

Truth's Table: Anti-Asian Discrimination in the Age of Covid

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[Truth's Table intro music]

Ekemini: Hey y'all, welcome to Truth's Table: Midwives of culture for grace and truth. I'm Ekemini.

Christina: And I'm Christina

.

Ekemini: This table is built by Black women and for Black women. So welcome to the table, C! How ya doing, girl?

Christina: You know - I'm doing. I'm doing out here.

[laughter]

Ekemini: I'm doing.

Christina: I'm doing. Look, look. Rise, shine, give God the glory. It is an *early* morning, is it not?

Ekemini: It is. It is. You know. You're doing, I'm being. So that's a good thing.

Christina: Exactly. That doing and culture piece right there. But for real for real, what's been on your mind and heart lately?

Ekemini: Well, you know, truthfully it's been... obviously we know it's been a heavy time. We are still in this pandemic and under quarantine and so we thought obviously as anti-racists at the table - all three of us - Michelle's not with us cuz we're doing an interview. Y'all know how this goes. We thought it would be important for us to - most importantly as Christians to show unity, solidarity, bear the burdens, as we're instructed to do in the Scriptures, of our brothers and sisters... and so we thought it would be good for us to bring anti-Asian racism to the table. And we figured the best way for us to do that was to actually bring our Asian brothers and sisters to the table.

Christina: Well look at that - [laughter]

Ekemini: You know, this is not rocket science, y'all... to come to the table to actually talk to us, to educate us on what is happening in their own community right now. So we are honored to have the founders, the president, the people that started the Asian American Christian Collaborative, which is a collaborative by Asian American Christians for Asian American Christians about Asian American Christians. Y'all know we are all about that for us, by us, life! [laughter]

So right now at the table, we have Raymond Chang who is the current president of the Asian American Christian Collaborative. We also have Michelle Reyes who is the Vice President of the Asian American Christian Collaborative and also y'all - I don't think we've ever - have we ever had five people at the table? We have not! But we also have a Russell Jeung at the table with us as well. He is a board member - one of the original drafters of the statement we're about to talk about and a researcher. And so what we are going to be discussing is the anti-Asian racism statement in the time of COVID. So, welcome to the table Raymond, Michelle, and Russell!

Raymond: Thanks so much for having us.

Christina: Hey, y'all!

Michelle R.: Thanks for having us.

Ekemini: It's good to have y'all. So since there are so many of us at the table, if y'all could just say your name before you speak - that way the people get acclimated to your voice. But yeah we wanted to bring you all to the table and just learn from you all and talk to you about why? why now? why did you all feel the need for a statement on anti-Asian racism in the time of covid-19? Why now?

Michelle: Yes, so this is Michelle Reyes, and this all started almost two Thursdays ago, March 26th. So Ray and I and a group of Asian American Christians and faith leaders across the country began talking online together about the rise in anti-Asian racism. And that week, one of us had tried speaking up about experienced racism and was called a "snowflake" for it. And so I'm an Indian American as well as a church planter and pastor's wife. I've been doing a good bit of counseling lately for Asian American Christians and the racism that they and their families have experienced. I've been talking with people who've been spit on. I've been talking with moms of kids who've literally been chased down the street with like a group of white boys shouting, "Coronavirus!" at him. Before the quarantine started, like kids being shamed in the classroom or cafeteria for bringing homemade food, and others being verbally threatened as well. And so, a lot of us were already hurting and we just kept seeing how things were getting worse and more dangerous for Asian Americans in this country. And there was an overwhelming consensus from our community that something needed to be done. So that very next day, Ray and I begin drafting a statement on anti-Asian racism that calls for an immediate end to the xenophobic rhetoric, hate crimes, and violence against our people and communities, and we wanted to invite all Americans to join us in combating these contagions. It was

especially important for us to join or link arms in solidarity with our fellow brothers and sisters - minority brothers and sisters - because what hurts one of us hurts all of us, right? We're in this together and so that's equally as important for us. So yea, there was a lot that we wanted to do with the statement. We wanted to speak to both our fellow Asian community and let them know that we see them and they're not alone, but we also wanted to do call outs. We wanted to call out anti-Asian racism in the Church, in educational systems, in the workplace, and within the language and actions of our elected officials. So we had the statement reviewed by a team of men and women after we wrote it which included Dr. Russell Jeung, Helen Lee, Soong-Chan Rah, Alex Jun, Margaret Yu, Vivian Mabuni, as well as Jeff Liou and J. Catanus. So after that we released the statement this past Tuesday.

Christina: One of the things I want to say, Michelle, and I'm very far on the the periphery of understanding what's happening. I receive the statement to sign it from a couple of different people and was eager to do so and distribute it. But one of the things that I have observed and just wanted to express my respect for is just the way in which you all shout out each other. I think that's just a good lesson for us all to learn about what it means to demonstrate solidarity within a movement, within a statement, so I've been really really blessed to see that and I think it's a good reminder for all of us about the importance of honoring each other. Right? What are you hoping that Asian Americans take away from the statement and the kind of mission work to follow? And what are you hoping that non-Asian American people who have signed the document take away from it and how it transforms them?

Ray: Yeah, this is Ray Chang here. Our hope is that the statement would serve as a resource for individuals, organizations, and most importantly churches on issues that are affecting the Asian American community, and, as Michelle said, what affects one member of the Body affects all members of the Body. Sadly a negative and harmful racial bias against Asian Americans is not a new phenomenon that we're seeing. It's been a part of the fabric of this country throughout history. Erika Lee who's an author and historian and a professor talks about how we're treated differently as Asian Americans depending on whether we're perceived as good Asians or bad Asians. And when we're perceived as good, as many have been in the most recent years we receive more society's benefits and are often used as wedges against other people of color, especially Black and Brown communities. But then when we're perceived as bad as we're being perceived now, we become the target of marginalization, exclusion, mass incarceration, violence - the language quickly turns as what Soong-chan Rah would call "a pet to a threat" - which happens across all racial categories. [C: Right, right.] When we assimilate and give up the things that God shaped into our people and erase the aspect of ourselves that make me *me*, we - meaning all people of color are treated as pets but then as soon as we show up, we bring ourselves into the room, we speak up at the table challenging the dominant norms, we're perceived as a threat and when we *are*, it hasn't fared well for us. When we saw the rhetoric around the virus and the way is it was associated with Chinese people, we saw the dangerous patterns of history basically starting to re-emerge and this was essentially the same patterns we saw around the Chinese Exclusion Act and the Japanese mass incarceration where the language we see now, including that of the Surgeon General as of late connecting the pandemic

to Pearl Harbor and 9/11 which both targets non-white populations: the Japanese for Pearl Harbor and Middle Easterners in 9/11 - instead of per se Oklahoma City bombings or bombing or the mass shootings we're seeing taking place, which are primarily focused on white terror - the rhetoric is that the early stages of what we could easily see to a mass quarantine of Asians in America. Our hope is for the statement to show awareness on issues and make sure the Church isn't silent on matters that we're called to be a voice in the wilderness to and then because of the large complexity surrounding race and racism throughout history in Asia and the fact that Asians by and large didn't want to be treated like Black and Brown people have, you see how Asians actually assimilated on healthy ways faster and compromised much more than our brothers and sisters from other communities of color. And we really wanted to reverse that trend and so we're hoping that the AACC moving forward - I think will serve as a home and convening point for Asian American Christians - kind of like what Truth's Table is for many Black Christians but also like many other Christians of color who want to stand with Black Christians and understand the Black Christian narrative in order to learn more about the realities surrounding Asian American Christians and we hope that the AACC becomes a place where people can grow in race consciousness - really deepen in discipleship, ground themselves in the holiness, righteousness, and justice of God - and then to raise awareness surrounding Asian American issues and about Asian American realities so that we don't have to repeat history in create a space for ourselves so that we can bring the fullness of all that God deposited into us to the table that God has set for us.

Christina: Thank you.

Ekemini: That is great, Raymond. Thank you so much for that. I think we look forward to learning more and more from the Asian American Christian Collaborative. I'm wondering if we can bring Russell in and since you are the one who was doing a lot of the research - I'm curious to know what you saw as you were analyzing the research and compiling the data. Can you tell us some of trends that you were noticing and what you want our audience to know?

Russell: Thanks. The trends are really striking. We noticed early on in January when the outbreak began that there's a lot of news about Asians being harassed and a lot of xenophobic rhetoric being used - just from history like Ray talked about - we knew that Asian Americans were going to get targeted and scapegoated. It's happened just as recently as in SARS but throughout our Asian American history, we've been scapegoated and excluded. So I began to track news stories and found a 50% increase in news stories in the U.S. about these types of incidents. So I knew it was going on throughout the nation. And then I collected firsthand accounts through these 2 non-profits. And we collected just like the Asian American Christian Collaborative blew up in like 2 weeks. In the first two weeks of our Stop API Hate Center, we gathered 1200 incidents. And they're not just small microaggression stories. They're stories of assault, stories of workplace discrimination, stories of people being coughed at. My own wife was coughed at and that's a public health threat at this moment.

Ekemini: Yes. Yes.

Russell: So, documenting the issue - because again, people don't believe that Asians face racism and we needed, we had to prove to people that we're people of color and we face racial profiling like other communities do. And so, that's why we needed to document and demonstrate to public policy officials our concerns and our needs. And the Christian world is probably even less responsive than our politicians.

Christina: You know, we... listening to you talk about the research and the trends that you're seeing, Russell, but also that qualitative narrative - just that small piece about your wife - that impactful piece around her experience for me is crushing to hear that - that dehumanization. My prayer and hope is that the statement will stir us, stir all of us to action, to concern, to deeper empathy, and to praying with our activism as well. But I'm wondering if one of you would be willing to offer a prayer specifically for you know the Asian American listeners that I know listen to Truth's Table, who have demonstrated solidarity with our work around a table built by and for Black women. Would one of you be willing to pray as we close out our time together?

Michelle R.: Yeah I'd be happy to.

Christina: Thank you, Michelle.

Michelle R.: Lord God, we come to you this morning and just so grateful for this community, this solidarity with these sisters at Truth's Table. We thank you for their hearts and the good work that they're doing and just the opportunity to come together as brothers and sisters and for our hearts to break together at the sins in our country, the racism that's spreading, that the rise in anti-Asian racism, the racism that's impacting all people of color and so we mourn for that Lord God. And we know that your heart breaks as well. We thank you that you overturn tables for righteousness and justice sake, that you laid down your life at the cost of of standing up for justice and having righteous anger was the model that you've left for us. And so we thank you for the ways in which you have been able to empower us as well as your servants to call out sins and we pray that "he who ears will hear." May your hand bring radical change first within the Church, Lord God, because we as Christians can't begin to be calling out sins within society if we are ourselves are not leading that charge in the Church and so we pray, Lord God, for a holistic discipleship of your people within the Church that cares, and incorporates, and is sensitive to Asians, Asian Americans, African Americans, Native Americans, Latin Americans, Lord God. May racism be called out from the pulpit and in our congregations. May you work within the hearts and minds of your people to go out into society to call out these sins in the workforce, with our elected officials, Lord God, within our educational systems, you know. May this be a way in which we show Christ to people around us. So we commit these things to you this week. We pray for forgiveness *and* liberation. We pray that you will comfort us in our pain, in this pain of discrimination and marginalization. Lord God, we pray for healing as well because we know that when we cry out to you to heal us, that you are a great healer. Heal our broken hearts and bind up our wounds, Lord God, from the pains of racism and so much more. And we pray all this in your name. Amen.

Ekemini: Amen.

Christina: Amen. Amen.

Ekemini: Thank you all so much. Thank you, Michelle. Thank you, Raymond. Thank you, Russell, for sitting at the table with us. We are appreciative of your work and we of course are asking our sisters at the table to sign that statement. So we'll included a link to the website and to the statement so that they also can sign as well. So thank you so much for your work and may God continue to protect you all and keep you.

Russell: Thank you.

Raymond: Thank you. We really appreciate the work that you're doing as well.

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Ekemini: Hey y'all. So you know that the three of us at the table: myself, Michelle and Christina are all anti-racists. As such, we are always trying to slay white supremacy in the name of Jesus and so we're actually proud to share with you all this book: Healing Racial Trauma - the Road to Resilience by Sheila Wise Rowe. People of color have endured traumatic histories in daily assaults on their dignity. In the new book, Healing Racial Trauma, professional counselor, Sheila Wise Rowe exposes the symptoms of racial trauma to lead readers to a place of freedom from the past and new life for the future. In each chapter, Sheila interviews a person of color to explore how we experience and resolve racial trauma. And get this! Our very own Michelle Higgins is an endorser of Healing Racial Trauma: the Road to Resilience by Sheila Wise Rowe. And of course, sisters at the table get a special discount. You can save 40% off of Healing Racial Trauma when you order at IVPpress.com, using the promo code truth20. The offer expires on September 30th. Don't forget to use your promo code tell them we sent you by using the code truth20 at ivpress.com to get 40% off of Sheila Wise Rowe's new book Healing Racial Trauma The Road to Resilience.

[ad music ends]

Ekemini: Alright and we are back. You know we had the privilege of course of speaking to our brothers and sisters who put together the Asian American Collaborative document about anti-Asian discrimination and we thought it was important for us to, after the break, to come back with some of our friends of the table to actually speak about what has been their own experience, what is their own narrative, and why they're at the table. And so we are honored to bring to the table Jane Kim. She is a friend of the table. She is an educator - born, raised, and based in Queens, New York. She is passionate about issues of culture, social justice, accessibility, diversity, equity, and inclusion. She earned her B.S. in Human Development from Cornell University and both her master's as a reading specialist and her Master's of Education of the Deaf and Hard of Hearing from Teachers College at Columbia University. We are also joined at the table with Timothy Isaiah Cho. He is the associate editor for Faithfully magazine - a

publication centering on Christian communities of color. He received a Master of Divinity from Westminster Seminary California and writes regularly on topics related to racial justice and equity, social justice, and Christian engagement in society. Welcome to the table, Jane and Timothy!

Jane: Thank you for having us!

Timothy: Yeah, thanks for having us.

Christina: I'm really glad that you all are here. I think it's easy to talk about topics instead of engaging with people, and so, thanks so much for coming on and recording this at the crack of dawn this morning by the way.

Ekemini: Come on.

[laughter]

Christina: which is why you're going to hear me sound like Barry White right now. It is what it is. [laughter] So, E gave us some of your academic and your work cred but I wondered if you would be kind enough to share with our audience just some of your story, who you are in a nutshell, some of your narrative of how do you get to this place in time? And so Timothy if you want to go first, go for it.

Timothy: Sounds great. So I am a Korean American Christian and a little bit of a backstory that's interesting: both of my parents actually emigrated from South Korea to South America when they were in their teens and they grew up there for about a decade and then they moved to the United States, met each other, and then got married, and then had me. So in terms of my upbringing, it's been kind of a weird upbringing because I'm still within the broad umbrella of being an Asian American, but culturally there's a lot of interesting interplay going on between three cultures, three languages. So my parents are trilingual; I'm not. I didn't get that blessing, but it's been interesting for me as someone who in my own lived experience as an Asian American, it's been interesting to see multiple cultures at play. And I think what's interesting is even conversation about what Asian American even is sometimes forgets this perspective because I've actually met a couple others who have similar stories where their parents also went moved to Brazil or to Paraguay or to Argentina and then they were born in the states. So you know it's an interesting you know narrative that isn't really talked about but it's still an interesting story in the Asian American circles, and so, besides that, grew up in the Korean American Presbyterian Church denomination. I didn't really get to know Jesus until college and so, I've been walking with Him. He's been faithful to me in so many ways and yeah married, have two kids, wonderful little boys, and enjoying as much life as I can under quarantine. [laughter]

Jane: Hi, this is Jane. I also am a Korean American Christian. I was born and raised in New York City. I've lived most of my life in Queens, New York which is the most linguistically diverse place in the whole world and a very you know diverse place in general. I kind of grew up in a New York bubble if you'd say. I've shared stories where I've gone to other places and did not realize the rest of America is not like New York City. And that was a shock as I grew up. Kind of similar to Timothy, I grew up in a Korean immigrant Presbyterian church and then as I got older you know just different... I guess I was able to come into different faith backgrounds and so I grew up in a pretty diverse setting, and I continue to work in Queens as well at a school for the Deaf here. Yeah I grew up being exposed to different cultures and having those kind of cross-cultural friendships has really been such a blessing for me to know the different lived experiences of different people cuz often times you can end up in kind of what is like an Asian American bubble or you know, more specifically, a Korean American bubble. As I've gotten older, it's been such a great value added to my life to constantly work towards bursting that bubble and just being able to form deep friendships and relationships with people beyond my own ethnicity and beyond my race, which is interesting because when I grew up: So, my mother - she raised me on her own and so my life was either home, church, and then school. But while she worked, 'cause she worked very long hours, I have, who were my neighbors at the time, I call them my Aunt and Uncle. So my Aunt is a Colombian woman and my Uncle is you know an Italian American WWII vet you know and so I also was raised under their kind of guidance and cultural lenses, and so my childhood experience was definitely interesting and it plays into how I live my life as an adult now.

Ekemini: Mmmm. That's really really... Both of you all have very very interesting upbringings that kind of took you out of you know Well most of us, right, can tend to have an insular world, right, within our ethnicity, but it seems that God has providentially put you all as insiders but outsiders, you know, at the same time. So you have a different vantage point from which to understand probably racism, to interpret your own experiences, and I'm just curious - obviously from both of you - to find out just maybe your own experiences with racism or how you all became passionate advocates with regard to - it's not just anti-Asian racism but you all are passionate advocates about racism even against other communities, but specifically you know where is your own you know, I guess place at the table in this conversation with regard to anti-Asian discrimination in the age of COVID-19.

Timothy: Well, you know. As I'm thinking about even you know, my own upbringing: what's really interesting about racism is racism really doesn't care about distinction and nuances of you know where people are from, where their parents came from, where they immigrated from, and so you know when it comes to anti-Asian racism, it really feeds off the fact that it really doesn't care whether you are a first-generation or second-generation, two and a half, any of those things. Pretty much if you are a target, right, of racism you will be treated in a certain way. And so you know, that's something that for me.... I grew up in Southern California in a town that was probably about 50% white maybe about 49% Hispanic and then a very small sprinkling of Asian Americans. And so all the way through grade school, much of junior high as well, I was either the only or one of very few Asian Americans. And so it was a very interesting sort of experience



because no matter how I would explain myself or how I would look at myself or however I thought of myself, my own family story, it really didn't matter, right? The way that you were treated or even the subtle things - the sort of microaggressions those kind of things happen no matter what. I mean there's no... no one really peeled below the layers to find out who you really are.

Christina: Right, right.

Timothy: And so for me, actually it's been interesting because maybe it might have been a defensive mechanism for me but growing up I did my best to try to be as invisible as possible, racially. That was just kind of my way of, you know, trying to kid myself more than likely that if I do well enough in these other things and these other ways and if I'm as assimilated as possible with the general broader culture then I won't receive that sort of stuff that sort of racism anymore - which was really naive but at the same time I can understand myself into being you know a grade-schooler - the only or one of the only Asian Americans in my school, I can understand why I was doing that. And so that was something that I kept within my head - just trying to keep my head down low, not really think about these things, don't rock the boat at all until about college you know. I came to know Jesus in college and it was in college - so this was in UC Berkeley which is to a lot of people's surprise where a lot of people become Christians, including myself. And that's where I got into contact with a lot of Asian American Christian fellowships, a lot of Christian campus ministries, and churches and just seeing the broad diversity of people coming to faith in Christ with a passion. And this is when I also started to think about - as I graduated from college and went on to seminary I had wanted to serve in the church in some sort of pastoral ministry sort of capacity. And so one of the things that I was able to do was actually serve as an intern at a church. And one of the jobs that I was given was to fill pulpit supply, preach in places where they don't have pastor, where they need someone to fill it, and one of the really great experiences I had was to preach at a all black OPC Church on the East Coast, which is unheard of.

Ekemini: Wow. Where's that?

[laughter]

Christina: Hey, there's always somebody out there.

Ekemini: There's always a remnant!

[laughter]

Timothy: So that was an enlightening experience for me because it was so wonderful to be with those brothers and sisters there. But it made me start wondering: why isn't the denomination why aren't these kind of churches - reformed conservative Evangelical churches - why aren't we more like this, right? Where are all of our brothers and sisters? And so as I started asking those kind of questions, I really got a lot of resistance. People started punting that question. People started to be really defensive about why, and I started to realize there were things going on - a

long history that's really parallel with American history of systemic racism things that have blocked people of color from these churches and positions of leadership and so it was kind of where I first started realizing even - you know - I started realizing I can't just be silent anymore. These are things that are impacting the Church. And it's, you know, a lot of other people will realize it's always been that way for many many many years but for me that's when it really hit home of seeing: this is something that affects the Church. Jesus is not pleased with that, and as I dug into it more, I started to see with anti-Black, people color receiving racism, how I fit into that story as well and my own experience and realizing I can't advocate for you know racial justice only for Asian Americans but we're all in this together, right? If there's any sort of injustice happening to one group, it affects my group too. And I think that's where- it's really - it's always been - it's shaped me in so many ways as a Christian seeing it from the perspective of the Church - the need to speak out against these things, stand in solidarity with our brothers and sisters.

Jane: My journey is a little interesting I would say. I think everybody is on a different kind of point in their ethnic and racial journey of understanding yourself in relation to things. So like I've mentioned before, my aunt and uncle are not Korean, and early on when I was a kid, I didn't grow up in like a predominantly white setting like Timothy did. In NYC, I feel like my elementary kind of journey was where.. It was what you had at that time a "picture perfect" image of what a "melting pot" class should look like and so we had a little bit of this and a little bit of that. And so, in a way that kind of was a bubble for me, but early on you know I encountered racial slurs even with other Asians in the school - that doesn't protect you from racism obviously. And I would notice that even as a child the way my mother would be treated if she showed up at school versus if my Aunt or Uncle picked me up. My Aunt, although she's Colombian, she's pretty fair-skinned and so I just automatically saw the different treatment in how I was treated and how they were treated depending on who showed up at school to pick me up or you know showed up at a school function. And then as I, you know, grew up, I feel like I was more in that kind of Asian American bubble even in school cause you kind of gravitate towards where you feel safe and where you don't have to explain yourself. So my kind of journey was a little bit later on. I feel like after 9/11 hit, the climate in NYC was radically different. And so, what was kind of more apparent within school hallways was a lot of Anti-Muslim racism that was more kind of in your face and that everybody picked up on whereas the other forms of racism were interpersonal and you know it happened between 1 or 2 students or like a small group. And then I went to college and then as I became a... as I started studying to be an educator in grad school I came back to NYC and I kind of maintained this NYC bubble - kind of naive and oblivious to how the rest of America was living. I would hear things that happened to Koreans or Asians in the world, but I wasn't really in tune with the rest of the world. And then as I entered the education field - you know, the education field in America is predominantly white, so for many years even at my school I was one of five teachers of color where our student population I believe it's 94% students color from all over NYC. And so I kept teaching, things would arise that I would have to address. And I realized that I lacked a lot of knowledge of history, knowledge on how to approach different things as situations would arise. So that made me want to go in and study more about what I was missing and I learned how whitewashed my understanding of history

was, even in NYC. I mean my first Asian American History course was in college because I was so... I wanted to know my history but it was just never mentioned in all of my precollege schooling. So as an educator, I just felt very ill-equipped to be teaching my students because I realized that I was just passing on what I had learned as a young child that wasn't accurate. And so when I started to realize this, it helped me to dig deeper into different resources out there and then also leading... the years leading up to the 2016 election were definitely eye-opening for me because we'd have conversations, you know whether conversations would arise at my workplace or different settings where people were starting to say: "Well you know all these Christians are voting this way, and as a Christian I was like, What are you talking about? because honestly - and this might sound really weird to people and I might be like a unicorn in this sense, but growing up I did not know that there were white protestant Christians.

Christina: I can relate.

Jane: Like to me, growing up, all the people I had met were either like Irish, Italian Catholics or Jewish people, or atheists. So I did not know there was this white evangelical Christian mass until people were like well yeah like this is what the news is saying. And I was having conversations with non-Christians and I was like, let me dig a little bit deeper into this. And then, I was like Oh the rest of the world is not or you know the rest of the country is very different. 'Cause all my life the Christians that I had met had all been Christians of color whether they were in the LatinX community, or the Black community, or the Asian Community. I'd never met... I think I met my first white evangelical Christian maybe in college and then a close friend in grad school. So that kind of was eye-opening. And as different, you know, very violent forms of racism and even all forms of it were starting to flood my news feeds as the years went on, I realized how silent the Asian American Christian community in my small community and that was very hard to deal with for me because I was like this silence makes us complicit. And as someone who works in a space with people who are not predominantly Asian and these conversations are happening - when I go on Sunday into my Asian bubble, none of this is being discussed. And it was very hard to reconcile as a Christian... like the silence was just really hard to deal with that led me to just learn about different things, looking into resources, and that's also how I came across Truth's Table.

Christina: Thank you for that both Timothy and Jane. I was thinking, Timothy, you - without using the language - I feel like part of what you were sharing about this myth of kind of the exceptional minority and kind of paralleling that with respectability politics - and those things are - as heavily as those things are critiqued and rightfully so, they are coping methods in order to be a part of a racist context, a racist society, and yet there are experiences that pull people out of that and they are usually triggering and painful experiences that help people to realize that respectability or the kind of the minority myth is not going to protect them. And it forces them to a place of internalized hatred or outward solidarity. And it sounds like in your narratives, what was created in you was outward solidarity. As you look at this present moment right now, the uptick of anti-Asian racism related to COVID-19, what is, for those people who are likely to lean

into respectability or into that myth - what do you think will help them come out of that? And how can our faith be helpful or harmful in that process?

Jane: I think it's important to know history. I think, as one who had kind of like fallen into that model minority myth as an Asian-American.. there is a point I feel like many Asian Americans go through where there's a significant point in your life where you realize you're not white. There are different articles out there and different essays. I think that that point comes at different moments for everybody. And you realize that though you had been treated like this model minority, that you believe that myth for a while until you are treated differently. There was this article or piece recently about how that model minority myth turns very quickly into Yellow Peril, especially in light of COVID-19. And I think it's important to learn history, to learn our history and how we can dig deeper and to know that white supremacy is not just limited to America. That way of thinking has infiltrated a lot of our - what we would consider motherlands, the countries our parents came from - and how that even is passed down to generations. And to be able to break out of that, I have to say that, equipping yourself with knowledge and being able to have conversations with other people is very important. I think for me, as a Christian, to be able to respond to different ways to formulate my thoughts around things, being able to listen and learn from Christians of color, especially Black Christians, has been tremendously helpful and such a blessing to grow as a Christian, to realize that my ethnicity and culture does matter in light of how I understand Scripture and the Gospel and that it doesn't exist in some kind of vacuum.

Ekemini: Yea. You know, Jane, you mentioned "Yellow Peril." Can you explain that for our sisters at the table who may not be familiar with that? Because that was really profound how you say it's flipped from being the model minority to, you know, Yellow Peril very quickly.

Jane: Yea, so Yellow Peril - it kind of refers to really like this fear this hatred of what was the Chinese in America - Chinese people in the U.S. And then, as I guess more Asians were allowed into America, that then transferred over into other Asian, you know, groups. So first, you know, with those who "look Chinese" by you know, our East Asian appearance, and then transferring over to, in general, Asians. Yellow Peril was definitely this feeling that was fueled a lot by anti-Asian initiatives, whether it was the Chinese Exclusion Act. And just this kind of anti-Asian racism is not new. It's nothing new, right? I think the same kind of sin continues, it's just the way it shows up is very different. So that concept of you know Asians being treated as perpetual outsiders, always being foreign, always somehow having to prove that you're American, but you will always have his kind of hyphenated American status. You know when I introduce myself, I proudly say that I am Korean American, but there's always this kind of Do I have to say that because I have to put a disclaimer like Yes, I'm American Oh but let me explain what kind of American I am when you know honestly people don't introduce like Hi I'm a white American - nobody says that. So there's always like - as a person with a hyphenated American identity that is imposed onto me, I know that this kind of anti-Asian sentiment has always been there. Terminology has changed, but the sentiment still remains. This concept that we are a "them" where it's an "us" and "them" mentality - which was prevalent in kind of the comments that came out of the White House and just the treatment of Asians as a them. So it's from

Yellow Peril but also in a lot of anti-Asian sentiments that have been deeply rooted in American history.

Ekemini: Thank you for that.

Timothy: And to add to what Jane said just knowing our history of anti-Asian sentiments, systemic things like you know even immigration policies in our country; it reminds us that the things that are going on now with the uptick in anti-Asian discrimination during the coronavirus isn't something new. These are not caused by the virus.

Jane: Right.

Timothy: The virus has actually... it's revealing something that's already in people's hearts. It's already within the systems that are at play and white supremacy.

Christina: Right.

Timothy: And you know I really feel for those who are experiencing traumatic experiences of racism - either in the past or currently and are trying to cope and trying to shield themselves off. And I think there's a good place to be healthy in that sense like we should not be willingly putting ourselves in for a traumatic experience. At the same time, I do want to say that the history of white supremacy has weaponized coping techniques.

Christina: Absolutely.

Timothy: And so you know when Asian Americans try to you know use the idea of the model minority as a defensive posture, as a coping mechanism - which it has some warrant in some circles of Asian American circles. It's quickly been mobilized and weaponized against other Black and Brown communities saying why aren't you like these Asian Americans who seemed to have picked themselves up and followed the American dream and made it so well. And I think that's one of the things where we have to realize that we're not just vacuumed off from everyone else. We're not living in a vacuum, but the things that we do, even the unintended things that happened because of our actions or the unintended things that happen because of our silence has been weaponized by white supremacy and will continue to. And so you know, I even think about things like - there's a study that came out a couple years ago from the Harvard Business Journal about even people of color just across the board when they apply for jobs - their names, just the names that they put down on their resumes will impact whether they'll get a call back for an interview and this is from people who have... from African Americans to Asian Americans who don't have "white-sounding names" and you know no matter what - even if you have a name - you know for me, you know, my last name - just having my last name on a resume automatically reduces the amount of call backs that I might get for an interview, and so in a lot of ways we're in the same boat. It's one of those things - it reminds me that white supremacy will use whatever it wants to use and not use whatever it doesn't want to use, right? It'll weaponize

Asian Americans and the model minority against Black and Brown communities but then at the same time it'll say you know you're not qualified to have this job just because of your name. I think it's one of those things that we have to remember: if we allow ourselves to be, and our intentions and our actions of defense and of coping to be weaponized, it affects our community, ultimately it affects all the other communities out there and we in a sense are being used by white supremacy.

Ekemini: Yes and I love how you brought that into play on how the model minority myth is - well it is a weapon in and of itself and it's weaponized of course. It's a weapon in that you're not allowed to bring your full self to the table and it's really a form of objectification, right? It's all about your performance; it's about how you excel on your job or your studies whatever it is.

Christina: And silencing too.

Ekemini: And then that's again then used as a weapon against other minorities, particularly Black folks as you raised here. And so, I'm curious about... there's so many things I want to ask, but I'm really curious about and we'd be remiss not to ask about just the tension between the Black community and the Asian Community right. How we've been pitted against each other by, yes, white supremacy but also just by sinful tendencies and just kind of how that has been magnified in the age of COVID with regard to... nobody's exempt from bigotry, right? Nobody is exempt from prejudice okay and maybe the attacks that maybe Asian Americans have been experiencing during the age of COVID and how you reconcile that though behind the backdrop of the discrimination that we have experienced from Asian Americans as well and Asians even abroad like the New York Times just released an article on April, I believe, April 11th that's titled African Nations and the U.S. Decry Racism Against Blacks in China. So currently African nations such as Nigeria, Sierra Leone, Ghana, South Africa, among others, as well as the U.S. have been reporting racial and racist incidents and discrimination against Africans and African-Americans in Guangzhou where they've been forcibly detained. They're being blamed for the uptick and the coronavirus that's beginning to I guess you can say have a second wave right now and so I'm curious about how you all reconcile just the very real discrimination and the hate crimes you are also experiencing with the fact that we too have been harmed and discriminated against by our Asian American community as well or Asian community as well.

Jane: So I think one thing that we really have to notice as Asians is that here and abroad anti-Blackness is very real in Asian communities and countries. Now Asia has 48 countries so I obviously cannot speak for all the different ethnic backgrounds, but as a Korean American and someone who kind of keeps track with what happens in South Korea, I've always just really kind of... Sorry, so to go back: South Korea and a lot of Asian countries you know, before a lot of this globalization, are pretty much mostly homogeneous nations. And then as globalization continues and South Korea has become more globalized with people from different countries now living in Korea, but this concept of anti-Blackness has been prevalent for many years and so with white supremacy kind of being imported in with the concept of white supremacy and how you know with Koreans, there is this focused attention on having lighter skin tones and

whitening creams and all of that because being more Westernized - a lot plastic surgery for having European features and being more Westernized is idolized. And this also what is imported is media and how African Americans have been portrayed in Western media has also been imported. So and then it trickles down into when people immigrate here and take interpersonal interactions and it just kind of fuels this mentality. And in terms of a fear that is happening, I feel like when there is fear, people look for a scapegoat, somebody to blame, and unfortunately it just kind of goes hand-in-hand with already existing fears that really are sinful and should have no place in this world but unfortunately have a very strong place in this world. And so I had this conversation with you know in New York.. Initially it was a lot of restaurants and Asian markets suffering back early in January. People avoiding Chinatown, people avoiding Koreatown. The economic hit was felt first by a lot of Asian businesses and then as the virus started spreading here you know that's when you started seeing footage of people being verbally attacked, spit on, sprayed down with Lysol in the train, you know most recently somebody being doused with acid.

Ekemini: Yes.

Jane: It has been very painful to see that, but also I had somebody ask me like how do you reconcile that because you want to share, you want to put out there that this is happening to Asians, but then there are people who are also conscious of when you want to share that story you see that in this situation it was unfortunately a person of color and sometimes it was a Black person who did it.

Ekemini: Mmhmm.

Jane: And then there's this tension of okay I want to share this so that other people are aware but I don't want to fuel this narrative that Oh you know the racist narrative that all Black people are like this.

Christina: Mmhmm. Right.

Ekemini: Right.

Jane: And I think this is a lot of what stems from communities being treated as monolithic.

Ekemini: Sure.

Jane: If one person does this, *everybody* is like this. And so it's been hard because you know I had a conversation with a white friend and I said you know it's been really hard because like this and this happened and I would state two news stories that I felt got pretty big coverage and they'd be like Oh I haven't even heard of that. So it's like wanting to break into *that* bubble and be like ok you need to know about this and I need you to stand in solidarity with me but at the same time I don't want to share this story because I don't know where you stand in your racial

understanding and in your journey where I'm going to perpetuate this really false narrative that you may unknowingly hold on to. And for me, as you know, seeing everything that has been happening - like Timothy mentioned before, we kind of grow up Okay don't speak up. Just kind of keep to yourself. Just take it in. It's a cultural thing and I think you come to a point and you're like, No, you can't stay silent. You have to be able to speak up about this, you have to be able to share the knowledge, share facts, share actual information and not, you know, lies. And so wanting to share that but also try to do it I guess with nuance and with context has been hard and also kind of having that conversation with you know older generations because my racial journey, my ethnic journey is very different from that of my mother's. And so being able to talk about different things. Like I saw on the news where there was an uptick in Asians now buying guns and immediately when I thought of that, I thought of you know the L.A. Riots, I thought of Latasha Harlins.

Ekemini: Mmhmm

Jane: And that's where my mind immediately went. That's a fear that I have in general. And it is definitely... the more you think about it, it can be scary but I think as Asians over the world, we have to wrestle with how deeply is this anti-Blackness embedded in our communities.

Ekemini: Come on. Yes.

Jane: And what can we do to really work against that? To really decolonize our minds and to also really invest in relationships with people - not to tokenize our friendships or not to treat people as this one person representative of their whole community, but to really do the work, to learn more, to learn the history, and to really check ourselves - I think is important and even in the midst of coping, I truly appreciate those who have checked in with me and said Hey like are you doing okay? As someone who is used to just dealing with things on my own, I didn't realized I needed that question and kind of like the Truth's Table series of You Okay, Sis? Like that - hey are you okay? That's just really needed and even with Asian American Christian Collaborative statement - I actually found that out through my friends at the table sharing about it. And so I just really appreciated it; being able to find out about an Asian American initiative through Black Christians was just really powerful for me personally.

Ekemini: That's really cool.

Christina: Thank you. I was wondering if we could just spend maybe a couple of moments talking about the ways that all of us have been impacted by, in the case of me and Ekemini - anti-Asian stereotypes and biases - and for both Timothy and Jane - anti-Black stereotypes. And kind of a Christian discipline of naming of taking what is in the unconscious and naming the bias and naming the sinfulness of dehumanization of neighbor and casting that away. I think that's important to model that for people 'cause I know often times we pretend like we don't have these things, but yet they live out in our actions, our practices, our policies and so I wonder if we could just model that in our remaining time together.



Ekemini: That's great. C, you want to start us off?

Christina: Sure, I could start that off. My earliest memories of interactions with Asian classmates was growing up in Baltimore where there was not... I was not around many Asian students, but I always had a couple of legitimate Asian friends, not just tokenized Asian friends but true Asian friends, but also I had a strong. So the stereotype I think I held for a very very long time was this timidity - particularly amongst Asian women, broadly speaking, sweeping all Asian women into one category. This timidity. This being so under-the-radar that they themselves weren't safe for me to be around. I always felt a bit safer around people who were outspoken. And it created I think stereotypical narrative in which, because I assumed silence, I did not lean in to listen and hear. And so as an adult now, repenting of that it becomes more important for me to examine how the belief that someone is quiet causes us to not hear them at all and not make space for them and not be patient enough for the ways people communicate differently, even in myself.

Ekemini: That's good.

Timothy: Yea, I think one of the things that was you know wasn't something that I was proactively creating as a bias but something that was just from my lived experience of what I saw you know as someone who grew up in a predominately mostly white, affluent, mostly upper middle class upper class area neighborhoods is you really quickly get conditioned to think that the more white a place is, the safer it is, the better school it is, the better you know all these sorts of things and whether you know it or not you're being conditioned or I was conditioned from a very young age to think you know that the more Black a neighborhood or community was, the more dangerous it might be, the more suspicious it might be, the more education... things like that you know that are untrue entirely but that's just how I've been conditioned with what I have experienced and so I think that's something where I think it's helpful for us to think about not only what are the active biases and racism and discrimination that we're forming but what are the things in our experience even just like who we lived with and who we were around how did that shape us to understand what constitutes what's good, what's healthy, what's safe even. And I think a lot of anti-Blackness in Asian communities can be found in that in where we've kind of buffered out ourselves in a way. Our idea of the American good life has been so closely positioned with whiteness and white neighborhoods that have conditioned us to think that a neighborhood for our own kids or whatever, our own families, that is in a less white neighborhood may be unsafe or wrong sort of ideas about a neighborhood just because of that.

Ekemini: Wow, thank you for sharing that. How about you, Jane? And I'll close us out.

Jane: So I definitely had that stereotype too. I think that for me due to kind of things that happened personally, I had the stereotype of Black people, specifically Black men, being aggressive, being aggressors and criminal in kind of what is portrayed in the narratives of just prisons and what is shared in media. And I was actually blessed to have a very diverse group of teachers growing up. And even if I would meet, you know, one of my favorite social studies teachers was a Black male and he would always be the "No, he's the unicorn. He's just not like,

he's the special one but everybody else like this is so true. Well, yea, look at the prisons. They have to be criminals." That kind of naive thinking of not realizing how systemic racism is, has been, has always been, and how just how widely it has seeped into everything and just this buying into objectification of Black people, specifically Black men, was unfortunately something that I had internalized and that concept of in order to be safe, like Timothy said, I have to avoid. I have to keep to myself. And yeah... and the only way to really break out of that bias was to be able to lean in, learn more, and gain knowledge in knowing ok *why* do I see these things? Why are these trends there? It's not because they are inherently this way or that. It's because of how our society has been set up, how systemic racism is very prevalent and how it has used different structures to perpetuate its false narrative.

Ekemini: Mmm. That's really good. Thank you so much, Jane, for sharing that, and Timothy and C. I think for me for my part... growing up in Cali, like you Timothy, but the Bay - Bay Area, grew up in low income housing. And in that place, Silicon Valley, so right down the street from Apple - very interesting upbringing. In that place, it was actually, in our low income housing project, it was actually somewhat diverse and quite a few Black folks and I did grow up with Black folks but I also did grow up with Asian Americans as well, specifically Korean Americans and Filipinos for the most part. And some Vietnamese people too. So I actually had somewhat of a diverse upbringing. But I do have to say the stereotype that I grew up or imbued you know growing up was that you know was the model minority stereotype so Asian Americans are really really good in school and their studies, particular math. [chuckles] and I leaned into that cuz I sucked at math truthfully.

[laughter]

Timothy: Me too.

Ekemini: There you go! Come on, Timothy! Yes. Cast aside the shame!

[laughter]

Ekemini: So I really fed into that. I believed that and there *were* students in my class that were good at math but that's not all that they're good at, like you know I had to undo that. When I'm thinking now, it is dehumanizing to only see people for what they can give you, right?

Christina: Or what we think they can give us.

[laughter]

Ekemini: or what we think they can give us, right. They'd be the ones I wanted in my study group [laughter] because of my own assumptions right about they can help me but i had to undo that thinking and repent of course and allow our Asian American brothers and sisters to actually be human and not machines because when I think about it in that way, I'm seeing them really as no better than my Texas instrument calculator, right? I think that's what it's called. Take me back

to the school days now. But you know, when I think about it, that's how I literally viewed Asian Americans as just very very good at academics, very very good at studies and definitely good at math because growing up, that's what I saw but that's not necessarily true across-the-board. Timothy, you just said you're not good at math. So I had to reconcile and you know, you're not the *only* one who's not good at math.

Christina: Come on, represent.

Ekemini: I had to kind of undo that because there were things reinforcing that stereotype for me you know. There were classmates that went to Kumon during the weekend - like they really worked hard at it. And I think that's the key, that they worked hard at it. Like if you did that too, you probably would have been good at math too. You know what I'm saying? But I had to do a lot of that and being able to like see folks for their humanity, fully in their humanity and be able to see their failures and their successes and obviously also befriending people that are Asian as well too helps kind of undo those stereotypes. But that was one for sure I definitely bought into: model minority myth, you know, and I do confess that right now obviously and also repent of that I think... I do think you know the fears... you all were articulating your own fears with what's going on with COVID-19 and what you're experiencing and even having the fear of coming out and saying well some of these things happened you know at the hands of Black people. I think part of what... where there's fear, there's also hope and at least my hope and I think I speak for the table when I say *our* hope is that some inter-minority solidarity can be built. I know a lot of us think it's a myth because sin and you know right when people should be standing with you they fail you, but I think this is an opportunity. And I *hope* that this episode has been an opportunity for our sisters at the table to learn about the experiences of our Asian American brothers and sisters and what they are going through, right, so that we can lift up this community, pray for this community, check our own community, right, when we hear comments, when we see videos, or we see something that's inappropriate, we speak up and we stand up and we say that's wrong, that's sinful, that is not reflective of God's will and intention for our community and for their community. My hope is that it will build good will in that way and in some ways - I feel like I'm talking a lot - we've taken a bit of a risk by even doing this episode if you think about it cuz there are some Black folks that are like "Well they would never do an episode for us or when have they really stood in the gap for us," but our posture, our approach, is not contingent upon the actions or inactions of our brothers and sisters. Our posture and approach is motivated by God's grace and the power and the Gospel. That's why we speak up. That's why we brought you guys to the table.

Christina: And I was going to say this too as we go to our close.

Ekemini: Come on. Where's the organ?

Christina: One of the ways for all groups to check the health of their community and this is not just across racial and ethnic lines but also the community of the Church is to think about what our distinctives are. What are we known for and to the extent that we are parts of communities

that take pride in a distinctive of being against someone else or being anti-someone else, that being a signature part of who we are - that's something to repent of versus... so my love for Black people does not require a hatred or an apathy towards anyone else, if it's truly love and not pity and idolatry towards Black people. And so, I think that solidarity is the right response for people who are secure in their cultural and ethnic identity and even more so with the spirit of God at work in them. So I'm really grateful for all the people who joined us today to tell and share their story, and I'm praying that it will be a blessing as we can relate to our own stories and to grow deeper in our love for each other.

Jane: Yea, and if actually just may add I think if we can take a posture of where we're so quick to objectify and I think like Ekemini said, that if we can really make that conscious effort to humanize people, I think that will lead us to more love.

Ekemini: Come on. And we need... Love is in need of love today.

Christina: Yes, that great prophetic theologian. Carry on.

Ekemini: Truly. Thank you for that. Well we want to thank you, Timothy and Jane, for taking a seat at the table with us and of course we want to thank our sisters for sitting at the table with us as well. Let's keep the conversation going. Tweet us your thoughts about our episode just about Anti-Asian discrimination and racism in the age of COVID. You can use the hashtag Truth's Table. Follow us on Twitter and Instagram @truthstable or email us your thoughts [asktruthstable@gmail.com](mailto:asktruthstable@gmail.com). Don't forget to rate and review the show on iTunes and subscribe on your favorite podcast player. Truth's Table has a patreon account now so you can send your love offerings to [patreon.com/truthstable](https://patreon.com/truthstable) or you can bless us at our PayPal which is [paypal.me/truthstable](https://paypal.me/truthstable). Truth's Table is made possible in part by Podestary Studios. Visit [Podastery.com](https://Podastery.com) for the highest & quality online audio entertainment. Our producer for the show is Joshua Heath, our executive producer is Beau York, and we have been your hosts: Ekemini, Michelle, and Christina. We'll see you soon on the next Truth's Table. Bye y'all.

[outro music]