



PROSPANICA
CENTER FOR
SOCIAL JUSTICE

THE JOURNAL

THE PCSJ DIGITAL JOURNAL

PCSJ Mission

The chief cultural mission of the Center is to improve our ability to have critical conversations about social justice issues as a diverse and multi-faceted community. We want to encourage civil discourse and make it easier and more available.



Thomas Savino

Prospanica CEO

Founder of the Prospanica Center for Social Justice

Introduction

Prospanica calls for an end to the wave of violence and hatred targeting the Asian American community. The articles in this edition of the Prospanica Center for Social Justice Journal (formerly the Special Edition Newsletter) explore challenges faced by the Asian American community. We call on our community to understand these challenges and join us in standing in solidarity.

"Injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere. We are caught in an inescapable network of mutuality, tied in a single garment of destiny. Whatever affects one directly, affects all indirectly." Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., "Letter from Birmingham Jail," April 16, 1963

Allyship has been an important practice for Prospanica and is integrated within our programming. One of the most meaningful and impactful partnerships we have is with Ascend, Pan-Asian Leaders, led by Anna Mok. At our most recent conference in Orlando, Ascend conducted programming for international students, and Prospanica has been represented at their conference. Together, our communities represent almost 25% of the US population.

Dr. Ngan Nguyen, Ascend Foundation, contributes “Model Minority Myth & the Double-Edged Sword” a critical eye-opening article on this myth and how it plays a major role in the injustices faced by the Asian American community. Minué Yoshida’s “Asia-Latinos, More Than Allies” more personally describes hatred towards Asian Americans and provides a plan for change. Please read this issue and take action.



Dr. Ngan T. Nguyen

Ascend National Director

Foundation Research & Executive Networks

Model Minority Myth & the Double-Edged Sword

This is an excerpt. [Read the full article](#), which contains further context.

The anti-Asian COVID-19 racism has brought to the fore questions about where Asian Americans are situated in the national discourse on race.^[1] In the popular American narrative and imagination, Asian Americans are perceived as the “Model Minority”: quiet, hardworking, and studious. This positive characterization is supported by studies showing that Asian Americans are the most educated and most affluent of any other racial groups in the U.S.^[2]

While the Model Minority stereotype may seem flattering on the surface, it also includes the less positive attributes of being weak, docile, complacent and overly deferential. In reality, it is a myth that oversimplifies Asian culture and assumes all Asian Americans are successful, which masks the multiple problems and bias that Asian Americans face in the workforce, at schools, and in the communities in which they reside. *This myth is especially problematic and dangerous because the anti-Asian violence and hate crimes that are currently playing out on streets across the U.S. are a direct consequence of Asian stereotyping.*

The term “model minority” was first used in 1966 by sociologist William Peterson in a New York Times Magazine article to praise the ability of Japanese Americans to gain success and capital in the United States, solidifying the stereotypes of Asians as “industrious and rule-abiding” as compared to African Americans, who were still struggling against systemic bigotry and poverty.^[3] Since then, this myth has been invoked politically to question the existence of institutionalized racism in America and manipulated to compare Asian Americans to other racial minorities. For Asian Americans, the stereotypes generated from this myth have been harmful on many levels.

To start, this myth disregards the widespread disparities of income, education and wealth that exist among different Asian communities, consisting of refugees, recent immigrants, and individuals who are first generation and beyond. The U.S. Census Bureau defines Asian Americans as a diverse group that includes

more than 20 different cultures and religions originating from East Asia, Southeast Asia and South Asia, and unlike other racial minorities, numerous languages are spoken which poses a challenge for the larger community to unite around common goals and address complex needs.^[4]

By casting Asian Americans as the “good minority” and portraying them as less likely to “rock the boat” or challenge the status quo, the Model Minority Myth perpetuates racist attitudes and stereotypes toward other minorities, namely Blacks and Latinx, and has long been used as a political tool to invalidate the struggles of other minorities. More tellingly, it has absolved racist systems from any accountability for the inequities that exist within them.^[5] The argument is that racial bias does not exist because if it did, how then can “Asian success” be explained? This implies that other minorities have not achieved the levels of socioeconomic success that Asians enjoy because of a lack of strong family values, hard work, and appreciation for education, and handily dismisses issues like structural barriers and deep-seated racism. This assertion maintains that if Asian Americans can build themselves up with few resources and take advantage of the opportunities embodied in the American Dream narrative, other minorities should be able to do the same. Given such opportunities, Asian Americans should stay quiet, be grateful and preserve the status quo.

The act of labeling one group as the good minority possessing unique cultural qualities places this group at odds with other racial groups and obscures other factors, such as high ethnic capital and immigration status, as contributors to success. This characterization, when situated in complex circumstances such as a pandemic, positions Asian Americans as more privileged than other racial groups and inevitably makes them easy targets of verbal and physical attacks.

The sad and unspoken truth is that many Asian Americans have worn the badge of the Model Minority proudly to gain acceptance into the dominant culture without realizing that there is a double-edged sword that excludes them from participating in race and equity discussions or ascending to executive ranks. The Model Minority does nothing to minimize the fact that Asian Americans become hate targets and are scapegoated as “perpetual foreigners” during periods of international conflict, economic recession, and/or worldwide pandemic.

The other reality is that Asian Americans are the invisible minority. Although some Asian American subgroups experience the highest levels of poverty in the US., Asian Americans are often stripped of the programs that are accorded to other racial minorities. At the top levels of U.S. leadership, Asian Americans are generally overlooked for cabinet positions and Supreme Court representation.^[6] Ascend research also shows that Asian Americans on the whole make up 12 percent of the professional workforce and yet only 4.4% of all Fortune 1000 board members are Asian American, with Asian American women faring the worst at just 1.47%.^[7] In popular culture, before *Crazy Rich Asians*, Hollywood had overlooked Asian men as romantic leads in mainstream movies.

On the whole, Asian Americans are wedged in an uncomfortable position as white adjacent on the one hand and as people of color on the other, and the complex set of stereotypes has rendered them invisible in discussions of race and prejudice in America. Because anti-hate is not a zero-sum game, it is imperative to acknowledge that animosity may arise among minority groups advocating for their needs; and it is critical to recognize the importance of not pitting minority groups against each other. As the popular saying goes, does it make sense for these groups to fight over the crumbs when the pie should be bigger and divided equitably among all groups?

Ascend's Mission to Dispel the Myth

In recent years, Ascend Foundation research has drawn attention to the systemic bias against Asians in corporate culture which stems from the Model Minority Myth. At the onset of COVID-19, the rise of anti-Asian sentiments, along with the adverse and unequal impact of this pandemic on communities of color, galvanized us to join forces with peer organizations to create a Joint 5-Point Action Plan to condemn bias and

promote inclusion. This collaborative effort garnered the support of over 110 companies, and we are now better positioned to use a multi-faceted approach to amplify this message and focus on constructive actions to address racial equity for all groups.

The ACT (Allies Coming Together) Initiative, created in 2020, was designed to support and empower the Pan-Asian community to be more race conversant to combat systemic bias and develop allyship strategies. ACT is one of many programs that support Ascend’s core focus of building holistic Pan-Asian leaders and to help institutions move away from the model minority mindset and embrace the individuality of Asian professionals toward a culture of tolerance.

The Ascend Impact Fund, which will launch in April 2021, will focus on expanding our awareness-raising, advocacy, thought leadership, allyship, education, and community engagement work that addresses the adverse effects of the Model Minority Myth in both the short and long term. It is set up for our corporate members and peer allies to work together in creative ways to engage with local communities toward the goal of promoting greater racial equity and harmony.

^[1] The term “Asian Americans” also applies to Pan-Asian Americans, AAPI, and Asians in this document. These terms describe people of Asian descent in the U.S.

^[2] 2018 Nielsen Company report

^[3] “‘Model Minority’ Myth Again Used As A Racial Wedge Between Asians And Blacks,” NPR CODE SWITCH, 2017

‘Model Minority’ Myth Again Used As A Racial Wedge Between Asians And Blacks

^[4] US Census Bureau

^[5] See, for example, the studies of Richard Lee, PHD, Professor of Psychology at Univ of MN

^[6] See, for example, “Senators back off vow to withhold support of Biden nominees,” AP, 2021 and “Will the U.S. Supreme Court get its first Asian American justice?” Washington Post, 2016.

^[7] “Asian representation on Fortune 1000 Boards,” Ascend/KPMG, 2020

About Dr. Ngan Nguyen & Ascend, non-profit Pan-Asian organization

Dr. Ngan Nguyen is Ascend Leadership’s National Director of Research & Thought Leadership and Executive Networks. Prior to Ascend, Ngan worked in the field of international development, starting with UNESCO and UNICEF in Hanoi. She then joined the Harvard Institute for International Development to help drive US/Vietnam normalization, served as a senior program officer at Oxfam America, co-led a National Geographic sea-kayaking environmental expedition to Vietnam, and advised Asia Society on global initiatives. Ngan has a doctorate in International Relations, is the founder of a food gourmet company, Ai Vy Springrolls, and is the proud mother of three New Yorkers.

About Ascend:

Ascend is the largest, non-profit Pan-Asian organization for business professionals in North America. Established in 2005, Ascend has grown to serve professionals and corporations across various professions and across multiple industries. Ascend Foundation's research provides the basis for the development of their leadership and development programs.



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Asia-Latinos, More Than Allies

Breaking Intersectionality by Activating the Word Inclusion

#inclusionisaverb

Has anyone ever given you “the look,” laughed at your accent, or criticized you for the way you mix your adjectives and adverbs? If so, welcome to the club! Have you been asked if your father catches flies with chopsticks, if you know karate, or to lay low and wait for your turn—also known as “The Asian Ricepaper-ceiling” (referring to the term “Glass-ceiling”)? If so, then welcome to the other club! These examples are just a small sample of the intersectionality some of us live daily.

The labels we typically use—background, age, gender, religion, interests, and preferences—are helpful when viewed as assets or positive differentiators. However, some people use them as discrimination flags, another excuse to show bias, intolerance, and sometimes even hatred. We can control part of this usage, and there is a part out of our control. To stop the negative impact, we must change our mindset and direct our actions towards real inclusion.

Inclusion is a verb. And the opposite of inclusion is disadvantage.

We’ve all heard in the news and social media that our Asian communities across the country continue to be attacked by intolerant and disrespectful individuals (to name them respectfully). As we know, this is not new! This has been happening for years. We hear about it now because the aggression has become harsher and the lack of action from authorities is more evident. The most recent case I watched was a woman attacked outside a hotel, and the most devastating part was not the action itself but the fact that two guards watched and didn’t do anything. It’s outrageous.

Any attack—verbal or worse—happening to anyone in front of us, regardless of who they are, becomes our issue. When a crime occurs in front of you, and you do nothing, you are an accomplice. The only way to change the current situation is to stand strong, side by side, with our Asian brothers, sisters, friends, and acquaintances. Let’s activate the word inclusion through these three actions:

- **Educate** – Research, read, ask, learn about history. Study topics from immigration to culture and traditions to understand who Asian Americans are, which countries they represent, and their contributions to our amazing country. As St. Augustin said in the year 399, “You can only defend what you love, and only love what you know.”

- **Unite** - Become an ally of other communities, introduce them to others, embrace their cultures, and defend their right to their traditions and beliefs. You can't achieve this goal from afar; it has to be from within. Participate, hold hands, wear their T-shirt (Note: I am still looking for some Asia-Latinos to help me create a MeetUp or Club in ClubHouse).
- **Represent** – Get involved in the conversation. Defend someone when you witness injustice. Help develop future leaders and participate in Asian-rights marches. Invite them to your meetings. Be heard by writing articles, speaking on podcasts, raising your hand. In short, activate your good intentions.

I am a proud Asia-Latina! I'm proud of my roots! I'm proud of my ancestry! I resolutely refuse to walk the streets in fear. We need you, Latina, Latino, Hispanic, LatinX, Latin@, to help our Asian communities fight for their rights, their rights for freedom, and the pursuit of happiness. This is not the time to be just an observer or a cheerleader. We need you to step up and lend a hand, speak up and protect each other, take action.

We have done it under the motto, "Si se puede." We know how to do it. Now it's our turn to become true allies of the Asian community, and together, stand up, get on, and stay strong.

About Minué Yoshida

Minué Yoshida is a multicultural speaking coach. She is a half Mexican- half Japanese multilingual entrepreneur and author, whose mission is to help people discover who they are, what they are capable of, embrace their powers with bravery, and leave an impact in the world. Through her coaching and consulting services, both in Fortune 100 Companies and her International Consulting Business, she enables those who are ready to get to the next level, whether this is breaking the glass ceiling at the top or launching their own businesses. Minué is the Co-Founder of Yoshida Academy for Leadership Skills, Excellence and Personal Transformation, expanding their services to a wide audience in the USA and Worldwide.

Learn More: PCSJ



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