Building Asian American and Black Solidarity for Racial Justice in Today's America

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Building Asian American and Black Solidarity for Racial Justice in Today’s America

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Relative valorization – dominant group exalts one minority group over another as a means to dominate both groups (“model minority”)

Civic ostracism – valorized group defined as foreign to justify marginalizing them (“perpetual foreigner”)

Figure 1. Racial triangulation.

“Yellow Peril” & “Hated Hindoo”

• Asian immigrant labors in late 19th and early 20th century. Considered to be harder, more reliable workers (valorization).

• But were also an economic threat. Several violent riots across the West coast in late 19th & early 20th centuries (ostracized).
  ➢ “Yellow Peril.”
  ➢ “Hated Hindoo”

• Immigration Act of 1917
“Yellow Peril” to “Model Minority”

- **Cold War**: After WWII, U.S. and Soviet Union are the world’s dominant powers. Immigration from Asia reopens.

- **Late 1950s and 1960s**: U.S. needed more scientists and engineers to keep up with the Soviet Union. China, India, Korea and other Asian countries had scientifically trained professionals who wanted economic opportunities.

Bachelor’s Degree or Higher

- Taiwanese: 75%
- Asian Indian: 74%
- Mongolian: 59%
- Sri Lankan: 57%
- Malaysian: 55%
- Korean: 54%
- Pakistani: 53%
- Chinese: 53%
- Japanese: 50%
- Filipino: 48%
- Bangladeshi: 48%
- Indonesian: 48%
- Thai: 44%
- Nepalese: 43%
- Vietnamese: 27%
- Burmese: 25%
- Hmong: 17%
- Cambodian: 17%
- Laotian: 14%
- Bhutanese: 11%

Source: Analysis of 2015 American Community Survey Microdata
“Model Minority”

• Asian American population boom after 1965. Many children of immigrants, benefiting from their parents’ educational advantage, become high academic achievers: the “model minority.”

• “Model minority” stereotype used to justify educational inequity: If Asian Americans can make it through hard work, why can’t other people of color?
“Model Minority” to “Yellow Peril”

• By the early 1980s, Asian Americans began enrolling at elite universities in large numbers, leading to resentment among White students on these campuses.
  ➢ M.I.T. = Made In Taiwan
  ➢ U.C.L.A. = University of Caucasians Lost among Asians
“Model Minority” to “Yellow Peril”


  ➢ “Princeton [admissions] study indicated Asian-Americans [rated] slightly higher academically than the average student ... [b]ut ... rated Asian-Americans below average on the ‘nonacademic’ portion of the admissions process[].”

  ➢ Stereotype of Asian Americans as one-dimensional “nerds” and “geeks”: good at math and science, but socially inept, lacking in leadership skills.
Affirmative Action vs. Negative Action

• “Affirmative Action” – policies or practices (including race-conscious admissions) which benefit underrepresented applicants in university admissions.

• “Negative Action” – policies or practices which disadvantage Asian American applicants in comparison to White applicants.
Students for Fair Admissions v. Harvard

• Lawsuit against Harvard University, contending that Harvard discriminates against Asian Americans, in favor of both applicants of color and White applicants.

• Broad challenge to race-conscious university admissions.

• Not disputed that on average, admitted Asian American applicants have higher grades and test scores than any other group.
Possible “Neutral” Explanations

• Asian Americans underrepresented in:
  ➢ Legacy admissions
  ➢ Athletic scholarships

• Asian Americans overrepresented in science and engineering majors
  ➢ Higher test scores may be required for admission to those majors.

• Geographic differences among applicants
  ➢ Asian American applicants more concentrated in East and West coast cities. Raises question of how large geographic preferences are.
Students for Fair Admissions v. Harvard

• Asian American applicants rated higher than White applicants on academic criteria and extracurricular activities (except athletics). Rated lower on “personal rating.”

• “Personal rating” score assesses applicants’ “character traits” and whether they have a “positive personality.” Qualities assessed include “humor, sensitivity, grit, leadership, integrity, helpfulness, courage, kindness and many other qualities ... [.]”

  ➢ Same qualities where Asian Americans are stereotyped as lacking and inferior to White Americans.
Students for Fair Admissions v. Harvard

• In October 2019, Judge Allison D. Burroughs of the U.S. District Court for the District of Mass. ruled for Harvard, but also noted that “the disparity between white and Asian American applicants’ personal ratings has not been fully and satisfactorily explained.”

• Judge Burroughs posited that implicit bias could be responsible—more likely from teachers and counselors’ recommendations than from Harvard’s admissions reviewers.
Possible Reasons for Differences in Personal Ratings Scores

• **School profile differences**
  ➢ Asian American applicants are more likely to go to large schools with higher teacher/counselor: student ratios - more perfunctory recommendations. Teachers and counselors don’t get to know students well enough. First Circuit suggested this may be an explanation.

• **Implicit bias**
  ➢ Asian Americans may be stereotyped as socially inept. Not legally actionable, but still cause for concern.
Students for Fair Admissions v. Harvard

• In November 2020, the U.S. Court of Appeals for the First Circuit upheld Judge Burrough’s ruling.

• SFFA has filed a petition for a writ of certiaroriri to the U.S. Supreme Court.

• Long-term concern is the divisive effect: pitting different groups of color against each other.

  ➢ NYC – Specialized High School Admissions Test (SHSAT) Controversy.
Affirmative Action: Favor or Oppose

Next, do you favor or oppose affirmative action programs designed to help Blacks/Black people, women, and other minorities get better access to higher education?

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<th></th>
<th>Favor</th>
<th>Oppose</th>
<th>Don't Know</th>
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<tr>
<td>Chinese</td>
<td>56%</td>
<td>25%</td>
<td>19%</td>
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</table>

Source: Asian American Voter Survey 2020
Stopping “Divide-and-Conquer” Politics & Building Coalitions Among People of Color

• Separate Affirmative Action from Negative Action
  ➢ Support the former, oppose the latter.

• Reject “Model Minority” & Other Stereotypes

• Recognize how Racial Stereotypes Contribute to Racial Inequities and Divide-and-Conquer Tactics
  ➢ “Model Minority” = Passive, Socially Inept
  ➢ “Model Minority” vs. Underachiever
  ➢ Perpetual Foreigner vs. Perpetual Criminal

• Identify Common Interest in Combatting Racial Stereotypes and Racism More Generally.