

Jack Wolf

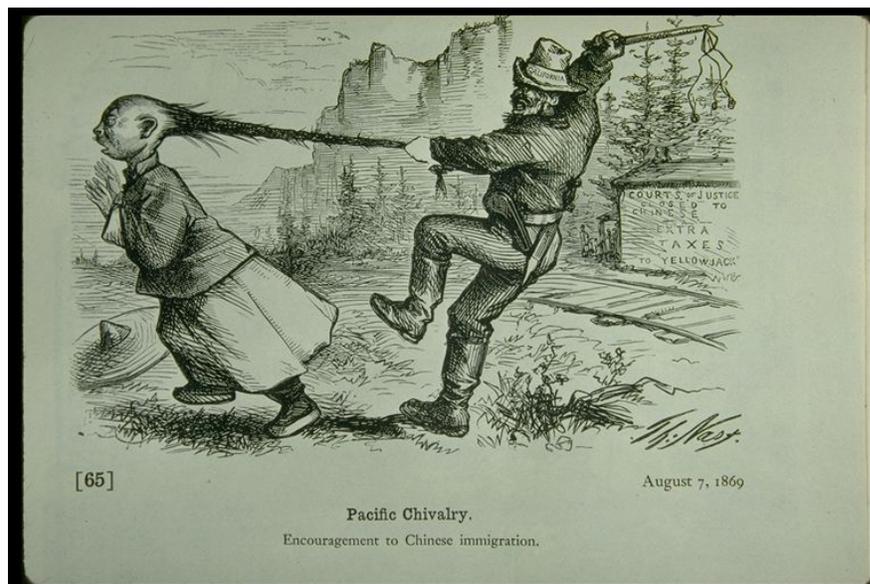
The “Chinaman” Predicament: The Reconstruction of the Model Minority

A relatively constant stereotype belonging to many races throughout world history, model minority is something more recently applied to Asian-Americans and those of Eastern racial backgrounds within America. However, this stereotype was extremely prevalent during the Reconstruction era, with the Chinese workforce in California being subjected to extreme prejudice due to their superiority in the workplace, threatening ‘the white-man’s’ jobs. Yet, as of today many of Asian descent in North America do earn above the poverty line, and there are numerous cases of other races, such as whites and blacks, accumulating much more wealth than Asian-Americans due to their superior numbers. However, American Asians continue to fit under the umbrella term of ‘model minority,’ as they tend to earn much more on average than other North American races, attend upper-class and prestigious colleges in mass, and overall, score much higher on standardized tests.

Beginning right after the defeat of the South in 1865, president Abraham Lincoln strived to make the United States a place of safety for people of all colors. However, Southerners, who still held negative views towards the now freed slaves they had some two years before, refused to acknowledge their right to equality under the mended North American Union. Like those in the South, many Westerners held those same views towards the Chinese, who had immigrated in mass to the newly founded state after the gold rush in 1848. The Chinese, who were not protected under the US Constitution at the time, were prime stress relievers for some of California’s more pro-southern inhabitants. Like blacks, their ability to flourish within the world of both physical labor and more professional occupations alike intimidated white settlers, who

eventually revoked many of their most basic rights as American citizens. However, how does this apply to the concept of model minority?

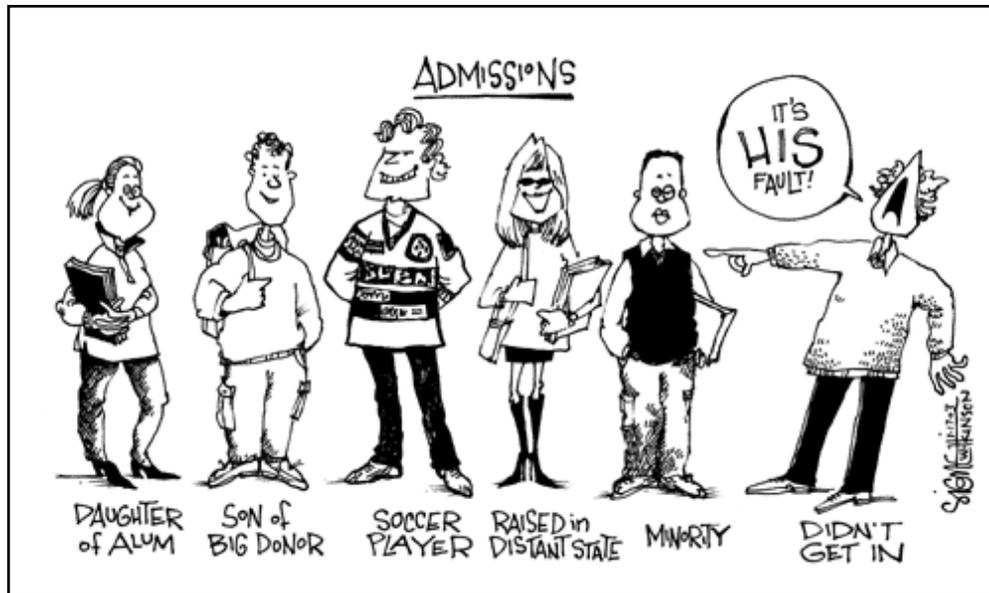
The idea of a model minority, or “a demographic group (whether based on ethnicity, race or religion) whose members are perceived to achieve a higher degree of socioeconomic success than the population average” began to grow and nourish its roots through conflict with the Chinese in the late 1800s (“Model Minority”). These people, who came due to high rates of poverty in their homeland and the recent British Dominance over China in the Opium war, rose to extreme economic prominence “after they were prompted to exploit other western state resources, providing products of use to the American society” and “also worked as small time merchants, gardeners, domestics, laundry workers, [and] farmers... starting in 1865” (Luo). In this case, the demographic group (i.e. The Chinese) became subjected to the stereotype of model minority during the Reconstruction era.



Source: Thomas Nast, “Pacific Chivalry,” 7 August 1869.

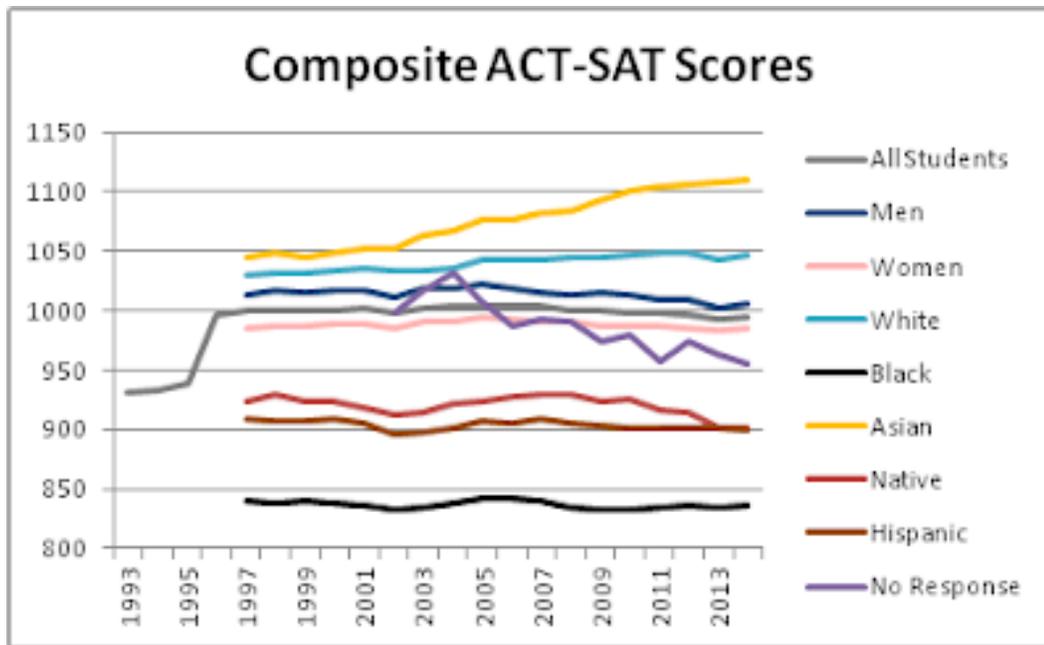
Yet, like African-Americans, many of the Californian Chinese had their basic rights as an American stripped away. In fact, one American illustrator named Thomas Nast had a particularly sympathetic view towards the model minority label that was granted to the Chinese during and after the Reconstruction Era. Within his image “Pacific Chivalry,” Nast makes a conscious effort to illustrate the Chinese predicament by including specific visuals and sayings. For example, Nast includes a stark news bulletin painted on the side of a workers shed: “Court of Justice closed to Chinese. Extra taxes to Yellowjacks.” These announcements are extremely reminiscent of the end of the Reconstruction Era, in which blacks would be subjected to offensive labels and violations of the Constitution under the guise that they would be ‘assisting’ African-Americans. The Chinese status as a model minority is what primarily caused this violent onslaught of what could be considered Constitutional violations, as the white man was extremely jealous of their newfound wealth within American borders.

In addition to this, the Chinese also received a more physical and violent punishment for their status. As illustrated by Nast, the “John Chinaman” is being whipped by a “California Ruffian,” and the man is also having his hair pulled. This violent response was caused primarily as a result of racial tensions in the South at the time, as the Chinese, like the former enslaved blacks, were not exactly accepted as proper American citizens, and were subjected to abuse because of this.



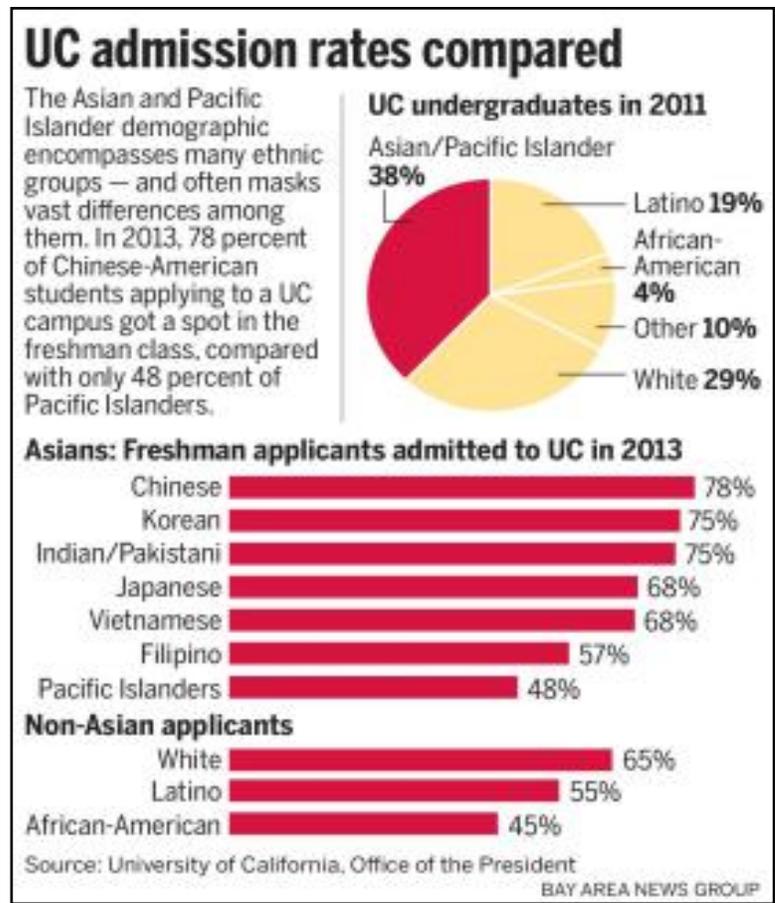
Source: Signe Wilkinson, "Admissions," 17 January 2003.

Like the Chinese of the past, Asian-Americans today are still victims of this unfair but true stereotype. In fact, one political cartoon published by illustrator Signe Wilkinson highlights the prejudice towards Asians in modern society. Within Wilkinson's cartoon, there are visuals of a line of college students who got accepted to a specific school, each have their own reasons why they got in, though none of them are for actual academic reasons. Yet, an Asian-American is being blamed by someone who didn't get accepted, regardless of their hard work to beat out other applicants. Rather, the adult is blaming the hard working minority instead of himself, as everyone is successful in their own right, but it just happens to be that a certain race, looking for new opportunities in America, is much more productive than those who chose to squander the privilege of freedom of speech by blaming their own losses on others.



Source: Composite ACT-SAT Scores," TheUnsilencedScience.blogspot.com, 18 October 2014.

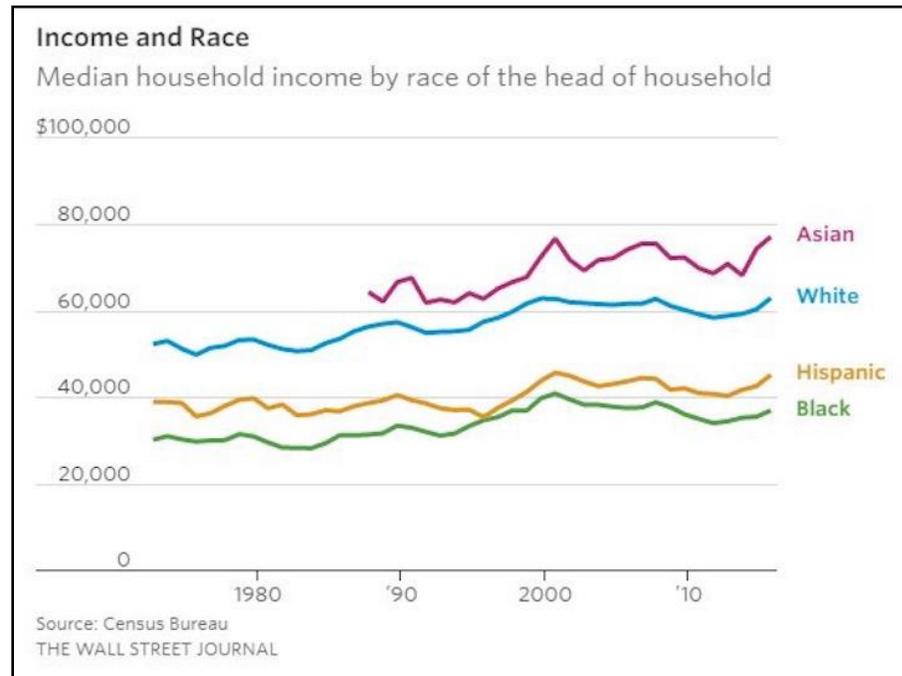
Asian-Americans do, however, possess some of the best overall educational and income based statistics seen in America. Originally released by College Board, one blogspot.com member compiled SAT-ACT Composite scores into a graph based on race. There are many lines, each corresponding to either a race or sex, increasing as SAT-ACT scores go up every year. Asian-Americans have the highest overall and consistent averages. Using this example one could very well deduce that the Asian-American population does exemplify the characteristics of a model minority, as they test much better than all other American races (around an 1100 as of 2013). It's because of this that they achieved this stereotype, as their hard work led many others who work much less than them to scrutinize them about a quality trait that is lacking in modern society: work ethic. However, this does not mean that they should be verbally or physically assaulted because of their prosperity. Rather, the other races around them should use Asian-Americans as an example as what they should strive to be.



Source: Katy Murphy, “UC Admissions Rates Compared,” The Mercury News, 12 August 2016.

But ACT and SAT scores are not the only areas in which this race excels in, Eastern races do have a greater rate of acceptance into more elite schools. According to a visual provided by the Bay Area News Group, Asians and Pacific Islanders take up 38% of all accepted UC applicants, and “78% of Chinese-American students applying to a UC campus got a spot in the freshman class.” This trend is not only applicable to UC schools however, this occurs across the country at schools such as Harvard, MIT, and other universities (Hartocollis and Saul). Yet, these increased rates of acceptance among specific races has made schools wary, therefore resulting in the introduction of policies trying to increase school diversity in which academic and athletic

statistics will be purposefully overlooked for the sake of color, subjecting the Asian-American minority to a degree of educational prejudice because of their model minority status (Hartocollis and Sault).



Source: Josh Zumbrun, "Income and Race," *The Wall Street Journal*, 13 September 2015.

Continuing to the final beacon of Asian-American success, the population as a whole seems to be much more wealthy in regards to average household income than most other races. One study put out by the US Census Bureau affirms these notions through a graph of compiled income statistics. The graph features color coded lines each corresponding to a different race, with the y-axis listing the amount of income earned. Through simple observation, it is obvious that most Asian-American households hold the number one spot for highest median income in America. Nonetheless, Asian-Americans are culturally more likely to be doctors and specialize in the sciences and mathematics, therefore earning them the spot of highest median income per

household because of their high paying professions. Due to this standard, they ultimately and regrettably fit the stereotype of modern minority through their superior income.

Although Asian-Americans do outperform all other races in regards to highest overall median household income, some still believe that they are undeserving of the model minority label. These people often use population statistics when comparing income between races. Asians alone encompass about 5.7% of the American population, and when compared to the caucasian majority of 76.9%, the sheer numerical difference between population values creates a much greater discrepancy in favor of those of European heritage, as even though whites may have lower income, their masses make up the difference (“U.S. Census Bureau QuickFacts: UNITED STATES”). Admittedly, the Caucasian population possesses a much larger amount of wealth due to their numbers, but Asians, within the definition of model minority, are still a much better fit than all other American races. Rather, the reason that they don't possess as much wealth as their white counterparts is merely their living costs. Most Asians living in America reside in high density, high living cost metropolitan areas. In fact, around 25% of Asians live in areas in which the cost of living is 20 times above average, compared to the mere 7% of Caucasians (Guo). This completely defies the perceived belief that American-Asians do not fit under the model minority label, as their living costs and money invested in real estate are not reflected in statistics involving wealth, giving whites a false sense of economic superiority.

Asian-Americans as a whole undeniably fit under the category of model minority, regardless of others efforts to try and stop this type of labelling. Yet, like all other human beings, they should not be expected to do better than anyone else, and should simply be themselves. High expectations often cause people stress and anxiety, as seen through the academic stress

many Asian parents put their children through today. Though this may pay off in the end, as they end up earning much more than other racial counterparts, get accepted into schools much more frequently, and have higher overall test scores. Using modern day trends, it is very likely, and mildly unfortunate that Asian-Americans will continue to possess the model minority stereotype deservingly forced upon them during the gold rush of the late 19th century.

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