

TALKING STORY IN ASIAN AMERICA

■ Polo



Two big men, one giant moment

I recall the Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. in our television's grainy black-and-white. I remember his eyes. Who doesn't remember Dr. King's eyes?

In my memory, he's examining some very important papers spread before him. A chunky pen he's paused, midair. The President of the United States of America, Lyndon Baines Johnson (LBJ), sits close to Reverend King in that flickering television image. Very close. The President's likewise skimming those serious docs — our 1964 Civil Rights Act. Pen in hand.

I'm 10 years old and we're on our couch, near our Penncrest TV. Pop is to my right, silent — exhausted from work. A respectful space separates us. Big brother Robbie's slouched on my left; we share a thin film of sweat between his arm and mine. Our parents' first American-born boy Roy sits between Robbie's muscular thighs.

Behind Dr. King and President Johnson, hovering left and right in several shades of grey, stand suited men from New Hampshire to California, shoulder to shoulder. All white.

Even as a fifth grader, I knew that both our kids' and our parent's awed generations were absorbing that grand moment. Indeed, back then we believed every household on our street, our immigrant and settled neighbors alike, were moved by that monumental black-

and-white moment. We believe it still, today.

Fifty years after those most trying days and terrifying nights of American democracy, the U.S. Civil Rights Act still lives on. It lives as much as a provision of law produced by the best of pragmatic politics, as it does as an article of faith. American faith. Of course it does.

That same grainy scene of Dr. King's polished obsidian eyes and President Johnson's determined brows, came back to me late-late last Saturday night. My wife and I were sitting on Timothy Lake's south shore. If you've not been there, Timothy Lake is a clear Cascade reservoir curtained by tall fir, pine, and cedar, shoulder to shoulder a lot like those 1960s U.S. congressmen. But these big elders never let harsh city lights or our urban din get past them. Not a bad thought they allow there. There, in their humbling stillness.

On that lake's edge, everyone gazes up at a billion-billion miles of pretty planets and pulsing suns and sparkling stellar matter. Heaven's enormity packs people's eyes and ears. That late night, it all so paralyzed my ordinarily buzzing neural networks that my wife had to elbow me, hard — to remind me to breathe.

For immigrant community mechanicos like me — for guapos used to working the instructive and destructive intersections of our city's several vigorous ethnic streams with our robust mainstream —



U.S. President Lyndon Baines Johnson (left) hands a signing pen to Martin Luther King Jr. during ceremonies for the signing of the Civil Rights bill in 1964 at the White House. (AP Photo)

late night Timothy Lake is as near as we may ever come to immediacy with our Creator. To the unspeakable grandness of our universe.

Toughness and tenderness all at once

And that's when it happened. That's when Dr. King and President Johnson came back to me.

I had just wrestled my heavy peepers away from that great mystery above us, my wife and I had just settled our tired bones into our shared North Face bag, when those two big men crackled to life, right there on the furry black backsides of my eyelids.

I saw Dr. King's polished black eyes; I saw President Johnson's determined brows; both of them in a monochrome matching Timothy Lake's nightscape. Had they appeared like that on my iPad, had this been a FaceTime call, I would've snapped a still shot. I would've sent it and them lickity split to OregonLive.com.

Current commentators' takes on President Johnson's Machiavellian modus operandi notwithstanding, there's unmistakable tenderness in the lines across the president's forehead, lines marking his and Dr. King's historic meeting of minds. It's a moment that hardly ever happens. Not in the individuated and accelerated west, where tough guys like LBJ rule. Not in the more communal cultures of all those developing nations constantly sending their most

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ambitious families packing here — nascent nations where we follow tender guys like Our Lady Aung San Suu Kyi, or Arch Bishop Desmond Tutu, or His Holiness Dalai Lama.

Mainstream commentators aside, we know that the responsibility of making common meaning between both kinds of men — one trading in political punch, the other committed to circulating spiritual and cultural capital — falls among us New American dreamers. It's also here, that we expect women coming into their political and moral authority, to blend better these two distinct streams of leadership. To lead better, by better articulating both.

President Johnson's 1960s Great Society initiatives were and remain, a great national agenda. Disappointment with his and Reverend King's common cause is mostly on account of our misunderstanding two kinds of giants. Like we mistake fir for pine. Like we mistake planets for stars.

Ancient evergreen enforce humbled silence. Old-school congressmen trade horses. Spinning planets pull us to rocket expensive science there; blinking stars pull ambitious sailors across dark seas toward American ideals.

Each kind of leadership, every heavenly body, is essential to American success and depends on us understanding and weaving daily, both Reverend King's eyes and LBJ's brows.

Illustrating the art of Chinese watercolors

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help her create depth and dimension when she draws people, flowers, or a landscape.

Zheng clearly loves immersing herself in the world of the landscapes and figures in her paintings. It was a thrill for me to watch her focus as each painting came to life. I was so enthralled, I often forgot to eat. During our Sundays together, I had to tell her to stop for the day, go home, and get some rest. It was especially poignant to see her face light up when I told her how much I liked what she was painting. "Really?" she'd ask me, as if surprised someone would complement her work. I hope she can continue doing this kind of artwork in Portland. Apparently, her friends often ask if she is still an artist. I can assuredly say, yes, she is.

Willow Zheng's paintings will be on display on Friday, November 21 at 7:30pm at the Clinton Street Theater, located at 2522 S.E. Clinton Street in Portland. The art exhibit precedes the 8:00pm screening of *Mei Mei, A Daughter's Song*. To learn more, visit <www.meimeiproject.com> and <www.willowzheng.com>.

Grief, rage at 36-year sentence for ferry captain

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because he abandoned two injured colleagues, escaped the ferry, and failed to tell rescuers about them, even though he knew they would die without help, the court said.

However, it cleared two other crew members of homicide charges for the same reasons it acquitted the captain. Those crew members got 15 years and 20 years in prison, it said.

Prosecutors and the crew members have one week to appeal, according to the court. Relatives of the victims said in a statement they will ask prosecutors to appeal the ruling, but senior prosecutor Park Jae-eok said his office hasn't yet made a decision.

"We will do whatever it takes to make sure that the crew members who abandoned our children, escaped, ran away, and thought only of their own lives pay for their crimes accordingly," said Ko Young-hee, the mother of a teenage victim.

The 15 crew members tasked with navigating the ferry *Sewol* have faced scathing public criticism because they escaped while many passengers were still trapped in the sinking ship. A total of 476 people were aboard the ship and only 172 were rescued in the April disaster.

Prosecutors accused the crew members of tacitly colluding to abandon the ship even though they knew passengers would be trapped and killed after it sank. The defense in the trial denied any collusion among the crew members, saying they were confused, injured, and panicked.

Nearly seven months after the sinking, 295 bodies have been recovered but nine are missing. Officials said they've ended searches because there was only a remote chance of finding more bodies while worries have grown over the safety of divers. Two civilian divers have died after falling unconscious during searches.

Authorities blame overloaded cargo, improper storage, untimely rescue efforts,

and corruption by the ship's owners that prevented enough spending on safety, along with the crew members' behavior, for the sinking.

The ship's billionaire owner was found dead about four months ago after fleeing arrest, and three of his relatives were sentenced last week to up to three years in prison for corruption. South Korean lawmakers recently approved plans to disband the coast guard and transfer its responsibilities.

South Korea has spent months debating public safety issues that critics say were largely ignored during the scramble to rebuild after the 1950-1953 Korean War. But a series of smaller deadly accidents have occurred since the sinking. In mid-October, 16 people watching an outdoor pop concert fell to their deaths when a ventilation grate they were standing on collapsed.

Associated Press writers Kim Tong-hyung and Foster Klug in Seoul contributed to this report.

The Asian Reporter is published on the first & third Monday each month.

News page advertising deadlines for our next two issues are:

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Artwork due: Wednesday, November 26 at 1:00pm

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Artwork due: Thursday, December 11 at 1:00pm

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