

What does the term
model minority refer
to according to Chan,
how accurate is thi...



Model Minority” The “ model minority” comprises those minorities who are able to assimilate into mainstream American culture by moving up from the status of working class individuals to that of middle class professionals. These individuals are referred to as model minorities because they are allowed to interact with “ a predominantly American society, living a life of relative economic comfort and raising a nuclear family.” (Chan, 2001: 51). Another important aspect of being members of a model minority are that these individuals are unlike the other minorities - the blacks - who generally tend to look for relief from federally supported public help programs. The publicity that has been given to the Asian minorities and brought forth the term “ model minority” is due to factors like low crime rates among young people in these communities and their higher socio economic status as compared to other minorities. Media publicity that propagated this view described how Asian Americans had been able to achieve a higher social class and standing through cultural mechanisms like hard work, their frugal lifestyles, their sacrifices for children and their family ties (Pyong 2006: 80). The criticism levelled against the model minority program contends that the publicity hype does not take into account all the relevant factors. For instance, the claims about Asian Americans achieving a higher economic status than white Americans in some cases, does not take into account the fact that in most Asian American families, more than one person in the family was earning and contributing, which helped to account for the higher family income. (Chan 168). Furthermore, while it was true that Asian Americans such as Chinese and Japanese had significantly higher levels of schools than non-Hispanic whites, their median incomes in the long run were

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no higher because the returns that should have come to them due to their higher levels of schooling were lower than the whites. According to the Human capital theory, the skills and knowledge gained by a worker through education and experience comprises human capital, hence the greater the capital, the greater should be the wages. Where Asian Americans are concerned however, this does not appear to hold good, since they receive lower wages in general despite higher education.

The model minority thesis has also been criticized on the grounds that it does not take into consideration the fact that most Asian Americans live in cities where wages in general are higher, as are also expenses. Comparing them on par with whites across the country who live in areas where incomes may be low on an overall basis, may therefore not offer an even platform for a fair comparison. When examining areas where the Asian American population is high, it may be noticed that there is a much higher percentage of Asian Americans who are working in low status, lower income occupations, as compared to whites who may not have such a large proportion of their comparable population engaged in low status, low income occupations (Chan 169). As Chan argues, Asian Americans are concentrated in certain professions and are not well represented in heavy machine, paper or construction industries. Hence, their concentration is more in the low paying jobs.

Chan has also argued that the low rates of unemployment among Asian Americans may suggest that they would rather be in underpaid jobs than remain unemployed. The high percentage of Asian American women in the workforce, also cited as one of the reasons for the model minority thesis,

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may be simply because the men earn so little the women are forced to work. Many Asian Americans are entrepreneurs and this is again touted as a reason for their model minority status; however as Chan argues, most of them are owners of small Mom-and-Pop stores with low gross earnings. On the basis of all these factors, the model minority thesis does not appear to be founded substantially on actual facts.

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