



Our American Education

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Picture this: a creaky boat filled with unkempt people in foreign clothes, each and every mind of which was full of uneasiness and uncertainty, each eager and excited to escape the hardships of the original country. Each was also ready to work and to try his or her luck in America. They were ready to chase their American dream. When they reached America, however, their hopes and dreams were brutally executed. It soon became apparent that the “gold paved” roads of America were simply nonexistent. The Asian people were at a predisposed disadvantage in this foreign land. They came here poor looking for work, with little to no support and scant resources except for their willpower and an impetus to succeed. Against all odds, they worked hard with their own blood, sweat, and tears. They were a paramount proponent of the Intercontinental Railroad, and took up jobs in factories and farms while being seen as “cheap labor”. When the hard work finally paid off and their success grew, so did the anti-Asian sentiment in America. Even in the initial years in America, they were targeted and bombarded by racist campaigns of eradication. These human rights violations went unseen and unpunished by the law. Take, for example, the Chinese Massacre of 1871. In Los Angeles, California, a mob of around five-hundred people took to the streets of Chinatown to attack, rob, lynch, and execute Chinese people. According to the Los Angeles Public Library,

“During the 1850s and 1860s, few attacks against Chinese were reported and press coverage of the Chinese was fairly neutral. The tolerant attitude changed in 1869 when the *Los Angeles News* and *The Los Angeles Star* began running editorials condemning Chinese immigration and attacking the Chinese as inferior and immoral. Unsurprisingly, there was a concomitant increase in racially motivated attacks against the Chinese.”

The article also goes on to state that due to rising tensions between the locals and the Chinese, a shootout broke out which caused the death of civilian Robert Thompson. As a result, an already militant group of locals rose up to brutally lynch, beat, and murder the Chinese people of Los Angeles. When the fighting stopped, seventeen Chinese people lay there, lifeless. This barbaric massacre of innocents was brushed off by the people of Los Angeles, and anti-Chinese sentiment grew. Anti-Asian sentiment in Los Angeles was a cause of fallacious hit-pieces against the Chinese. Anti-Asian and Sinophobic mentalities have been around for a long time and have become such an intricate part of the American social fabric to the degree that many turn a blind eye.

At present, anti-Asian discrimination in the U.S. has been “conveniently” swept under the rug. It’s almost as if this long history of discrimination was erased from American public education, while anti-Asian sentiments remain perpetuated in America, which is now comprised



of 5.6% Asians. Even the government has institutionalized anti-Asian discrimination, with a plethora of taxes and policies enacted in order to impede the evident prosperity and success of the Asian community. One of these acts is the infamous Chinese Exclusion Act, which thwarted any Chinese laborers from entering the country. Since then, California embraced an array of legislations to further oppress the Asian people for “stealing” jobs and income from the locals. The long-standing institutionalized discrimination against Asians, whether it be physical, political, or social, has compromised the ability of Asian Americans to pursue their American dream, of which education is an integral part. Outright racism in the past has morphed into modern-day stereotypes, interlaced with historical bigotry. The conjunction of these two factors has reduced Asians’ overall success, their access into academic institutions, and their ability to prosper upon graduation.

Even decades after the horrid discrimination and display of pure hatred against the Asian people, anti-Asian sentiments continue to exist and take on implicit yet equally consequential forms. Stereotypes and discrimination persist, especially in regards to education. The usual stereotype that applies to Asians in education is that they are the most intelligent and academically competent. This stereotype is promoted in many schooling systems, and I myself have been a target. Many Asian students work hard to fulfill these high expectations set by their peers, teachers, parents, and institutions. It is a particularly damaging stereotype as we feel very pressured to meet these “benchmarks” and feel horrible about ourselves if we don’t. To complicate the matter, these outrageous stereotypes and expectations do have roots in reality. In the ancient Chinese society, its people gave education a high seat as a means of elevating one’s position in society. This importance of education was diffused throughout Asia and to later generations who brought this cultural value to America. Even in Asia, this societal stigma of education remains. Higher education seems an unattainable goal in many Asian countries, and competition begins in elementary schools where children study and do homework for long hours in order to contend for a spot at the top of the class. In America, it seems absurd to subject children to such hardships at a young age. However, many Asian immigrants including my own parents promote the idea to varying extent. This heightened importance on education is what has deepened the stereotype of intellectualism surrounding Asians in American’s school systems. It has then been magnified and cemented into the minds of peers, teachers, parents, and educational institutions. If you don’t conform to these expectations, you are usually seen as lesser and unintelligent. I have been a victim of this stereotype from my peers, who see me as less bright for being at a lower level of math and getting worse grades. For me and many others, even a low A seems socially unacceptable, while that usually is an outstanding grade for other students. While this “positive stigma” could be seen as a “motivator” to better oneself and perform better academically, it is often a too perfect pair of shoes many struggle to fit in. This stereotype is a very limited space to confine the Asian Americans, leading to a narrow narrative on identity formation and life pursuits. It prevents the necessary growth of the Asian-American community



from just being “smart people”. It also makes Asians look much worse than others if they perform poorly academically since most people have such high expectations for them.

These high expectations also alter the college admissions system and the chances of Asian-American students getting accepted into a college, creating overall impacts on all Americans. Race-based affirmative action is a policy that a small number of institutions--usually the elite ones--take part in. It is the practice of preferring those who are a part of groups that have been historically disadvantaged. However, the practice does not positively impact Asian Americans’ acceptance rates, even though our people were discriminated against in history. This brings back the point of the history of anti-Asian discrimination being swept under the rug in the U.S. While Asians have a 65% enrollment rate in American universities, that number has stagnated and even decreased over time as colleges attempt to increase racial diversity on their campuses. Notably, while race is taken into consideration in college admissions, it is allegedly not a major deciding factor of whether one makes it into college or not. In fact, most “non-competitive” colleges don’t take race into factor at all. However, in response to their parents’ pressures and peer expectations, most Asians strive for these top elite schools, in which race does play a role, even if small, in acceptance. One of these schools is the world-renowned Harvard University. A recent lawsuit claimed that Harvard discriminated against Asians and put their performance to a higher standard compared to other groups. However, the judge ruled in favor of Harvard and came to the verdict that Harvard did not and does not discriminate against those of Asian descent. The case did bring the possible discriminatory admissions process of elite schools into the public eye. Additionally, the plaintiff did present data that shows discrimination against Asians who applied to Harvard. According to New York Times reporter Anemona Hartocollis, “Harvard consistently rated Asian-American applicants lower than others on traits like “positive personality,” likability, courage, kindness and being “widely respected,” according to an analysis of more than 160,000 student records filed Friday by a group representing Asian-American students in a lawsuit against the university.” The article also reports that although Asian-American academic and extracurricular performance was better than any other group, their personality ratings and analysis significantly dropped and jeopardized their chances of acceptance into Harvard. In addition, Harvard itself launched an investigation into its admissions process, in which they found that there was indeed a bias against Asian applicants. It should also be mentioned that Harvard tried to conceal the results of this investigation. In contrast, an essay published by professors Jennifer Lee and Van C. Tran of Columbia University, who both agree that they were benefited by affirmative action, states that even in the college admissions office of many top colleges, Asian stereotypes and discrimination still come into play. The two Columbia professors also write that stereotypes and bias on personality traits are usually based on the assumption that the Asian applicant is too one-sided and not well-rounded, and that they lack in diverse interests and personality. The stereotype surrounding Asians are by no means grounds to cram them into a such a general label and to flat out discriminate them in a professional setting.



Asians seem to be held to higher academic and societal standards than other groups of people, which greatly reduces their chance of getting into a prestigious school. The stereotype also makes them seem as though they are only good for academics, which also reduces acceptance rate.

And it's not just Harvard, either. Many other top colleges and Ivy League schools have had similar ratios of minority groups, despite major changes in the number of applicants, which implies that there could be racial quotas, furthering the point of discrimination against Asians and pitting them against other minorities in universities. Additionally, after graduation, many Asians will find that they are exposed to far fewer employment opportunities than their Caucasian counterparts, according to the aforementioned essay published by professors Jennifer Lee and Van C. Tran. This has serious legal implications as it is illegal for a business or private school to discriminate on the basis of race. The negative impacts of race-based affirmative action far outweigh the positives. It denies equally or more qualified students from entering top institutions and acquiring jobs. I believe that this policy should be abolished and that the application process to schools and jobs should be colorblind.

In the modern society, there seems to be a forgotten minority and a forgotten history in American: the Asians. The decades of institutionalized discrimination against Asian people without punishment has been purged out of the sanctified history education. Now, instead of being seen as an inferior and hated people, Asians are too often seen as book-smart and unpersonable. However, there is much more to the Asian people: centuries of culture and history which seems to be forgotten in the minds of many due to predetermined thoughts and mentalities surround us. These predisposed mentalities are the reason why we are held to such a high standard at the secondary and institutional level. As an Asian American and a high-school freshman, I still have much to learn. My hope is that 1800-era anti-Asian sentiments and modern stereotypes disappear in order to clear a path for future generations. I hope that Asian-Americans are held to an equal standard in future admissions offices and that we are seen as equals and not as subservient. My wish is for a better future and the expansion and growth of opportunities for us, and I am eager to see the blossoming of the Asian-American community. Whether it be developing new technologies to leading key organizations, Asians are truly a great people and have a lot more versatility and dimensions than at first glance. And as I grow older, I yearn for the day Asians can pursue their American dream equally, and this must be achieved through the abolition of institutionalized discrimination and the authorization of Asians to have an equal education, our American education.

**Author Carter Xu is a high-school freshman from Georgia. He participates in many clubs such as FBLA and HOSA and is also a Boy Scout. Fully immersed in a Chinese (mandarin and Cantonese) home environment, Carter cherishes his Chinese heritage and finds great pride in being Asian-American.*

