

Asian and American

On a form I once filled out, the demographic choices were White, Black, Hispanic, and Other. Over the decades, that disheartening message of invisibility remained true. That is still the list I often hear.

Asians in America occupy territory that is both quietly unseen and perpetually foreign. As “others,” Asian Americans are not always considered minorities, but we are not white. (Does the shorthand term “Black and brown” include me? I honestly don’t know.) People ask, “No, where are you *really* from?” We’re complimented on our ability to speak English, even if it’s the only language we know.

During the pandemic, Asian Americans are once again the scapegoats the country seems to require. In 1871, Chinese were massacred in Los Angeles, in one of the largest mass lynchings in America. In 1942, Japanese Americans were forced into internment camps. Now we have COVID-19. For 150 years, Asian Americans have been told to go back home.



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This past year, Asian Americans have been verbally assaulted, spit on, kicked, punched, stabbed, and killed. Then came the mass shooting in Atlanta.

The term Asian American Pacific Islander (AAPI) feels complicated to me: I’m grateful to have a category. But it’s a bit like a garment that someone else chose. As a child who was commonly asked, “Are you Japanese or Chinese?” I didn’t grow up thinking I was just like people from India,

Pakistan, Cambodia, or Guam. But somewhere along the way, I became Asian/Pacific American, which came to mean anyone from East Asia, South Asia, Southeast Asia, and the Pacific Islands.

Now Asian/Pacific Americans realize we’re all in this together: To those who spit, we look the same.

We’re not the only ones who are in it together. After the death of George Floyd, the Asian American Christian Collective marched with Black Americans and, after the shooting in Atlanta, Black and Asian American Christians increased their efforts to fight racism together. Suffering communities are holding each other up.

“Anti-Black racism and anti-Asian racism are different fruits of the same poisonous tree of white supremacy,” writes Esau McCaulley, a Black assistant professor at Wheaton College. “Both are rooted in a hierarchy of persons based on the color of their skin. This hierarchy was designed to keep one group in power at the expense of everyone else.”

This poisonous tree does not have to be the tree that feeds us. Don’t believe that life is a zero-sum game. America’s caste system harms everyone, but God’s abundance is a system that heals.

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MESSENGER (ISSN 0026-0355) is published 10 times a year by Brethren Press, Church of the Brethren. Periodicals postage paid at Elgin, Ill., and additional mailing offices.

POSTMASTER: Send address changes to MESSENGER, 1451 Dundee Ave., Elgin, IL 60120-1694.

Printed on recycled paper (20% post consumer)

Every living creature

don't understand why climate change is a partisan issue. This is like having ideas about car brakes, for example, that are based on politics rather than engineering. Everybody agrees that brakes are good and that cars should be required to have brakes. No one thinks brakes take away our individual freedom, or



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aren't worth the money, or should be phased in over a decade or two. Whether we are drivers or pedestrians, brakes are essential if we want to live.

Maybe dealing with climate change is more like critical building repairs proposed to the members of a condominium association. It's too expensive, I might say. My unit seems just fine. Let's wait. Maybe I'll be gone when the bill comes due.

Our planet is more than steel and concrete, however. It is alive, says Genesis 1. It is fashioned with plants yielding seed, with swarming creatures in the sea, flying birds, cattle and creeping things, and wild animals—all animated with the life of the Creator. These living things are given life by God's pronouncement. And in an intricately designed system, our very

being as humans depends on the existence of these living creatures.

If the car mechanic or the building inspector is ignored, we know the results might be tragic. Collectively, we are responsible for much more than roads and buildings. All the evidence around us says we cannot ignore the warnings about the potential demise of the place we live.

In a sense, we are all condominium dwellers. Whether we live in apartments or houses, trailers or mansions, we don't actually own very much. The effects of climate change testify that individually we don't control the land, air, or water around us. We are part of a community that must act together to protect our global home. My unit may feel like my own, like an individual space, but it's ultimately dependent on the same foundation and structure as all my neighbors.

Surely we don't intend to harm what God has declared good. Let us worship the Creator by guarding and protecting the garden—and every living creature.

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MESSENGER (ISSN 0026-0355) is published 10 times a year by Brethren Press, Church of the Brethren. Periodicals postage paid at Elgin, Ill., and additional mailing offices.

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Outside the box

I've been sorting through lots of boxes.

It began in the summertime helping my sister deal with family stuff stored in her basement long after our parents had died. She and her husband are missionaries overseas, so there had been few opportunities to process photos, letters, furniture, and other memorabilia.



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Years in a North Carolina basement had not been kind to the cardboard boxes and their contents. But after a week of hot work and multiple trips to the recycling center, the donation center, and the dump, finally everything was clean, organized, and slimmed down.

That inspired me to tackle my own basement, where I'm making headway even though the end is not yet in sight.

Now it's time for the same process at work, where there's a major rearrangement of offices taking place. I'm trying hard to keep from moving anything that should instead be recycled, pitched, or sent to the archives. It's a good end-of-year activity.

Why do I find all this organizing so satisfying? I think it's the pandemic. With little control over anything right now, it feels good to establish order, one box at a time.

Some of the things I've been able to shed were easy because they had gotten outdated and no longer mattered. The one that made me chuckle was a thick folder marked, in a coworker's handwriting, "Rainy day project." I don't know how it traveled years ago from her office to mine, but the contents had aged enough to be thrown away guilt-free, rain or shine.

As I look at the world around me, I sense that there's a lot of sorting and evaluating going on. As we go about church—and life—we are trying to figure out what to keep and what to let go of. The process was already on its way, to be honest, but the pandemic has moved it into warp speed.

While sorting through my office, I've found a few artifacts that I plan to keep. So far the collection includes a pica ruler, printer's lupe, T-square, floppy disk, 3.5-inch diskette, and Rolodex—all tools of an earlier era. They remind me of the ways we used to write, edit, design, and publish. I don't need them anymore, but they show me that methods change all the time. Even while the message survives.

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