Together In Empowerment: Campus Action Plan

Not Your Model Minority: A Zine Gauging the Monolithic Asian American Identity at USC

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Project Purpose

As interns participating in APASS’s Together In Empowerment (TIE) program and in fulfilment of the campus action plan, we collected survey responses from a small pool of diverse USC Asian and Pacific Islander students to gauge the atmosphere surrounding Asian/Asian American issues.

In particular, we have centered our project around the monolithic misrepresentation of the Asian community and how it feeds into issues of mental health, trauma, and violence. This zine aims to help address the parts of Asian history that often go unseen (based on our own experience as well as the survey results) as well as highlight how the portrayal of Asian Americans as a monolith affects the present day.

Given the results and research, we call upon the USC administration and wider USC community to commit to providing serious and robust support to our peers during this time and beyond.
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Brief Timeline of Asian American History

1500s
The earliest documented Asian immigrants to arrive in the colonized land that would become the US were the Filipinos of Luzon in California and Louisiana. Some, travelling with Spanish colonialists, escaped their captors and formed St. Malo in 1763. South Asian Indians were also some of the first Asians to arrive, in their case as part of the global trade system.

1800s
1850s—creation of the first ethnic enclaves by Chinese, Japanese, and Filipino immigrants as a method of securing relative safety among anti-Asian discrimination and violence, having been forced to live in segregated housing, mining towns, rural areas

1898—United States v. Wong Kim Ark grants automatic citizenship to children of Chinese (and all) immigrants born in the US
1900s

1900— South Asian immigrants first settle in the United States from the Indian state of Punjab, mostly male farmers settling in California and marrying Mexican women.

1923— In the case of United States v. Bhagat Singh Thind, the court states that while South Asians are Caucasian by scientific precepts, they do not fit the “common sense definition of white,” and therefore cannot apply for naturalization. And by doing so, Supreme Court admits race is a social construct, whether they meant to or not.

Mid-Late 1900’s

1946— Luce-Cellar Act allows Filipino and South Asian immigrants to naturalize for the first, based on a quota system.

1965— Delano Grape Strike begins as 2,000+ Filipino farm workers refuse to continue working in grape fields north of Bakersfield, led by Larry Itliong. Itliong convinces Cesar Chavez and Dolores Huerta to bring the issue to the National Farm Workers Association, and Mexican-Americans join the strike. Together they carry out one of the most important and successful strikes in US history.
Mid-Late 1900’s continued

1975— United States involvement in the Southeast Asian wars resulted in the displacement and resettlement of 130,000+ Southeast Asian refugees from Vietnam, Laos, & Cambodia.

2010’s - Present

2012— Sikh-temple shooting in Oak Creek, Wisconsin, where 40-year-old Wade Michael Page fatally shot six people and wounded four others. The event was labeled as “domestic terrorism incident” perpetrated by a white supremacist. One member of the Sikh community, Manjit Singh, said that “People think we are Muslims,” highlighting the ignorance of not knowing the difference between religions.

2020— President Trump calls coronavirus “kung flu” and instigates more discriminatory acts towards Asian Americans. The use of this weaponized language by Trump is clear that he meant to demonize the Chinese and results in more stereotyping of Asian Americans as being foreign or culturally exotic.
The Model Minority Myth: How Monolithic Misrepresentation Feeds into Issues of Inequity and Continued Racial Injustice

What is the Model Minority Myth:
The Model Minority Myth is a collection of stereotypes perpetuating the narrative that Asian Americans are the model minority; it characterizes Asians as naturally smart and hardworking, having supposedly already achieved success and a higher status in American society due to innate talent and perseverance. This overly-positive narrative alienates Asian Americans as perpetual foreigners and attempts to erase past and current racism against Asian-Americans from conversation.

How the Model Minority Myth is a Monolithic Misrepresentation
Because the Model Minority Myth and Monolithic Misrepresentation create only a single image that supposedly encompasses the people of an entire continent, it mistakes shared cultural aesthetics within Asia as one homogenous entity; the myth furthers the mistaken assumption that all Asians are the same and have identical experiences.

Ellen D. Wu, an Asian-American studies professor at Indiana University, has been especially careful about monolithic misrepresentation in her work, which focuses on dispelling the Model Minority Myth; her books highlight “that the construction of a model-minority identity is indeed an overgeneralized characterization of the Asian American population, given that its formation is largely based on the history of Japanese and Chinese Americans.”¹ Not only is the misdecoration disrespectful, but it sends the message that “Asian Americans are all the same — and all different from other Americans.”²

Aggregated Data and Economic Realities
In a report by NAPAWF, an organization that works to build power among Asian American Pacific Islander women, the group addressed the misleading image of Asian Americans by pointing out “for every dollar the average white man makes in the United States, an Asian Indian woman makes $1.21 and a Taiwanese woman makes $1.16. A Samoan woman makes $0.62. A Burmese woman makes 50 cents.”³ The variation within the Asian population is often overlooked because disaggregated data, or data that include information on individual countries of origin, is difficult to come by.
In comparison with a median net worth of $355,000 for white households in Los Angeles, three Asian subgroups—Japanese, Asian Indians, and Chinese—had higher median net worth, while three others—Filipinos, Vietnamese, and Koreans—had much lower net worth. That represents an enormous gap of 25 to 1 within the Asian community.

While Asian Americans, on average, fare well on measures of education and employment, a closer look reveals great diversity by ethnicity, immigration status, and geographic area—as well as barriers to economic success. Representing Asians as a monolith neglects these differences and hides the challenges many Asian Americans face.

**Google Form Connections: The Model Minority Myth and the issues it causes is definitely prevalent at USC**

*sample size: 25 students*

**Student Testimonies:**
- Opinion that many on-campus clubs focus on East-Asians
- “A lot of students who are not Asian think that Asian=East Asian and that Asian=international student. As a Southeast Asian with darker skin than East Asians I often felt like I did not belong in the Asian community because of how powerful the Asian=East Asian monolith has been in conditioning me and other members of society.”
- “Whenever Asians are talked about during a history class or world perspectives class, we are usually addressed as Asia but never really go in depth into the regions much less the countries.”
- “Vague emails” from USC about anti-Asian hate crimes that “didn't feel genuine, and lacked an acknowledgement of intersectionality and depth among the Asian American community.”
Mental Health

Studies have shown that internalization of the model minority myth not only leads to negative psychological outcomes, but may also negatively impact ethnic identity development among Asian Americans.

That internalization increases the likelihood of presence of certain psychological symptoms (e.g. depression, anxiety, low self-esteem). It also perpetuates “status-based rejection sensitivity,” the anticipation of prejudice based on membership to a stigmatized group.

A recent qualitative study indicated that Asians would see a counselor only as the last resort, with family and friends being first sources of help. (Kim, B. S. K., Brenner, B. R., Liang, C. T. H., & Asay, P. A. (2003))

Issues such as shame, stigma, and discrimination can deter Asians from seeking and utilizing services. Prevalence of mental health problems among Asians is not that much different from other minority groups but Asians use services at a rate that is far below that compared to white people.

What USC mental health resources are you aware of or have used?

![Chart showing awareness of USC mental health resources]

On a 1-5 scale, please rate how the following statement pertains to you: "I have access to safe spaces to talk about Asian/American issues at USC."

![Bar chart showing responses]

- 4 responses
- 2 responses
Anti-Asian Violence

Anti-Asian violence should not be seen as merely episodic or as an individual act of violence. It should be viewed as a structure of U.S. settler colonialism and racial capitalism.

A feature of settler societies like the U.S. that are founded on dispossession of the native population.

Violence becomes a pattern that emerges in moments of crisis when the capitalist exploiter fails to generate profit or when his imagined sense of safety feels threatened.

Insecurity is then expressed through violence directed at a deemed “alien.”

“Tell us that we matter to you, that you stand by us, that you support us. Do not only show you support us when Asian women ruthlessly murdered or when it seems cool or hip to support us. Be there for us and show us you are here to support us every day, not just when we are mourning.”

-Felicia Tacto, junior
Conclusion

Our group acknowledges the institutional and imperial directives that enable the model minority myth and violence against Asians and Asian Americans. Stated in our purpose, we created this not only to inform the greater USC, but to also implore change and support. Provided by students we surveyed along with our group members, we call for the following:

1. Administrative
   - Disaggregated data of Asian students at USC to better support historically underrepresented students
   - Retention programs for Southeast Asian students and faculty
   - An expansion of Asian American studies and Asian programs beyond East Asia
   - Encourage professors providing space for discussions of white supremacy and current issues that may be weighing on students

2. Asian Pacific American Student Assembly & Asian Pacific Student Services
   - Celebration of Southeast Asian holidays (e.g. Thai, Lao, Cambodian, Myanmar New Year)
   - Encourage cultural organizations to be aware of their position on campus not only a social outlet but also as an advocate for communities of color and minority groups

3. Mental Health
   - At every year’s mandatory USC Health workshop, highlight all the mental health cultural resources available so students are aware and encouraged to seek services