sentencing them to unpayable fines, imprisonment, even executions. They played a constant game of divide and conquer, and they invariably considered Indians their inferiors. Ousamequin's sons Pumetacom—called King Philip by the English—and Wamsutta began forming a resistance, despite the poor odds. By 1670, the immigrant population had ballooned to sixty or seventy thousand in southern New England—twice the number of Native people.

We falsely remember a Thanksgiving of intercultural harmony. Perhaps we should recall instead how English settlers cheated, abused, killed, and eventually drove Wampanoags into a conflict, known as King Philip's War, that exploded across the region in 1675 and 1676 and that was one of the most devastating wars in the history of North American settlement. Native soldiers attacked fifty-two towns in New England, destroyed seventeen of them, and killed a substantial portion of the settler population. The region also lost as much as forty per cent of its Native population, who fought on both sides. Confronted by Mohawks to the west, a mixed set of Indian and Colonial foes to the south, and the English to the east, Pumetacom was surrounded on three sides. In the north, the scholar Lisa Brooks argues, Abenaki and other allies continued the struggle for years. In "Our Beloved Kin: A New History of King Philip's War" (Yale), Brooks deepens the story considerably, focussing on indigenous geographical and linguistic knowledge, and tracing the life of Weetamoo, the widow of Wamsutta and the *saunkskwa*, or female leader, of her tribe, the Pocasset. Weetamoo was Pumetacom's ally, his relative, and a major figure in the fight. In the end, not only Pumetacom's head was stuck on a pike; hers was, too, displayed for Wampanoag prisoners who were likely soon to be sold to the Caribbean.

The Thanksgiving story buries the major cause of King Philip's War—the relentless seizure of Indian land. It also covers up the consequence. The war split Wampanoags, as well as every other Native group, and ended with indigenous resistance broken, and the colonists giving thanks. Like most Colonial wars, this one was a giant slave expedition, marked by the seizure and sale of Indian people. Wampanoags were judged criminals and—in a foreshadowing of the convict-labor provision of the Thirteenth Amendment—sold into bondage. During the next two centuries, New England Indians also suffered indentured servitude, convict labor, and debt peonage, which often resulted in the enslavement of the debtor's children. Thanksgiving's Pilgrim pageants suggest that good-hearted settlers arrived from pious, civilized England. We could remember it differently: that they came from a land that delighted in displaying heads on poles and letting bodies rot in cages suspended above the roads. They were a warrior tribe.

Despite continued demographic decline, loss of land, and severe challenges to shared social identities, Wampanoags held on. With so many men dead or enslaved, Native women married men outside their group—often African-Americans—and then redefined the families of mixed marriages as matrilineal in order to preserve collective claims to land. They adopted the forms of the Christian church, to some degree, in order to gain some breathing space. They took advantage of the remoteness of their settlements to maintain self-governance. And by the late twentieth century they began revitalizing what had been a "sleeping" language, and gained federal recognition as a tribal nation.

Today, Wampanoag people debate whether Thanksgiving should be a day of mourning or a chance to contemplate reconciliation. It's mighty generous of them.

David Silverman, in his personal reflections, considers how two secular patriotic hymns, "This Land Is Your Land" and "My Country 'Tis of Thee," shaped American childhood experiences. When schoolkids sing "Land where my fathers died! Land of the Pilgrim's pride," he suggests, they name white, Protestant New England founders. It makes no sense, these days, to ask ethnically diverse students to celebrate those mythic dudes, with their odd hats and big buckles. At the very least, Silverman asks, could we include Indians among "my fathers," and pay better attention to the ways *they* died? Could we acknowledge that Indians are not ghosts in the landscape or foils in a delusional nationalist dream, but actual living people?

This sentiment bumps a little roughly against a second plea: to recognize the falsely inclusive rhetoric in the phrase "This land is your land, this land is my land." Those lines require the erasure of Indian people, who don't get to be either "you" or "me." American Indian people are at least partly excluded from the United States political system, written into the Constitution (in the three-fifths clause and the Fourteenth Amendment, for example, where they appear as "Indians not taxed") so as to exist *outside* it. Native American tribes are distinct political entities, sovereign nations in their own right.

"American Indian" is a political identity, not a racial one, constituted by formal, still living treaties with the United States government and a long series of legal decisions. Today, the Trump Administration would like to deny this history, wrongly categorize Indians as a racial group, and disavow ongoing treaty relationships. Native American tribal governments are actively resisting this latest effort to dismember the past, demanding better and truer Indian histories and an accounting of the obligations that issue from them. At the forefront of that effort you'll find the Mashpee Wampanoags, those resilient folks whose ancestors came, uninvited, to the first "Thanksgiving" almost four centuries ago in order to honor the obligations established in a mutual-defense agreement—a treaty—they had made with the Pilgrims of Plymouth Colony. ♦

Retracing his ancestor's boarding school escape

INDIAN COUNTRY TODAY / AUG 17, 2021

Ku Stevens runs on a road not far from the Stewart Indian School near Carson City in this photo taken on June 18, 2021. The Yerington High School cross-country runner plans to retrace later this summer route his great-grandfather took when he escaped from the school to his home in Yerington. (Ed Andersen/ Lyon County News Leader via AP)

When news broke of the mass graves found in Canada at residential schools earlier this year, one young cross country runner in Nevada thought of his own family.

Ku Stevens, Yerington Paiute Tribe, is 17, and a runner. His great grandfather Frank Quinn attended the Stewart Indian School in 1913. Quinn ran away three times.

The Canadian residential schools were modeled after the U.S. government run boarding schools that started in the late 1800s.

The U.S. Secretary of the Interior Deb Haaland, Laguna Pueblo, called for an investigation to look into boarding schools.

In the midst of the news, the Nevada high schooler decided to retrace his great-grandfather's escape route, when he fled boarding school back in 1913.

His route home went across the desert between Carson City and Yerington.

Stevens retraced those steps this past weekend.

Before the run, Stevens was emotional at the Stewart Indian Boarding School, which was turned into a cultural center and museum last year.

“To anybody else here, you just see these old buildings, you know, you see the cool rocks on the walls and the old window panes," Stevens said. "You can tell it’s an old place but to me you know what happened here and it’s a lot different to anyone just coming here visiting, it's a lot more persona."

His family organized a two day “Remembrance Run” to honor the young people, like his great-grandfather, who were forced into boarding schools.

The journey took Stevens uphill.

“As an 8 year old to cross 50 miles over these hills, that’s a feat,” Stevens said about Quinn.

Stevens ran during the day. His family says it’s more likely his great-grandfather Frank ran at night to avoid being seen.

But Frank wasn’t the only one who attempted to run away.

Stacey Montooth, Walker River Paiute, executive director of Nevada’s Indian Commission, said the young people at the school were not in good health and were not fed well.

Clothing was often an issue and they were given a uniform and hand me down shoes that were left over from U.S. soldiers, Montooth said.

“But again we have first hand accounts of these types of very heroic, just absolutely courageous attempts by these young people to get back to their families,” Montooth said.

Often the federal government would pay people to find runaways. This happened at dozens of other government-run boarding schools for Native children.

“Federal representatives, people who were paid by Uncle Sam to round up students to take them to very far away intuitions for boarding school, also bounties were put out for young Indian children,” Montooth said.

Stevens’ great-grandmother Hazel was hidden by her family, who denied her existence when government officials came looking for her.

The Stewart Indian School operated from about 1890 to 1980, it was one of hundreds of military-style boarding schools across the U.S. and Canada.

“The point of it all is to educate people on what happened to our people and what happened in Canada,” Stevens said

His journey started at the Stewart Indian School and ended at the Yerington Paiute tribe.

“It didn’t really hit me until the end what I was doing running down that hill, you know, seeing my valley, my home, just my peoples’ land out here, man, goosebumps all the way down,” Stevens said.

Stevens ended his journey with a celebration from friends and family.

He says he even felt his ancestors on his feet and he knows what he would say to his great grandfather if he was here today.

“Thanks for getting me this far because without him and the decisions he would have made to even run away from here, if he didn't, I couldn't possibly be here. Thanks for being a good man and wanting to be with your family and wanting to support them anyway you could. (Because) that’s family, you know, you would do anything for them,” Stevens said.

Stevens is heading into his senior year of high school, he posted the second fastest time in the state in the 1,000-meter (4:23.16) and in the 3,200-meter (9:47.26).