

Asian american experience



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Asian American Experience The pain and the suffering, the oppression, and the exclusion all describe the history of Asia America.

When they arrived to the United States, they become labeled as Asians.

These Asians come from Japan, China, Korea, Laos, Thailand, and many other diverse countries in the Eastern hemisphere. These people wanted to escape from their impoverished lives as the West continued to infiltrate their motherland. They saw America as the promise land filled with opportunity to succeed in life. Yet due to the discrimination placed from society and continual unfair treatment by the government, the history of Asian American was being defined and written every day they were in America, waiting to be deported because of the complexion of their skin. Striving everyday to conform and mix with society, the Asian American faced constant rejection and exclusion from the American way of life, defining the history of Asian America.

The Asian Americans came to America with a common goal: to seek work and make money. In the article The Centrality of Racism in Asian American History, Takaki tries to frame the Asian American history and describe the hardships and unfair treatment absorbed by the Asian American. Takaki asserts: Employers developed a dual wage system to pay Asian laborers less than white workers and pitted the groups against each other in order to depress wages for both. " Ethnic antagonism"- to use Edna Bonacich's phrase- led white laborers to demand the restriction of Asian workers.

Throughout the article, Takaki shows the hardships endured by the Asian Americans due to the oppression and discrimination from the " whites. These

Asian Americans lost their low-wage jobs, and they realized their only options were to become “shopkeepers, merchants, and small businessmen.” The Asian Americans were excluded from the labor market, and the only means of survival was to be a self-entrepreneur. They were forced to separate from society and start their own businesses. Even today Asian Americans have been labeled as Laundromat and restaurant owners.

This fear of Asian Americans stealing their jobs influenced the government to respond. Hence, the Asian Americans have a rich history of holding a wide range of occupations throughout their history. The government targeted the Asian Americans as a threat. As Takaki asserted, “Unlike European immigrants, Asians were also victimized by the institutionalized racial discrimination of public policies.” These policies include the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882 and the National Origins Act of 1924. The social image of America can clearly be seen as only “whites” when the government institute policies to encourage European women to arrive to America so the immigrants can form families, while Asian women were barred the entry to prevent families to form for Asian Americans.

Furthermore, the Asian American was denied naturalization when the government instituted the “The Naturalization Law of 1790.”² Thus the Asian American would not be able to exert any political pressure without the ability to vote. These extenuating circumstances continue to shape the history of Asia America. In addition, the fear of the Asian American can be seen beyond the governmental exclusion policies and social pressures. Takaki explains how during World War II, the president issued Executive Order 9066, which forced Japanese Americans to be incarcerated in

internment camps by the federal government. If the United States were afraid of people who had origins with the enemy, then the Germans and the Italian Americans should have been incarcerated.

The Japanese Americans were feared especially from their skin complexion. Even though two thirds were citizens, the American government lacked the trust in these people to remain loyal to the country. This kind of specialized treatments of Asians is unique only to Asian Americans, and this is what defines the history. Asian Americans were different than the other minority groups because of their status.

In the article " Rethinking the Centrality of Racism in Asian American History," Sylvia Yanagisako points out that the Asian Americans enjoyed a better quality of life with better education and occupational status compared to the African Americans, Chicanos, and American Indians. The favorable socioeconomic position of Asians can be clearly seen from the high rates of college attendance and a lower rate of infant mortality. The problem with the success of Asian Americans is that they may eventually forget their cultural roots. Tagaki demonstrates that Asian Americans are ubiquitous on college campuses, including Harvard, Princeton, Stanford, and MIT. " Yuppies" drive BMWs, wear designer clothes, and congregate at continental restaurants.

We cannot forget how far Asian Americans have come to be accepted by society. Many Asian American history professors fail to mention the family groups of these " bachelors" in America. The men clearly dominated the history of Asia America because the women were left at home. As

Yanagisako noted, “ at least half the Chinese ‘ bachelor’ population was married and had wives and children in China.

Therefore the early Asian Americans were comprised of mostly working men who seek success. They strived to make money in order to eventually return home to their families. There has been little research on this “ transnational” family, and Yanagisako believes that this could amplify our understanding of Asian American communities, understanding the waves of people, money, and goods between the nations that have shaped the Asian American experience. Furthermore, some Asian Americans struggle to find their identity as an Asian American. In the article What Does It Mean to Be Asian American? , Bill Ong Hing tries to discover the different ethnicities and their relation to being identified as Asian American. Bill Ong Hing remarks: “ To many, then, the concept of Asian American identity may not involve a new cultural identity.

Rather, it might properly be viewed as a means of achieving political integration. ” There have been numerous accounts where these Asian Americans identify themselves as Chinese, Japanese, and other nationalities rather than Asian. I can recall identifying myself as an Asian American because of the Caucasian environment I grew up in. However, the people who grew up in a Taiwanese community identify themselves as Taiwanese or Chinese, rarely would they identify themselves as Asian because they do not feel an affinity with the other nationalities. The complexity of the Asian American identity demonstrates the need for a deeper understanding of the sophistication and its continuing evolution.

Asian Americans tend to switch identities depending on the situation. Is the Asian American identity defined by the cultures and customs or for the political mobilization purposes? The majority tends to believe that there is not a common cultural identity established among the Asian Americans, but there is a common means of achieving political integration. As Bill Ong Hing states, “ the persistence of Chinatowns, Filipino American suburbs, and Vietnamese business pockets promotes intra-community mobilization. Thus it is extremely difficult to integrate our cultures since the immigrants tend to flock to these towns instead of integrating with society. They find it easier to identify themselves easier with their nationalities than as an Asian American. However, for the purpose of political mobilization, they understand the need to identify as Asian American in order to persevere within society.

These are the stories of our founding fathers. However the Asian American history fails to land in the history textbooks. They only make a passing notice of Asian Americans altogether. As Tagaki asserts, “ When one hears stories about the pioneers going West to shape the land, the Asian immigrant is rarely mentioned. ” The constant unfair treatment by the employers, the social pressures forcing the Asian Americans to exclude themselves from society, the government continual institution of racial and discriminatory policies has been glanced over by the historians.

We need to create a “ rev-vision” history to include Asians in the history of America. America has proclaimed to be the melting pot, a nation of immigrants. Yet coming from Asia, these immigrants were not accepted with open arms. They were seen as “ aliens” invading their land and jobs, and

even their great-grandchildren still find that they are considered “ aliens” and not accepted as Americans.

There has been a remarkable situation with Senator Daniel Inouye who became a target of racial slurs during a scandal. They wanted him to return back home to Japan even though Senator Inouye was born in America and was awarded a Distinguished Service Cross for his valor as an American soldier during World War II. Even when an Asian American would serve in the army and die as an American, society continued to mark Asians as aliens and foreigners. These are the reasons why there is a need to establish an identity as an Asian American.

With a strong political identity, society would be able to understand that Asian Americans are indeed part of their society. Instead of being judged by the character and merit of a person, our skin complexion brought judgment from society as a whole. The history of Asia America has been shaped by the continual struggle to be accepted by society. Our forefathers came to America seeking an opportunity to succeed and create better lives for their families and relatives. These men strived to break down the racial barriers, while facing persecution from the “ whites” and burdens of institutionalized racist policies from the government.

They never complained about the dual wage system, being paid less than their counterparts, and yet they still were shunned from the labor markets. However, our forefathers continued to fight to establish a life in America, whether it was establishing their own Laundromat or their own restaurant. Even to this day, we have faced many types of discrimination, and even

when we continue to work hard and have this American life, society still label us as “ aliens. ” Furthermore, with the integration of Asia America, we will continue to fight for our way of life and force society to recognize us as one of the groups of America. We will continue to create new history of our struggles as we pass these stories down generation to generation.