

CHAPTER 9

Asian Americans' Experiences of "Race" and Racism

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The Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882 and the full exclusion of Asian Americans by 1924; the incarceration of over 120,000 Japanese Americans during World War II despite little evidence of anti-U.S. activity among them; the brutal murder of Vincent Chin in 1982 by two white¹ men armed with anti-Japanese views and a baseball bat; the racist epithets hurled at Judge Lance Ito during the 1995 OJ Simpson trial; the Senate's suspicion of all Asian American Democratic contributors for the allegedly illegal actions of one in 1997, John Hwang; MSNBC's 1998 headline declaring Tara Lipinski's defeat of Michelle Kwan as "American Beats Out Kwan"; in 1999, the FBI imprisonment of nuclear scientist Wen Ho Lee for supposed espionage despite no evidence of it. All of these events are bound by one theme, that of the Asian American foreigner.

No matter how long Asian Americans have been in the United States or how "assimilated" into mainstream society they have become, they remain "foreigners" in America. Exclusion and foreignness are at the core of the racial subordination of Asian Americans despite white Americans' sweeping valorization of them as model minorities. Although Asian Americans have been positioned above black Americans along the traditional color line (superior-inferior), Asian groups have been subordinated along America's citizenship line (insider-foreigner) (Kim 1999). Such historic and ongoing anti-Asian racism is thus partly rooted in white Americans' nativism. John Higham (1970:4) defines nativism as an "intense opposition to an internal minority on the ground of its foreign (i.e., 'un-American') connections." But nativism against Asian Americans is more troubling because this group is not just an *immigrant* minority but a *racially* non-white minority. Asian Americans' experiences are thus determined by the intersection of "race" and nativism. That is, they are distinctively subordinated by what Robert Chang (1993) labels "nativistic racism."

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¹ All references to whites denote non-Hispanic whites unless otherwise qualified.

THE ASIAN AMERICAN FOREIGNER

Nativistic racism against Asian Americans has relied on several ideologies and stereotypes: economic competitor, organized criminal, “illegal alien,” unwelcome immigrant (Ancheta 1998:11), and military enemy (“yellow peril”). For instance, white Americans’ resentment of alleged economic competition from the “yellow hordes” led to the exclusion acts against Chinese, Japanese, and Korean Americans in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. In addition, scholars have considered the alarmist “yellow peril” stereotype, often couched in terms of “American patriotism,” to be an especially egregious form of nativistic racism. The “yellow peril” ideology emerged from the U.S. war against the Japanese during World War II, against Koreans and Chinese during the Korean Conflict, against the Vietnamese during the Vietnam War (“gooks”), and against most of these countries during the Cold War. Perhaps the most systematically unjust outcome of yellow peril notions was the mass incarceration of Japanese Americans during World War II. In fact, Asian Americans remain the only group in U.S. history to have been incarcerated *en masse* during wartime because of their racialized status. Moreover, the vast majority of the Japanese were law-abiding Americans at the time President Roosevelt ordered the mass incarceration. As a formal governmental policy, then, Executive Order 9066 equaled U.S. nativistic racism at its worst (Ancheta 1998:11–12). In fact, Asian Americans still suffer intimidation, violence, and other hate crimes on December 7, the anniversary of Japan’s bombing of Pearl Harbor. Similarly, the two unemployed white male auto workers who killed Vincent Chin, a Chinese American, had mistaken him for a “Jap.” Chin embodied the “yellow peril” who was supposedly destroying the American auto industry and these two men.

These forms of nativistic racism reveal that Asian Americans’ racial status is not formed solely in the United States but is shaped by their (ancestral) Asian country’s relationship to the United States. These relationships either have been largely antagonistic, such as in the case of Japan and Vietnam, or they have been based in war such as in the case of the colonized Philippines and occupied South Korea. For instance, some scholars argue that U.S. treatment of Filipino and Korean Americans draws on racist ideologies that emerged from U.S. dominance over the Philippines and South Korea (see Espiritu 2003). Anti-Asian nativistic racism also demonstrates the public’s association of Asian Americans with Asian countries, countries that may not be the actual homelands or have anything to do with the individual. A study by Mia Tuan (1999) found that U.S.-born youth believed that they would face reprisals not only if the United States warred with their ancestral Asian country, but if it warred with *any* Asian country. Many of the respondents in Tuan’s (1999) study claimed that Americans couldn’t tell the difference between Asian-Americans and Asians. A respondent in her study remarked:

When there was all the whoop-to-do about Japan and all the businesses that Japan owns and all the property that Japan owns in this country, (while) England, Canada and the Netherlands own a whole lot more individually than Japan ever did. But it was this thing of the Pacific horde. And of course American car companies screwed up and they had to blame it on someone else. (cited from Tuan 1999:110)

Similarly a Chinese American male stated, “They’d see us as being evil and they’d start, it’s just like what they do with the Middle East and the Soviet Union, they would all look down on us” (cited from Tuan 1999:110). These patterns reveal how Asian Americans who were born and raised in the United States, have been there for five generations, and who are culturally and socioeconomically “assimilated” are still presumed to be foreign (Tuan 1998). In this way, Asian Americans are often linked to an enemy, exotic, or conquered Asian land

and are racially homogenized by the wider public. Such racial homogenization has meant that Asian Americans often become victims of discrimination meant for other Asian ethnics. Again, the murderers' erroneous labeling of Vincent Chin as a "Jap" serves as a good example of the dangers of racial labeling.

Despite the noted struggles with nativistic racism and subordination along citizenship lines, several sociologists still celebrate Asian Americans by focusing on the socioeconomic successes or marital trends of certain Asian ethnics, namely East and South Asian Americans. For instance, some scholars stress that since 1960 these Asian Americans have had higher rates of high school completion and college degree attainment than have whites. On standardized tests Asian American students have consistently scored higher than white students in math, though their English scores fall a bit below those of whites (Xie and Goyette 2004). Asian Americans' educational achievements seem to be the linchpin that has enabled their entry into high-status professional occupations and that explain their relatively high earnings. In recent decades Asian American men have reached parity in earnings with whites (although within the same educational levels, Asian American men earn 5% less than white men). Interestingly, Asian American women consistently earn more than white women in 2000, largely because of Asian American women's high educational attainment and higher representation in fields like science and engineering. In terms of intermarriage, some scholars claim that marriages between Asians and whites have been the most common interracial couplings from 1970 to 2000, especially those between Asian women and white men (Lee and Edmonston 2004 as cited in Min 2006). Outmarriages are most common among Japanese Americans followed by Filipino, Chinese, and Asian Indian Americans (Lee and Fernandez 1998). Moreover, Japanese Americans are said to most closely resemble whites in their marriage and family behaviors such as time at marriage, divorce rates, and fertility rates.

REEXAMINING ASIAN AMERICANS' SOCIOECONOMIC PICTURE

The fact that Asian Americans are discriminated against as foreigners, however, belies the notion that some socioeconomic successes and high rates of intermarriage signal the end of anti-Asian racism. Indeed Asian Americans suffer from foreigner bias and discrimination both *despite* their socioeconomic success and *because* of it.

In fact, the much-hailed socioeconomic success of Asian American groups, particularly East and South Asians, has been challenged. Upon cursory glance of the Censuses since 1970, including the most recent in 2000, it would appear that Asian Americans have achieved a great deal socioeconomically. In 2000 Asian Americans had the highest education levels, household and median family incomes, and the most expensive homes. Since 1980 they have even out-done whites along all of these dimensions. Yet, these data need to be understood in context and need to be disaggregated. For instance, while some pundits claim that Asians are inherently more intelligent in mathematics and science, such a "biological" conclusion ignores the "social" phenomenon of U.S. policies favoring highly educated, professional Asians.² That is, the U.S. government's immigration policy since 1965 has mostly allowed in Asian immigrants with high education and advanced technical backgrounds or other professional skills (Park and Park 2005).

² Much of the data in this paragraph come from Lai and Arguelles (2003).

In addition, Asian Americans' individual income lags more than 10 percent behind the individual income of whites. If we include Pacific Islanders incomes, theirs alone were 40 percent lower than those of whites. The difference between Asian Americans' household incomes (which are higher than that of whites) and their individual incomes (which are lower than that of whites) is largely explained by the multiple earners in Asian immigrant households. This extended family or multiple immigrant household differs markedly from most white American household structures, hence, the difference in household income. In addition, the higher home values of Asian Americans can be largely explained by the propensity of Asians to live in immigrant-receiving states with high costs of living, namely Hawai'i, California, and New York. In fact, one of the reasons that more and more Asian groups, especially Vietnamese, Korean, and Indian Americans, have been moving to the South is their inability to live in such high-cost states as New York and California.³

And despite being glorified as a model minority group that could be "becoming white," Asian Americans' heads have certainly been aching from hitting the infamous glass ceiling. For one, numerous studies point to the lower returns Asian Americans receive for their education, some estimating that their college degrees receive seven times less protection from poverty than do whites' degrees. The clearest indicator that discrimination against Asian Americans exists is that Japanese Americans are not paid nearly as much as they should be given their levels of education (Feagin and Feagin 1993: 354). In addition, Asian Americans' overall higher educational attainment than white Americans, has not ameliorated their underrepresentation in two major high-status occupations: (1) lawyers and judges (only 2.7%) as well as (2) administrators and public officers (only 2.4%). Moreover, the long-standing trend of Asian Americans being underrepresented in skilled trades, i.e., carpentry, construction work, and electrician work, continues. Their absence in these fields is traced to the discrimination Asians faced from dominant trade unions in the 19th and early 20th centuries, such as the American Federation of Labor (AFL)⁴. Such discrimination against Asian American labor was part of the larger history of tense competition between whites and workers of color in skilled trades. Asian Americans are also greatly underrepresented as managers in several occupational sectors: government, private employment, and higher educational institutions (both public and private). In addition, although it was noted earlier that Asian American women currently earn more than white women, studies have found that at universities across the country Asian American women faculty disproportionately suffer from harassment in a hostile environment (Hune 1998).

In the civil service sector Asian Americans have filed many formal complaints about being passed over for those with far less training, education, and years of experience. And in industry where most Asian Americans work they have lodged many glass ceiling complaints. Although Asian Americans were most dissatisfied with the electronics industry 75 percent of them expressed interest in managerial positions as opposed to technical work in this industry (Asian Americans for Community Involvement 1993). The same study also found that the exclusion of Asian Americans from managerial positions could not be attributed to their poor English proficiency, time of arrival, cultural differences, work experience, formal training, or greater job concentration in low-status sectors of the economy.

³ Much of the socioeconomic data reported in this paragraph come from Lai and Arguelles (2003) and from Nishioka (2003).

⁴ Much of the data in this paragraph come from Xie and Goyette (2004).

Furthermore we have to consider the social class disparities *within* the Asian American group. In doing so we find that many Asian Americans are, in fact, not middle-class. Census 2000 data reveal that when we look more carefully across multiple variables, many Asians – especially Vietnamese, Cambodians, and Laotians (as well as Pacific Islander Americans)—live in poverty, are unemployed, and are less-educated than the average American. For instance, while other Asian ethnics earn as much as or more than whites, ethnically Vietnamese and Filipino women and men earn considerably less than white women and men. In fact 2000 Census estimates put the Asian American poverty rate at 10–13 percent, considerably higher than that for white Americans. Not only is the poverty rate high among Southeast Asian groups like the Vietnamese, it is high among certain East Asian groups as well, such as Chinese and Korean Americans.⁵ Indeed, Asian Americans are the group with the biggest gap between rich and poor in the United States (Wong 2003).

REEXAMINING ASIAN AMERICANS' INTERMARRIAGE TRENDS

Since 1990 we have seen a decrease in Asian-white marriages and a sharp increase in interethnic marriages. Before we further examine this trend it is important to note the larger macro-context that shaped these seemingly personal matches. As noted earlier, U.S. relationships with Asian countries have had profound effects on Asian Americans. Not only did U.S. intervention in Asian nations spark the emigration waves to the United States in the first place, it fostered many of our society's racial stereotypes. The same holds for the social phenomenon of Asian-white intermarriage. In light of U.S. colonization of the Philippines between 1898 and 1944 and its continued pervasive military presence until 1991, the Philippines has sent more immigrants through the preference of wives of U.S. servicemen than any other Asian nation (Min 2006:46). An estimated 343,000 brides of "U.S. citizens" came between 1950 and 2003, most of whom were brides of servicemen. When the United States occupied Japan from the end of World War II until 1952 a sizeable portion of the armed forces remained behind in Japan, thus spurring a large number of Japanese military brides to the United States in the 1950s and early 1960s. Between 1950 and 1979 alone the vast majority of the 71,000 wives of U.S. citizens were Japanese military brides. In South Korea, where an even greater number of U.S. servicemen has been stationed since 1945 (around 37,000), approximately 96,000 Korean women have married servicemen and immigrated to the United States between 1950 and 1989. Again, U.S. (neo)colonial and imperial projects in Asian nations spurred the phenomenon of interracial marriages in the United States, especially between Asian women and white men. In this way, Asian-white intermarriages cannot be understood apart from this larger context of (neo)colonialism and imperialism.

Despite some claims that Asian-white marriages are the most common form of interracial marriage, most studies find a sharp decrease in Asian-white pairings since 1980. Based on the U.S. Census, specifically 5 percent PUMS data, Asian-white marriage declined from 18 percent in 1980 to 15.3 percent in 1990 to 12.7 percent in 2000. The 2000 Census reveals that most Asian Americans are married to members of their own ethnic group. Filipino and Vietnamese Americans in particular have dramatically shifted to marrying people in their own group. The second largest proportion of marriages is interethnic couplings. That is, not only has the proportion

⁵ Much of the data in this paragraph come from Xie and Goyette (2004).

of Asian-white marriages dropped significantly, rates of interethnic marriage, i.e., marriages among different Asian ethnics, have risen dramatically. Between 1980 and 1990 Asian interethnic marriages doubled from 11 to 21 percent and had eclipsed marriages between Asian and white Americans. Broken down by gender, 18.9 percent of Asian American men and 16.3 percent of women were interethnically married.⁶

In states with high concentrations of Asian Americans such as California the number of interethnic marriages was even higher. While 21.1 percent of Asian American men in California were interethnically married, by 2000, 64 percent were so married. In 1980, 10.8 percent of Asian American women in the state were married to Asian men, while in 1990, 45.5 percent of the women were so married. Given most of the women's consistently higher rates of marriage with whites than their Asian American male counterparts, a figure like 45.5 percent constitutes a dramatic increase.⁷ These jumps indicate that interethnic marriages will likely remain a trend for some time, having increased 400 to 500 percent between 1980 and 1990 alone.

What are the reasons for Asian Americans' growing preference for interethnic marriage over marriage with whites? Many speculate that the growing size of the Asian American population has largely contributed to the shift toward intra-Asian marriage. Indeed, the conspicuously high rates of interethnic and intraethnic marriage occur in places with large Asian American populations like California, Hawai'i, and New York. When the population of Asian Americans had been small their rates of marriage with whites was rather high (this trend is also true of Native American). As the Asian population grows the effect of group size alone is expected to depress outmarriage rates. And as this group constitutes one of the fastest growing in the United States, endogamous marriage will likely continue in the future.

Many also believe that Asian Americans' choice of other Asian mates reveals a growing racial (panethnic) consciousness among them. In light of racial homogenization, watershed events that affect one ethnic group often affect all others, such as the murder of Vincent Chin. In light of this panethnic consciousness, Asian Americans have increasingly been marrying one another (Shinagawa and Pang 1996; see Lee and Fernandez 1998). In addition, as the younger generations come of age, the increasing class similarity among them seems to have fostered interethnic and intraethnic marriage. That is, as Asian immigrant families attain middle-class status they tend to move from ethnic enclave areas into mixed Asian suburbs (and white suburbs). In mixed Asian suburbs they have increased chances for contact with Asian Americans who are similar to them (Shinagawa and Pang 1996).

Furthermore, the importance of Asian American populations on college campuses cannot be denied. Not only is college the place where Asian Americans come into contact with various Asian ethnics, it is also the place where most Asian Americans forge and develop a panethnic consciousness. Interestingly, this trend reveals that Asian Americans' ascent into the middle class does not necessarily signal the whitening that assimilationist scholars have predicted. Their ascent into the middle class has also worked in the opposite way by fostering pan-Asian identification, social networks, and marriage. To be sure, class is not the only determinant of interethnic or intraethnic marriages.

Other influential factors could be the shared experiences of being American-born Asians; being treated as foreigners; negotiating Asian immigrant family norms like filial piety and the pressure to please parents who immigrated just for their education; and having Asian

⁶ Much of the data in this paragraph come from Lee and Fernandez (1998).

⁷ Much of the data in this paragraph come from Shinagawa and Pang (1996).

"homelands." In addition, popular cultural expressions of pan-Asianism may contribute to the blurring of ethnic differences. Given that Asian women marry whites at much higher rates than their male counterparts, another reason for interethnic marriages could be the improved image of Asian American men in some segments of popular culture. Finally, recent marital trends may be pointing to a broader "people of color" consciousness. That is, Asian Americans' marriages to Latinos have risen from 3 percent in 1980 to 11 percent in 1990. Some attribute this change to the shared immigrant experience of many members of these groups as well as their common residence in states like California (Lee and Fernandez 1998).

BEYOND THE "ASIAN AMERICANS ARE WHITENING" THESIS

The foregoing socioeconomic and marital trends reveal that white Americans' focus on blacks has hidden from view whites' subordination of other groups like Asian Americans. In order to present the U.S. opportunity structure as meritocratic and to validate "blame the victim" notions whites have celebrated Asian Americans as model minorities who are "whitening" past blacks and some Latinos. These notions of "whitening" are inaccurate insofar as they assume that Asian Americans do not experience racism. Mainstream white America largely does not want to recognize or concede that it has been racially discriminatory toward Asian Americans and others, in large part because whites have visibly been implicated in anti-black racism. But such a refusal to acknowledge all forms of racism against nonwhites denies actual anti-Asian subordination along lines of immigration, citizenship, and larger global inequalities. Such a denial has prevented the identification and redressing of the nativistic racism that has been discussed at length in this piece. In this way, not only do white Americans overlook the way they have racialized Asian groups, they ignore the ways they have *pitted* Asian Americans against blacks and other nonwhites (see Kim 1999 for overview).

Although the racial subordination of Asian Americans is obscured by the model minority myth, national public opinion reveals racial biases. Two national surveys of Americans' racial attitudes by the National Conference for Community and Justice called "Taking America's Pulse" found that whites reported many negative stereotypes of Asian Americans, particularly foreigner-based ones. But as evidence of the way groups of color internalize dominant whites' stereotypes of each other, more Latinos (42%) and blacks (42%) reported that Asian Americans were "unscrupulous, crafty, and devious in business" than did whites (27%).⁸ A 2001 national survey study led by a professional Chinese American organization called the Committee of 100 found that of the most prejudiced Americans 18 percent reported that they would be uncomfortable with an Asian American supervisor. Yet only 9 percent of these Americans were uncomfortable with a black supervisor, 5 percent with one who was female, and 7 percent with one who was Jewish. And consistent with foreigner stereotypes 23 percent of the nation stated that they were "uncomfortable" voting for an Asian American to be president of the United States. They were substantially more comfortable voting for an African American candidate (15%), a female candidate (14%), and a Jewish candidate (11%), all of whom are much more prominent in politics than are Asian Americans. The Committee of 100 was also interested in the American public's perceptions of Chinese Americans more specifically. The

⁸ One limitation of these results, however, is the small sample size for Asian Americans ($N = 155$).

Committee was disturbed to find that anywhere between 68 to 73 percent of the nation believed that Chinese Americans were “taking away too many jobs from Americans,” insinuating that Chinese Americans were not “Americans” themselves. Moreover, 68 to 73 percent of the public also believed that Chinese Americans had “too much power in the business world,” invoking the stereotype of Asian Americans as foreign economic competitors. Another dimension of the foreigner racial ideology is to associate, often conflate, Asian Americans with their ancestral home country. In fact, 46 percent of Americans reported that “Chinese Americans passing on information to the Chinese government [was] a problem.” In addition, 24 percent of Americans would not approve of intermarriage with an Asian American, surprising given the historically high number of Asian-white intermarriages in the United States. Although more Americans were opposed to intermarriage with an African American (34%), a finding that conforms to most studies, they still opposed an Asian American partner more than they did a Hispanic (21%) or a Jewish (16%) one. The substantial decrease in Asian-white intermarriages noted earlier and recent tensions with Asian nations may well be related to increasingly negative attitudes toward such marriage.

As further evidence that model minority stereotypes exist alongside foreigner stereotypes, large numbers of Americans also noted that Chinese Americans “have strong family values” and “place a higher value on education than do most other groups in America.” Yet, as studies like the 2000 installment of the “Taking America’s Pulse” national survey found, it is precisely the success of some Asian Americans that has sparked negative foreigner stereotypes. Indeed, the “positive” stereotypes of Chinese Americans as valuing family and education were popular even among those reporting the most negative attitudes toward Chinese Americans. A 1993 *Los Angeles Times* survey of Southern Californians found that Asian Americans were thought to be too successful and too enamored with material success. This survey asked whether any group “is getting more economic power than is good for Southern California” and whether any group “is working harder than the others to succeed in Southern California.” Asian Americans’ economic prowess was considered to be endangering Southern California. In addition, survey analyses revealed a statistical linkage between the notion that Asian Americans were too economically powerful and the notion that they were the most prejudiced group in California. Counter to classic assimilation theory, then, Asian Americans’ economic mobility often engenders less social acceptance and intensifies racism toward them.⁹ This link between model minority and foreigner stereotypes suggests that irrespective of whether stereotypes are “positive” or “negative,” they are stereotypes nonetheless. Judging and homogenizing a group as having particular traits, traits that are often seen as “inherent,” effectively dehumanizes a group.

Beyond the good stereotype–bad stereotype paradox, multiple survey studies have found another paradox. The second paradox reveals that while Asian Americans report experiencing discrimination at levels close to those of black Americans, most Americans see Asian groups as experiencing little to no discrimination at all. In two nation-wide polls of the four largest racial/ethnic groups in the United States—a 1995 *Washington Post*/Kaiser Foundation/Harvard University poll and a 1993 *Los Angeles Times* poll—Asian Americans were just behind African Americans in reporting experiences of discrimination. Polling of only Asian groups conducted by the *Los Angeles Times* yielded similar results: 57 percent of Chinese, 46 percent of Filipinos and Koreans, and 41 percent of Vietnamese reported discrimination. Even a 1998 University of Massachusetts poll which restricted Asian Americans’ reports of

⁹ The data analyses of the *Los Angeles Times* come from Lee (2000).

discrimination to experiences within the last three months of the survey still found that fully 25 percent of Asian Americans reported bouts with discrimination. Still, only 10 to 15 percent of the American public considered racism to be an obstacle for Asian groups, while the above *Washington Post* and *Los Angeles Times* national polls revealed that 40 to 60 percent of Asian Americans reported personally experiencing discrimination. Testifying to the importance of question-wording on surveys, however, when a recent *San Francisco Chronicle* poll simply asked whether certain racial groups faced "a lot" of prejudice in Northern California, the public's perception of anti-Asian racism went up noticeably. A large number of Latinos, 27 percent, believed that anti-Asian bias existed. Yet this number is still nowhere near the percentages of Asian Americans who report suffering discrimination. And when the American public does acknowledge racism against Asian Americans it often uses "blame the victim" reasoning, pointing to the group's supposed cultural distinctiveness, clannishness, and language problems. Paradoxically, however, Asian Americans are the only group who attributes the racial discrimination they face to their success in the United States. Moreover, Asian Americans are the only ones who consistently recognize that their lack of political power—their invisibility and unrecognized needs—is a major obstacle for them. It is thus not surprising that among all groups, Asian Americans have most strongly opposed a moratorium on immigration and the deportation of Chinese who seek U.S. asylum. They also most strongly support reparations for Japanese Americans incarcerated during World War II and a University of California (UC) admissions policy that is meritocratic (in the 1980s, some UC schools had tried to stem the tide of Asian admissions) (Lee 2000:135).¹⁰

Why do Asian Americans report so much racial discrimination while non-Asians do not see it? There are three plausible explanations that have been offered for this puzzle. First, Asian Americans themselves have become more aware that the model minority stereotype is indeed a stereotype in light of the heightened influence of Asian American studies and social activism. They have become more aware that the model minority myth was constructed by white American leaders and public opinion makers, exploited during the Reagan era, to counter the civil rights gains of black Americans. Survey data have also shown that Asian Americans who are young, are educated, have personally experienced discrimination, or have close social ties with other Asian groups are more likely to support policy positions that are pro-Asian American (Lee 2000:139). Most importantly, Asian Americans are acutely aware that the model minority stereotype has been used to divide racial groups from each other. The recent attacks on affirmative action policies bear out the divide and conquer strategy. In light of their lived experiences of racism, Asian Americans are much more attuned to the historical and political agendas behind such ideologies, more so than the larger American public.

The second explanation is that those Asian Americans who report discrimination tend to be the more successful, upwardly mobile ones. While the larger American public may simply explain away professional Asian Americans as not facing any barriers the professionals themselves are feeling their heads bang against the invisible glass ceiling above them. Survey studies have indeed found that Asian Americans tend to face much of their racial discrimination in institutional contexts (Bobo and Suh 1995). It is thus not surprising that Asian Americans who are white collar, highly educated, and highly paid are most likely to report discrimination in the workplace. Yet, because these Asian Americans have made it into white collar professions, the American public does not believe that they face any barriers.

¹⁰ The information in this paragraph comes from Lee (2000).

The third reason why Asian Americans may report high rates of discrimination while non-Asians believe they experience none may point to the types of questions surveys ask. Given the history of slavery in the United States most understandings of “race” have been centered on the black American experience. Despite the major diversification of the United States since 1965, surveys have not modified or added questions to address the experiences of Asian Americans, Latinos, Arab Americans, and other groups. As such, the unique form of discrimination that Asian Americans experience—specifically along lines of citizenship—is not captured by survey questions on “race” and racism generally. That is, survey researchers continue to assess Asian Americans based on stereotypes mostly associated with black Americans (Lee 2000). These include stereotypes about intelligence, family, criminality, and cultural community patterns. Yet studies of Asian Americans should focus on immigration, citizenship, the glass ceiling, entrepreneurship, U.S. relations with Asian nations, and war. Indeed, survey respondents in the *Los Angeles Times* poll did not stereotype Asian Americans as welfare dependent, but they did stereotype them as inscrutable and as perpetual foreigners. The public also expressed feelings of hostility toward Japan and other Asian nations. Interestingly, whites and Latinos who stereotyped Asian Americans as not properly integrated into “American culture” were more likely to hold anti-Asian attitudes. Furthermore, age and education make a difference. Older and less educated respondents, especially among whites, tended to hold more prejudiced and hostile views of Asian Americans.¹¹

THE SILENT DILEMMA: ANTI-ASIAN VIOLENCE

Beyond surveys, the criminal justice system and the mass media have been inattentive to the specific struggles of Asian Americans, but so. Although anti-Asian violence rose steadily in the 1990s and has been spiking in years like 2001 after 9/11, the American public is largely unaware of the high rates of anti-Asian violence and hate crimes. For instance, the middle to late 1990s witnessed high rates of anti-Asian violence, rates that have since remained steady even considering high rates of underreporting. And despite nationwide declines in some years, anti-Asian hate crimes have increased sharply in various states like Connecticut, Michigan, Nevada, and Wyoming. Murders on the whole have also increased (National Asian Pacific American Legal Consortium 2002).

Hate crimes overall are underreported due to a combination of factors. Some states do not comply with federal regulations and thus do not collect any hate crimes data. In addition, most state institutions do not label crimes as racially motivated. Such “race aversion” can be traced to their refusal to consider the victim’s account alone as sufficient evidence, their inability to see racism (especially true in the case of Asian groups who are tagged “model minorities”), and their reluctance to admit to the extent of racism. Indeed, state government’s own police forces have come under fire for their racist practices. In addition, mass media rarely report anti-Asian hate crimes. Another contributing factor is the large immigrant contingent among Asian Americans who are disadvantaged by language barriers, lack of cultural understanding, legal status, mistrust of police, and a multitude of other factors. These forms of underreporting mean that even the disturbing statistics to follow are underestimates.

¹¹ For the information in this paragraph, see Lee (2000).

National Asian Pacific American Legal Consortium's yearly audits of anti-Asian violence found that between 1995 and 1996 alone hate crimes against Asian Americans jumped up from an already high base. Threats and intimidation more than doubled while harassment increased 161 percent. Between 1994 and 1996 vandalism and destruction increased 177 percent. The dramatic increases in anti-Asian crime are even more disturbing in light of the FBI's reporting of an overall 7 percent decrease in hate crimes between 1995 and 1996. Also troubling is that Asian Americans are increasingly subject to racially motivated crimes in their homes, workplaces, and schools. Those who suffered hate crimes at their homes tended to live in public housing. In Asian Americans' places of employment hate crimes increased 117 percent between 1995 and 1996. In the same year the FBI found a similar increase in school-based hate crimes. K-12 schools experienced a 27 percent increase in anti-Asian crimes.

Asian American students were also more vulnerable on college campuses where they experienced a startling 100 percent increase in hate incidents in recent years. NAPALC's 2000 report found that anti-Asian crimes on college campuses were an increasingly alarming problem, one that had not been adequately addressed by college campuses or by the nation. In 2000 an Asian American interest magazine called *aMagazine* conducted an online survey and found that 33 percent of the 559 respondents either had been called an ethnic slur or had been the target of a racially motivated verbal assault on college campuses. Another 5 percent had been physically attacked because of their "race." In line with stereotypes of Asian Americans as a foreign competitive threat schools like UC Berkeley with large Asian populations have reported high rates of anti-Asian incidents. Another disturbing finding revealed that among the 25 percent of the 260 surveyed Berkeley students who had experienced anti-Asian discrimination, most had not reported the incidents. The students did not think that the crimes were important enough, that reporting would make a difference, and did not know of any campus resources to help them deal with the issue.

Anti-Asian incidents on college campuses are telling for two reasons. First, they problematize and perhaps challenge the notion that higher education fosters individuals' more liberal views on "race." Second, they show the connection between model minority stereotypes and anti-Asian racism that this piece has discussed throughout. That is, Asian American college students are too "model minority," hence, too much competition.

Among the numerous campuses plagued by anti-Asian incidents some examples of hate incidents are worth noting. In a widely publicized incident in 1996 a former University of California-Irvine student Richard Machado had emailed 59 Asian students and staff the message that he would "find and kill every one of [them] personally" and signed it "Asian hater." Machado's statements to witnesses that he wanted to kill Asians because they were such tough academic competition made him the first person in the United States to be convicted of a federal hate crime via computer transmission. In another incident four year later at SUNY-Binghamton, three white students on the school's wrestling team attacked four Korean American students outside their dorm, all the while yelling, "This is what you get for being chinks!" They fractured the skull of student John Lee and caused him to have a cerebral concussion and internal bleeding. The school's response was slow and did not clearly condemn the crime as racially motivated. As New York has no hate crimes laws on the books, the attackers were also not charged with a hate crime. In the same year white men at Cornell University also attacked an Asian American female after shouting racial and gender epithets at her. Similarly, at UC Davis white fraternity brothers beat a group of Korean American males in an opposing fraternity to the point that one had to be rushed to the hospital for emergency

surgery. The scuffle was precipitated by one of the white male fraternity members calling one of the Asian male fraternity members a “f**king chink!”

There have also been many murders of Asian Americans. Since the tragic death of Vincent Chin in 1982 for which the convicted killers never spent a night in jail, there have been a substantial number of murders and attempted murders of Asian Americans. Although most of these murders have received very little media coverage, some of the more publicized murders have been those of Thien Ly, Kuan Chung Kao, Won Joon Yoon, Joseph Iletto, and Balbir Singh Sodhi. In 1996 Thien Ly, a young Vietnamese American who had recently earned a Master’s degree at Georgetown University, was stabbed to death by two young white supremacists while he was exercising. After the killer Gunner Lindberg had bragged in a letter about “kill[ing] a Jap” he became the first person in California to be sentenced to death for a racially motivated murder. In 1997 a 33-year-old Chinese American engineer named Kuan Chung Kao was shot dead by Rohnert Park police. Based upon his racial identity and his carrying a stick, one of the officers believed Kao to be a martial arts expert and killed him within *34 seconds* of arriving at his home. After shooting him, they handcuffed him and prevented his wife, a registered nurse, from administering potentially life-saving CPR. Kao died shortly thereafter. Despite mass organized protests neither of the police officers has been punished or charged with any kind of misconduct. In 1999 a white supremacist named Benjamin Smith went on a shooting spree to kill Jews, blacks, and “mud people,” his derogatory term for Asians. As Indiana University student Won Joon Yoon, a Korean American, was leaving church Smith shot him dead (Smith also killed Ricky Byrdsong, an African American and former Northwestern University basketball coach). A month later in California a white supremacist named Buford Furrow asked Filipino-American postal worker Joseph Iletto to mail a letter for him. When Iletto agreed Furrow shot him twice. Although Iletto tried to run away Furrow gunned him down as a “good target of opportunity” because Iletto was “Hispanic or Asian” and was a federal employee. Finally, the murder of Balbir Singh Sodhi in Mesa, Arizona, is one of the first-known racially motivated murders in the wake of 9/11. Sodhi, a South Asian American, was landscaping the grounds of his Chevron gas station on September 15, four days after 9/11, when Frank Roque shot and killed him because of Sodhi’s supposed likeness to “al-Qaeda” members. After later trying to kill Afghani and Lebanese Americans Roque was finally arrested, at which time he claimed himself “a patriot.” Two years later he was sentenced to death for Sodhi’s killing. The “silent dilemma” of hate crimes against Asian Americans is in dire need of publicity and, more importantly, solutions. Reaching solutions will require a much better understanding of the racial subordination of Asian Americans in the first place.

CONCLUSION

In brief, Asian Americans’ experiences of “race” and racism center on “nativistic racism.” Even fifth-generation Asian Americans are presumed to be foreigners, that is, outsiders who *really* hailed from an Asian country (one that is sometimes a U.S. enemy), they are also presumed not to be citizens or patriots, and not to speak English or know “American” ways. As noted, the notion of Asian Americans as *both* foreigners and model minorities comes together in the form of the foreign competitor stereotype. In other words, the threat of Asian Americans’ success has often led to anti-Asian violence and hate. An important implication of these anti-Asian trends is that they challenge the idea that Asian Americans do not experience racism or are simply becoming “white.” Not only do Asian Americans suffer

from discrimination *because* of their socioeconomic success, but it is the more successful ones who have been hitting the infamous glass ceiling and reporting the most discrimination. Moreover, many Asian American groups such as those from Southeast Asia suffer high rates of poverty. Another marker of so-called whitening, Asian Americans' intermarriages with whites, have also changed dramatically. Rather than marry white Americans more Asian Americans are marrying other Asian ethnics. In short, one of the main reasons why most Americans do not know about racism against Asian Americans, such as high rates of anti-Asian violence, is white Americans' lack of acknowledgement of historical and ongoing racism against Asian Americans. Scholars and laypeople alike must start understand to the distinct, yet linked, ways in which Asian Americans experience "race." Indeed, we must pay close attention to global inequalities such as U.S. relations with Asian nations, to stereotypic representations, and to the immigrant conditions under which Asian Americans struggle. In the absence of such understanding we will only continue the racialized divisions and vast inequalities that have plagued our society since the beginning.

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