

TALKING STORY IN ASIAN AMERICA



■ Polo

River City

Our Ethnic streams and our Race boxes

Last night, I was energized by an event at the Asian Pacific American Chamber of Commerce. Last week, elegant community elders discussed social policy at the new offices of Latino Network. Last month, we prayed among optimistic parents, their bright and beautiful children, breaking Ramadan fast at the Muslim Educational Trust.

River City's ethnic streams are robust. According to Portland Public School District 2010 data, about a hundred run through here. Each, a blend of Old World civility and New American ambition. Each also, distorted a little or distorted a lot, by our new homeland's destructive habit of racializing everything. Of racializing us.

Of course, our sending countries also institutionalize discrimination. Russian and Ukrainian ultra-nationalists daily incite new cruelties among old neighbors; Myanmar's Buddha priests burn out her Rohingya Muslims; Guatemala's light-skinned elites remove families indigenous to their beloved soil. Indeed, like many Portlanders, our family's ethnic identity got us evicted from our home and expelled from our homeland.

Ethnicity has a million meanings, but at its simplest, ethnicity is an intricate weave of historically shared values and presently lived beliefs. A rooted and shared culture. What's troubling about America, our otherwise kind and creative new country, is our mainstream's systemic impatience with beautiful cultural complexity in favor of institutional commitment to "Race." Four or five check boxes of it. It's all a bit crazy-making.

How's that working for you?

At our schools and workplaces; for our licenses to drive, to do business, to marry, to welcome a baby, we're directed to "self-identify" as this race or that race. You can of course, call yourself "2+" or "Other" — though one sounds diluted and the other feels like you don't count.

I did a survey. Okay, it wasn't very

scieny, but I did earnestly poll those dignified elders and civic activists I mentioned at the top of this essay. I did another in front of Nordstrom Rack, last Saturday morning — where and when you'll find super hardworking immigrant Oregon. All elbows.

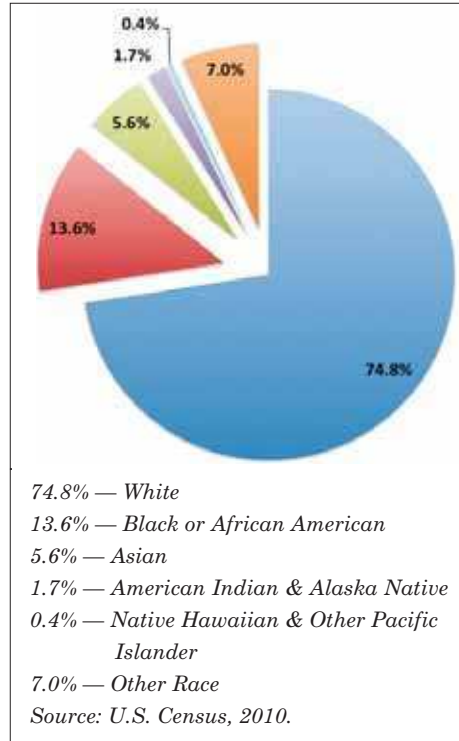
How super? — the American Immigration Council reports that Oregon's Asian shoppers spent \$6.1 billion, our stubbornly optimistic Spanish-speaking families added another \$8.4 billion (2012).

And you know, not one of my tired though proud respondents reported feeling comfortable with this race thing. Not at all.

We are an American gateway city. 1-in-5 Portlanders are foreign born, and that's not counting our kids, dressed well every September, as an expression of our respect for their teachers. And here, on the confluence of our region's two river matriarchs, on silty shores that convened vigorous politics, commerce, social and spiritual life, for 12 centuries before President Jefferson's Corps of Discovery paddled up — here of all places, our hundred robust ethnic streams are directed to channel our identities into five or six Race boxes. It's like damming our living rivers. It hurts us.

I will never forget how hurt and confused our mother was when she noticed a University of Oregon Affirmative Action form among my homework on her kitchen table. The "Asian" box was checked. I marked it because doing so further coded me as "Socio-economically Deprived." Which got me all kinds of college help. Money too. Immigrants are a practical lot. Immigrant teens are even better than their American-born buds at maneuvering inside the space left by exhausted, distracted, or absent adults.

I remember how our mom scolded me about how blessed we are, recipients of 75 generations of muscular and elegant Javan civilization. She insisted, if Japanese and Chinese and Koreans are



"Asians," then we certainly *are not*. We had no such notion (Asian) back home, back then.

Dump the check box

It's likely that otherwise competent policymakers in President Nixon's Census Bureau just didn't know that there are not a lot of shared attributes among Hmong and Magar, among Malay and Mongolian, among many-many communities sharing our vast Eurasian continent and her big broken-off tectonic pieces. Except maybe loving rice and bok choy. In fact, just our mom's world, our sweaty 3,000-mile Indonesian archipelago, has always been an unmanageable mélange of about 700 resilient ethnicities, none of them "Asian."

"Oh aduh'illaah" (OMG) our mom finally-finally finished. "If Opa see you do dis," waving my awful U of O Affirmative Action form, and stabbing my duplicitous heart. She walked away mad and sad.

Fast-forward 40 years. Though less cringy language like "Under-privileged" and "Under-served" have superseded the one that so rattled our mom, America's institutionalized ruts still rule. Today, for example, six proudly distinct ethno-cultural local communities, given asylum here during the Soviet Union's disintegration, are not happy about having to self-identify as "White" Portlanders. They're outside the mainstream. Way out there.

What's troubling about America, our otherwise kind and creative new country, is our mainstream's systemic impatience with beautiful cultural complexity in favor of institutional commitment to "Race."

Here's another: Recent immigrant and refugee families — urban professionals from Mother Africa's rich west coast; migratory herders from her arid eastside; resourceful subsistence farmers from her humid, thick middle — cannot settle themselves into the "Black or African American" check box. Arab- and Persian- and Punjabi-Portlanders would really rather not be White or Black or Other or 2+. Really not.

As applied to any of River City's ridiculously optimistic ethnic streams, Race and those damning attributes that word assigns to those thus described, are terms out of touch. No stubborn elder, no tired parent, no eager teenager, from Dove Bar chocolate to Baby Grand ivory, around our east Portland Sunday dinner table wants to be a "Minority" or "Under-privileged." Really. It's not working for New Americans. And unless our policy leaders are committed to sealing a self-fulfilling prophecy by linking this language to robust New Americans, it's not working for settled Americans either. It will never work.

If kind government proposed dumping the Race box next week, surely each of us would happily contribute a hundred hours to rethinking and restructuring all that negativity, to better inventorying our newcomers' enormous assets. Because you know, just as living rivers *will* outlast Army Corps of Engineers' dams, American dreamers *will* work around those check boxes.

But you must also know, that between now and then, we worry a lot about the excruciating costs in treasury and in misery, we'll pay for the awful distortions in our cultures, and for the consequent bitterness between us. Between us all.

Wildlife groups say 41 tigers have died in India this year

Continued from page 5

Coupled with the decline in deer, wild boar, and other smaller animals that tigers prey on, the loss of buffer areas outside tiger reserves is increasingly driving the cats to move outside their established territory into human settlements, Niraj said.

A century ago an estimated 100,000 tigers roamed India's forests. Their numbers declined steadily until the 1970s, when India banned tiger hunting and embarked on a program to create special reserves and protected areas in national parks and wildlife sanctuaries. Conservation efforts began to pay off around 2010, when tiger numbers began to slowly rise.

India faces intense international

scrutiny over its tiger conservation efforts as it has nearly three-fourths of the world's estimated 3,200 tigers.

The illegal trade in tiger skin and body parts still remains a stubborn and serious threat.

Tiger organs and bones fetch high prices on the black market because of demand driven by traditional Chinese medicine practitioners.

India is also roping in celebrities to promote its tiger conservation program. In mid-August, the western state of Maharashtra announced that it was appointing Bollywood superstar Amitabh Bachchan as the state's tiger ambassador to create awareness about its efforts to save the animals.

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		2		6			
6	4			2			3
	8		1				5
2			3			5	9
	6		9		4	3	
1	9			5			7
9				7		4	
8				1		2	6
			6		3		

Difficulty level: Easy #26642

Instructions: Fill in the grid so that the digits 1 through 9 appear one time each in every row, column, and 3x3 box.

Solution to last week's puzzle

Puzzle #25787 (Hard)
All solutions available at www.sudoku.com.

3	1	9	6	2	8	5	7	4
5	2	6	1	7	4	9	8	3
7	8	4	9	3	5	2	1	6
1	9	7	8	4	6	3	5	2
4	3	8	5	9	2	7	6	1
2	6	5	3	1	7	4	9	8
6	5	3	4	8	9	1	2	7
8	4	2	7	5	1	6	3	9
9	7	1	2	6	3	8	4	5

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