



## **After the Fact** | [Crisis & Change: Race and Diversity Today](#)

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### **TRANSCRIPT**

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**Dan LeDuc, host:** Over the past year, discussion of race and ethnicity has moved to the forefront of the American conversation—an important topic and, some would say, an uncomfortable one. I’m Dan LeDuc from The Pew Charitable Trusts.

**Eric Nee, editor-in-chief of *Stanford Social Innovation Review*:** And I’m Eric Nee from *Stanford Social Innovation Review*, back again for the second episode in our “Crisis & Change” series—where we turn to the issue of racial reckoning in America. Dan, to quote one of our guests on this episode, “I think it’s time all of us got comfortable being uncomfortable.”

**Dan LeDuc:** The pandemic has illustrated the shortcomings in our health care system for people of color, and violence and threats against Asian Americans.

**Eric Nee:** That’s true. The tragic murder of George Floyd back in 2020 sparked a wave of protests around the country and also a conversation around race which really should have been happening a long time ago. There is a lot to unpack on this issue—and a lot of work ahead in the social sector, and I think it’s great that we can shed more light on this topic.

**Dan LeDuc:** You’re right, Eric. So how do we move forward, and will this new national conversation on race and equality lead to substantive change? Those are the questions playing out now throughout society at a time when the Pew Research Center reports that three-fourths of Americans believe that racial and ethnic discrimination is a serious problem in the United States.

**Eric Nee:** So, in this episode, you’re really lucky, Dan, to have been able to speak with Crystal Hayling, the executive director at The Libra Foundation, and Sonal Shah, president of The Asian American Foundation. Both are incredible leaders at nonprofit institutions working at the intersection of racial equity and philanthropy, and, of course, passionate about creating a culture of inclusion.

**Dan LeDuc:** Here’s our conversation.



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**Dan LeDuc:** Let me begin by just saying that in the wake of George Floyd's death and the Black Lives Matter movement, it seems like our national conversation about race and ethnicity and diversity is changing. You two work in this field very closely. Is it, in fact, changing? Crystal, I'm going to let you go first.

**Crystal Hayling, executive director at The Libra Foundation:** I do believe that we are seeing a change happening in the country. I think people's minds are changing. I think people's minds are opening. What I think is really important is that we not think of this as being one moment of a racial reckoning, but recognize that this is a process. And it will take us years to actually unpack all the work that we need to do, and recognize the systemic racism where it is, and remodel and redesign our systems so that we can design that kind of racism out of them.

I think people are also waking up to the fact that racism is not just individual acts of hatred, but is actually systemic, and that that's what we're really trying to get at. Not that we don't want to stop individual acts, but that the real work that we can undertake as a nation is to address the much broader issues that have been ingrained.

**Dan LeDuc:** Sonal, your organization, The Asian American Foundation, is virtually brand new, in terms of you were formed in 2021. What was the leadership of your foundation seeing in society and saw as a need to step in and do something and how it all plays with what Crystal was saying?

**Sonal Shah, president of The Asian American Foundation:** I'm going to just start with a little bit of gratitude for that we can actually have this conversation. I'm not sure, a decade ago, we would have even been open to talking about systemic racism—we talk about pockets of things that have happened—and super gratitude in the sense that we're at a place in society that we want to have a conversation as a society on, what is systemic racism? What does that mean? Where is it? How do we think about it? Now we can actually have a conversation about it.

So, we got started because we realized there was no organization that was systemically always standing up for, what is the Asian American community? What is the experience? What's happening? How does somebody call it out when they see it, but allowing all the local organizations that have been doing all of the hard work to continue what they're doing and making sure we can support them—making sure we can build the infrastructure, making sure that there are local as well as national spaces to have conversations about racism against Asian American communities—but also recognizing that we have to do this in conjunction with the Black community, in conjunction with the Latino community,



in conjunction with the Jewish community, in conjunction with the LGBTQ community. There's lots of communities that are left out and we have to come together because hate is hate. It's not one or the other. It's not your hate versus my hate, it's just hate. And it makes us all feel like crap. And, so, we have to figure out how to address that.

**Dan LeDuc:** Crystal, could you jump in also now and tell us a little bit about The Libra Foundation. Tell us what The Libra Foundation is working on over the last almost two decades of existence and why this racial reckoning is resonating, in particular, for you.

**Crystal Hayling:** The Libra Foundation is a family foundation based here in San Francisco. And the foundation, as you mentioned, is more than a decade old. But I've been with the foundation now for almost five years. And when the family hired me, Nick and Susan Pritzker and their adult kids hired me, they said, you know, we're a domestic foundation that wants to bring a human rights lens to all of our work. And I'm African American.

And I said to them, if we're going to bring a human rights lens to this work, then it has to also include a racial justice lens because that is actually how we determine who gets rights and who doesn't. And, so, that they really were hiring me to come in and do Libra 2.0. And, so, we have been really bringing that racial justice lens to all of the work that we do, centering the communities most impacted, focusing on organizing, focusing on funding organizations where people have the most lived experience and, therefore, we believe, have the most innovative solutions to what's happening.

Right after George Floyd was murdered, I was very concerned. I've worked in philanthropy for over 30 years. And I have seen other flare-ups of racial incidents in this country. And, typically, what philanthropy has done is to hold a commission, say that they're going to have a report, have somebody look into a study. And then a year later, it comes back and nothing really changes. So, I wanted to do something different this time. And I just picked up the phone and started calling people I've known for years in this field—other CEOs, foundations' CEOs—and saying, we need to do something different. I have an idea. Will you join me?

And, thankfully, 11 other funders joined. And we created the Democracy Front Lines fund, which is a \$36 million, three-year effort to support Black-led organizing in this country. And we felt that was important to put a stake in the ground to say that we're going to fund Black-led organizing, and also for us, as funders, to create a learning journey for ourselves. We have very long, deep, complex, uncomfortable conversations with each other and with our grantee partners about issues of race in this country. We handed over the power of the



decision-making of who the grantees are to people who know the issue really well. And we have put ourselves on a learning and change journey. So, that's how we've responded to try to shift, shake philanthropy up a little bit, and recognize that the racial reckoning is not just an intellectual exercise, it's got to change who we are and how we do this work.

**Sonal Shah:** I mean, Crystal, your points are so important. People of color rarely get large amounts of money from foundations over the years. Everybody says we care about people of color, but we rarely give it to organizations that are led by people of color.

And I think there was some study, if I remember, that showed like, on average, Black-led organizations get less than a million dollars in general operating support or, actually, frankly, large amounts of money. Asian American organizations are very similar. It's the same problem. Most of them get less than half a million dollars. And yet we say we want to support communities and we care about communities. And, so, this idea of coming together and saying, we're going to trust the community to let us decide where to put the money, and then give them the general operating support to do the work that they want to do, if we want to build trust in communities, this is what it's going to take.

**Dan LeDuc:** Three-quarters of Americans believe racism is a real serious issue in this nation, according to the Pew Research Center. So how does racism affect the prosperity and sort of opportunity for all of us?

**Sonal Shah:** I think it would be easy to think about racism as just today and what we see in front of us and not remember history. Because if we want to make change happen, we have to know historically how to change things and how that happens.

Historically, in communities of color, health care is underfunded. There's no clinics. There's not enough doctors. There's not even a hospital within the first 25 areas. Rural communities have this in droves.

If that's the problem we're facing, then just saying that it's racist or there is racism without saying, how are we going to invest in these communities, how are we going to make sure health care is available—not just put a telehealth doctor out there and saying, oh, you can do it online. But what are we going to do differently that addresses the systemic issues that exist? Same with education, recognizing that education is not equally the same. Teachers are not equally the same. Supplies are not equally the same for teachers in schools.

Let's just talk about that. Because in some ways, we keep talking about racism as if it's happening somewhere else and it's there, but it's not in the everyday



world that we're living in. And that requires addressing racism in that way. And that is what prosperity is. If we want to move toward prosperity—- better health, better education, better incomes—- then we need to make sure we're addressing where the core of the issues are and how we can change that.

And for the Asian American community, it also means disaggregating the data. Comparing Indian Americans to Nepalese Americans is not fair because Nepalese Americans are actually getting much less access to resources than Indian Americans, and recognizing that the disparity of wealth between Asian American communities is the highest amongst any ethnic group, and then breaking that down, which is what Pew is doing. And I'm grateful for the Pew survey that's looking at Asian American communities and disaggregating.

There's a lot of people who live out in the process of it, and I think it's important that we recognize that. And that is what I think what the survey shows. But also remember, when we're going to solve these problems, we have to dig deeper.

**Crystal Hayling:** Absolutely. I think that how we think of ourselves and what we consider to be this American dream really matters. We are a hopeful nation. And hope is the opposite of cynicism. And racism is the ultimate way to implement cynicism; it's to say, yeah, we're going to pretend that everybody's equal. But in truth, we're just going to make sure that we're shutting the door on those folks over there. And I think that it is really important that we are honest about that as a nation. We know that we think of ourselves as being a place where people can achieve and can see more.

My father was a civil rights activist. The Klan shot up, tried to burn down our home. They did that shooting up of the house when my mother was in the house, pregnant with me. That's my lived experience right now today. And we have to acknowledge that the truth of the history of this nation has to be confronted because that racism and that inequality compound. Just like interest compounds, racism and inequality do as well. These are things we can do. And these are important things to do. I am incredibly hopeful. And I believe that things can change. But I do believe that we have to confront truths in order to do that. So that's what excites me is that we are, in the moment of, even though there's a backlash to the truth telling, the truth wins out. You can't lie to young people. You can't lie to each other. And I think that's what we are seeing in this country is greater truth telling, greater risk taking, and walking forward, even as we recognize that we have to reckon with our past.

**Dan LeDuc:** You both are certainly leaders in the philanthropic field. But let me ask you to just take one or two steps back and look at the nonprofit world, in general, corporate America, the media. In this era now of new conversations



about race, you have corporations and big organizations bringing in diversity officers at very high levels. Is that a sign of progress or is it still too early to tell?

**Sonal Shah:** I'm happy to start here. I'd probably say it's still too early to tell. I think it's going to require—having chief diversity officers, honestly, is not enough, it's whether the chief diversity officer has the power to make change in terms of hiring or decision-making or has a budget.

So, I think part of it is that we shouldn't get comfortable with adding a person and a title, but with whether change is actually happening within the institution, even if it's small bits, but to show that there is a progress that's being made day by day, week by week, month by month, year by year.

I think people are still learning. I think philanthropy is still learning, but corporations are still learning. I mean, I can speak just for my own perspective. For many companies in the United States, Asian Americans are a very large part of the, sometimes 10% of the population or 15%. They've never thought about Asian Americans as an affinity group. They've never even thought about Asian Americans as a minority. And it's like it's almost like you're not even seen because you don't even exist in that. And so many companies, when we started, were, for the first time, having these conversations with their Asian American employees.

We have to say, what are the needs of the Asian American population? What are the issues that they're facing? What are the questions you're asking? But having that conversation with the AAPI communities is actually really important. So, I think this, I think there's a learning journey that has yet to happen, even within companies. And I think the nonprofit community is learning, too. Because it's not just because you're a nonprofit and just because you're trying to do good, that there's diversity within those nonprofits, either. So, it is a process. And it's uncomfortable. I'll be honest, it gets uncomfortable.

And I, even as a leader leading an Asian American organization, an Asian American community, we have our own uncomfortableness amongst ourselves. There's no, there's no shortage of challenges for us. We're 40 different ethnicities, 20 different Pacific Islander communities. So, it's important that we have to work through these questions—here are the tough conversations, and then figure out how do we make progress together to show that there are steps that we can take to go in the right direction.

**Crystal Hayling:** Absolutely. I would completely agree with that. And I think, in addition to everything, the important points you just made, Sonal, I think the other thing is what we're working toward here is a multiracial democracy. And the questions that we're asking is, how do we all live into that in our work, in our





social lives, in our friendship groups, in our government? But we are also looking at the much broader societal level as well. And, so, we have to learn new skills. How do we talk to each other respectfully? How do we share power and recognize that some of our default assumptions about who's competent and who's not? How do we actually allow people who have been silenced to say the thing that they've never thought they would be able to say? And recognize that really and truly when groups are diverse on many, many different dimensions, we end up with better decisions. We end up with better products. We end up with better government. And that's really what we're all trying to aim for here.

**Dan LeDuc:** All of this is happening, though, against a changing America, demographically, politically, and economically. In one of our previous conversations like this, Sarah Rosen Wartell from the Urban Institute was with us. And she was making a point that parts of society are thriving like they've never succeeded before, others are being left behind. And at the same time, the demographics are changing. People literally look different. People who are being left behind maybe feel more vulnerable today than ever before. She calls it the fear of the other that's occurring right now. And I'm just curious, to use that phrase, how you see it? And how do you, how do you come at that as we try to all get better at this?

**Crystal Hayling:** Absolutely. I think about John Powell, who created the Othering and Belonging Institute, which really is where he describes in the basic thesis, which I agree with, is that this is the ultimate question of the next century, is, how do we create a bigger we? How do we bridge those differences? And what do we do to inoculate ourselves and our neighbors against the easy solution of blaming the other for my discomfort, for my fear of my economic circumstances? That, I think, is what is really important here for us to begin to address.

And one of the things that I think is very important about that is that there are some folks who say that, for the purpose of unity, let's stop talking so much about race. And I think what the truth is that racism makes every system broken, as Natasha Brown says, right? So, in order to unbreak, in order to repair those systems, we do actually have to talk about race. And we have to get comfortable with being uncomfortable in that.

So, if we really focus on that, I think that we can get to a point of belonging, can get to a point of a successful, multiracial democracy, and recognize that this othering is a tactic that is used against us, but it's not the only solution.

**Sonal Shah:** Yeah, I'm going to add to that and say, I think we have to call out on othering, which is when we're doing it ourselves, and also catching ourselves in doing it. Because sometimes it's easy to blame someone when something's not working for you. And many times, it might just be ourselves. Like, how do I



approach this problem differently? How might I think about it? And I think that othering is the easier thing to do. It must be because and too often we're pitting ourselves against each other.

But I think the belonging part is so powerful that we almost sort of talk about it as a side thing. But when you think about how to create belonging, it requires talking about othering. So, in order to bring people in, I need to recognize that I have left people out. And to do that requires a very long, hard, thoughtful process of doing it.

**Dan LeDuc:** I wanted to spend just one moment on the pandemic and the experience of some of the racial and ethnic groups in this country, which were quite varied. African Americans have long faced inadequate health care issues. And then the violence that was directed against Asian Americans because of we know that the virus originated where it did and all of that. How would you describe the pandemic's role in shaping any of the conversation we're having now about race? And were the experiences of different racial groups different because of the pandemic?

**Sonal Shah:** I'm happy to start with this one. I think for the Asian American community, it was scary. It was scary for a lot of elderly parents and elderly family members who were too afraid to go to community centers or too afraid to go even walk outside because they were afraid of getting attacked. And you know, it's one thing to say like—and there's no good in the end anybody being attacked or spat on or anything. It's another when you start either picking on very young people or elderly people. It was anxiety-driven enough for them. But then to be afraid to go outside because you're afraid of what might happen to you is further anxiety, which then puts you back in an isolated box.

And, I will gather and I will bet that I think there is a larger mental health crisis, especially for the elderly but, frankly, for a lot of people where that fear is real. Parents were afraid to send their kids to school when schools opened up in the Asian American community because they were afraid that the bullying would increase because of masking and because of vaccine requirements and other things. So, I think for our communities it was fear, but I also think a recognition that creating belonging is going to require a collaboration and a solidarity with other communities to change the way we want America to look 10, 15, 25 years from now.

**Crystal Hayling:** Absolutely. I think that's beautifully said, Sonal. And I think about the words of Arundhati Roy, who said the pandemic is a portal. And it's almost as if walking through that portal, it took our blinders off. And it made us see our society as it really is, that we really have abandoned building a firm public health infrastructure decades ago. And we are now living with the results





of that, that people who are in jobs that we said were essential have really been sacrificed to this pandemic in a way that none of us would individually ever do to an individual, but as a society, we sort of just kind of allowed it to happen.

I have friends and family and relatives in the South who have been going to work in businesses, factories that never shut down, that never provided appropriate safety equipment, and where they have governors and other people who have just been continuing to issue statements saying that people just need to show up for work. I think that is laying bare something that most of us an uncomfortable truth that we have to accept and now begin to work against and fight against.

Because we are not going to come out of this pandemic individually. It's just not going to happen. That's not how it works. We actually each have to come together and, as a society, we can make better decisions for all of us. And we just need to actually put the policies in place that allow that to be true.

**Dan LeDuc:** So, in the coming months and years, what are the markers that you'll be looking for to know whether or not this has been a passing moment or a time of real change?

**Sonal Shah:** I think seeing greater representation in companies, in government, in civil society, in sort of everyday things, whether it's advertising or other places where we're starting to see society and boards and other things start to look more like America and what America looks like, as opposed to what we think is a meritocratic system, which is, in my view, not that meritocratic.

But I think when we start seeing that, when we start seeing people for the contributions they're making, not for the titles that they have—what did someone do? How did they do it? What are they doing? And people do things differently. Communities do things differently. They're all working together, recognizing they need to bring people together. When we start seeing that, I think we're going to start seeing changes start to happen.

But I think the forces of change have never had it that easy. It's going to be one step forward, two steps back, one step forward, two steps. But we have to keep pushing for those forces to keep changing. The other thing that I think—and I'm so bullish about this—I think this generation that's coming is not afraid to try. They may not get it right, but so what? It isn't like I got it right or anybody else got it. But if they even get 20% of what they're asking for, that is 20% further than we are today.

But I think there's a lot that we can do. I think there's a lot of balls that are moving already. But I'm sort of with Crystal. I think we have the power for change. And



we might be afraid of our own power for change, as opposed to the fear of change.

**Crystal Hayling:** I agree. And I completely agree with you, Sonal, about this generation that's coming up. People forget that every major social movement in the history of this country has always been founded and grounded by young people. It's true of the Civil Rights movement. And it is absolutely true right now. I think it's also important to note that we are in the midst of another major civil rights movement.

I think this generation coming up is not asking. I think they're telling. And they're going to tell us the kind of society that they are going to build. And I think that, ultimately, is what community power is about.

Those are the things that I think are happening all over the country in ways that are incredibly inspiring. We haven't got media coverage that's catching up with that yet, but it will because we're getting more local-led media as well. But that's what I consider to be the markers for success that we are already starting to see and we'll continue to see grow.

**Dan LeDuc:** Well, this has been a terrific conversation. I don't want it to end without asking each of you, though, this question one at a time. What's an important lesson you have learned from living in this sort of unprecedented moment?

**Crystal Hayling:** I'll just say that I keep coming back to Maya Angelou's quote, that courage is the most important virtue because without it, no other virtue can be practiced consistently. So, the antidote to our fear and concern and just the sense that, well, there's not much we can do about it, the antidote to that is individual and collective courage. It's to say, I might be afraid of the thing, but I'm going to do it anyway.

As Audre Lorde says, your silence will not save you. We must speak up. We must embrace courage as the virtue that we're going to take forward into this next century.

**Sonal Shah:** Let me add to courage and say risk. I think what I've learned in this particular position, but also in previous positions, is that we're going to have to take risk. And too often, we spend all of our time calculating risk, as opposed to just taking the risk because the risk of not doing something is much greater than the risk of doing something.

And that is, to Crystal's point on courage, I think a part of courage is being able to not just speak out, but do things even when people say it's not possible, but to



ask of something even when you know it's not possible or somebody might say no.

It might be messy. It might be ugly at times. It might be wrong at times. But our willingness to work through that muddle and take that risk to do more matters to the rest of the world because young people, not just in the United States, around the world, are looking for that hope. And if we want to be the beacon of hope, then we have to show what hope looks like, which is taking risk. And I don't think we should walk away from that.

**Dan LeDuc:** Well, Crystal Hayling and Sonal Shah, thank you so much for this conversation. It was great to eavesdrop as the two of you spoke back and forth and to have a small chance to talk to both of you as well.

**Crystal Hayling:** Thank you so much for inviting us. This is great. And the chance to talk to Sonal is—I just love listening to you. Launching this foundation at this time, it is game changing, Sonal. So, thank you so much for taking it on for doing this work. You're just somebody that I'm just proud to know and call a friend, so thank you.

**Sonal Shah:** Vice versa, sister. I'm so glad we're in this together because there is no better person in the world to be doing this with than you, and to learn, and to have a friendship and colleagues and friends that you can call upon for help and to help you figure out how to do it differently. And, Dan, thank you for this incredible conversation. I so enjoyed it.

[Outro music begins]

**Dan LeDuc:** For more information about this series, visit [pewtrusts.org/afterthefact](https://pewtrusts.org/afterthefact) or [ssir.org](https://ssir.org). And we hope you'll tune in for more conversations with leaders in our series, "Crisis and Change: Conversations With Leaders." You can find us on your preferred streaming platforms under the "After the Fact" podcast or the "Inside Social Innovation" podcast from Stanford Social Innovation Review. For The Pew Charitable Trusts, I'm Dan LeDuc.