

10 THINGS TO KNOW ABOUT ASIAN AMERICANS



1

ASIAN AMERICANS ARE NOT A MONOLITHIC GROUP OF PEOPLE

Asia is made of 4.46 billion people in 48 countries speaking over 2,300 different languages with rich and diverse ethnic, cultural and religious backgrounds, so that Asian Americans live with vastly different cultural, religious and linguistic traditions.

There is no common language that all Asian Americans speak. For the above reasons, most Asian Americans, when asked to describe our race or ethnicity, tend to say, "I am Korean American," or "I am Thai, Cambodian, Chinese, Filipino, etc."

Very few of us would start out by saying, "I am an Asian American."

2



THE TERM "ASIAN AMERICAN"

was first used in 1968, when Yuji Ichioka and Emma Gee, students of the University of California in Berkeley, were inspired by the Black Power movement and protests against the Vietnam War to found the Asian American Political Alliance (AAPA). Their purpose was to unite different ethnic student groups of Asian heritage on their campus. Calling themselves Asian American signaled a shared and interconnected history of immigration, labor exploitation and racism, as well as a common political agenda. It was also used as pushback against the pejorative word oriental, a Eurocentric term that geographically referenced "the East" relative to Europe.

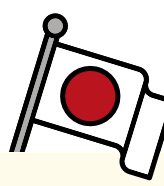


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THE HISTORY OF ASIAN AMERICANS

goes back to the 16th century, much earlier than when many people think in the 19th century, with the more visible presence of Chinese and Filipino immigrants. In fact, the first Asian people to come to what is now the United States of America were "Luzonians," people from the Philippines who arrived in Morro Bay, Calif. in 1587. An "East Indian" person was listed as a resident of Jamestown, Va., as early as 1635.

4



ASIAN AMERICANS OF JAPANESE ANCESTRY

During World War II, while the United States was at war with Japan, about 120,000 people of Japanese ancestry—most of whom lived on the Pacific Coast—were forcibly relocated and incarcerated in concentration camps, losing their legally owned properties. Sixty-two percent were United States citizens.

About 80,000 were second- and third-generation, American-born Japanese people with U.S. citizenship.

5

ASIANS ARE OFTEN REFERRED TO AS THE "MODEL MINORITY"

This is a racist term coined by the white-dominant society to further discriminate against African-Americans and other non-Asian people of color. The implicit bias of this designation becomes clearer when one asks, "A model for whom and by whose standards?" It intentionally incites different racially and ethnically marginalized people to compete with one another, rather than work and live in solidarity with one another to make the world a better place where God's will may be done. Holding up Asian Americans as a model for African Americans, for example, ignores the two centuries of enslavement, systemic racism and colorism that Black people have endured, and blames them for not working hard enough. Also, it excuses white people from the responsibility to dismantle racist social structures. Further, the myth of the "model minority" creates a stereotype and false assumption that all Asian Americans are successful. Among Asian Americans, like other communities, there are poor, undereducated and suffering people who need our care and God's mercy.



6

THE MOST COMMON FORM OF RACISM

The most common form of racism Asian Americans experience is "the perpetual foreigner stereotype." Regardless of our family's history and length of residence in the United States, most Asian Americans—including second, third and fourth generations—are asked, "Where are you really from?" If we answer we are from the United States or Europe, we are often asked again, "But where are you FROM from?" These questions assume all Asian Americans are "foreigners" or recent immigrants who do not belong here and/or have not contributed meaningfully to the building of this nation. To Asian Americans, the question of where you are really from is often experienced as xenophobia, which is defined as an aversion, hostility to, disdain for, or fear of "foreigners" or people from different cultures or strangers.

7

WOMEN OF ASIAN HERITAGE

Another common expression of racism a majority of Asian American women experience is their treatment as exotic, hypersexual fetishes. In my role as a clergywoman and seminary professor, I have been told by non-Asian men, "Asian women are the best!" "You Korean women must be eager to date a white man! That's why you are here!" Asian American women frequently experience this interweaving of racism and sexism. The March 2021 murders of eight people—including six women of Asian heritage— should be understood in this context.



8

HATE CRIMES AGAINST ASIAN AMERICANS

In 2020 alone, hate crimes against Asian Americans increased 150 percent over previous years, with 3,800 reported cases, according to StopAAPIHate, a resource organization begun to address racist violence and hate speech aimed at Asian and Pacific Islander Americans. These hate crimes and discrimination against Asian Americans have a long history. In 1875, the U.S. Congress passed the so-called Page Act which prohibited Chinese women from entering the country. It was based on false assumptions all Chinese women were sex workers and carried diseases. In 1882, the U.S. Chinese Exclusion Act legally banned the immigration of Chinese men as well. Although the number of Asian immigrants was small compared to that of immigrants from Europe, these exclusionary laws were enacted specifically to prevent "undesirable" immigrants from East Asia from entering.

9

ASIAN AMERICANS ARE RELIGIOUSLY DIVERSE

About 4 out of 10 Asian Americans are Christians (42%); 22 percent are Protestant and 19 percent are Catholic, according to a 2012 survey from the Pew Research Foundation. Asian Americans are more religiously diverse than the U.S. population as a whole. Among United Methodists in the United States, about 1% are Asian American.



10



ROLES IN THE UNITED METHODIST CHURCH

In 1972, Rev. Wilbur Wong Yan Choy was elected as the first Asian American United Methodist bishop. In 1982, Rev. Mamie Ming Yan Ko of the California-Pacific Conference and Rev. Mochie Lam, California-Nevada Conference, became the first Chinese American women to be ordained United Methodist elders. In 1983, Rev. Colleen Kyung Seen Chun of the California-Pacific Conference became the first Korean American woman to be ordained a United Methodist elder.

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