

HOW DOES U.S. SOCIETY VIEW ASIAN AMERICANS?

**An infodeck based on Claire Jean Kim's 1999 paper,
"The Racial Triangulation of Asian Americans"**

How does our society view Asian Americans, beyond the usual Black/White binary?

Maybe as a hierarchy, with White people at the top with the most privilege, Black people at the bottom, and Asian Americans in between?

Hmmm... but this ignores the different kinds of racism that Asian Americans and Black people face

OK, maybe we can't make comparisons then, because each group faces its own, independent kind of racism

But they're not independent! Racism against Asian Americans also perpetuates racism against Black people, and vice versa. Here's a better explanation:

Triangulation Theory

Our society views Asian Americans in terms of two factors:

**SUPERIORITY/INFERIORITY
(MODEL MINORITY)**

Our society perceives Asian Americans as relatively superior to Black people in order to oppress both (but especially Black people).

**INSIDER/OUTSIDER
(PERPETUAL FOREIGNER)**

Our society perceives Asian Americans as outsiders, unassimilable, in order to ostracize them from political and civic action

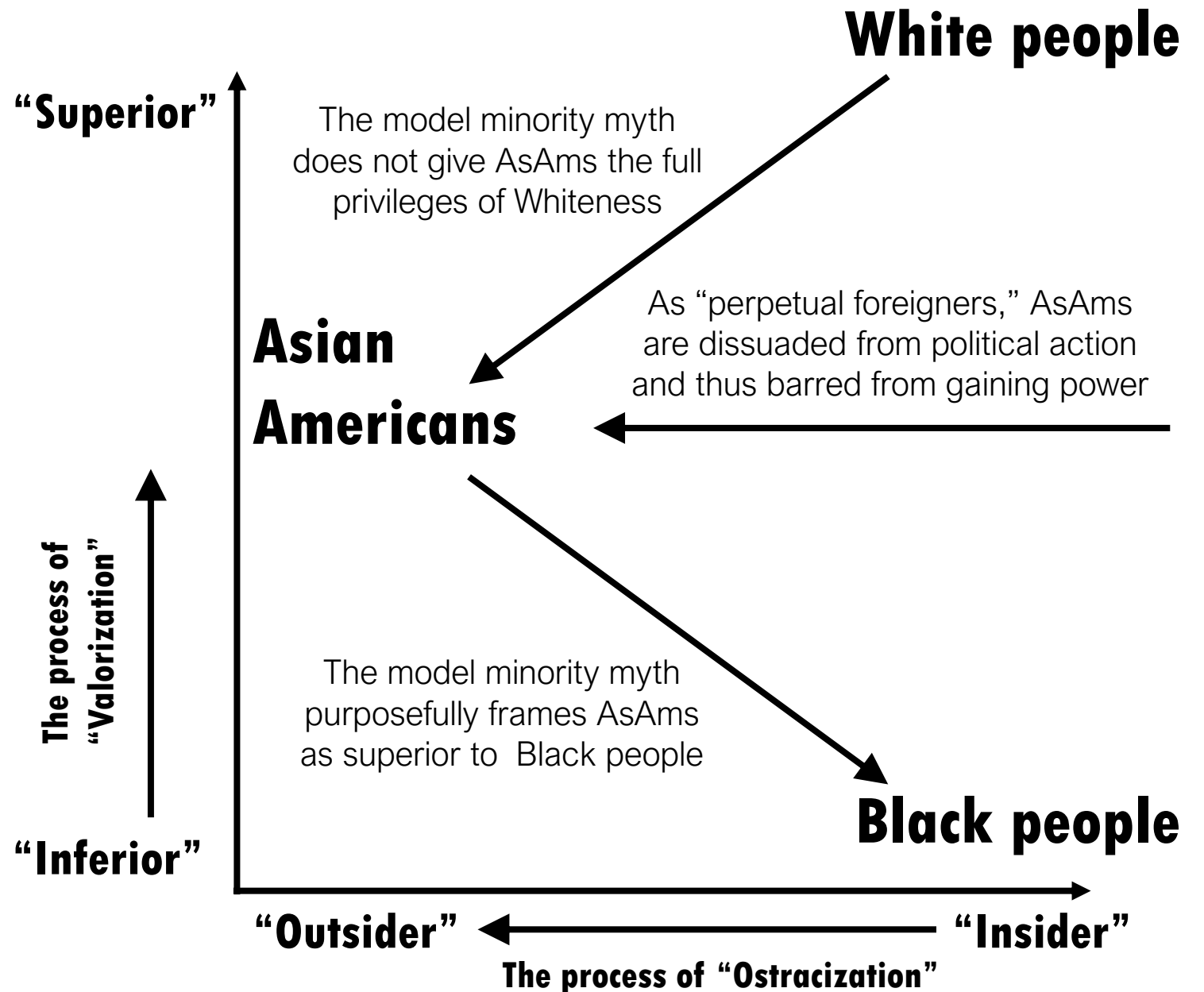
What is the Model Minority Myth?

- **Definition: the myth that Asian Americans have achieved economic success through quiet hard work, education, and other “cultural values”**
- **Not only does the Model Minority Myth (MMM) exaggerate Asian American success, homogenize Asian America, and ignore discrimination against Asian Americans...**
- **But also, the MMM purposefully frames Asian American “*cultural values*” as superior to Black “*cultural values*” by implying that if Black people just stopped complaining about racial inequality and worked harder, they could also succeed**
 - **“Cultural values” is a stand-in for race in “colorblind” discussions**
 - **Asian American “cultural values” are also shown as passive, apolitical, and irreconcilably different from White America**
- **The MMM conveniently shifts the cause of racial inequalities away from systemic reasons and to internal sources**

What is the Perpetual Foreigner Stereotype?

- **Definition: the stereotype of immigrant and native-born Asian Americans as innately “un-American,” forever unable to assimilate into American culture**
- **The Perpetual Foreigner Stereotype (PFS) erases the enormous contributions that Asian Americans have made in the formation of this country, scapegoats Asian Americans in times of domestic turmoil, and deters Asian Americans from gaining political power**
 - **Outright ostracization (e.g., The Chinese Exclusion Act) has been replaced with more subtle reminders of foreignness, such as calling COVID-19 “The China Virus” or “Kung Flu,” and the associated rise in violence against Asian Americans**
- **By ostracizing Asian Americans, the PFS leaves the Asian American community vulnerable to attacks and too politically weak to retaliate**

**In short,
the model minority
myth and the
perpetual foreigner
stereotype ostracize
Asian Americans,
leaving the
community
vulnerable to attack,
while also further
oppressing Black
people through false
comparisons.**



Claire Jean Kim, "The Racial Triangulation of Asian Americans"

Where do we see the Model Minority Myth and the Perpetual Foreigner Stereotype?



Candace Owens ✓ @RealCandaceO · Mar 28

According to FBI statistics, black Americans are the #1 violent offenders against Asian-Americans.

The horrific murder in DC may not have fit the narrative, but is emblematic of the facts.

If people cared about fixing black culture, they would start with telling the truth.

Candace Owens ✓ @RealCandaceO · May 28, 2018

Jewish and Asian Americans have made significant economic gains in this country with hardly any political representation in the government.

When will the black community learn that black politicians do not equate to black progress?

1K

6.2K

21.3K



You'll often see people contrast the *perceived* political passivity of Asian Americans with the *perceived* aggression and political activism of Black people, making solidarity between the two communities more difficult and disenfranchising both groups.

Opinion: Andrew Yang: We Asian Americans are not the virus, but we can be part of the cure

We Asian Americans need to embrace and show our American-ness in ways we never have before. We need to step up, help our neighbors, donate gear, vote, wear red white and blue, volunteer, fund aid organizations, and do everything in our power to accelerate the end of this crisis. We should show without a shadow of a doubt that we are Americans who will do our part for our country in this time of need.

Claire Jean Kim, "The Racial Triangulation of Asian Americans"

Viewing Asian Americans as somehow "un-American" seems to excuse violence committed against Asian Americans, while also ignoring the fact that not only are there Asian Americans who "vote, wear red white and blue, volunteer," etc., but also, Asian Americans who choose not to are still just as American.



Let's look at anti-Asian violence during COVID-19

- **Context: during the COVID-19 pandemic, hate crimes against Asian Americans have skyrocketed more than 150% as Asian Americans get scapegoated for spreading the “China Virus”**
- **Political disenfranchisement and media portrayals of Asian Americans as “foreign” and “passive” make the Asian American community especially vulnerable to racist attacks**
 - **During US-Asia conflicts, domestic attacks on Asian Americans become a proxy war**
 - **Differences in ethnicity, nationality, and citizenship status are disregarded by attackers because of historical ignorance towards Asian American diversity**
- **Instead of focusing on the systemic issue of pervasive anti-Asian rhetoric in America, the discussion has shifted to inaccurately blaming Black people for this rise in violence, again elevating the “Model Minority” at the expense of the Black community and Black-Asian solidarity**

Let's look at Affirmative Action

- **Context:** In the 1980s, an increase in the number of Asian American applicants to prestigious universities did not result in a comparable increase in acceptances
- **Public debate quickly shifted from the bigger issue of if these institutions had imposed racial quotas on Asian Americans to preserve the Whiteness of their student bodies**
- **Instead, it focused on whether Affirmative Action programs specifically designed to benefit Black and Latinx people unfairly discriminated against Asian Americans, who were more portrayed as more deserving of admission**
 - **Note that Affirmative Action programs impact a relatively miniscule number of slots**
 - **Numerous Asian American advocacy groups and community organizations disputed this false narrative, but were ignored— probably because they contradicted the myth of Asian American apoliticalness**

Let's look at early U.S. Legal History

- **People v. Hall (1854):** after a White man murdered a Chinese man in front of 3 Chinese witnesses, the California Supreme Court ruled that Asians could not testify against Whites in court, because they feared that this civic right would lead to all other rights of citizenship
 - To argue their case, the court cited an earlier law that barred any Black person from testifying against a White person, and claimed that Black included Asians
- **Naturalization Law of 1790:** only White people could naturalize and become US citizens; an 1870 amendment later allowed people of African descent to naturalize
 - Asians tried to gain citizenship by arguing that they were white, without much success:
 - **Ah Yup (1878):** Chinese-born Ah Yup could not naturalize because he was a member of the “Mongolian” race and therefore by definition not Caucasian, according to leading ethnologists
 - **US v. Bhagat Singh Thind (1923):** India-born Thind could not naturalize even though he was considered Caucasian by ethnologists, because he was not white in accordance with the understanding of the common man