Asian Americans As Model Minorities Essay, Research Paper

Asian Americans as Model Minorities

For 20 years, Asian Americans have been portrayed by the press and the media as a successful minority. Asian Americans are believed to benefit from astounding achievements in education, rising occupational statuses, increasing income, and are problem-fee in mental health and crime. The idea of Asian Americans as a model minority has become the central theme in media portrayal of Asian Americans since the middle 1960s. The term model minority is given to a minority group that exhibits middle class characteristics, and attains some measure of success on its own without special programs or welfare.

Asian Americans are seen as a model minority because even though they have faced prejudice and discrimination by other racial groups, they have succeeded socially, economically, and educationally without resorting to political or violent disagreements with the majority race. The ?success? of the minority is offered as proof that the American dream of equal opportunity is capable to those who conform and who are willing to work hard. Therefore, the term model minority really is a means (1) to control minority groups in society, (2) to validate and reinforce the values of the white majority, and (3) to inform other minority groups that they too could achieve success if they conform to the values and norms of the middle class.

Statistics that support this model minority theory can be found in many areas, the first being education. Fifty percent of Asian Americans 25 and older hold a bachelor?s degree compared to twenty-nine percent of the white population.

Many studies have used standardized tests and school records, such as SAT, GPA, and other measures to compare the academic performance of Asian American students with non-Asian American students. Several studies have indicated that the outstanding academic performance of Asian students might be attributed to their cultural and family values.

Another area of model minority success is found in the professional workforce. Asian Americans as a group work in the same place of employment as whites. This alone suggests that they have succeeded. A high percent of Asians are found at the top of professional and managerial positions. This success in the workforce has also lead Asians to hold one of the highest income figures per family by race.

On the other hand, the model minority label is also seen as a myth. This label suggests that Asian Americans conform to the norms of society, do well in school and careers, are hardworking and self-sufficient. It follows that Asian Americans are a model for all groups, especially other minority groups. However, a closer look uncovers serious problems for if the model minority label accurately describes Asian success, then they should compare favorably to whites on indicators of success. The myth of the model minority shows up in academics and industry. For example Asians are typically excluded from executive standings in public and private areas. In part, this is due to a discriminatory view that they are either content or they are not suited for executive positions despite all their education and abilities. Incomes of Asian Americans are also not what they seem. Asians tend to live in extended families, therefore more members of the household that work contributes to the perceived high-income status.

The term model minority is at best and incomplete picture of the Asian-American experience in the United States. Yet this perception continues, in spite of the fact that Asians are also discriminated against and have not achieved equality with whites.

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