

# The History of Yellow Peril and the Model Minority Myth in Relation to AAPI-Hate in 2020

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## ABSTRACT

In this paper, we discuss the relationship between the yellow peril stereotype along with the model minority myth and how they influence the recent Asian American and Pacific Islander (AAPI) Hate in 2020. We first delve into the treatment of Asian Americans during the interwar years, specifically the immigration center Angel Island. Using oral histories we collected from outside sources and books, we discuss the social and legal treatments of the Asian immigrants both in the immigration center and in the country. Next, we discuss the origins of the model minority myth that date back to the 1960s to 70s using newspaper articles and interviews conducted during the time period. We also explore the formation of the Asian American identity and movement in the 1960s and 70s through newspaper articles that demonstrate the community's pushback to white supremacy and dismantling harmful prejudices against Asian Americans. From this historical lens, we connect the formation and continuation of the yellow peril and model minority stereotypes to the Asian American hate of 2020 through current interviews and podcasts with Asian Americans. This reemergence of hate against the Asian American community demonstrates the stereotypes' long-lasting effects. Simultaneously, the AAPI protests evidence that Asian Americans continue to fight back against their mistreatment as a continuation of the Asian American Movement that started in the late 1960s. These historical and modern events assist our discussion of the Asian-American community's relationship with white supremacy in order to fight back against the discrimination we face today.

## INTRODUCTION

“An elderly Thai immigrant dies after being shoved to the ground. A Filipino-American is slashed in the face with a box cutter. A Chinese woman is slapped and then set on fire. Eight people are killed in a shooting rampage across three Asian spas in one night”<sup>1</sup>. In 2020, there was a grave shift in the attitude towards Asian Americans due to the pandemic. Compared to the beginning of 2020, the beginning of 2021 saw a 164% increase in the number of hate crimes against Asian Americans in the 16 largest U.S. cities.<sup>2</sup> The shocking fact is that the stereotypes that motivated these hate crimes have existed for over two centuries. One of these stereotypes is the yellow peril, which is essentially the fear instilled within Western society that Asians will invade their lands and threaten Western values and ways of life. This sentiment toward Asians first emerged in the late 1800s but gained more traction during the interwar era between World War I and World War II. The 1960s saw the inception of the model minority stereotype which instead placed Asian Americans on a pedestal. At the same time, Asian Americans began organizing the Asian American movement based on and in solidarity with the civil rights movement for racial justice. The analysis of the relationship between the Asian American Pacific Islander movement of 2020, the origins of the model minority myth, and Asian

<sup>1</sup> “Covid 'Hate Crimes' against Asian Americans on Rise,” *BBC News* (BBC, May 21, 2021), <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-us-canada-56218684>.

<sup>2</sup> “Anti-Asian Prejudice March 2020-Center for the Study of Hate & Extremism.” San Bernardino : CSUSB , n.d.,pp. 1, <https://www.csusb.edu/sites/default/files/FACT%20SHEET-%20Anti-Asian%20Hate%202020%203.2.21.pdf>.

immigration in the interwar era has revealed that the ideas of yellow peril and the model minority myth still exist to uphold white supremacy, despite Asian American resistance. By establishing the historical aspect of racism and xenophobia against Asian Americans, we get a better understanding of how to combat discrimination today.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

The yellow peril is both a belief and a stereotype in which people fear that Asians will infiltrate Western society and destroy its values. Democracy, Christianity, and Western innovation are examples of what white Americans believed Asian immigrants would attempt to disrupt. Furthermore, their religion and customs were considered barbaric as they didn't follow the beliefs of Christianity and the typical Western ways of life.<sup>3</sup> Extremely racist media portrayals emerged as well that depicted Asian immigrants as evil and malicious. From then on, the yellow peril stereotype made life difficult for many Asians who were trying to enter the country and even those who already lived in America.

Although the yellow peril stereotype first emerged in the late 19th century with the rise of Chinese immigrants, it gained popularity among white American citizens during the interwar years when many different Asian ethnicities entered America through immigration centers. One of nineteen immigration centers was Angel Island, located off the coast of San Francisco, becoming the main Pacific gateway in and out of America.<sup>4</sup> Although immigrants from North America, South America and Australia used this center, Asian immigrants consisted of the largest population at Angel Island. From 1910 to 1940, over one million people passed through Angel Island with over 800,000 were immigrants and 300,000 were either citizens or residents of the United States.<sup>5</sup> The process for most immigrants to enter the country was long and grueling. Some were detained for only a couple of days, but for others it was months.

There were countless checkpoints that needed to be passed just for officials to even consider allowing an immigrant into the country, essentially hindering many Asian immigrants from entering the country. They needed the right papers and documents that verified the country they came from, and they also had to have a reason to want to enter the country in the first place. Many Asian immigrants at the center were fleeing from either religious, ethnic, or gender persecution in their home countries. Despite this, American officials continued to bar immigrants from entering the US. However, immigrants who were rich, educated, or had family in the country had an advantage to gaining admission into the United States. For example, six Korean students from Shanghai came to Angel Island to escape persecution from Japan; however, they didn't have proper identification and had hookworms.<sup>6</sup> Luckily, a letter from the secretary of state in D.C. stated that due to their wealth, they should be given special consideration for entering the country which proved successful for their admission.<sup>7</sup> Sadly, these cases constituted only a small percentage of what happened to detainees at Angel Island. Instead, many had to endure exhausting and arduous interrogations. These sessions included questions that were as simple as asking what country they came from to as hard as who lived in the second house on the third street in their town, or even what kind of birthmark a distant relative had on their hand. Henry S.H. Gee recounted his experience before entering the island and on the island, stating that he "had spent at least a year practicing for the interrogation even before [they] left for America."<sup>8</sup> These interrogations went in-depth in order to make it harder for immigrants to pass, allowing officials to deport them regardless of the struggles they

<sup>3</sup> "Asian Immigration: The 'Yellow Peril,'" *Omeka RSS*, accessed July 14, 2021, <https://digitalgallery.bgsu.edu/student/exhibits/show/race-in-us/asian-americans/asian-immigration-and-the--yel>.

<sup>4</sup> Erika Lee and Judy Yung, "Angel Island: Immigrant Gateway to America," in *Angel Island: Immigrant Gateway to America* (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 2012).

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, 4.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, 4.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, 4.

<sup>8</sup> Henry S.H. Gee, "Angel Island: Immigrant Journeys of Chinese Americans," *Angel Island: Immigrant Journeys of Chinese-Americans* (Lydia Lum), accessed July 2021, <http://www.angel-island.com/hgee.html>.

will endure back in their home country. Additionally, the implementation of the Immigration Act of 1917 required literacy tests to be given to all adult immigrants and also denied access to those in the other Asian ethnic groups, such as South and Southeast Asians, along with Middle Easterns.<sup>9</sup> Those who were educated and wealthy had a chance of gaining entry into the country. Other than the privileged, there was a slim chance they could get in even after passing all the tests and having all the documents.

Along with the grueling interrogations, the living conditions and treatment of Asian immigrants were dreadful. Mary Bramford, a baptist missionary, visited Angel Island often when it was in use to give out Bibles to immigrants that were housed there. On one of her visits in 1917, she documented her observations on the immigration center. She reported that ten acres of land were sectioned off for the use of the immigration center, and within these acres, there were sections for each ethnic group of immigrants.<sup>10</sup> According to her, all immigrants were kept separate depending on their ethnicity, and men and women were housed in different buildings.<sup>11</sup> Women were more likely to be deported than men were, and “usually deportation means that the Chinese women are taken to Hong Kong, where they fall almost immediately to the hands of slave-dealers, who take them back to their old dreadful life.”<sup>12</sup> White people knew the struggles that Asians had to face in their home countries, yet due to their neglect and fear of Asian immigrants, they would rather send them home than accept them as one of their own as American citizens. As an outsider, Bramford used different vocabulary to refer to different ethnic groups; for example, she refers to the Chinese immigrants as “creatures,”<sup>13</sup> whereas she calls the Indian immigrants “brothers.”<sup>14</sup> The view of most immigrants by outsiders was not a respectable one, and much of the language Bramford uses to describe them is also what many other Americans would use as well. Americans, especially missionaries, saw what was going on in the centers, but due to their white supremacist beliefs and xenophobia, they allowed Asian immigrants to be mistreated within the centers.

However, the xenophobia and yellow peril stereotype was not only experienced in the centers. Asian immigrants had to deal with these hardships even after finally gaining entry into the country. White people continually oppressed Asian Americans, denying them jobs, hate-crimes, and like previously mentioned, portrayed them as evil in the media. The Immigration Act of 1917 had also placed a special tax amongst new immigrants. Through the yellow peril stereotype, Asian Americans were seen as less than by their white counterparts; however, white people that displayed their reluctance to accept Asians as Americans were also quick to praise them as the “model minority” and place them in a positive light, which in reality was another stereotype to uphold white supremacy.

The ‘model minority’ stereotype overshadowed the previous ‘yellow peril’ stereotype during the 1960s. This stereotype regards Asian Americans as more hardworking, better educated, and wealthier than other racial or ethnic groups.<sup>15</sup> It mainly centered on Chinese and Japanese Americans because they were the largest ethnic populations and the most prominent groups that consisted of the Asian American community between the 1940s and 1960.<sup>16</sup> However, this stereotype later applied to other ethnicities who also identify as Asian American. Although the model minority

<sup>9</sup> Ibid., 4.

<sup>10</sup> Mary E. Bamford, “Chapter 1,” in *Angel Island: the Ellis Island of the West* (Chicago: Woman's American Baptist Home Mission Society, 1917), pp. 11-22.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid., 10.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid., 10.

<sup>13</sup> Bramford, 19.

<sup>14</sup> Bramford, 22.

<sup>15</sup> Eunil David Cho, “From the Yellow Peril to the Model Minority and Back Again: Unraveling the Orientalist Representations of Asian Americans in the Age of Covid-19,” *Journal of Pastoral Theology*, 2021, pp. 1-18, <https://doi.org/10.1080/10649867.2021.1929711>, 6.

<sup>16</sup> Ellen D. Wu, *The Color of Success: Asian Americans and the Origins of the Model Minority* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2015), 7.

stereotype contradicted the ‘yellow peril’ perception of Asian Americans, both contributed to positioning white people as superior to other races. The stereotype can be traced back to a newspaper article written by sociologist William Peterson in 1966, “Success Story, Japanese American Style.” Throughout this article, Peterson outlined the discrimination that Japanese Americans faced in the 20th century, particularly the Japanese internment camps in World War II, and subsequently showed how this racial group achieved economic and social upward mobility. Peterson wrote, “barely more than 20 years after the end of the wartime camps, this is a minority that has risen above even prejudiced criticism.”<sup>17</sup> He compared Japanese Americans with other “problem minorities” such as Black Americans whose negative stereotypes had relegated them to “slum life.”<sup>18</sup> By contrasting other minorities’ inability to overcome negative stereotypes imposed upon them, Peterson presented Japanese Americans as a ‘model minority.’ In another newspaper article published in *The New York Times* in 1970, the author wrote, “the pig-tailed coolie has been replaced in the imagination of many Americans by the earnest, bespectacled young scholar.”<sup>19</sup> This line exemplifies how the perception of Asian Americans in the 1960s shifted from the “pig-tailed coolie,” which reinforces the yellow peril stereotype to “the earnest, bespectacled young scholar,” an image that supports the model minority stereotype.

During this time period, many Asian Americans actively perpetuated the stereotype to benefit themselves. Japanese and Chinese Americans emphasized their attributes such as their culture of harmony and accommodation, respect for family and defecation, and their hard working attitude to fight against their discrimination to purposefully conform to the norms of the white middle class. This ultimately lifted Asian Americans to be superior to other racial groups and achieve white validation by shifting the public perception of Asian Americans from “aliens ineligible to citizenship” into “admirable—albeit colored—Americans.”<sup>20</sup> In the newspaper article published in 1970, “Orientals Find Bias Is Down Sharply in U.S.,” the author interviewed numerous Asian Americans who claimed that they faced little to no discrimination. For instance, a man named Mr. Chu stated that “if you have ability and can adapt to the American way of speaking, dressing, and doing things, [...] then it doesn’t matter any more if you are Chinese.”<sup>21</sup> Cho, along with other interviewees in this article, expressed how Asian Americans could overcome discrimination themselves and assimilate into American culture. This widespread belief among Asian Americans contributed to their reputation as obedient, hard working, and passive citizens which assisted them in receiving more help and having more opportunities to succeed compared to other marginalized groups. Later in the article, Elaine Yuehy, a junior in college, recounted, “My teachers have always helped me because they had such a good image of Chinese students, [...] ‘Good little Chinese kid,’ they said, ‘so bright and so well-behaved and hard-working.’”<sup>22</sup> Yuehy benefited from this stereotype because her teachers treated her well from her racial reputation. Therefore, these positive assumptions and consequences rooted in the model minority myth influenced Asian Americans to perpetuate the stereotype.

Despite it being widely accepted in American society, this stereotype was a myth that invalidated many of Asian Americans’ actual lived experiences. In the 1970 newspaper article, the author claimed that the discrimination against 400,000 Chinese and 500,000 Japanese Americans since the end of World War II had greatly diminished and that Asian Americans had successfully assimilated into American society, which was untrue because they still faced discrimination.<sup>23</sup> For instance, Chinese and Japanese Americans had not achieved economic and social parity with

<sup>17</sup> William Peterson, “Success Story, Japanese American Style (Article),” *Success Story, Japanese American Style* (article) | *Densho Encyclopedia*, accessed July 14, 2021, [https://encyclopedia.densho.org/Success%20Story,%20Japanese%20American%20Style%20\(article\)/](https://encyclopedia.densho.org/Success%20Story,%20Japanese%20American%20Style%20(article)/).

<sup>18</sup> William Peterson, “Success Story, Japanese-American Style,” *The New York Times*, January 9, 1966, 21.

<sup>19</sup> “Orientals Find Bias Is Down Sharply in U.S.,” *The New York Times* (The New York Times, December 13, 1970), <https://www.nytimes.com/1970/12/13/archives/orientals-find-bias-is-down-sharply-in-us-discrimination-against.html>.

<sup>20</sup> Wu, 5.

<sup>21</sup> “Orientals Find.”

<sup>22</sup> “Orientals Find.”

<sup>23</sup> “Orientals Find.”

white Americans by 1960. Although more Japanese and Chinese Americans received education than Black and white Americans, Japanese and Chinese Americans earned less money compared to their white counterparts who obtained the same years of education. California's Japanese and Chinese American men had a lower median income, \$4,388 and \$3,803 respectively, compared to white men, \$5,109, even though the Japanese and Chinese American men had higher levels of education.<sup>24</sup> The model minority myth masked this economic and social inequality by assuming that all Asian Americans were wealthier and more successful than other racial groups, even white Americans. Articles highlighted successful Asian Americans with distinguished careers such as the architect Minoru Yamasake who designed the original World Trade Center, director GERALD Tsai who managed a multimillion-dollar investment management firm Manhattan Fund, and Nobel-prize winning physicists Tsung Dao Lee and Chen Ning.<sup>25</sup> However, these were only the stories of the wealth, health, and success of a few which ignored the broad range of inequities that the Asian American community faced.<sup>26</sup> Moreover, the stereotype justified historical racism against Asian Americans, such as justifying Japanese internment during World War II. *Newsweek* proclaimed that Japanese Americans were "glad" for being "pushed into the mainstream of American life." In the article, a Japanese American resettler in Chicago reflected, "It seemed at the time painful, but now my wife and I feel that the evacuation was a godsend. You know, America gives you a chance, no matter who you are."<sup>27</sup> Instead of placing legitimate blame on the American government and country rooted in white supremacist and xenophobic attitudes, Japanese American's success in the 1960s functioned to uphold white supremacy by justifying their internment as a chance to prove their 'Americanness.' Therefore, the model minority stereotype erased or justified the wide range of Asian Americans' discrimination and inequalities they faced.

The model minority stereotype also reinforced Asian Americans as foreigners and unable to be completely accepted in American society. In the original 1966 article by William Peterson, he emphasized the racial distinctiveness of Japanese Americans by attributing their success to their "alien culture" and "heritage."<sup>28</sup> In a U.S. News and World Report article from 1966, "Success Story of One Minority Group in U.S.," the author reported that Chinese Americans move ahead by "applying the traditional virtues of hard work, thrift and morality."<sup>29</sup> The emphasis on Japanese and Chinese traditional values racialized their success because their achievements were shown to be based on their foreign culture. This supports the racial triangulation theory put forth by Claire Jean Kim, who positioned Asian Americans as superior to Black Americans and inferior to white Americans. The other dimension of her theory placed Asian Americans as foreign compared to Black and white Americans, who were considered "insiders" (See Figure 1).<sup>30</sup> The model minority myth accentuated the "foreignness" of Asian Americans and disallowed them from being able to be completely accepted into American society.

The myth also pit Asian Americans against other marginalized groups to maintain the racial order that upholds white supremacy. This stereotype became widespread during the Civil Rights Movement which fought for equal rights for Black people in America. This myth conveniently diverted attention from the systemic racism and inequality ingrained in American society, and instead set standards for how minorities should behave to overcome the discrimination themselves.<sup>31</sup> In the U.S. News and World Report article, the author directly compared Chinese Americans

<sup>24</sup> Wu, 146-148.

<sup>25</sup> Wu, 1.

<sup>26</sup> Cho, 2.

<sup>27</sup> "Nisei: Disguised Blessing," *Newsweek*, December 29, 1958, pp. 23-23, 23.

<sup>28</sup> Wu, 170.

<sup>29</sup> "The Success Story of One Minority Group in the United States (Book Report Sample)," The Success Story of One Minority Group in the United States, Book Report Download Sample, December 9, 2017, <https://essayzoo.org/book-report/apa/history/success-story-minority-group-united-states.php>.

<sup>30</sup> Claire Jean Kim, "The Racial Triangulation of Asian Americans," *Politics & Society* 27, no. 1 (1999): pp. 105-138, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0032329299027001005>, 108.

<sup>31</sup> Cho, 7.



with Black Americans. The article read, “At a time when it is being proposed that hundreds of billions be spent to uplift Negroes and other minorities, the nation’s 300,000 Chinese Americans are moving ahead on their own—with no help from anyone else.”<sup>32</sup> This signaled to Black Americans that they should be able to overcome their discrimination themselves, similar to how Asian Americans seemingly did through their work ethic. White Americans and some Asian Americans perceived their success as evidence that American society was neutral and color-blind, invalidating the racial inequality within society that the Civil Rights Movement exposed in the 1960s and 70s.<sup>33</sup> This fueled tension and animosity between Asian and Black Americans, pitting one against the other to mask the real perpetrator: white supremacy. Therefore, the stereotype placed Asian Americans as superior to other marginalized groups to maintain this racial order and uphold a white supremacist American society.

Although there were many harmful stereotypes imposed upon and intentionally perpetuated by Asian Americans, they also actively combatted anti-Asian discrimination. Largely influenced by the Civil Rights Movement, the Asian American Movement originated in the late 1960s which formed the Asian American identity. The Civil Rights Movement uncovered much of the racial inequality that underlied America which influenced Asian Americans to examine their own place within the racialized society. As Asian Americans participated in the movement to eradicate discrimination and segregation for Black people, they became aware of the discrimination they suffered within the same system. Whereas Asian Americans previously identified more with white people in helping Black people integrate into American society, their newly gained racial consciousness led them to empathize more with Black Americans in their shared struggle against racial discrimination toward equality.<sup>34</sup> Furthermore, Asian Americans were also influenced by the Black Power movement to form the Yellow Power movement within the Asian American Movement. In an article published by *Gidra*, an underground newspaper that published writings and artwork supporting the Asian American Movement, Amy Uyematsu in “The Emergence of Yellow Power in America” wrote, “Asian Americans can no longer afford to watch the black-and-white struggle from the sidelines. They have their own cause to fight, since they are also victims—with less visible scars—of the white institutionalized racism. A yellow movement has been set into motion by the black power movement.”<sup>35</sup> This explicit call for a Yellow Power movement demonstrates some Asian Americans’ willingness to fight back against the discrimination they faced. Thus, Asian Americans formed their own political identity including various Asian ethnic groups, which in large part was caused by the lumping together of these groups in the American perception. For instance, in government statistics, society used the term ‘Oriental’ to lump together Asian Americans, so they found it convenient and necessary to act collectively.<sup>36</sup> Hence, the advent of the Asian American Movement allowed Asian Americans to counter their oppression through the newly formed political identity.

The Asian American Movement sought to dismantle the racial order and white supremacy to obtain racial justice for Asian Americans and other marginalized communities despite the harmful stereotypes imposed upon them. In another article in *Gidra*, “Yellow Power,” written by Larry Kubota, Kubota stated that the “‘Yellow Power’ means we as Asian Americans are seeking greater control over the direction of our lives. It also expresses a determination to effect constructive changes in the larger society.”<sup>37</sup> This definition of the movement demonstrates the motivation of Asian Americans to affect change in society despite the many harmful and contradictory stereotypes placed upon them. Kubota rejected stereotypes that discriminated against and oppressed Asian Americans, including the “passive Oriental stereotype,” which he contrasts with “the shout of Yellow Power,” a move toward empowering Asian Americans to speak up against their oppression.<sup>38</sup> In the article written by Uyematsu, she also rejected the model minority

<sup>32</sup> “Success Story,” in *U.S. News*, 6.

<sup>33</sup> Cho, 7.

<sup>34</sup> William Wei, *Asian American Movement* (Temple: Temple University Press, n.d.), 12-13.

<sup>35</sup> Amy Uyematsu, “The Emergence of Yellow Power in America,” *Gidra*, 1969, pp. 9-13, 9.

<sup>36</sup> Paul Wong, “The Emergence of the Asian American Movement,” *Bridge 2.1*, 1972.

<sup>37</sup> Larry Kubota, “Yellow Power,” *Gidra*, April 1969, pp. 3-4, 3.

<sup>38</sup> Kubota, 3.

myth and how many Asian Americans take “false pride in their economic progress” and believed that Black Americans could similarly succeed if they had the same value systems. She countered, “the white power structure allowed Asian Americans to succeed through their own efforts while the same institutions persist in denying these opportunities to [B]lack Americans.”<sup>39</sup> Uyematsu revealed that the colorblind and neutral society that many Asian Americans believed in were false, and that they had to counter stereotypes such as the model minority myth to achieve true racial equality for all marginalized communities. The rejections of these stereotypes to fight against white supremacy in how it not only affects Asian Americans, but other marginalized communities highlights the inclusive nature of the movements to demand racial equality for all despite stereotypes pitting minority groups against one another.

However, the prevalence of the ‘model minority’ and ‘yellow peril’ stereotypes would come to affect the Asian American community for years to come. From the onset of the COVID 19 pandemic, Asian Americans have been experiencing an intense amount of discrimination. In the 2020 Case Study, we will be investigating how the current racism connects to the deeply entrenched stereotypes that have existed for much longer than a year.

## 2020 CASE STUDY - AAPI HATE AND MOVEMENT

Asian Americans have been portrayed as a danger to the United States for over a century, and the manifestation of the yellow peril stereotype over the past year has been eerily similar to what we saw during the interwar era. While Asian Americans have always experienced racism, especially microaggressions, this past year has seen an eruption of anti-Asian sentiment compared to before. According to data released by the Center for the Study of Hate and Extremism at California State San Bernardino, anti-Asian hate crimes spiked by 146% across 16 of America’s largest cities which makes up over 10% of the country’s population.<sup>40</sup> This sudden, shocking increase in anti-Asian sentiment in the past year can be primarily attributed to the COVID 19 pandemic because the virus was thought to have originated from Wuhan, China so many blamed the pandemic on the Chinese population. Consequently, Asian Americans experienced various different types of abuse including both physical and verbal harassment. For instance, a report from the non-profit Stop AAPI Hate details many personal experiences of racism. One woman explains that a man came up to her in a store and said, “What’s wrong? You are out here shopping! We delisted your companies, shipped back your international students...when do you ship out? When do you ship out? We are going to take away your citizenship!”<sup>41</sup> The monograph *Crisis* successfully connects the current anti-Asian sentiment to its roots over a century ago. Ari Larissa Heinrich’s “The Future Repeats Itself: COVID-19 and its Historical Comorbidities” draws a parallel between the origins of the yellow peril stereotype and the present. Heinrich argues that Asian Americans are being wrongfully blamed for COVID 19. In the mid 1800’s, China was believed to be the “cradle of smallpox” which proves how Asians have been blamed repeatedly for the spread of diseases thus perpetuating the yellow peril stereotype.<sup>42</sup> Heinrich uses the authenticity of primary sources while also utilizing the details from secondary sources to create a sound, well founded argument. Forwarding about a century into the 1920’s, Asians began immigrating to the United States through places such as Angel Island where they experienced tremendous amounts of racism. They were physically inspected extremely thoroughly and forced to live under severe conditions from anywhere for a few weeks to years. They were separated on the basis of race, the Japanese population being favored over the Chinese. While the similarities are not

<sup>39</sup> Uyematsu, 11.

<sup>40</sup> “Anti Asian Prejudice March 2020-Center for the Study of Hate & Extremism.” *San Bernardino : CSUSB*, (2021),<https://www.csusb.edu/sites/default/files/FACT%20SHEET-%20Anti-Asian%20Hate%202020%203.2.21.pdf>.

<sup>41</sup> Russell Jeung, “STOP AAPI HATE NATIONAL REPORT,” <https://secureserv-ercdn.net/104.238.69.231/a1w.90d.myftpupload.com/wp-content/uploads/2021/03/210312-Stop-AAPI-Hate-National-Report-.pdf>.

<sup>42</sup> Ari Larissa Heinrich, “The Future Repeats Itself: COVID-19 and Its Historical Comorbidities,” in *Crisis = Duo Shi Zhi Qiu*, (Australian National University Press, 2021),166-178.

immediately apparent, the experiences on Angel Island actually have a striking resemblance to the events today, specifically the prevalence of the yellow peril stereotype which we see through the harassment that Asian Americans experience today. Author and historian Erika Lee describes the intense conditions her grandfather went through to immigrate to the United States, “Immigration officials ordered my grandfather to be subjected to the most invasive and humiliating medical exam that I’ve seen... they had the medical doctor at Angel Island examine him for diseases, but also to measure every aspect of his body; his teeth, his genitals, his height to determine if his claim of being seventeen was actually true.”<sup>43</sup> Utilizing the harsh stereotypes associated with yellow peril, America has been able to successfully uphold white supremacy.

While the yellow peril stereotype has clearly influenced the hate crimes that have occurred in the past year, a more elusive yet equally potent culprit is the model minority myth. From its origins in the 1960s, it has proven its continued prevalence in America perhaps more so than the yellow peril stereotype in the fifty years prior to the pandemic. Its influence on 2020 AAPI hate, however, has been less conspicuous. The model minority myth insinuates that Asian Americans have assimilated into American culture due to the fact that they are portrayed as smart, law abiding citizens. While this may seem positive, the stereotype is actually quite negative because Asian Americans are still considered inferior to white Americans and face a lot of discrimination. In Cathy Park Hong’s *Minor Feelings: An Asian American Reckoning*, she states that “In the popular imagination, Asian Americans inhabit a vague purgatorial status: not white enough nor black enough... We are the carpenter ants of the service industry, the apparatchiks of the corporate world, we are math-crunching middle managers who keep the corporate wheels greased but who never get promoted since we don’t have the right ‘face’ for leadership.”<sup>44</sup> Asian Americans are portrayed as “forever foreigners” who will never truly have a place in American society which furthers the idea that Asian Americans do not belong here. This thought would play a sizable role in the views of non-Asians against the Asian American community. The model minority myth also insinuates that they are meek and obedient which, according to research, would paint Asian Americans as more attractive targets.<sup>45</sup> The use of the model minority myth to uphold white supremacy is apparent; by making Asian Americans seem like they do not belong, it gives white America a path to “assert its dominance” over them. In Li and Nicholson’s journal article “When model minorities become “yellow peril”—Othering and the racialization of Asian Americans in the COVID-19 pandemic,” they discuss the relationship between the model minority myth and white supremacy. Their primary goal within the paper is to refute the idea of Asian assimilation. In order to support their argument, they connect the model minority myth, racial triangulation theory, and white supremacy together to demonstrate how the model minority myth effectively upholds white supremacy over multiple minority groups (particularly Black and Asian Americans). The authors state that “In her influential racial triangulation theory, Kim (1999) elaborates on how Whites Americans valorize Asian Americans—for example, as “model minority”—relative to subordinate Blacks and meanwhile they construct Asians as immutably foreign and unassimilable with Whites to ostracize them from politics and civic membership; the conjunction of the two processes—relative valorization and civic ostracism, both based on cultural and/or racial groups—helps protect White privileges from both Black and Asian American encroachment and ensures the domination of Whites over the two minority groups (Kim, 1999, pp. 107, 112).”<sup>46</sup> This paper provides a thought provoking, in-depth analysis of the

<sup>43</sup> Erika Lee, “When Xenophobia Turns into a virus,” March 4, 2020, in *NPR*, podcast, MP3 audio, <https://www.thisamericanlife.org/radio-archives/episode/622/who-you-gonna-call>.

<sup>44</sup> Cathy Park Hong, *An Asian American Reckoning*, (One World, 2020).

<sup>45</sup> Zaid Jilani, “Why are Asian Americans being attacked and What can you do about it,” *Greater Good*, (2021), [https://greatergood.berkeley.edu/article/item/why\\_are\\_asian\\_americans\\_being\\_attacked\\_and\\_what\\_can\\_you\\_do\\_about\\_it](https://greatergood.berkeley.edu/article/item/why_are_asian_americans_being_attacked_and_what_can_you_do_about_it).

<sup>46</sup> Yao Li, and Harvey L. Nicholson, “When ‘Model Minorities’ Become ‘Yellow Peril’—Othering and the Racialization of Asian Americans in the COVID-19 Pandemic,” *Sociology Compass* 15, no. 2 (2021). <https://doi.org/10.1111/soc4.12849>.



connection between deep-seated stereotypes and racism towards the Asian American community which makes this quite an effective piece.

As the yellow peril and model minority stereotypes have evolved, they have caused the Asian community as a whole to be perceived as a monolith. During the time of Angel Island, Asians were treated differently on the basis of nationality. However, over time, this attitude has transformed completely due to the fact that the stereotypes against Asian Americans have come to represent the entire community. This portrayal of Asian Americans is extremely dangerous because it masks “intragroup inequality.”<sup>47</sup> In the past year, we have seen Asian Americans of various ethnic groups get assaulted, not just Chinese Americans. According to an article by Professor Lisa Son from Barnard College, “Asian Americans are frequently viewed as all being much the same—we’re treated as though we don’t have rich inner lives. And that’s a breeding ground for the anti-Asian racism and violence we’ve seen amplified over the past year.”<sup>48</sup> The journal article “From Narrative Scarcity to Research Plenitude for Asian Americans” highlights the variety between different groups of Asians. The authors, Ramakrishnan and Lee, claim that there is a narrative scarcity of the Asian American population, and in order to create a narrative plenitude, more research must be done. This is extremely important because research helps dismantle stereotypes. The authors include data to disprove both the model minority myth and the monolith. According to the article, there is a massive amount of variation in terms of educational attainment among different groups of Asian Americans. For example, Cambodians fall below the U.S. mean, while Indians tend to rise far above it. Additionally, Asian Americans have the largest income inequality among any group. Indians have a median income of \$100,000 while Burmese have a median of \$36,000. Apart from income inequality, Asian Americans also face intragroup inequality in English-language proficiency, poverty levels, welfare receipt, access to health care, and health outcomes.<sup>49</sup> The arguments within this article are quite effective as they not only provide a great deal of research to back their claims, but also a great deal of analysis on them. By reinforcing stereotypes, the idea of the monolith effectively aids in the validation of white supremacy.

Together, all of the stereotypes we have seen support white supremacy in unique ways, and unless people are educated about the consequences of enforcing these stereotypes, there will not be any change. Asian Americans have been actively fighting against this racism for over five decades. In the past year, Asian Americans have found unique ways to fight against injustices towards their community. There have been many rallies in support of the AAPI community. One of the organizers of the Boston AAPI protest discusses the key to abolish racism in the following: “In terms of how do you stop it, we need to understand how we got here and the evolution and the historical precedent for this surge. That requires us to understand U.S. imperialism and U.S. wars because we see the same M.O. and the same story and the same trajectory as soon as the U.S. has a target under its scope.”<sup>50</sup> Online protest has also been utilized. The hashtag “Stop AAPI Hate” became extremely popular.<sup>51</sup> Additionally, the organization Stop AAPI Hate has been fighting against the anti-Asian sentiment by collecting data on the hate incidents in the past year to show how many

<sup>47</sup> Jennifer Lee, and Karthick Ramakrishnan, “From Narrative Scarcity to Research Plenitude for Asian Americans,” *Journal of the Social Sciences* 7, no. 2 (2021): 1. <https://doi.org/10.7758/rsf.2021.7.2.01>.

<sup>48</sup> Lisa Son, “Opinion: Stop Treating Asians as a Monolith, *Barnard College*, Accessed July 12, 2021. <https://barnard.edu/news/opinion-stop-treating-asians-monolith>.

<sup>49</sup> Jennifer Lee, and Karthick Ramakrishnan, “From Narrative Scarcity to Research Plenitude for Asian Americans,” *Journal of the Social Sciences* 7, no. 2 (2021): 1. <https://doi.org/10.7758/rsf.2021.7.2.01>

<sup>50</sup> Mary Markos, Kwani A. Lunis, “‘This Is Nothing New’: Stop Asian Hate Protesters, in Their Own Words,” *NBC Boston*, (May 3, 2021). <https://www.nbcboston.com/news/local/this-is-nothing-new-stop-asian-hate-protesters-in-their-own-words/2346889/>.

<sup>51</sup> Shereen Marisol Meraji and Gene Demby, “Screams And Silence,” March 24, 2021, in *NPR*, podcast, MP3 audio, <https://www.npr.org/transcripts/980437156>.

Asian Americans have been experiencing racism.<sup>52</sup> All of these different forms of protest help slowly remove many of these deeply entrenched stereotypes.

## CONCLUSION

Our findings prove that the Asian American community is utilized by America to uphold white supremacy through multiple stereotypes that have been implemented over the past two centuries that continue to exist today. The yellow peril idea and stereotype has been used as a means for white people to spread their xenophobia and racism against Asians in a way that actively discriminates against them. On the other hand, the seemingly contradictory stereotype of the model minority places Asian Americans on a pedestal as superior to other minorities while still inferior to white Americans. However, this stereotype further establishes Asian Americans as foreigners in America and functions to oppress and invalidate the systemic racism of other marginalized communities. These stereotypes have effectively continued to exist to this day which still cause people to discriminate against the Asian American community. The hate crimes today have been influenced by the yellow peril and model minority stereotypes because they portray Asians as being “diseased foreigners” who do not have a place in this country. The idea of the monolith further exacerbates these stereotypes by grouping all of the diverse nationalities and cultures into one. By researching the historical and current manifestations of discrimination against Asian Americans, we acknowledge the devastating effects of white supremacy and racism that explain why these incidents have been happening. Since we have discovered the reason for all of the hate crimes we have been experiencing in the past year, we hope to educate many on where this racism comes from and how we can eliminate these racist ideologies.

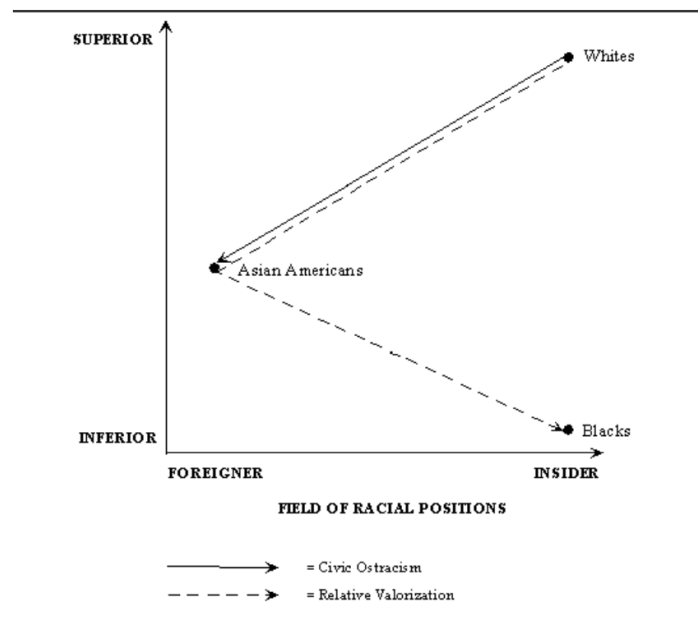


Figure 1. Racial Triangulation.<sup>53</sup>

<sup>52</sup> Namkung, Victoria, “The Story behind the Group Tracking Anti-Asian Hate Incidents,” *NBCUniversal News Group*, (May 4, 2021). <https://www.nbcnews.com/news/asian-america/story-group-tracking-anti-asian-hate-incidents-rcna662>.

<sup>53</sup> Kim, "The Racial," 108.

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## AUTHOR CONTRIBUTION STATEMENT

K.K. conducted research on the yellow peril stereotype and its presence in the interwar years. L.T. conducted research on the origins of the model minority myth in the 1960s and 70s. S.P. connected these two stereotypes together and exemplified their presence in the Asian American community in 2020.

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