Constructing a White Nation: Social Work in the Americanization Movement – Yoosun Park, MSW, PhD
Episode 63
www.dointhework.com

Shimon Cohen:

Welcome to Doin' The Work: Frontline Stories of Social Change, where we bring you stories of real people working to address real issues. I am your host, Shimon Cohen.

In this episode, I talk with Dr. Yoosun Park, who is an Associate Professor in the School of Social Policy & Practice at the University of Pennsylvania. We talk about her article, co-authored with Michael Reisch, entitled: *To "Elevate, Humanize, Christianize, Americanize": Social Work, White Supremacy, and the Americanization Movement, 1880–1930*, in the October 2022 issue of Social Service Review. I cannot say enough about the level of research and analysis in this article. We are very fortunate because the article is going to become a book. Dr. Park explains the key points of the article: how social work was a major part of the Americanization movement, which was a national project rooted in whiteness, aimed at defining what it means to be an American and who gets to be an American, along with the full rights of American citizenship and the ability to enact those rights. Dr. Park breaks down how the Americanization movement, which included many White social reformers and social work leaders, viewed European immigrants as Americanizable, or White, whereas Indigenous Peoples and Africans, along with Asian and Mexican immigrants – and even this wording is problematic because the U.S. took parts of Mexico – were seen as un-Americanizable and the Other. We discuss how many of these same white supremacist beliefs, policies, and practices show up in social work today. I hope this conversation inspires you to action.

Before we get into the interview, I want to let you all know about our episode's sponsor, the University of Houston Graduate College of Social Work. First off, I want to thank them for sponsoring the podcast. UH has a phenomenal social work program that offers face-to-face master's and doctorate degrees as well as an online and hybrid MSW. They offer one of the country's only political social work programs and an abolitionist focused learning opportunity. Located in the heart of Houston, the program is guided by their bold vision to achieve racial, social, economic, and political justice, local to global. In the classroom and through research, they are committed to challenging systems and reimagining ways to achieve justice and liberation. Go to www.uh.edu/socialwork to learn more. And now, the interview.

Hi, Dr. Park. Thank you so much for taking the time to come on Doin' The Work. I'm really excited to have you here and talk about this incredible article that you and Michael Reisch published in the December, 2020 issue of the Social Service Review To "Elevate, Humanize, Christianize, Americanize": Social Work, White Supremacy, and the Americanization Movement, 1880-1930.

Dr. Yoosun Park:

Thank you so much for inviting me. I'm super excited to talk about this book. Although as I said to you before, I think that it's such a complicated topic that it's difficult to talk about.

Shimon Cohen:

Absolutely. And I think one of the great things about podcasts is ideally they can make complicated topics initially more accessible, right? That people can kind of get into it, and then ideally it encourages them to read the article and then to read the book that this will become, which is super exciting. I also want to acknowledge and congratulate you on the Frank R. Breul Memorial Prize, which is awarded to the best published in Social Service Review for that preceding year, and that they acknowledged the groundbreaking nature of this topic and the breadth and depth of your research and analysis.

Dr. Yoosun Park:

Thank you so much. Yeah, we were really happy to hear it because hopefully it'll help people find their way to the article because I think it is an important topic.

Shimon Cohen:

Definitely. And for me reading it, I just kept thinking, wow, this must have been incredible. I don't know how long you must have spent doing all of this research. I guess that would be the first question before we really get into the content is, how long did it take to even get this article out?

Dr. Yoosun Park:

It's hard to talk about it in those ways because I first came across the idea, I conceived the idea when I was doing my dissertation so a very long time ago. I came across a couple of articles that mentioned the term Americanization, and always had it in the back of my mind that I would come back to it and to really think about what does this word mean? Because it's kind of a disturbing word, right? And as I have progressed in my career, I've really realized that it's not anywhere. The explanation of what this means isn't anywhere in our own disciplinary history, and uncovering things that we've sort of covered up in our history is something sort of what I do in my career. So went back to it. So how long has it taken me? It's I mean a long time really to get to it, and thankfully Michael agreed to do this actual project with me because it is a lot of work.

Anyway, I began it sort of thinking with the idea that it was going to be this time-limited phenomenon because what I understood was that this was a movement. So a movement that had a beginning and an end really, but then ended up really understanding that it really was an endeavor that is ongoing because what Americanization was trying to do was to really settle what it means to be American, and then what does it mean to be America. So it ended up being a much more vast project than I ever imagined, but that is I think the way any historical research goes. There's so much you have to find out and know, and hardly any of that actually shows up on the page.

Shimon Cohen:

Yeah, it's really phenomenal. And I knew nothing about the Americanization movement. I had never heard of it. I've now talked to colleagues, friends about it, they haven't heard of it either and these are all people who at least have graduate level degrees in social work or related disciplines. So this is really important, which is as soon as I saw it I wanted to get you on here. So let's start with the quote that the title comes from, "To elevate, humanize, Christianize, Americanize, these elements of the population." What was the Americanization movement and what elements of the population was Reverend Frederick Howard Wines talking about in this quote?

Dr. Yoosun Park:

I mean when you write anything you want to put a sexy title on it and it was kind of a sexy quote so it is a quote from the National Conference of Charities and Correction, which was the precursor of what became the National Conference of Social Work. So it was the main conference for the profession of social work. And let me talk a little bit just about Frederick Wines because he's such a good example of the kinds of people who were involved in social work at the time. He was born into a prominent family, philanthropist family in Philadelphia. He became a Christian minister, studied at Princeton Theological Seminary. His father was a philanthropist and a college professor I think. So he was a chaplain during civil war, and he became the administrator to Illinois State Board of Public Charities in 1869 and was a

statistician. And had a really important or influential report on, this is a quote, "Defective dependent and delinquent classes of the population of the United States."

And the reason I say that he's sort of a good example, he was also the secretary for the National Prison Association for over a decade and he helped to establish that conference, the National Conference of Charities and Correction. And he did a lot of good work, and was really a prominent member of social work as it was developing. And I just want to pause and say we really need to note that the National Conference of Social Work started as National Conference of Charities and Correction. So carcerality was there from the very beginning and I think he's just a really good example because he was also a thorough racist like so many others. And the element that he's talking about here is African Americans, so this particular conference was in Nashville, Tennessee. And so he's talking about, there's a quote from him if I can read. He says, "The great difficulty with which we have to contend in the North," where he's from, "is the presence of the foreign element," meaning immigrants.

"The great difficulty in the South is the presence of the Negro element. We have to elevate, humanize, Christianize, Americanize, these elements of the population," is the rest of the quote. So what does it mean to Americanize? I think the historian Maria Lauret describes it best in many ways that it was a way of inculcating in everyone, immigrants and people who were born here, the rights and privileges and duties of American citizenship. I mean, that's one way to say it, but it was a way to actually really define the Other, and define, in my read, who the we are in America, in American. So it was a nation building project in the sense that it was a project to really define what the nation is and where the nation was going. And who the citizens of that nation should be, should act like, look like, and so on and so forth.

So Lauret describes Americanization as a deliberate and wide-ranging project in social engineering. And the progressives were really famous for their love of social engineering, so trying to fix society in particular ways. And it's a project that actually, as she says, Lauret says, "To develop the hegemonic discourse of American nationhood." So what does it mean to be American and how to inculcate absolutely everyone in the country in that notion. And as you can imagine, people disagreed. People who were very much involved in Americanization, including different social workers, disagreed on what that meant, how you should get there. And yeah, let me stop there.

Shimon Cohen:

I think what is really clear in the article and his quote and the other things you're saying about him just come across very clearly as like you said the racism and also the classism that is inherent from the beginning in terms of defining who is an American and who isn't, right? So one of the things that you write about is who gets to become American and who is excluded and deemed un-Americanizable? I was hoping you could talk a little bit about that.

Dr. Yoosun Park:

Sure. So in our analysis, I mean Michael and I talked over this a lot that we sort of categorize this idea of who is American and who is not American. Ultimately, as I say in the article it can be explained by Anglo-Saxonism and Nordicism. So it's about white supremacy. So America as a nation that was begun by White people and should remain so. And this notion of the Anglo-Saxon lineage, which then turns into this larger term called Nordic around this time actually because there's lots of immigrants that are coming in from Eastern Europe. And that Nordic term incorporates and enlarges the Anglo-Saxon term to include things like people like the Irish, Northern Italians and the Scandinavians who were in a previous era considered not Anglo-Saxon enough and considered really problematic. So there's that. And the way I think it makes sense to really talk about this population of who is Americanized and who is

not Americanized is broadly to think about in most scholarship on Americanization, it's only immigrants, recent immigrants, the new immigrants that are talked about.

But it's obviously bigger than that. The word Americanization was used to cover and to really talk about "civilizing" both Indigenous Americans and African Americans. And the way that the literature reads to me from the period is that here are these two people, two groups of people, Indigenous and African Americans who are here and we have to deal with them somehow. If we did it again, we probably wouldn't want them and they obviously don't fit into this paradigm of the Anglo-Saxon or Nordic American who really is the true American. But they're here and they're in large enough numbers that we have to deal with them. The Mexicans who are coming in as laborers a lot, and let's not forget the whole war with Mexico and the fact that most of the Southwest we took as war booty at the end of the war with Mexico under the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo. So to talk about Mexicans as immigrants is complicated, and there's also the notion we have to deal with the Mexicans as Indigenous populations of those regions.

But Mexicans insofar as immigration goes at this period are considered really dispensable. So we can bring them in, we can use them, and we can throw them out if we want. And the Asians beginning with the 1882 Chinese Exclusion Act are considered people that we could easily exclude and should. And not to say that there weren't scattered Americanization efforts by organizations with either of these populations, but I think that's how it goes. White people are Americans, and then there's these problem populations that are here, so we have to do something with. And then there are these other two populations, Mexicans and Asians, mostly Chinese at this point, that we don't want and we can get rid of. So we don't really need to spend a whole lot of time either talking about them or trying to Americanize them.

Shimon Cohen:

It's just mind-boggling, and this is where rationality just has nothing to do with this stuff because the Americans chose to be here, they came here, right? They weren't here originally so to say, well, we've got this problem with these Indigenous people, we've got these problems with Africans, it's like, but you all enslaved those Africans and you wouldn't even have an economy if it wasn't for that labor, that unpaid labor. So there's like this total, maybe it seems like a disconnect, but really it's not because it's still just all about control and white supremacy.

Dr. Yoosun Park:

Yeah. I mean, to get at this, to think about what kinds of sciences and what kinds of logics and what kinds of illogic were really deployed to make sense of all this is so complicated, but you can see this how it plays out in the present too, right? But Wines and other people who were really prominent at the time sincerely believed, and they could be both... So Franklin Sanborn for instance, he was one of the founders of NCCC, the National Conference of Charities and Correction, and really a prominent person in the developing field of social work at this time. He was an abolitionist, he was one of the people who funded the raid on Harpers Ferry, right. John Brown. So he's one of the Secret Six.

But at the same time, he was so profoundly racist and had this really deeply held belief that he didn't have any trouble articulating that as bad as slavery might have been, it also had an effect of really elevating African Americans and allowing them to civilize at a speed that they would not have been able to do if they had been left in Africa because of their forced proximity to White people. So the conference materials and other writings at a time by people who are involved in social work just replete with this kind of contradiction. And I think it's really something that we should think about now. Where are the contradictions that we're not really seeing? And this idea that somehow somebody who does good work

can't be racist or a racist can't be doing the kinds of work that we would actually say, yeah, we kind of like that kind of thing.

So the complexity of political affiliations, but also the really embedded, deeply, deeply sedimented fact of institutionalized racism and white supremacy that we don't see, if we think about people and interventions and ideas in really these sort of dichotomous stark ways I think.

Shimon Cohen:

Yeah, that section on Franklin Sanborn totally jumped out at me. It was like, wow, this guy helped fund John Brown and he's so racist. And one of the things that I think is so powerful about this article, and I'm sure the book will have even more of it, is that you went and you got the direct evidence, you got the direct quotes, right? This isn't a summary, this isn't like your own opinion of what happened. Of course, your analysis is there, but these people said these things, these people did these things, and to bring it up to the present day, some of this is still said, of course within social work we see it, but a lot of it is a more covert now. In terms of just even the concept of cultural competence and diversity and the Othering that's involved and still centering whiteness, and then everything else is Other and there's something wrong with the Other that we got to teach the White people how to–right? So that thread I just see it straight through as I'm reading this.

Dr. Yoosun Park:

Yeah, thank you for saying that because that's exactly where the project began. With the suspicion that we moved from Americanization and went to other language like assimilation, acculturation, and I think the language now is really integration. But that to me, and Michael would agree, that we haven't moved fundamentally because it's always unidirectional. We're expecting the Other to move into and become integrated into whatever America is, whatever our society is, and this notion of who is our, who is we, always remained unsaid and undefined. But if you look, it doesn't take very long to figure out that unsaid mainstream, that unsaid center, is whiteness. And like you said earlier on, it's about middle-class whiteness, performing middle-class whiteness.

So one of the interesting things to think about I think is that, is that a thing? Does that actually exist or is this sort of this imagined center that we're constantly asking people to move towards? And it's not just immigrants, it's anybody. If you think about any intervention, any kind of an idea in social work, how do you define the good, right? And anytime you do any intervention or you are looking at anything you are trying to get people to be better, healthier, less risky, less whatever. And I really would argue that that thing that we're trying to move people into, that we don't examine, is whiteness. And that leaving that unexamined means that we're complicit in the process and we're complicit in that project of white supremacy.

Shimon Cohen:

Absolutely. So when you talked about social engineering, that really I think helps clarify a lot. And I haven't heard that a lot in my social work education, and it needs to be. Maybe others are using it a lot and it's just not the education I got or what I've been around even as faculty for a number of years, but it is a social engineering of whiteness. And it's like you said, and it makes me think of these parenting classes, and I've done episodes on the family policing system, and you made that connection to carcerality from the jump, from the very roots of social work. And the idea that, well, this person who's in poverty and that gets called neglect, right? And then now they have to go to these parenting classes and who created those parenting classes and who sets the standard of what good parenting is? This is just one of many examples of course.

Dr. Yoosun Park:

Yeah, that's exactly right. And if you think about some of the Americanization projects at the time, that's exactly what they're doing it. The settlement houses have classes on parenting for women, right? So what does a healthy family look like? What does a good family look like? And it is our argument in this article and in the book overall that is predicated on middle-class whiteness. And that even people like Jane Addams and the more progressive, the more liberal of the progressives in settlement houses could not somehow remove themselves from their own positions and their own training, their own socialization, thinking that this is better than this other thing. I mean, some of it's funny because you have White American social workers trying to teach new Southern Italian women how to cook because their food isn't healthy, but the family and women and children become really central to this process, right.

Because you got to get them early and to develop proper citizens with healthy bodies and healthy minds, you have to start in the family, and who's responsible for that? The women. So there's a lot of gendered ideas here. And it's also the same time this is the time when the kindergarten movement was happening, and compulsory public education is happening. And so there's a lot of different discourses, a lot of different forces, a lot of different sciences coming together to make all this work. And whether it's immigrants or whether it's children thinking about how do you define what that ideal is? And to repeat myself, I mean, to not examine what that ideal, where are we going, where is it that it's going, means that we're really not examining the the political ramifications, the structural, deeply embedded structures that force us to really operate in these ways.

Shimon Cohen:

Absolutely. So you started to get into it a little bit, and I want to go more into how some of these Americanization programs actually operated. And I know they were different for different groups of people as Wines said, "the different elements," as he said, of the population.

Dr. Yoosun Park:

Yeah. So one thing I guess to say is that it was a movement, and it was a movement that went on for a few decades, but it was a massive movement. There were Americanization programs started by and run by states, municipalities, cities. It involved public, voluntary, private sectors, the industry, as well as religious organizations. I mean, everyone was involved in this thing. Something like 30 plus states enacted legislation to promote Americanization. Cities created and funded bureaus to study methods of Americanization and how to best deliver it. American industrial bodies got super involved. The Ford Motor Company was huge in it, American Steel and other industries. And the compulsory English classes was one big thing. So there was a lot of education involved, so whether it was at nighttime or during the school day, English language classes and civics classes, and how to be a citizen and how to practice democracy, what that means.

I think something like more than 3,000 school boards are involved in this. And of course, settlement houses and charity organization societies and every aspect of social work was doing this. And I've argued before and continue to do so in this paper, and we will, Michael and I will in the book, that in some ways, in every way I think, every piece of work that we did as social workers was Americanization work, whether you call that or not. Because every piece of work is geared towards developing a particular type of human being to function in a particular type of society, and that has theoretical drivers, right? So this is what that person should look like. This is what an ideal child should look, because then if you provide that ideal childhood then you can have that kind of a citizen. But in order to have that idea, then you

have to know what kind of a citizenry are we looking for? So I hope that makes sense. So yeah, mandatory schooling, all kinds of things.

I mean, in some ways maybe the the Ford Motor Companies project was a really good example because what they did was they held compulsory English classes on the factory floor because they had people from all over the world working, and one argument was that this was going to make things more efficient if everyone spoke English. Although I think there was really seriously a patriotic assimilative and moral component to the fact that people should speak English. Then there was a whole division that Ford developed called the Sociological Division where people were sent out to homes to surveil. So somebody might show up at your house all of a sudden unannounced and ask you, to see, do you have a savings account? Are your kids in school? What kind of furniture do you have? Is there alcohol laying around? Sobriety and morality. Do you have lodgers?

Because you don't want to have lodgers that are unrelated to you living there if you have a daughter living there, this kind of idea. So there's a whole lot of surveillance, and it got tied to how much money they got paid a salary. So if you could pass all these things you earned a higher salary than if you couldn't pass these things.

Shimon Cohen:

Wow.

Dr. Yoosun Park:

So this sort of compulsory Americanization is usually talked about as 100% Americanism on one end, and then on the other end of the spectrum are people who really thought, no, we need to have a kinder, gentler Americanization program. This is not how you get people to love America and become American. More of the acculturative angle of pluralistic ideas that you get to have your food and particular types of cultural habits and practices and that we need to invite you in rather than, and then force us upon you. So there's a large spectrum of people and large spectrum of types of activities.

Shimon Cohen:

And these are more for the immigrant groups that were deemed able to become White more so, correct?

Dr. Yoosun Park:

Yeah, that's an interesting question. So I'm going to bring us back to the 1790 Naturalization Act. So 1790 Naturalization Act, and there were multiple amendments after that, but one of the main components of that which said, "Only free Whites could become naturalized citizens of the U.S.," held until 1952 in many ways. So the European, the Southern and Eastern European immigrants who were coming in large numbers at this time compared to the Northern and Western Europeans from England and other places, were talked about as the new immigrants and the inferior immigrants. But they were always White because their naturalization was never held up by this 1790 Naturalization Act, which said only free Whites could become U.S. citizens. And this component, this notion of what whiteness was, was really contested in the courts, in the Supreme Court multiple times around this time, and where it really came down was that Asians were not White.

1860 Naturalization Act that was post Civil War stated that people of African and African descent could become naturalized, so that was not an issue, not that you had very many African immigrants coming in at the time. But even the Russian Jewry fleeing pogroms, the Sicilians who were really hated as oversexed and really problematic populations, people from Dalmatia, people from the Carpathian

Mountains. I mean, all these Europeans that you think of from Eastern Europeans who were really vilified in many ways were still White. Did I go off on a tangent there?

Shimon Cohen:

No, that was really good. And so based on my understanding from the article is that these groups could receive these... Well, not could, did receive these Americanization programs, right? Because it was like, we're going to do this to you and it will help you. But then Mexicans, Asians, Indigenous people, Black people, what happened with them was different.

Dr. Yoosun Park:

I see what you mean. Yes. I think how we conceived Americanization was very different yeah. And I mean, we don't have enough really time to go over the Indigenous American population because that was a series of genocidal laws that took not only the land away, but it was systematically trying to undo the particular ways of life. Because that was one of the ways in which Americanization was thought about for that particular population that we have to get them out of this notion of communal property, let's say. Or we need to actually inculcate this notion of individual ownership, and so that looked very different than how it functioned for White European immigrants. And for the most part, Asians were simply blocked. 1882 to 1924, there was a series of laws that are passed to really block them from coming in entirely.

So you didn't really have to do a whole lot of Americanization because they were considered really un-Americanizable. The term "race suicide", it was coined by Edward Ross who's a sociologist, a really prominent sociologist who's considered the father of American sociology. He talked about a lot about how the Oriental workman was going to be the cause of race suicide because the White man could not compete because the Oriental workers were able to and willing to live on so little because their lack of standards. So allowing them to come into the country was heading towards race suicide.

Shimon Cohen:

Wow.

Dr. Yoosun Park:

African-Americans, I mean, Americanization was talked about because really one of the big need for this, people like Sanborn talked about a lot was that wait, all of a sudden the Civil War happens and these people who were enslaved now have the franchise, they can vote. This is a big deal, so that's one thing. And then the other thing is that huge numbers are moving up north in the Great Northern Migration. So then there's a lot of writing about, okay, so they're coming from the South and they don't know how to do anything, how do we Americanize them into society? For the White Europeans, one of the things I think that was really important to inculcate was their recognition and buy-in into this racial, cultural hierarchy. To learn that they were White and what that whiteness looked like and how they had to perform it in this country and to be then slot themselves into a hierarchy. Does that make sense?

Shimon Cohen:

Yeah.

Dr. Yoosun Park:

Because that wasn't really obvious in many ways, right? So part of that was to really accept and then participate into the differential wage system, the segregation, and learning really to know that I'm better than those other populations, and thus I deserve more. And so how to quickly inculcate them into this white supremacist ideology I think was part of their training in Americanization.

Shimon Cohen:

Yeah, it makes perfect sense to me. I mean, there's a reason in my own family that we don't speak Yiddish anymore, and I see it as directly connected to assimilation and being able to, right? So someone has to be able to assimilate which is the whiteness part of it, and then what is given up culturally, ethnically, to do so, and what it then means, is something I think about often.

Dr. Yoosun Park:

Yeah. I mean I think one way to think about culture as a necessity because if you could become part of American, then that sort of hyphenated Americanness didn't need to exist. I mean, people like Roosevelt and the 100% Americanism people really railed against this idea that there would be hyphenated Americans. You had to give all that up in order to be considered American. So that was something that was argued publicly and taught publicly. So you had to give up this notion of language, whatever language you came from, and notions of how to dress, how to talk, where to live, what kind of furniture to buy like I was saying were things that social workers were actually teaching. There's a poster that I found in doing this research, and it's a Ku Klux Klan recruitment poster from the 1920s and it was from Baltimore. And obviously, this is a podcast and you can't see it, but let me just read to you.

"Membership in the Ku Klux Klan is systematically against and regularly opposed to any and everything contrary to pure Americanism. It works within the law legally and morally and welcomes honest criticism. It is an active protestant organization with strong backing, insisting upon the unhampered maintenance of all American institutions, and continues to advance and will go ahead not withstanding all opposition from any quarters whatsoever because of its determination for right and its belief in pure Americanism." So I think we think about Ku Klux Klan as having a very limited presence in the South or something like this, but that isn't the case and they were very much involved in this notion of what is an American. And if you look at the so-called culture wars today you can see the connection immediately. What does it mean to be American? Who is American? How do you have to behave? What is it? So yeah, I mean, that thread, which some historians argue was developed then, and we continue today.

So even though it was a limited timeframe of as far as a national movement and those bureaus of Americanization do not exist anymore, that these ideas are still settled and operating within our systems. And George W. Bush created through an executive order I think, what is it called? It was Bureau of Americanization or New Americans, and they put out a document and part of it is how do you create Americanization for the 21st century.

Shimon Cohen:

Wow.

Dr. Yoosun Park:

So this is not a thing that went away, we just don't talk about it in the particular ways that they did. Which you said now it's far more subtle and it's sub rosa, but the ideas are I think still very much present.

Shimon Cohen:

Yeah subtle in some aspects of social work, but for example, when you were making the connection to the culture wars today, and as you were talking earlier I was writing some notes down and I wrote down anti-CRT, anti-DEI, anti-diversity. 'Cause I'm in Florida, but people can look at Florida and be like, "Wow, it's so extreme." And it is is, and it's getting worse, but this is happening everywhere and this is the test case. This is all the anti-Disney, Disney being woke. These targeted campaigns, there was a campaign that started clearly last night where all these people who have been a part of the anti-CRT movement, the anti-trans, using certain terms and issues to generate more political power, but then get these things passed. All these posts started going up on social media about this clip from a Disney series where they're talking about the history that this country was built on slavery.

And it's a cartoon and they're talking about it and they're all posting this is the woke, we need to get rid of this, and it's the same type of thing because this is the history that isn't taught. Everything in your article, when I read it, and I'm talking about social work, but then social work's only a smaller example of the broader society.

Dr. Yoosun Park:

Yes.

Shimon Cohen:

And by not teaching this history, like you said, we're continuing to avoid the conversation. And I think I'm just going to say it because this is what I think, and I'm going to say it, it's my podcast and let me know what you think. But I think Franklin Sanborn, Frederick Howard Wines, maybe they sound extreme, people listening could be like that's extreme, but if you really go deep into some of the people who are teaching social work, administrators running social work, the belief in the superiority of Americanism and White people is still there. They will never come out and say it, but it is there through the programs they do, through their actions.

Dr. Yoosun Park:

Yeah. And I guess what I would say to that is that beyond the beliefs and behaviors of individuals, really encourage us as social workers to look at the structures. What does our education look like? What are we studying? What's considered a good? So what are we teaching people? Like you had brought up earlier, what do we imagine as the family? What kind of behaviors? And without looking at those fundamental structures, I think we miss a big deal here. And just to say, I actually started looking into, because of this project, the eugenics ties to social work are really just unbelievable.

And so in this project, I keep unearthing all these individuals who are some of the founders of social work in many ways, who were part of the eugenics movement that I've never seen anywhere. And so a couple things come up for me, which is how do we not know this? And it's because we don't study any of this, but I brought up the 1790 Naturalization Act before, how many American students actually learn about that? That we actually had a legislation that said the citizenry of our nation could only be White, right.

Shimon Cohen:

Right.

Dr. Yoosun Park:

That's not white privilege in a amorphous way that you have some psychological privilege. No, that means you cannot come into the country. And there were all kinds of attendant losses that you couldn't own land, you couldn't even rent land for more than a period of time, let's say. So these are concrete structures that got in the way of people being able to live and participate fully in our society, or even really step foot here for one thing. By the way, it was called Task Force on New Americans that George W. Bush put together, and I just saw mention on the internet that Biden has just reauthorized this Task Force on New Americans. So I'm not sure what the content of that will be, but you can imagine that it has a lot to do with unity and civic duty and how you perform democracy. And so these are politicized terms and back to you talking about Florida, the example that I give which really spoke to me in this article was the story of Enid, Oklahoma.

It was a New York Times article, which was talking about the small town, small place at the edge of the Prairie Lands in Oklahoma. And it spoke to me especially because Oklahoma was the last of the, it was called Indian Territory, the very last part of that which was then of course taken away in order to make the State of Oklahoma. But this New York Times article was about the pandemic and mask wearing and that city's efforts to make people wear masks turned into this huge thing. It became a cultural war where different organizations were started and people really felt like this was, were fighting about... The article says that they were fighting about masks, but really what they're fighting about was who's American, and what does it mean to be American? And in it are expressed these ideas that there's a great demographic shift had happened in Enid, meaning the influx of Asians and Hispanics is what it says, changing the nature and the character of the place, right?

And the article of course, fails to point out that this used to be Indian Territory and before Indian Territory, it was unincorporated territory of any kind, so that this was not the first time a great demographic shift had happened. But what that article really does is to talk about the White people in that town or city feeling discomfort that their idea of what America was was being challenged by this influx of new people. And I read the article several times and ultimately came away with this realization that there is this really common sense belief that anywhere in the U.S. if you have all these immigrants coming in, non-White people come in, then it's, of course people are going to feel like their way of life is being changed, right? And then I think, but why? It's not an obvious thing. It only is obvious that Americanness is being threatened only becomes obvious if you actually really hold onto this notion that without stating it, that American means White, and a particular thing.

So I think it's a topic that is really, really, really alive and well right now. And Florida, CRT, all those things are the current aspects of it, but during the Trump era all the immigration laws and all kinds of laws that he threw up were straight out of the playbook of the 1920s. Do you remember him saying something about we don't want any more immigrants coming from these shithole countries, and what we want are more Norwegians? That is Nordicism right there. So these ideas have not gone away, nor have they gone dormant. I think that there's a renewed permission to say it out loud in a sense since the Trump administration I think, but not ever gone away.

Shimon Cohen:

Something that I think about in terms of social work practice or clinical practice and just how we go about a lot of things, and critical race theory's really helped me, especially this article by Dr. Tara Yosso on Whose Culture Has Capital. Just around this concept of deficit thinking and that there's something wrong with someone. And then talking to you and reading this, it's yes, this is what goes all the way back to the beginning because the problem is you're not White enough, or you're not White, right? That was the standard, and then all these other things become the problem. And like you're saying, we don't say

it necessarily now, but we still look for the problem and then some deficit within a person rather than what are these social conditions, and how they're affecting people's lives? But I don't know, at least for me, I draw the line from present-day deficit thinking back to how these other groups were considered problems.

Dr. Yoosun Park:

Yeah. I mean, no, absolutely. I actually have an article, it was one of the first articles I ever wrote when I was in the doctoral program called Culture As Deficit.

Shimon Cohen:

Oh, wow.

Dr. Yoosun Park:

I'll send it to you, it's discourse analysis of the concept of culture in social work. And in it what I say as an analysis is that the word culture doesn't get applied to people unless you're some minoritized position. And that it usually, it's a proxy for race and culture and ethnicity and other things and definitely class, but that what it measures really is the distance from the unarticulated center, which is whiteness. 'Cause I mean, how many trainings have I been in where some White person from the Midwest says, well, I don't really have culture because I'm not an ethnic, I'm not a hyphenated person? I mean, really think about that. And the way I explain it to my students in class is that if you've ever gone down the aisles of a grocery store, and you have that section, and usually, now it's international, but there used to be sections that said Mexican, or the Oriental section. You have to think about what the rest of the grocery store is, the rest of the grocery store is just food.

Shimon Cohen:

Right. Right.

Dr. Yoosun Park:

So what gets to be food and what needs to be hyphenated as this weird food, right? I mean, it's really a simple explanation of how we understand that Otherness in the society and around culture. But culture I think as I say, is really often a proxy for those raced and classed positions. So yeah, I'll stop there, but what have we not talked about now?

Shimon Cohen:

We've covered a lot, but one thing I just want to us to be really explicit about too is just the anti-Blackness in all of this, 'cause obviously if White ends up being the standard, then White can only exist as the anti-Black.

Dr. Yoosun Park:

Yes, anti-Blackness is something that is present in all of this. African-Americans as the conceptual nadir of race thinking. And one good example, I think that all other groups really bought into in many ways, all of us, right? And a good example of this to me is that the Supreme Court cases and court cases that were happening around the turn of the century into the '20s around especially Asians trying to become... But it wasn't just Asians actually, it was the Syrians and Armenians and other populations arguing that they should be part of this whiteness to be able to be naturalized. I've looked, and there's

two ways to actually gain the right to naturalization. One was to claim whiteness. So there were all these cases where people said, well, no, I should be part of that whiteness because whiteness can be interpreted in this way. So it means that I'm assimilated or it means that I'm from a region originally. There's a Bhagat Singh Thind case where Mr. Thind's argument was that he was an Indo-Aryan, he spoke an Indo-Aryan language and the high caste people from India originally came from the region of Mount Caucasus, so they're original Aryan, but put me into this whiteness.

The famous Japanese-American case was Mr. Ozawa said that he didn't speak Japanese, didn't eat Japanese food so we're really White because what White means is assimilatable. Both were denied, but the really interesting thing to me is that they didn't argue for the absolute ludicrousness of the set of policies that said whiteness was a reasonable measure. But that's understandable, they needed citizenship. Citizenship was a matter of life and death for many people so it was an exigency so you argue for it however you can. But the interesting thing is that there was another way to become naturalized, which was to argue for Blackness. Because remember the 1860 law that said Africans and people of African descent could become naturalized as well. Nobody went there because that didn't actually bring you to a citizenship that was either desirable or worth anything. Does that make sense?

Shimon Cohen:

Yeah.

Dr. Yoosun Park:

So anti-Blackness is at the heart of so much of this. And also I think the efforts to completely destroy the ontological, the epistemological framework of Indigenous American life was something that we don't really talk about much in social work. I think both are very important. Not only because I'm Asian, but also because I think it is important. I think we also forget that so many laws that are currently existing around immigrant surveillance were created to block Asian bodies from coming into this country. So to miss that history also is to really have an incomplete understanding of the history of racism in this country. Because to not get the nuanced histories of different populations is to constantly only see this as a dichotomy there's White people and there's non-White people, which then once again centers whiteness I think. I hope that makes sense.

Shimon Cohen:

Yeah. And I know you have prior work on this around the internment of Japanese Americans, but that's another piece of U.S. history that often isn't taught. I mean, I never learned about it. I learned about it through personal relationships with people who had family members who lost everything and were forced into internment camps.

Dr. Yoosun Park:

So that history also was something I discovered when I was doing my dissertation, and I couldn't believe it because it was in no history book. It's beginning to appear in social work histories now since I wrote about it, but it wasn't anywhere. And I remember going to my professors and asking, "Do you know about this? How come we don't know about this? And it's not in any book that I'm looking up because nobody had written about it post 1946 in social work." And the only person who knew about it was my mentor, Tony Ishisaka, who had been born in a camp. Nobody else on my faculty had actually ever heard that this had existed, so it's interesting to think about what kinds of histories get erased.

Shimon Cohen:

Absolutely. And as you've shown in your prior work and in this work, social work's been a part of all of this. Not just not telling the history, but being involved in this oppression that's been done and is continuing to be done.

Dr. Yoosun Park:

Yeah. We need to take a lot more responsibility I think. I think we tend to hide behind this, oh, we don't have any power, which is I think a disingenuous argument, but also I think the history of social work is understudied I have to say. In that I think we don't realize how central the development of social work was to not just social work, but for any social sciences and any of the different movements and different endeavors that happened in the progressive era. I mean, I was joking about it to somebody the other day, but there's hardly anybody who had any liberal cred in the progressive era who didn't at some point live in a settlement house. I think we've undercut that history in multiple ways. A, by insisting that we were somehow kinder and gentler and purer than other people and nicer. And by not understanding our own influence in the history of this country, especially in the social sciences. So I think there's so much to be studied in this.

Shimon Cohen:

I've done some episodes on the history of the National Association of Black Social Workers. I was honored to interview one of the founders, that was just phenomenal. And the National Archivist as well and that was just so educational. And also an episode about the whitewashing of social work history, and it was very much focused on Black social workers. And for me, and I'm still trying to work through this in my own mind, and especially now reading your piece, is, is there one social work or are there many different kinds of social work that are all happening simultaneously and in tension with each other? Or something has become called social work, where in the past... For example the Black Panther Party, the Young Lords, these groups that believed in community self-determination and had all these social programs, people don't talk about them as social workers.

And I don't know if they would call themselves that way either, but there is a historical tradition in that that then led into present-day social work for the NABSW and that tradition as well. So I'm still trying to figure that out, I guess for myself, what it means, because people will say social work, but what they're talking about often is White social work.

Dr. Yoosun Park:

Yeah, I think so. I mean, I'm right with you in trying to figure all this out. I think I started this whole conversation by saying how complicated it is. And what I find is that the more I study it and more I'm researching something the more I realize that I don't know. So I have to go and study a whole 'nother pile of things, but I think there's hopefully some new scholars coming along with different... I mean, like that article on the whitewashing. They're young scholars that are coming up with different takes on things. I have a student, a doctoral student who's working on challenging this notion that social work excluded minority populations because enacting racist policies and interventions was actually... I'm going to explain it badly, but was determining the lives and structures of people of color especially. Does that make sense?

Shimon Cohen:

Yeah absolutely.

Dr. Yoosun Park:

A slightly different angle to look at the presence of racism and white supremacy in social work rather than saying, looking at absences, but how, the presences that we don't acknowledge.

Shimon Cohen:

100%. I just want to say that, so the two authors, the two scholars of that article on Stop Whitewashing Social Work History: Tell the Truth, Kelechi Wright and Kortney Carr, and I did an interview with them and that article was in the Advances and that's just a phenomenal... That was an incredible double issue that there's just so many great articles that are talking about a lot of this, but I've never seen anything about the Americanization movement period and then with social work. And I just think this groundbreaking work that you've done is phenomenal. When is the book, is there a timeline?

Dr. Yoosun Park:

That is a question that authors hate.

Shimon Cohen:

Sorry about that.

Dr. Yoosun Park:

It's actually supposed to be due sometime this summer, so hopefully that'll get done. I think Michael is going to pull his hair out when I say that. I keep finding new materials so I keep going down these different paths. So yeah, it's interesting to see all these things that I don't know about that. So writing history is like you see the tip of the iceberg, but you have to know what's underneath it in order to actually make sense of anything. So if you see this happened, how do you interpret that event? You have to know what else was going on during that time, so it ends up becoming this massive task of searching, searching, searching and doing more research to see what happened. And then that may or may not end up on the page. So all that to say hopefully this year.

Shimon Cohen:

So on the show notes and the podcast website, I'm going to link to this article so people can access it. And then when the book comes out, I'll go back and update and put the link to that so people can find it. So save the episode, people checking this out, listening, reading the transcript, so you can come back to this or stay informed with Dr. Park so you can see when the book comes out 'cause you are on social media that people can follow you and stay up-to-date on your stuff.

Dr. Yoosun Park:

Barely, but yes.

Shimon Cohen:

Well, hopefully when the book comes out you'll at least post about that. I know you keep a low profile. Is there anything you feel like we missed? I mean, I know there's always more we could get into with this.

Dr. Yoosun Park:

No. I mean, only to say that I think everything I've talked about really is the knowledge I have up to the present and that I'm always studying and learning a new thing. So yeah, that's all.

Shimon Cohen:

Well, thank you so much for coming on the podcast and for sharing your knowledge, your expertise and having this conversation. And thank you for doin the work.

Dr. Yoosun Park:

Thank you so much for inviting me. I really appreciated the ability to just have this in-depth conversation with you. It was fun.

Shimon Cohen:

Thank you for listening to Doin' The Work: Frontline Stories of Social Change. I hope you enjoyed the podcast. Please follow on Twitter and leave positive reviews on iTunes. If you're interested in being a guest or know someone who's doing great work, please get in touch. Thank you for doing real work to make this world a better place.