

GENTRIFICATION

WHEN DID YOU BECOME GAY?

APPROPRIATION VS. APPRECIATION

WELFARE

WHITE PRIDE

WHAT ARE YOU?

MODEL MINORITY

RACE CARD

CODE WORDS

FEMINISM

**WHAT I HEAR
WHEN YOU SAY**

VIEWING GUIDE

MODEL MINORITY



AN INTRODUCTION TO **WHAT I HEAR WHEN YOU SAY**

Deeply ingrained in human nature is a tendency to organize, classify, and categorize our complex world. Often, this is a good thing. This ability helps us make sense of our environment and navigate unfamiliar landscapes while keeping us from being overwhelmed by the constant stream of new information and experiences.

When we apply this same impulse to social interactions, however, it can be, at best, reductive and, at worst, dangerous. Seeing each other through the lens of labels and stereotypes prevents us from making authentic connections and understanding each other's experiences.

Through the initiative, What I Hear When You Say (WIHWYS), we explore how words can both divide and unite us and learn more about the complex and everchanging ways that language shapes our expectations, opportunities, and social privilege. WIHWYS 's interactive multimedia resources challenge what we think we know about race, class, gender, and identity, and provide a dynamic digital space where we can raise difficult questions, discuss new ideas, and share fresh perspectives.

MODEL MINORITY



“ There is a public perception of Asian American’s being wholly successful and without problems... when in fact we’re a very diverse community with many problems.

Pearl Parks, Filmmaker

def·i·ni·tion
MODEL MINORITY
noun

A minority group whose members are perceived to achieve a higher degree of socioeconomic success than the population average.

Join Comedian, Helen Hong; Filmmaker, Pearl Park; and Activist Christopher Punonbgayan as they discuss how the Model Minority stereotype has affected their lives and how the Model Minority myth acts as a wedge between Asian Americans and other minority communities.



Watch the full episode: Model Minority
pbs.org/what-i-hear/web-series/model-minority/

A QUICK LOOK AT THE MODEL MINORITY MYTH

- Approximately 20.1 million Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders live and work in the United States, and they represent over 30 countries and ethnic groups that speak over 100 different languages.^{1 2 3}
- Asian Americans are among the fastest growing groups in the United States. As of 2014, Asian Americans made up 5.4% of the total population and is expected to more than double in size by 2060 to 9.3%.⁴

- As of 2015, 87.1% of Asian American/Pacific Islander students graduate high school. However, there is an achievement gap within this broad group. More than 30% of Southeast Asian Americans drop out of high school.^{5 6}
- Asian American teachers represent only 2% of the nation's teachers even though Asian American students make up 4.4% of the student population.^{7 8}
- Wealth inequality among Asian Americans is greater than that among White Americans and has grown over time. Asian Americans with wealth in the top 10%, earn 168 times more than Asian Americans in the bottom 20%. Whereas White Americans in the top 10% earn 121 times more than the bottom 20%.⁹
- Asian American college students report high incidents of anxiety and depression, due in part to the Model Minority stereotype, and are less likely to seek mental health support.^{10 11 12 13}

DIG DEEPER | FOREVER FOREIGN AND MODEL MINORITY

In the early 1970s, historian and civil rights activist Yuji Ichioka coined the term “Asian American” to help unify diverse Asian ethnic groups and increase Asian visibility and political strength.¹⁴ Despite Ichioka’s positive intentions, this umbrella term often masks the diversity within and across Asian communities and reinforces stereotypes associated with a monolithic view of Asians in America.

THE MYTH OF THE MODEL MINORITY

Although the Model Minority myth appears to be positive, like most stereotypes, it is limiting and damaging. The Model Minority myth implies that all Asian-Americans are high-achieving, hardworking, quiet and non-confrontational and have overcome the challenges of immigration and minority status. In the process, it dismisses the complex and historic experiences of racism faced by many Asian Americans and pits minority communities against each other.

The term “Model Minority” emerged in the 60s, at the height of the Civil Rights movement, and was used as a wedge to justify anti-Black bias and isolate marginalized communities.¹⁵ According to Janelle Wong, the director of Asian American Studies at the University of Maryland, College Park, the Model Minority strategy works by:

1. “Ignoring the role that selective recruitment of highly educated Asian immigrants has played in Asian American success” such as the Immigration and Nationality Act of 1965 which gave preferences to highly-skilled applicants from Asia.
2. “Making a flawed comparison between Asian Americans and other groups, particularly Black Americans, to argue that racism, including more than two centuries of Black enslavement, can be overcome by hard work and strong family values.”¹⁶

In addition to reinforcing racial stigmas, the Model Minority myth also ignores the diversity of the Asian American experience as well as the personal and institutional racism faced by many Asian Americans.

Despite the stereotype, Asian Americans represent both ends of the achievement spectrum. When viewed as a single group, Asian Americans seem to hold the highest median income and education levels of any communities of color in the United States. In reality, many communities under the Asian American umbrella, specifically Southeast Asian and Pacific Islanders, are more likely to live below the poverty line and less likely to graduate from high school than other minority groups.¹⁷

The Model Minority myth also has a silencing effect that endangers the most vulnerable members of the population. Southeast Asian and Pacific Islander women aged 15 to 24, as well as women over 65, have the highest rates of suicide among all women across all ethnic and racial groups in the nation.^{18 19} The Model Minority myth obscures this reality and makes it more difficult for youth and adults in these communities to access the resources and support they need.

FOREVER FOREIGN

Asian Americans have been part of America's story for more than four centuries, but they continue to be seen as outsiders and foreigners. This ongoing stereotype of Asian Americans as "forever foreign" has its roots in the long, often contentious, history of American immigration, assimilation, and identity.

Throughout our history, periods of economic uncertainty have fueled anti-immigrant sentiments and stoked fears that foreign communities were displacing 'American' workers and undermining their way of life. In the mid-1800s, anti-immigrant groups, including the Workingman's Party and the Supreme Order of Caucasians, singled-out Asian immigrants who they believed were driving down wages and failing to assimilate.²⁰ Through aggressive propaganda and violent agitation, they fuelled anti-Asian fears and led public campaigns to halt Asian immigration and limit immigrant rights.²¹ In response, the United States government enacted The Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882, the first American law to prohibit immigration solely on the basis of race or national origin.^{22 23}

In the decades that followed, anti-Asian hostility and distrust intensified and drove increasingly severe restrictions on immigration and immigrant rights. The Immigration Act of 1924 introduced quotas for the entire Eastern Hemisphere and ushered in a period of near complete exclusion of Asian immigration to the United States.²⁴ In response to anti-Japanese sentiment during World War II, the U.S. government incarcerated more than 110,000 people of Japanese ancestry—including U.S. citizens and legal residents—in remote internment camps.²⁵

With the rise of the civil rights movement in the 1950s, anti-Asian policies came under scrutiny and their Constitutional legitimacy was challenged. Finally in 1965, The Hart-Celler Immigration and Naturalization Act overturned more than a century of anti-Asian legislation but the view of Asian Americans as outsiders and "forever foreign" has endured.²⁶

QUESTIONS TO THINK ABOUT

- What does it mean to be a Model Minority?
- In what ways are the Model Minority and Forever Foreign stereotypes damaging for Asian American communities?
- How does the Model Minority myth isolate Asian Americans from other marginalized communities?
- What are some ways that we can diffuse racial stereotypes like the “Model Minority”?



Hear different perspectives on the Topic, Model Minority
[pbs.org/what-i-hear/topics/model-minority/](https://www.pbs.org/what-i-hear/topics/model-minority/)

LEARN MORE

ASIAN AMERICANS: MYTH OF THE MODEL MINORITY

<http://www.pbs.org/video/america-numbers-model-minority-myth/>

This PBS: America By The Numbers documentary examines the Model Minority myth and the education achievement gap among Asian American communities

SOUTHEAST ASIA RESOURCE ACTION CENTER (SEARAC)

www.searac.org/

A national advocacy organization for Cambodian, Laotian, and Vietnamese Americans

ASIAN NATION: ASIAN AMERICAN HISTORY, DEMOGRAPHICS AND ISSUES

www.asian-nation.org/

A sociological resource on the historical, political, demographic, and cultural issues of the Asian American community

VOICES FROM THE EPISODE | MODEL MINORITY



Helen Hong
Comedian

Performed standup comedy on Last Call with Carson Daly, The Arsenio Hall Show, Comics Unleashed with Byron Allen and Wanda Sykes Presents Herlariou

Plays Janet Fung in the Coen Brothers' film Inside Llewyn Davis

Played roles on Parks and Recreation, Bones, Pretty Little Liars, New Girl, and Inside Amy Schumer



Pearl Park
Filmmaker

Produced award-winning documentary Can

Invitee of community gatherings on Asian American mental health sponsored by the White House Initiative on Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders (WHIAAPI)

Executive board member of Asian American Women Media Makers



Christopher Punonbgayan
Activist

Recognitions from Ford, Strauss, & Gerbode Foundations for his work with Asian American Advancing Justice

Serves on Community Advisory Panel of KQED

Served as Vice-Chair of the San Francisco Immigrant Rights Commission

Visit pbs.org/whatihear for a detailed Viewing Guide on every topic.

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