

Northwestern University School of Law
Public Law and Legal Theory Papers

Year 2003

Paper 26

Untangling the Myth of the Model Minority

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Abstract

The model minority stereotype depicts Asian Americans as a group that has succeeded in America and overcome discrimination through its hard work, intelligence, and emphasis on education and achievement - a modern-day confirmation of the American Dream. A large body of work by Asian critical scholars condemns this image and charges that it conceals more sinister beliefs about Asian Americans and other racial minorities in America. Is this critique correct? Does the model minority stereotype really mask hostility toward Asian Americans or breed contempt for other minorities? This article presents the results of an empirical study into the model minority stereotype. Using 1990, 1994, and 2000 General Social Survey data (including some of the very data used by critical scholars to establish the existence of this stereotype), we confirm claims that some non-Hispanic white Americans think that Asian Americans as a group are more intelligent, harder working, and richer than other minorities and that some think Asian Americans are more intelligent and harder working than whites. But we also discovered that these ideas are not usually linked with negative views of Asian Americans (or of other minorities, for that matter). Indeed, we found weak support for the contrary position - that those who rate Asian Americans higher than other minorities, or particularly higher than whites, are more likely to hold other positive views about Asian Americans, immigration, African Americans, and government programs supporting these groups. Our study nonetheless confirms the scholarly suspicions in one crucial respect: non-Hispanic whites who have positive views of Asian Americans are less likely to think that Asian Americans are discriminated against in both jobs and housing, thus tending to support the claims of some Asian critical scholars that positive stereotypes about Asian Americans tend to be associated with a failure to recognize continuing discrimination. In these data, however, this complacency by whites about prejudice against Asians does not translate into hostility toward government programs to alleviate the problems of Asian or African Americans.

March 1, 2003

ABSTRACT

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The model minority stereotype depicts Asian Americans as a group that has succeeded in America and overcome discrimination through its hard work, intelligence, and emphasis on education and achievement—a modern-day confirmation of the American Dream. A large body of work by Asian critical scholars condemns this image and charges that it conceals more sinister beliefs about Asian Americans and other racial minorities in America. Is this critique correct? Does the model minority stereotype really mask hostility toward Asian Americans or breed contempt for other minorities?

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Our study nonetheless confirms the scholarly suspicions in one crucial respect: non-Hispanic whites who have positive views of Asian Americans are less likely to think that Asian Americans are discriminated against in both jobs and housing, thus tending to support the claims of some Asian critical scholars that positive stereotypes about Asian Americans tend to be associated with a failure to recognize continuing discrimination. In these data, however, this complacency by whites about prejudice against Asians does not translate into hostility toward government programs to alleviate the problems of Asian or African Americans.



UNTANGLING THE MYTH OF THE MODEL MINORITY

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I. INTRODUCTION

The stereotype of Asian Americans as a “Model Minority” appears frequently in the popular press and in political and scholarly (as well as not so scholarly) debates about affirmative action, immigration, and education more generally. The model minority stereotype contains the belief that “Asian Americans, through their hard work, intelligence, and emphasis on education and achievement, have been successful in American society.”¹ As critiqued in the scholarly literature, however, this positive image of Asian Americans as a model minority conceals a more sinister core of beliefs about Asian Americans and other racial minorities in America: a view of Asian Americans as foreign and unpatriotic; a belief that there is little racial discrimination in America; a feeling that racial minorities have themselves to blame for persistent poverty and lags in educational and professional attainment; a hostility to foreigners, immigrants, and immigration; and a hostility to government programs to increase opportunities for Asian Americans and other ethnic minorities.²

What is the model minority stereotype? On the positive side, there seem to be two versions of the model minority stereotype. On one version, which we will call the “weak” form, Asian Americans are compared to other minorities and are seen as a minority group that is especially hard working, resourceful in the face of adversity, committed to education, highly educated, and economically more successful than African Americans and Latinos, though not necessarily as successful as whites.³ This version has been used to argue that belonging to the racial group “Asian” should not in and of itself qualify a person for remedial or forward looking affirmative action (but has not been used to claim that institutions should apply more stringent admissions or hiring standards to Asian Americans than those applied to whites). Additionally, it supports a belief in the American Dream: that “anyone who works hard can do well” in America.⁴

* Associate Professor of Law, University of Minnesota. B.A. University of California at Berkeley; J.D. Stanford University. This article is dedicated to my brother and my sister, Stuart and Marissa Oshige, whose experiences growing up Asian in America inspire my work. For ideas or comments, the authors would like to thank Mark Ramseyer of Harvard, Deborah Merritt of Ohio State, Frank Wu of the University of Michigan and Howard, Mark Kelman of Stanford, and the participants in faculty workshops at Minnesota, Northwestern, and San Diego. THIS ARTICLE MAY NOT BE CITED OR CIRCULATED WITHOUT EXPRESS PERMISSION OF THE AUTHORS.

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¹ Pat Chew, *Asian Americans: The “Reticent” Minority and Their Paradoxes*, 36 WM. & MARY L. REV. 1, 24 (1994).

² See Part II *infra*.

³ See, e.g., Note, *Racial Violence against Asian Americans*, 106 HARV. L. REV. 1926, 1931 (1993) (“Asian Americans are regarded as the *model minority*, succeeding by virtue of a pious work ethic. . . . [and] rest beneath whites in the social hierarchy, but as the *model minority*, they stand above other racial minorities.”)

⁴ Chew, *supra* note __, at 24; see also Parts II.A, II.B, and III.C, *infra*.

On what we call the “strong” version of the hypothesis, Asian Americans are compared to all ethnic groups (including whites) and viewed as something of a super-race with whiz-kid children.⁵ Seeing Asian Americans as a hard working people to the point of being grinds, this version emphasizes that they have overcome and transcended racially discriminatory barriers through hard work, a commitment to education, and an embrace of meritocratic ideals and the American Dream. This version has been used by some commentators to suggest that other, less successful minority groups should take a page from Asian values of hard work and family cohesiveness and try harder.⁶ Others have used it to suggest that Asian Americans are leaving whites in the dust—the mere Protestant work ethic swept away in the wake of Confucian values.⁷

In recent years, a growing body of literature by Asian Critical Legal Scholars⁸ and by Asian American social science scholars⁹ has closely interrogated the content and accuracy of the model minority stereotype and critiqued how the stereotype has been deployed in the service of various political causes. Generally, the Asian critical scholars attack the stronger version, though

⁵ See Part II.A *infra*.

⁶ See Part III.C *infra*.

⁷ See III.F.1 *infra*.

⁸ Several law journals dedicated to Asian Pacific American legal issues have been founded in the last decade or so. They include: THE ASIAN LAW JOURNAL, UCLA ASIAN PACIFIC AMERICAN LAW JOURNAL, ASIAN-PACIFIC LAW AND POLICY JOURNAL, and THE COLUMBIA JOURNAL OF ASIAN LAW.

⁹ There are at least three scholarly journals dedicated solely to Asian American studies and issues, THE JOURNAL OF ASIAN AMERICAN STUDIES, published by Johns Hopkins University, the AMERASIA JOURNAL, published by University of California at Los Angeles, and the ASIAN AMERICAN POLICY REVIEW published jointly by the John F. Kennedy School of Public Policy and the University of California Berkeley Graduate School of Public Policy. Additionally, the Association for Asian American Studies is an academic association that publishes scholarly works and sponsors symposia and conferences. The LEAP (Leadership Education for Asian Pacifics) Asian Pacific American Public Policy Institute and UCLA Asian American Studies Center publish titles on social, race, and political issues unique to Asian Pacific Americans, including THE STATE OF ASIAN PACIFIC AMERICA series. Temple University Press’s *Asian American History and Culture Series* has published several books, including: THE SUM OF OUR PARTS : MIXED-HERITAGE ASIAN AMERICANS (Teresa Williams-Leon and Cynthia L. Nakashima, eds.) (2001); DAVID PALUMBO-LIU , ASIAN/AMERICAN : HISTORICAL CROSSINGS OF A RACIAL FRONTIER (1999); JUANITA TAMAYO LOTT, ASIAN AMERICANS : FROM RACIAL CATEGORY TO MULTIPLE IDENTITIES (1998); HMONG MEANS FREE : LIFE IN LAOS AND AMERICA, (Sucheng Chan, ed.) (1994); THE NEW ASIAN IMMIGRATION IN LOS ANGELES AND GLOBAL RESTRUCTURING, (Paul Ong, Edna Bonacich, and Lucie Cheng, eds.) (1994); William Wei, THE ASIAN AMERICAN MOVEMENT (1993); TIMOTHY P. FONG, THE FIRST SUBURBAN CHINATOWN : THE REMAKING OF MONTEREY PARK, CALIFORNIA (1994); PEI-TE LIEN, THE MAKING OF ASIAN AMERICA THROUGH POLITICAL PARTICIPATION (2001); ROBERT G. LEE, ORIENTALS : A SIAN AMERICANS IN POPULAR CULTURE (1999); JERE TAKAHASHI, NISEI/SANSEI : SHIFTING JAPANESE AMERICAN IDENTITIES AND POLITICS (1997); YEN LE ESPIRITU, ASIAN AMERICAN PANETHNICITY : BRIDGING INSTITUTIONS AND IDENTITIES (1992). Garland Publications of New York has published an *Asians in America Series*, edited by Franklin Ng, with titles including: THE HISTORY AND IMMIGRATION OF ASIAN AMERICANS (1998), ASIAN AMERICAN FAMILY LIFE AND COMMUNITY (1998), ASIAN AMERICAN ISSUES RELATING TO LABOR, ECONOMICS, AND SOCIOECONOMIC STATUS (1998), ASIAN AMERICAN WOMEN AND GENDER (1998), ADAPTATION, ACCULTURATION, AND TRANSNATIONAL TIES AMONG ASIAN AMERICANS (1998), and ASIAN AMERICAN INTERETHNIC RELATIONS AND POLITICS (1998). Ronald Takaki may have sparked the Asian American Studies movement with his book IRON CAGES: RACE AND CULTURE IN 19TH-CENTURY AMERICA (1979); more recently he has written , STRANGERS FROM A DIFFERENT SHORE : A HISTORY OF ASIAN AMERICANS (1990), FROM DIFFERENT SHORES : PERSPECTIVES ON RACE AND ETHNICITY IN AMERICA (Ronald Takaki, ed.) (1987); FROM EXILES TO IMMIGRANTS : THE REFUGEES FROM SOUTHEAST ASIA (1995), A DIFFERENT MIRROR : A HISTORY OF MULTICULTURAL AMERICA (1993). Other works by Asian American scholars are cited throughout this article, especially in Parts II and III, *infra*.

the weaker version has not escaped unscathed.¹⁰ Though their work forms an eclectic body of literature, their critique of the model minority stereotype has generally proceeded on four fronts.

First, Asian critical scholars argue that the model minority stereotype is wrong as a factual matter.¹¹ Here Asian critical scholars scrutinize data that appear to demonstrate Asian educational, occupational, and economic success. Asian critical scholars argue that generalizations about “Asians” as a group are misleading, because persons classified as Asian may be newly-minted immigrants who speak little or no English, persons whose families have lived in America for a century or more, immigrants who seek greater economic opportunities than those available in their country of origin, or refugees who have fled their homes amidst great confusion and fear.¹² In short, while the stereotype of Asian Americans as a very well educated, hard working, and fairly well-off minority group may be accurate for some individuals and some Asian national origin groups, it is decidedly wrong for other Asian American national origin groups and Asian immigrants.

Second, Asian critical scholars argue that the reported success of Asian Americans as a model minority has created a backlash against their perceived success.¹³ Sensitive to the historical fact that whites in the Nineteenth and early Twentieth Centuries considered Asian immigrants’ tolerance for hard work to be threatening, some Asian critical scholars have argued that this more recent attention to the success of Asian Americans is merely the old fear of the “Yellow Peril” dressed in sheep’s clothing.

Third, Asian critical scholars have argued that the model minority stereotype is also used as a cudgel against other minority groups and therefore entrenches white hegemony.¹⁴ Asian critical scholars argue that other minorities are measured against the model minority stereotype and remonstrated for their comparative educational and economic failures: if Asian Americans can succeed, what’s wrong with Blacks and Latinos? And if Asian Americans succeeded against the odds of discrimination and the strains of immigration without much government assistance, why should we invest in government programs for or give affirmative action to Blacks and Latinos?

Fourth, Asian critical scholars have argued that the purely positive side of the model minority stereotype obscures discrimination against Asian Americans.¹⁵ While some Asian American ethnic groups do seem to enjoy educational and professional success, those successes, Asian critical scholars argue, obscures the barriers many Asian American professionals have confronted in becoming highly-placed managers and the fact that Asian Americans seem to earn less per year of education than do whites.¹⁶

It is surely true that some people have positive views of Asian Americans as smart and hard working and some people have negative views of Asian Americans as foreign and

¹⁰ See Part III *infra*.

¹¹ See Part III.A *infra*.

¹² See *id*.

¹³ See Part III.F *infra*.

¹⁴ See Part III.D and Part III.E *infra*.

¹⁵ See Part III.A *infra*.

¹⁶ See *id*.

threatening. But is it true that the same people tend to hold both views? It would be worrisome if those who thought Asian Americans were smart and hard working tended to be hostile to people of Asian heritage, immigrants, and other minorities. Does the model minority stereotype really have both a positive and a negative side, such that negative views inhere in the positive ones (as in the “yellow peril”)? Or, instead, do the same people who think Asian Americans are smart or hard working tend to like Asian Americans, immigrants, minorities, and programs that support them?

That both negative and positive stereotypes about Asian Americans float about in American society has been well documented by the Asian critical scholars—a fact we confirm and document here. While we do not question that negative images and depictions of Asian Americans are used in debates about social and political issues, we have wondered just how the negative and positive portrayals are linked in the minds of the public. Do people who express a belief in the positive aspects of the model minority stereotype mask their hostility to Asian Americans? A close analysis of that linkage in the minds of the dominant ethnic group—non-Hispanic American whites—is the main task of this article.

With these questions in mind, we decided to treat the two-edged model minority stereotype as a hypothesis and test it: Do positive views of Asian Americans as smart, hard working, and relatively successful tend to be found with other positive or negative views of Asian, immigrants, and African Americans? Our investigation focused on several fronts. First, we wanted to know how non-Hispanic white Americans see Asian Americans. Do they view Asian Americans as a group as more intelligent, harder working, and richer than average? If whites see Asian Americans in such superficially positive terms, we wondered whether negative opinions accompany these seemingly positive beliefs, such as perceiving Asian Americans as unpatriotic, foreign, or inassimilable. Moreover, if the model minority stereotype is really just covering up white hostility to Asian Americans, we wondered whether people who held model minority views were opposed to immigration. We also wanted to probe the extent to which “model minority” beliefs engendered hostility toward or eroded sympathy for other minority groups: do model minority beliefs, for example, correlate with certain opinions on affirmative action and government assistance to various minority groups?

The General Social Survey (GSS) served as the main basis for our exploration of these questions. The General Social Survey is currently a biannual survey of Americans, which has been conducted since 1972. The National Opinion Research Center (NORC) at the University of Chicago surveys scientific samples of the non-institutionalized U.S. adult population that understands English. After the U.S. Census, the GSS is the most used database by sociologists and is among the most used in all of the social sciences. The GSS contains sets of questions grouped around various topics and allows researchers to correlate responses to one question with responses to other questions. The survey data also contain very wide demographic information about respondents: race, ethnicity, income, education, political affiliations, marital background, and so on.

In particular, we focused on a set of questions that allows us to test several versions of both the strong and weak forms of the Model Minority Hypothesis—that positive stereotypes of Asian Americans are associated with and mask negative views about Asian Americans,

immigrants, and other minorities. Specifically, one module asks respondents several questions about various racial and ethnic groups that we found pertinent to establishing the positive side of the hypothesis:¹⁷

1. *Do you perceive (Asians, Hispanics, Blacks, Whites, Jews) as a group to be hard working or lazy (on a scale of 1 to 7, with hardworking being 1 and 7 being lazy)?*¹⁸
2. *Do you perceive (Asians, Hispanics, Blacks, Whites, Jews) as a group to be intelligent or unintelligent, on a scale of 1 to 7 with unintelligent being 1 and intelligent being 7?*¹⁹
3. *Do you consider (Asians, Hispanics, Blacks, Whites, Jews) as a group to be rich or poor (on a scale of 1 to 7, with rich being 1 and poor being 7)?*²⁰

We then can compare the scores on these positive questions to the scores for other groups. The respondents were not asked to compare one group to another, but rather to rate each group separately, which might explain why many people were willing to ascribe differences, despite taboos against stereotyping.

Thus the positive form of the hypotheses can be stated as follows:

Model Minority Hypothesis—Positive Side

Weak Form Test:

- 1. Asian Americans are more intelligent than other minorities.**
- 2. Asian Americans work harder than other minorities.**
- 3. Asian Americans are richer than other minorities.**

Model Minority Hypothesis—Positive Side

Strong Form Test:

- 1. Asian Americans are more intelligent than whites.**
- 2. Asian Americans work harder than whites.**

¹⁷ Respondents are asked to rate their perception of Asians, Hispanics, Blacks, Whites, Southern Whites, Jews, legal immigrants, and illegal immigrants.

¹⁸ The question here read as follows, “The second set of characteristics asks if people in the group tend to be hard-working or if they tend to be lazy.” GSS mnemonics WORKASNS, WORKWHTS, WORKBLKS, WORKHSPS.

¹⁹ This question was, “Do people in these groups tend to be unintelligent or tend to be intelligent?” GSS mnemonics INLASNS, INTLWHTS, INTLBLKS, INTLHSPS.

²⁰ The exact wording of this question is as follow:

Now I have some questions about different groups in our society. I'm going to show you a seven-point scale on which the characteristics of people in a group can be rated. In the first statement a score of 1 means that you think almost all of the people in that group are "rich." A score of 7 means that you think almost everyone in the group are "poor." A score of 4 means you think that the group is not towards one end or another, and of course you may choose any number in between that comes closest to where you think people in the group stand.

GSS mnemonics WLTHASNS, WLTHWHTS, WLTHBLKS, WLTHHSPS.

Although not a perfect fit, these questions parallel the core of the positive model minority stereotype, that Asian Americans are hard working, highly educated, and relatively well-off financially.²¹ To obtain larger samples, where available we combined data for the 1990, 1994, and 2000 surveys, which were ones where respondents were asked to rate various ethnic groups on components of positive and negative stereotypes. There was no trend between 1990 and 2000 in adherence to the positive side of the model minority stereotype.²²

The GSS respondents answered questions about their opinions on various social issues that are part of what Asian critical scholars have considered to be the downside or negative side of the Model Minority Hypothesis. GSS respondents answered questions on Asians, immigration, discrimination, African Americans, and affirmative action. Our model of the negative side of the Model Minority Hypothesis has many facets:

Model Minority Hypothesis—Negative Side

Foreignness:

1. **Asians are less patriotic than whites.**²³

Hostility to Asians and Programs for Asians

2. **Asians have too much influence in American life and politics.**²⁴
3. **In general, how close do you feel to Asians?**²⁵
4. **I would oppose a close relative or family member marrying an Asian American.**²⁶

²¹ It is a common aspect of the stereotype that Asians are richer than other minorities. While many have said that Asian family incomes are higher than whites', we have not heard the argument that Asian accumulated wealth exceeds that of Whites, though probably someone has indeed made this point. The GSS questions ask about whether a group is viewed as rich, which we interpret as pointing more to accumulated wealth than to income. Thus, we included wealth as part of the weak form comparison of Asian Americans with other minorities, but not as part of the strong form comparison with whites.

²² Not all questions were asked each year (in particular, the intelligence questions were not asked in 1994). Adding all five components of the positive side into a single index, the mean score of these five variables combined is 1.978 in 1990 and an almost identical 1.965 in 2000, meaning that non-Hispanic whites held positive model minority views on about two of five variables in both 1990 and 2000. So there is no trend in these data from 1990 through 2000. Further, we weighted the GSS sample to adjust for its efficiency compared to a simple random sample, decreasing the number of respondents by a factor of 1.7.

²³ This question was, "Do people in these groups tend to be patriotic or do they tend to be unpatriotic?" *Id.* GSS mnemonic PATRASNS, PATRWHTS, PATRBLKS, PATRHSPS.

²⁴ The exact wording of this question was:

Some people think that certain groups have too much influence in American life and politics, while other people feel that certain groups don't have as much influence as they deserve. On this card are three statements about how much influence a group might have. (1. Too much influence, 2. Just about the right amount of influence, 3. Too little influence) For each group I read to you, just tell me the number of the statement that best says how you feel.

The groups respondents were queried about were whites, Jews, Asians, Blacks, Hispanics, and Southern whites. *Id.* GSS mnemonics INFLUASNS, INFLUWHTS, INFLUBLKS, INFLUHSPS.

²⁵ GSS mnemonic ASNCLOSE.

²⁶ GSS mnemonic MARASIAN, asking whether respondent would strongly favor, favor, neither favor nor oppose, oppose, or strongly oppose a close relative or family member marrying an Asian American person.

5. **I would oppose living in a neighborhood where half my of neighbors were Asian American.**²⁷
6. **Government pays more attention to Asian Americans than they deserve.**²⁸

Failure to See Discrimination Against Asians:

7. **Asian Americans are not discriminated against in housing.**²⁹
8. **There is little or no discrimination that hurts the chances of Asian Americans to get good paying jobs.**³⁰

Hostility to Immigrants and Immigration:

9. **The U.S. should not let in more immigrants.**³¹
10. **Immigrants should be eligible for welfare.**³²
11. **Immigration increases unemployment.**
12. **Immigration makes it harder for the country to unite.**³³
13. **Immigrants are getting too demanding in their push for equal rights.**³⁴
14. **Immigrants should overcome bias without help.**³⁵

Hostility to African Americans and Programs for African Americans:³⁶

15. **The federal government should provide special college scholarships for black children who maintain good grades.**³⁷

²⁷ GSS mnemonic LIVEASNS, whether respondent would strongly favor to strongly oppose it happening.

²⁸ GSS mnemonic ASNGOVT, asking whether respondent would “answer [that Asian Americans get] much more attention from government than they deserve, more attention than they deserve, about the right amount of attention, less attention than they deserve, or much less attention from government than they deserve?”

²⁹ The question asks, “How much discrimination is there that makes it hard for Hispanic Americans to buy or rent housing wherever they want? How about for blacks? How about for Asian Americans? GSS mnemonics HSPHOUSE, BLKHOUSE, ASNHOUSE.

³⁰ Specifically, the question asks, “How much discrimination is there that hurts the chances of Hispanic Americans to get good paying jobs? Would you say there is a lot, some, only a little, or none at all? How about for blacks? How about for Asian Americans?” *Id.* GSS mnemonics, HSPJOBS, BLKJOBS, ASNJOBS.

³¹ The exact question was “Do you think the number of immigrants to America nowadays should be increased a lot, increased a little, remain the same as is, reduced a little, reduced a lot?” GSS mnemonic LETIN

³² The question was, “Under current law, immigrants who come from other countries to the United States legally are entitled, from the very beginning, to government assistance such as Medicaid, food stamps, or welfare on the same basis as citizens. But some people say they should not be eligible until they have lived here for a year or more. Which do you think? Do you think that immigrants who are here legally should be eligible for such services as soon as they come, or should they not be eligible?” GSS mnemonic IMMFARE.

³³ The questions regarding the economy, unemployment and national unity were phrased as follows: “What do you think will happen as a result of more immigrants coming to this country? Is each of these possible results very likely, somewhat likely, not too likely, or not at all likely? . . . Higher economic growth? Higher unemployment? Making it harder to keep the country united?” GSS mnemonics, IMMUNEMP, IMMUNITE.

³⁴ GSS mnemonic IMPUSH.

³⁵ Respondents were asked whether they agreed with the following statement, “The Irish, Italians, Jews, and many other minorities overcame prejudice and worked their way up. Today's immigrants should do the same without any special favors.” GSS mnemonic IMMWRKUP.

³⁶ Respondents were asked regarding several possible policy initiatives to help Blacks, “Here are several things that the government in Washington might do to deal with the problems of poverty and unemployment among Black Americans. I would like you to tell me if you favor or oppose them. . . . Would you say that you strongly favor it, favor it, neither favor it nor oppose it, oppose it, or strongly oppose it?”

³⁷ GSS mnemonic BLKCOL.

16. The federal government should spend more money on the schools in black neighborhoods, especially for pre-school and early education programs³⁸
17. The federal government should give business and industry special tax breaks for locating in largely black areas.³⁹
18. I would oppose a close relative or family member marrying a Black person.⁴⁰
19. I would oppose living in a neighborhood where half of my neighbors were Blacks.⁴¹
20. How much discrimination is there that hurts the chances of Blacks to get good paying jobs?⁴²
21. How much discrimination is there that makes it hard for Blacks to buy or rent housing wherever they want?⁴³
22. Are you for or against preferential hiring and promotion for Blacks?⁴⁴
23. Conditions for Blacks have improved.⁴⁵
24. There should be laws against marriages between African-Americans and whites.⁴⁶
25. African Americans have too much influence in American life and politics.⁴⁷
26. White people have a right to keep African-Americans out of their neighborhoods if they want to, and African-Americans should respect that right.⁴⁸
27. African-Americans shouldn't push themselves where they're not wanted.⁴⁹
28. Do Blacks get more attention from the government than they deserve?⁵⁰

Some of these questions obviously reflect negative views towards minority groups, while others do not—one might, for example, feel very positively about African Americans and still oppose affirmative action, or one could think highly of Asian Americans and Latinos and still oppose immigration. We will generally refer to this aspect of our model as “the negative side of the model minority stereotype” because *Asian critical scholars* have considered these views to be negative in their critique of the model minority stereotype.⁵¹

The GSS is a particularly appropriate dataset for this project, because some Asian critical scholars have relied on GSS data to bolster claims about the perniciousness of the model minority stereotype.⁵² Some of the very GSS questions we use are presented by Asian critical

³⁸ GSS mnemonic BLKSCHS.

³⁹ GSS mnemonic BLKZONE.

⁴⁰ GSS mnemonic MARBLK.

⁴¹ GSS mnemonic LIVEBLK.

⁴² GSS mnemonic BLKJOBS.

⁴³ GSS mnemonic BLKHOUSE.

⁴⁴ GSS mnemonic AFFRMACT.

⁴⁵ GSS mnemonic BLKSIMP.

⁴⁶ GSS mnemonic RACMAR.

⁴⁷ GSS mnemonic INFLUBLK.

⁴⁸ GSS mnemonic RACSEG.

⁴⁹ GSS mnemonic RACPUSH.

⁵⁰ GSS mnemonic BLKGOVT.

⁵¹ See Part III *infra*.

⁵² See, e.g., Chew, *supra* note __, at 33 (citing to support claims that model minority stereotype has pernicious effects: Lawrence Bobo & James R. Kluegel, Modern American Prejudice: Stereotypes, Social Distance, and Perceptions of Discrimination Toward Blacks, Hispanics, and Asians, 33-38 (Aug. 1991) (unpublished paper presented at the Annual Meetings of the Am. Soc. Ass'n) 33-38; and Tom W. Smith, Ethnic Images, Gen. Soc. Surv. Topical Rep. No. 19, 7-8 (1990)); see also Paula C. Johnson, The Social Construction Of Identity In Criminal Cases: Cinema Verite And The Pedagogy Of Vincent Chin, 1 Mich. J. Race & L. 347, 390-91 (summer 1996) (discussing

scholars as direct support both for the existence of the model minority stereotype and for the claim that the stereotype leads people to hold negative views of Asians, immigrants, and African Americans.⁵³ Indeed, in one of the classic articles in the field, Professor Pat Chew summarizes some of the data from the 1990 GSS in terms almost identical to our construction of the weak form of the hypothesis: “Asian Americans are more likely to be thought of as wealthier, more hard-working, and more intelligent than other minorities.”⁵⁴ Thus, not only are these data relevant for testing the hypothesis, but some Asian critical scholars have conceived of the stereotype in terms of the same variables and dataset we use, though we have added more recent (1994 and 2000) GSS data to the older 1990 GSS data used in the earlier studies.

Our inquiry is limited somewhat by the questions the GSS asks, and not all of these survey questions perfectly track the issues Asian critical scholars have raised. For example, the GSS asks about perceptions of ethnic groups’ patriotism, not perceptions of groups’ “foreignness,” which is a related but somewhat different concept. (It is fair to say, however, that perceiving a group as foreign would be a major reason why one might suspect a group’s patriotism.) On the other hand, other questions, such as those about affirmative action and the proper level of government attention different groups deserve parallel the claimed downsides of the model minority stereotype quite well.

Our findings turned up some surprising results. Part IV will discuss our findings in greater detail, but in very general terms, we found that the model minority stereotype is not correlated with hostility to Asians, immigrants, African Americans, or government programs to increase opportunities for minorities. It is true that substantial numbers of non-Hispanic white Americans hold the positive aspects of the model minority stereotype and substantial numbers hold the negative views that Asian critical scholars are concerned about. But these ideas tend to be held by different people, rather than one accompanying the other. The data strongly confirm one important part of the Asian critical scholars’ critique: those who hold positive views of Asians as hard working or intelligent do indeed tend to believe that there is less discrimination against Asian Americans in jobs and housing.

The plan for our paper is as follows: this next part will map out how the model minority stereotype has been portrayed by the popular press, social scientists who write for both scholarly and popular audiences, Asian critical scholars, and some conservative political commentators. Part III will explain Asian critical scholars’ concerns about the danger this stereotype poses. Part IV will turn to describing our findings in detail and our analysis of what they show. In Part V we will explore some possible implications of our findings.

articles by Chew, Bobo & Kluegel, and Smith to support the existence of model minority views and their negative effects).

⁵³ See, e.g., Chew, *supra* note __, at 33.

⁵⁴ See, e.g., *id.* at 32 n.140.

II. MODEL MINORITY STEREOTYPE IN A NUTSHELL

At bottom the model minority stereotype is about demonstrating that “a racial minority *can* succeed in the U.S.”⁵⁵ Asians have “made it” in America. As Professor Chew put it,

“Americans have pieced together images of Asian Americans as a successfully assimilated minority group which has fulfilled the Asian immigrant’s dream of the “Golden Mountains.” While retaining vestiges of their cultural identity and ancestry, they are considered economically and socially assimilated. Although there may have been isolated incidents of discrimination in the past, society believes that Asian Americans today generally do not experience discrimination.”⁵⁶

Commentators wave statistics showing Asian American economic and educational triumphs. Asian American families, many newspaper articles in the early 1990s reported, have the highest family income of any racial group—higher by a few thousand dollars than white families. Persons from Asian backgrounds complete college at an astoundingly high rate.⁵⁷ Asians excel at math and science while other kids melt from math and science anxiety.

The model minority image of Asian Americans affirms “a belief central to the American dream—anyone who works hard can do well.”⁵⁸ Professor Chew argues that “[t]he idea of a model minority allows Americans to believe that their social system functions properly and does not impeded the progress of those committed to the Puritan ethos” of hard work and sacrifice.⁵⁹ “The image is similarly attractive to some Asian Americans. They consider it a compliment—an affirmation that their ceaseless efforts and sacrifices have resulted in their achieving the American dream.”⁶⁰

Before discussing our findings regarding the consequences of holding model minority beliefs, let’s turn to how Asian Americans have been portrayed as a model minority.

A. Popular Press Accounts of the Model Minority

How have Asian Americans been portrayed as a model minority? It all seems to have started with two articles: the New York Times Magazine article, *Success Story: Japanese*

⁵⁵ Neil Gotanda, *Asian American Rights and the “Miss Saigon Syndrome”*, in *ASIAN AMERICANS AND THE SUPREME COURT: A DOCUMENTARY HISTORY* 1087, 1088 (1992).

⁵⁶ Chew, *supra* note __, at 6 (but author offers no support for this characterization of American beliefs).

⁵⁷ In 1999, 42% of Asian Pacific Islander Americans over 25 had at least a college degree, compared to 28% of non-Hispanic whites. Karen Humes & Jesse McKinnon, *Current Population Reports: The Asian and Pacific Islander Population in the United States: Population Characteristics*, CPS Data Mar. 1999 (2000), <http://www.census.gov/prod/2000pubs/p20-529.pdf>. March 2000 Current Population Survey data report that 43.9% of Asian Pacific Islanders over age 25 have at least a college degree compared to 28.1% of non-Hispanic whites. *Table 7, Educational Attainment of the Population 25 Years and Over by Sex, and Race and Hispanic Origin* (2001) <http://www.census.gov/population/socdemo/race/api/ppl-146/tab07.pdf>.

⁵⁸ Chew, *supra* note __, at 24.

⁵⁹ *Id.*

⁶⁰ *Id.*

American Style in January, 1966,⁶¹ and a U.S. News & World Report article in December of that year. Apparently trying to dispel the idea that America was going to hell in a hand basket and taking the American Dream with it, U.S. News proclaimed: “At a time when Americans are awash in worry over the plight of racial minorities—One such minority, the nation’s 300,000 Chinese-Americans, is winning wealth and respect by dint of its own hard work.”⁶² Chinese-Americans, the article explains, knows that “people should depend on their own efforts—not a welfare check—in order to reach America’s ‘promised land.’”⁶³ Not that it had been easy for Chinese Americans to achieve this success: “What you find, [in] back of this remarkable group of Americans, is a story of adversity and prejudice that would shock those now complaining about the hardships endured by today’s Negroes.”⁶⁴ Chinese Americans, according to the article, are willing to work hard, at any job, even a menial one; they value education and insist that their children do well in school; they work together as a community to keep order and keep crime low; they pool resources to help each other move ahead; and they move to suburbs as they get wealthier.⁶⁵

The *New York Times Magazine* article contained the same sorts of glowing remarks about Asian Americans and pointed comparisons with African Americans.

Asked which of the country’s ethnic minorities has been subjected to the most discrimination and the worst injustices, very few persons would even think of answering: “The Japanese Americans.” Yet, if the question refers to persons alive today, that may well be the correct reply. Like the Negroes, the Japanese have been the object of color prejudice. Like the Jews, they have been feared and hated as hyperefficient competitors. And, more than any other group, they have been seen as the agents of an overseas enemy. . . .

Generally this kind of treatment, as we all know these days, leads to what might be termed “problem minorities.”⁶⁶

Japanese Americans, however, challenge⁶⁷ such conclusions according to this article. “Barely more than 20 years after the end of the wartime camps, this is a minority that . . . [b]y . . . any criterion of good citizenship . . . [is] better than any other group in our society, including native-born whites.”⁶⁸ Most strikingly, Japanese Americans “have established this remarkable record . . . by their own almost totally unaided effort. Every attempt to hamper their progress resulted only in enhancing their determination to succeed.”⁶⁹

⁶¹ William Petersen, *Success Story, Japanese-American Style*, N.Y. TIMES MAG., Jan. 6, 1966, at 20.

⁶² *Success Story of One Minority Group In the U.S.*, U.S. NEWS & WORLD REPORT, Dec. 26, 1966, at 73, 73 reprinted in ROOTS: AN ASIAN AMERICAN READER 6, 6 (AMY TACHIKI, ET AL., EDS., 1971).

⁶³ *Id.*

⁶⁴ *Id.*

⁶⁵ *Id.* at 73-76.

⁶⁶ Petersen, *Success Story, Japanese-American Style*, *supra* note __, at 20.

⁶⁷ *Id.* at 21.

⁶⁸ *Id.*

⁶⁹ *Id.*

About a decade and a half later, sparked by reports of skyrocketing Asian American college enrollment rates in the early 1980s, a spate of magazine articles appeared that shared a common theme: Despite having endured severe discrimination in the United States, Asian Americans have shown themselves to be a startlingly successful minority group, and their success was making an indelible mark on American life and culture. A 1985 article in *The New Republic*⁷⁰ assumes a tone typical of these articles. After describing how the “Asian-American population is exploding”⁷¹ because of immigration in the late 1960s and 1970s, it argues that the most extraordinary thing about Asian Americans “is the extent to which [they] have become prominent out of all proportion to their share of the population.”⁷² Most notably, Asian Americans had made a “spectacular” “entry . . . into the universities.”⁷³ Not only are Asian Americans attending college at a high rate, the article continues, they are also “outstanding” students, outscoring whites on the math portion of the SAT, winning the Westinghouse Science Talent search, and being elected to Phi Beta Kappa in droves.⁷⁴ *Fortune* magazine concluded simply: “Asian Americans are [simply] smarter than the rest of us,”⁷⁵ and, what’s more, they push their children to excel in school. To the extent that Asian Americans are having problems reaching the highest ranks of corporate America, they seem to be solving them on their own by being self-starters and adapting to American management culture.⁷⁶

The New Republic allowed that some Asian American groups are not as successful as others, and that Asian American college students have an unfortunate tendency “to crowd into a small number of careers” (math and science). But the magazine article concluded optimistically that whatever problems Asian Americans currently face would fade as the next generation of American-born Asian Americans comes of age.⁷⁷ Without the language problems of their parents and older siblings, *The New Republic* predicted that they would soon disperse through professions.⁷⁸ To the extent “Asian-Americans face undeniable problems of integration,” these problems should not be blown out of proportion: “[I]t takes a very narrow mind not to realize that these problems are the envy of every other American racial minority, and of a good number of white ethnic groups as well.”⁷⁹

So what does the popular press portrayal boil down to? First, Asian Americans are extremely hard-working—even more hard-working than whites. Second, they are intelligent and highly-educated, though a large number of them are math and science geeks. Third, as a group, they are economically successful, even though they faced severe discrimination in the past, and may encounter some (fairly minor) discrimination now. In other words, a regrettable history of

⁷⁰ David A. Bell, *The Triumph of Asian-Americans*, THE NEW REPUBLIC, July 15 & 22 1985, at 24.

⁷¹ *Id.*

⁷² *Id.*

⁷³ *Id.* at 26.

⁷⁴ *Id.*

⁷⁵ Anthony Ramirez, *America’s Super Minority*, FORTUNE, Nov. 24, 1986, at 148, 149.

⁷⁶ *Id.* at 152-56.

⁷⁷ Bell, *supra* note ___, at 29-31.

⁷⁸ *Id.* at 31.

⁷⁹ *Id.*; see also Dennis A. Williams, Dianne H. McDonald, Lucy Howard, Margaret Mittelbach, & Cynthia Kyle, *A Formula for Success*, NEWSWEEK, April 23, 1984, at 77 (pointing to Asian American’s successes and predicting that most problems Asians face will ebb as the next generation comes of age).

past discrimination has not kept them down (and indeed, may have spurred them on). Fourth, Asian Americans are described as mostly “assimilating” into mainstream American life—living in the suburbs and intermarrying with whites.⁸⁰ Mostly assimilating, but not entirely: the articles tend to describe (and mirror) a persisting element of foreignness or exoticism. Asian Americans “crowd” the universities, and “crowd” into math and science careers⁸¹ (which evokes the teeming streets of an urban Chinatown), and practice exotic medical treatments and cultural traditions⁸² (imagine a row of ducks hanging in a shop window and the smell of incense wafting into the streets).

The 1980s incarnation of the “model minority” stereotype differed somewhat from the 1966 version. Between 1965 and the 1980s, new groups of Asian immigrants flowed into the United States—from the Philippines, Taiwan, Vietnam, Cambodia, India, and Pakistan—and in very large numbers; prior to 1965, immigration from Asian nations had been severely circumscribed, and for periods of time, banned. So while the 1966 articles in the *New York Times* and *U.S. News and World Report* talked of the successes of Japanese and Chinese Americans who had been in this country for a generation or more, and who had suffered the evils of state-sponsored discrimination as well as private discrimination, the model minority stereotype of the 1980s tells a slightly different story about the success of a new immigrant group, as well as of the successes of more established Asian Americans.

B. *The Model Minority in Social Science*

The appearance of the model minority image has not been limited to just a few newspaper and magazine articles. It also shows up in more scholarly works. Thomas Sowell, in particular, has often highlighted the success of Asian Americans in his work. He once argued that the experience of Asian Americans—specifically Chinese and Japanese Americans—demonstrates that *de facto* school segregation does not invariably lead to poorer educational opportunities for minority students. “The most casual knowledge of history shows that all-Jewish, all-Chinese, or all-German schools have not been inherently inferior,” he wrote. “Chinese and Japanese school children were at one time segregated both *de facto* and *de jure* in California, yet they outperformed white children—and largely still do.”⁸³ He has also touted the Asian propensity for hard work as the key to their success.⁸⁴

Sowell also uses the example of Japanese workers earlier in the century to argue that discrimination will not persist if there is no economically rational reason for it (that is, discrimination will not persist unless minority workers actually are less productive). He describes that “[a]t the height of anti-Japanese feeling in the early twentieth-century United States, the initial practice of paying white workers more than Japanese workers collapsed—and

⁸⁰ See Bell, *The Triumph of Asian-Americans*, *supra* note ___, at 30-31 (describing pattern of integration and intermarriage).

⁸¹ *Id.* at 29, 31.

⁸² *Id.* at 24, 26 (describing quaint practices of leaving origami figures as calling cards, use of bear parts for medicinal purposes, and “traditions” of parent-child suicide and marriage-by-capture).

⁸³ THOMAS SOWELL, CIVIL RIGHTS: RHETORIC OR REALITY? 70-71 (1984)

⁸⁴ *Id.* at 27-28 (“The Chinese have established reputations for working hard and long, in countries around the world, and for not being stopped by the stigma of ‘menial’ work.”).

apparently *reversed*—as it became evident that the Japanese worked harder.”⁸⁵ No anti-discrimination laws were necessary to accomplish this reversal; and indeed “*political* intervention . . . was necessary . . . to stop the economic *rise* of the Japanese, precisely because economic pressures were too great to keep them down under competitive conditions.”⁸⁶ This set of circumstances should hold for any discriminated against group—“to say that any group is systematically underpaid or systematically denied as much credit as they deserve is the same as saying that an opportunity for unusually high profit exists for anyone who will hire them or lend to them.”⁸⁷ After all, “[w]hen Japanese American farmers began bidding for underpaid Japanese American laborers in the early twentieth century, white farmers had no choice but to join the bidding war rather than lose good workers.”⁸⁸

Asian Americans, under this view, show that discrimination does not bar socioeconomic success and perhaps has even spurred Asian Americans to success.⁸⁹ Nor is integration out of reach for racial minorities, and it doesn’t require total assimilation. “As a group, Chinese Americans have, in one sense, integrated into American society occupationally and residentially, while retaining their own values and ethnic identity. It is no small achievement, against great odds.”⁹⁰

Sowell does allow that the notion that Asian Americans are simply smarter than whites is not actually the case.⁹¹ But he deploys this conclusion against African Americans: “what has been claimed, erroneously, for blacks and other low-income minorities in the United States, is in fact true for Asian Americans: Their subsequent academic and job performances exceed what their IQ test scores would predict.”⁹²

Sowell suggests that cultural factors make up a great deal of the difference between Asian Americans and other groups. “Although these cultural advantages do not apply today to low-income minorities, the large impact of cultural factors argues against any claim that low-income groups are doomed to remain where they are.”⁹³ The Asian American success story points the

⁸⁵ *Id.* at 112-13.

⁸⁶ *Id.* at 113 (second emphasis added).

⁸⁷ *Id.*

⁸⁸ *Id.*

⁸⁹ Sowell writes,

The history of Japanese Americans is a story of tragedy and triumph. Few people ever came to America more predisposed and determined to be good Americans. Few met such repeated rebuffs and barriers—including barriers of mass internment camps—or more completely triumphed over it all, across a broad spectrum of economic, social, and political success.

THOMAS SOWELL, *ETHNIC AMERICA* 155 (1981).

⁹⁰ *Id.* at 154.

⁹¹ Sowell explains that a careful review of the studies on intelligence shows that Japanese and Chinese Americans do not score higher than whites on intelligence tests though they do get better grades than whites and outperform them on achievement tests like the SAT. THOMAS SOWELL, *RACE AND CULTURE: A WORLD VIEW* 182 (1994).

⁹² *Id.*

⁹³ *Id.* at 182-83. Sowell is more explicit about what sorts of cultural forces are at work in other writings. For example, in *ETHNIC AMERICA* he wrote that the Chinese carried a cultural respect for learning with them to the

way for other minority groups: The “importance of cultural factors, expressed in such mundane things as longer hours devoted to homework, points in the direction from which improvement can come.”⁹⁴ In short, work harder and dedicate yourself and your children to school as Asian Americans have, and success will come.⁹⁵

C. *The Model Minority in Affirmative Action Debates*

The portrayal of Asian Americans as a model minority has also been deployed in debates about affirmative action and minority enrollment in colleges, first in the 1980s, when Asian American college enrollment rates began to rise dramatically; and more recently in the 1990s when California’s Proposition 209 (which ended state affirmative action based on race and ethnicity) was debated and then passed. Asian Americans as the model minority were used both by those for and those against affirmative action.

In the early 1980s, it Black, Latino, and Native American college enrollment rates flattened out while college enrollment of Asian Americans was booming.⁹⁶ The boom in Asian American college enrollment was natural. In California, for example, it was a fact in the 1980s⁹⁷ (and likely true now)⁹⁸ that “on the basis of strict academic criteria alone, Asians [were] the best-prepared group to enter the UC system.”⁹⁹

But some supporters of affirmative action interpreted the decline in Black and Latino college enrollment and the boom in Asian enrollment to mean that “Asian American admissions threatened racial diversity”¹⁰⁰ –implying that Asian enrollment came at the expense of Black and Latino enrollment.¹⁰¹ Some even feared that the boom in Asian American college enrollment

United States in the late Nineteenth Century. This respect for learning grew out of the fact that “Imperial China had for centuries chosen its civil servants according to their education and performance on examinations, and learned men were accorded great respect.” Though it “would be generations before Chinese Americans could obtain and utilize higher education in the United States, . . . they were prepared before the opportunity arose.” THOMAS SOWELL, *ETHNIC AMERICA* 135 (1981).

⁹⁴ SOWELL, *RACE AND CULTURE*, *supra* note __, at 182-83.

⁹⁵ SOWELL, *ETHNIC AMERICA* at 152 (“Today, much of the Chinese prosperity is due to the simple fact that they work more and have more (and usually better) education than others.”).

⁹⁶ DANA Y. TAKAGI, *THE RETREAT FROM RACE: ASIAN-AMERICAN ADMISSIONS AND RACIAL POLITICS* 78-79 (1992).

⁹⁷ *Id.*

⁹⁸ See Norimitsu Onishi, *Affirmative Action: Choosing Sides*, N.Y. TIMES, Mar. 31, 1996, at 4A pg. 26 (reporting that Asian Americans applying to the University of California system “generally have the highest grades and test scores of any racial group”).

⁹⁹ TAKAGI, *supra* note __, at 60.

¹⁰⁰ *Id.* at 82.

¹⁰¹ Vice Chancellor Travers of U.C. Berkeley noted that U.C. Berkeley could easily “fill up half the freshman class with Asians.” But, in his opinion, “that [result] wouldn’t be acceptable to the [California] legislature.” *Id.* at 72. U.C. Berkeley excluded Asian American students from its Educational Opportunity Program (EOP)—a quasi-affirmative action program based on race or ethnicity along with socioeconomic factors. Only Blacks and Latinos were permitted to apply for admission through EOP—the “truly underrepresented minorities,” as David Gardner, President of the University of California, explained. *Id.* at 53. See also DINESH D’SOUZA, *ILLIBERAL EDUCATION: THE POLITICS OF RACE AND SEX ON CAMPUS* 27 (1992) (contending that President Gardner was “worried that overrepresentation of Asian Americans hampered his efforts to multiply black and Latino enrollment.”)

also threatened white enrollment.¹⁰² Accusations flew that the University of California, Berkeley, Stanford, and Ivy League schools were imposing quotas on Asian enrollment similar to those that kept Jews out decades before.¹⁰³

Affirmative action opponents also made use of Asian Americans. Dinesh D’Souza, for example, argued that the controversy over Asian college admissions showed that affirmative action “depreciated the importance of merit criteria in admissions” in order to admit more African Americans and Latinos.¹⁰⁴ At the same time, schools saw Asian Americans as “overrepresented” because they a greater proportion of them were represented in the student body than in the general population.¹⁰⁵ He thought it tragically ironic that affirmative action for African Americans and Latinos “hurt[] a [different] minority group Quotas which were intended as instruments of *inclusion* now seemed to function as instruments of *exclusion*.”¹⁰⁶ D’Souza was not alone. Other affirmative action opponents also used the Asian American admissions controversy to argue that race-based admissions were inherently unfair.¹⁰⁷

¹⁰² TAKAGI, *supra* note __, at 73 (quoting U.C. Berkeley Vice Chancellor Travers as saying, “If we keep getting extremely well prepared Asians, and we are, we may get to the point where whites are an affirmative action group.”). Though Vice Chancellor Travers was probably joking, his remarks imply that U.C. Berkeley considered Asians to be overrepresented in the student body. D’SOUZA, *supra* note __, at 27.

¹⁰³ See *id.* at 29 (noting that Harvard, UCLA, Stanford, Brown and “other selective colleges which attract Asians have also faced criticism for imposing upper-limit quotas.”); see also TAKAGI, *supra* note __, at 29, 50. Administrators at Brown University reportedly described Asian American students as “overrepresented” on campus because they comprised twenty-five percent of the student population, a percentage that far outstripped their presence in the general population, which was only three percent. TAKAGI, *supra* note __, at 28-29; see also Grace W. Tsuang, *Assuring Equal Access of Asian Americans to Highly Selective Universities*, 98 YALE 659, 660-61 (1989) (describing pattern of comparatively low admission rates for Asian Americans to selective universities). A committee on minority affairs at Brown ultimately determined that Brown’s admissions process had treated Asian American applicants unfairly by assuming that most Asian Americans were seeking to be pre-med, though the committee made no finding of intentional discrimination. TAKAGI, *supra* note __, at 28-29. Here, too, the task force found evidence of bias in admissions: there was a huge disparity between the Asian American applicant rate and admit rate that simply could not be explained. Tuang, *supra* note __, at 661 n. 16 (quoting Stanford University 1985-86 ANNUAL REPORT OF THE COMMITTEE ON UNDERGRADUATE ADMISSION AND FINANCIAL AID, which reported that from 1982 to 1985 Asian Americans were admitted to Stanford at a rate of about 2/3 the rate whites were admitted). After the Stanford task force’s report was completed, Asian admission rates climbed immediately and approached the white admit rate. TAKAGI, *supra* note __, at 39-40.

¹⁰⁴ D’SOUZA, *supra* note __, at 27.

¹⁰⁵ *Id.*

¹⁰⁶ *Id.* at 29.

¹⁰⁷ For example, William Bradford Reynolds, President Reagan’s Assistant Attorney General for Civil Rights, “placed the blame for discrimination against Asians at the door of affirmative action” when he said that

Asian American candidates face higher hurdles than academically less qualified candidates of other races whether those candidates be minorities (black, Hispanic, Native American) or white. . . . [T]he phenomenon of a ‘ceiling’ on Asian American[] admissions is the inevitable result of the ‘floor’ that has been built for a variety of other favored racial groups.

Quoted in *id.* at 103-04. *Fortune* magazine also portrayed the Asian American admissions flap as another example of the inherent unfairness of reverse discrimination. Daniel Seligman & Patty de Llosa, *Quotas on Campus: The New Phase*, FORTUNE, Jan. 30, 1989, at 205, 205-08 (“Racial preferences in college admissions, legitimized by the Supreme Court’s infamous Bakke decision in 1978, [are] now being used against the wrong people [Asian Americans].”).

Asian Americans, in short, enabled affirmative action opponents to claim that the era of white privilege was over, and to make more attractive arguments against affirmative action couched in terms of equal treatment among minority groups, while steering clear of old arguments about affirmative action's unfairness to whites.¹⁰⁸ William Bradford Reynolds, President Reagan's Assistant Attorney-General for Civil Rights, spun the issue this way: "[W]here admissions policies are skewed by a mandate to achieve some sort of proportional representation by race, then, inevitably, there will be pressure to squeeze out Asian Americans to make room for other minorities (or for whites)."¹⁰⁹

In the mid-1990s, Asian Americans' model minority status again placed them at the heart of affirmative action debates, mostly in the service of affirmative action opponents. Peter Shaw of the *National Review* pointed out that once if race-based preferences were done away with at U.C. Berkeley, "Asians would go from 40 per cent to 55 per cent of the student body. Whites would go from 30 per cent to 35 per cent. Hispanics would go from 15 per cent to 5 per cent. Blacks would go from over 6 per cent to under 2 per cent." This "outcome," he argued, "makes clear the extent to which Asian-descended students are currently discriminated against."¹¹⁰

Affirmative action critic Stephan Thernstrom attacked those who claimed that the end of race-based preferences in admissions meant the end of racial diversity and the reservation of elite colleges and universities to the "lily-white."¹¹¹ He charged that such arguments uncomfortably resembled the "yellow peril" arguments of the late-Nineteenth and early-Twentieth Centuries.¹¹² He argued that one could only worry that the minority student representation at Boalt Hall School of Law at U.C. Berkeley would "drop . . . precipitously" if "Asians somehow lost their minority status when preferential admissions were abandoned; all the 'color' they had . . . has suddenly been bleached away."¹¹³ The whitening of Asian Americans was no accident, according to Thernstrom. "The Vanishing Asian . . . obscures the truth that a fair, open, color-blind process does not greatly disadvantage racial minorities in general. . . . [because] Asians are distinctly better off when judged . . . on the basis of their academic qualifications."¹¹⁴

III. WHAT'S SO BAD ABOUT BEING A MODEL MINORITY?

Asian critical scholars have looked skeptically on how Asian American successes have been portrayed in the popular and scholarly press, and how these successes have been used in the debates we have described here (and other debates, as well—our discussion is by no means exhaustive). Asian critical scholars resist what they call the "model minority myth" for several

¹⁰⁸ James S. Gibney, *The Berkeley Squeeze*, NEW REPUBLIC, Apr. 11, 1988, at 15, 17.

¹⁰⁹ See FRANK H. WU, *YELLOW: RACE IN AMERICA BEYOND BLACK AND WHITE* 143 (2002) (quoting Assistant Attorney-General for Civil Rights William Bradford Reynolds).

¹¹⁰ Peter Shaw, *Counting Asians*, NAT. REV., Sept. 25, 1995, at 50, 50.

¹¹¹ Stephan Thernstrom, *Farewell to Preferences?*, PUB. INT. 34, 39-41 (1998).

¹¹² Thernstrom chided President Clinton for having said that "there are universities in California that could fill their entire freshman classes with nothing but Asian Americans" if they relied only on high school grades and standardized tests—"paper" records, in other words. "To bring in different kinds of people," Clinton argued, one must look beyond paper records. *Id.* at 43.

¹¹³ *Id.* at 41.

¹¹⁴ *Id.*

reasons. First, they resist the term because it is false, or at the very least, a gross generalization. Second, they argue that often statistics that purport to prove comparative Asian American economic or educational success are misleading upon closer examination.

Asian critical scholars also claim that, aside from the misleading factual claims, the model minority myth has several bad consequences. These criticisms of the model minority stereotype sparked and formed the main focus of our investigation. Their criticisms coalesce around five main areas. *First*, the model minority stereotype conceals that many Asian Americans are poor and not highly educated; as a result, the model minority stereotype persuades people that there is no need for governmental programs to help Asian Americans or for affirmative action in education or jobs for Asian Americans. *Second*, the reputed success of Asian Americans blinds people to the fact that discrimination against Asian Americans is a serious, continuing problem that needs to be addressed.

Third, the model minority stereotype falsely bolsters the American Dream—the idea that any individual in America, regardless of race, ethnicity, or nation of origin, can succeed based purely on her merit if only she works hard enough. *Fourth*, the model minority myth both implicitly and explicitly blames other minority groups—particularly African Americans, but to some extent Latinos, too—for their own comparative lack of success. By doing so, it increases resistance to affirmative action for African Americans (why is affirmative action needed if Asian Americans were able to succeed without it?), and it erodes support for governmental assistance and programs for African Americans and Latinos. The model minority stereotype also breeds African American and Latino resentment against Asian Americans, preventing these groups from working together to pursue common goals.

Fifth, the model minority stereotype is a wolf in sheep's clothing—the “fear of the Yellow Peril” in disguise. Though superficially a positive stereotype, Asian critical scholars argue that upon closer inspection it masks more negative feelings toward Asian Americans and anxiety about having to compete against them. The model minority stereotype also obscures that, regardless of their success, Asian Americans are perpetual foreigners and outsiders in America; indeed, the mythical story of their socioeconomic success sets them apart as different from plain, vanilla Americans.

A. *The Model Minority Stereotype Denies Asian Americans the Government Attention and Assistance They Need and Deserve*

Asian critical scholars contend that the model minority stereotype's line about the socioeconomic success of Asian Americans misleads Americans about the plight of many Asian Americans. It inappropriately “lumps” together all Asian Americans—“third- or fourth-generation Japanese or Chinese Americans” with recent refugees and immigrants.¹¹⁵ The resulting composite portrait of success masks real difficulties and problems, such as the fact that “the overall rate of poverty among Asian Americans is roughly twice that of whites.”¹¹⁶

¹¹⁵ Natsu Taylor Saito, *Model Minority, Yellow Peril: Functions of “Foreignness” in the Construction of Asian American Legal Identity*, 4 ASIAN L.J. 71, 90 (1997).

¹¹⁶ *Id.*

Professor Frank Wu argues that, ironically indeed, it “is [now] common to refer to an ‘Anglo-Asian’ overclass in contrast to an African American-Hispanic underclass.”¹¹⁷

By concealing that there are many Asian Americans who are poor and poorly educated, the stereotype persuades people that Asians need no help in attaining economic and educational success. As Professor Chew puts it, “Believing the composite image of the successfully assimilated Asian American, American society tends to ignore Asian Americans’ problems and to dismiss their complexity and diversity as people.”¹¹⁸ Asian Americans are depicted as a group that “never [has] problems, like racism or poverty, to contend with and never need[s] assistance from government agencies or anyone else.”¹¹⁹ When Asian Americans’ problems and challenges are acknowledged, it is often in the context of relating how some Asian American person has succeeded despite high hurdles to success.¹²⁰ People simply assume, according to Asian critical scholars, that “Asian Americans don’t need public assistance or culturally specific programs, don’t deserve private foundation support, and don’t need educational help.”¹²¹

B. The Model Minority Stereotype Blinds Americans to the Persistence of Discrimination Against Asian Americans

Professor Neil Gotanda writes that white Americans are wedded to the idea that “racism directed against Asian Americans is insignificant or *does not exist*. . . my assessment is that the mainstream denial of racism towards Asian Americans is a pervasive and deeply held belief.”¹²² Professor Gotanda argues that the model minority stereotype solidifies this belief.¹²³ The problem with this conclusion is that there is evidence that discrimination against Asian Americans persists today. There is some indication that Asian Americans make less money than whites with the same educational attainment. Moreover, though pinning down the precise nature and extent of the problem is difficult, Asian Americans have been the victims of a large number of hate crimes. Asian critical scholars contend, however, that the model minority stereotype creates the impression that Asian Americans could not possibly suffer pervasive discrimination, “much less the kind that spawns physical violence.”¹²⁴ Indeed, Asian critical scholars report that Asian Americans’ complaints of discrimination are sometimes met with derision.¹²⁵

¹¹⁷ See WU, *YELLOW*, *supra* note __ at 19 (“Journalist Dan Walters introduced the notion in his 1986 book on the new California, writing that ‘the high level of Asian education and economic achievement . . . has led many demographers to see them as part of an Anglo-Asian overclass that will dominate California’s two-tier society of the 21st century.’”).

¹¹⁸ Chew, *supra* note __, at 7.

¹¹⁹ HELEN ZIA, *ASIAN AMERICAN DREAMS: THE EMERGENCE OF AN AMERICAN PEOPLE* 118 (2000).

¹²⁰ *Id.* at 207 (“Where poor Asian immigrants have garnered public notice, it is usually to celebrate the exceptional individuals who overcome all odds, such as the refugee or immigrant child who becomes an Intel (formerly Westinghouse) Science Talent Search winner.”).

¹²¹ *Id.*

¹²² Neil Gotanda, *Asian American Rights and the “Miss Saigon Syndrome”* *supra* note __, at 1088.

¹²³ *Id.* Professor Pat Chew agrees: “Although there may have been isolated instances of discrimination in the past, society believes that Asian Americans today generally do not experience discrimination.” Chew, *supra* note __, at 6.

¹²⁴ Gotanda, *supra* note __, at 1088. Professor Frank Wu has also argued that

C. The Model Minority Stereotype Reinforces Belief in the American Dream and Implicitly Blames Other Minority Groups for Their Problems

“Whites love us because we’re not black,” one Asian critical scholar contends.¹²⁶ Asian critical scholars charge that Asian Americans’ supposed success is used “to demoralize or to anger other minority groups and disadvantaged people.”¹²⁷ Professor Chew charges that the model minority stereotype tells other minorities that if they “work hard, have certain values, and are reasonably intelligent” they “can be successful.”¹²⁸ That they have not succeeded is therefore a sign that “they are lazy, their values are misplaced,” and they lack “the inherent capabilities to succeed.”¹²⁹ The blame for “the plight of unsuccessful minorities” thus lies at their own doorstep; their “failures are under their control—even perhaps their choice.”¹³⁰ If only other racial minorities would follow the example of Asian Americans and channel the energy they spend complaining into hard work.¹³¹

Upside down or right side up, the model minority myth whitewashes racial discrimination. “People don't believe it,” as one Asian American leader told the *L.A. Times* in 1991, in discussing the prevalence of anti-Asian bias. An Asian American student leader said that, like whites, other people of color doubt claims about [racial hate-crime] attacks: “Some simply didn't see us as minorities. . . . They think if you're Asian you're automatically interning at Merrill Lynch and that you're never touched by racism.”

WU, YELLOW, *supra* note __, at 69.

¹²⁵ Professor Frank Wu relates that

When the U.S. Civil Rights Commission report released a report on civil rights issues facing Asian Americans in 1992, *Fortune* magazine scorned the findings in an article entitled, “Up from Inscrutable?” Aside from playing on a stereotype, the author asks, “What’s the problem?” He concludes that the government study which detailed offenses such as hate crimes, was “easily the strangest document produced by the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights in recent years” because “the predicament, if that is the word, which we doubt” of Asian Americans could not include civil rights violations.

WU, YELLOW, *supra* note __, at 69.

¹²⁶ R. LEE, ORIENTALS, *supra* note __, at 145 (quoting writer Frank Chin).

¹²⁷ Chew, *supra* note __, at 70-71. William Wei concurs, “[T]he insidious ‘model minority’ stereotype. . . . serves a particular social purpose—in this case, to make invidious comparisons with other people of color, blaming them, rather than the economic and sociopolitical barriers in American society, for their problems.” WILLIAM WEI, THE ASIAN AMERICAN MOVEMENT 49 (1994).

¹²⁸ *Id.* at 71.

¹²⁹ *Id.*

¹³⁰ *Id.* Professor Wu concurs, “The myth implies that bigotry has been brought on by the victims, who must defeat it, rather than that it is the responsibility of the perpetrators, who could be compelled to eliminate it.” WU, YELLOW, note __, *supra* at 69.

¹³¹ “[Asian Americans] are living proof of the power of the free market and the absence of racial discrimination. Their good fortune flows from individual self-reliance and community self-sufficiency, not civil rights activism or government welfare benefits. They believe that merit and effort pay off handsomely and justly, and so they do. Asian Americans do not whine about racial discrimination; they only try harder. If they are told that they have a weakness that prevents their social acceptance, they quickly agree and earnestly attempt to cure it. If they are subjected to mistreatment by their employer, they quit and found their own company rather than protesting or suing.” *Id.* at 44.

Asian critical scholars worry that blaming other minorities for their own troubles will erode support for government assistance, early education programs, and affirmative action for African Americans and other minorities. Professor Chew thinks that this is already the case. “[S]tudies show,” she says (citing research drawing on GSS data) that “derogatory perceptions” of minority groups erode “societal support for government assistance for minorities, affirmative action, and school integration.”¹³² The logic is simple—if Asian Americans have succeeded without government help, why help African Americans and other minority groups?¹³³

D. The Model Minority Stereotype Drives a Wedge between Asian Americans and Other Minority Groups

Asian critical scholars are increasingly concerned that the model minority stereotype is part of a white supremacist agenda to divide racial minority groups by creating resentment and jealousy among groups in order to dissipate their numerical power when America becomes “majority minority.”¹³⁴ Moreover, if Professor Wu is correct that persons of color—Asian Americans, African Americans and Latinos—must band together and work as a coalition to improve their collective lot,¹³⁵ then Asian critical scholars should be concerned if the model minority stereotype “fosters resentment from non-Asian minorities who are impliedly faulted as less than model.”¹³⁶ If the stereotype “pit[s] Asian Americans against African Americans,” then “racial barriers that limit Asian Americans and African Americans [will] remain unchallenged” while Asian- and African Americans fight among themselves.¹³⁷ Indeed, some Asian critical scholars charge that *the very point* of the model minority stereotypes is to splinter any possible coalition between persons of color by “manipulating other minorities,” “isolat[ing] Asians,” and causing “resentment” among African Americans and Latinos.¹³⁸

The model minority stereotype now takes on a sinister cast: Asian critical scholars brand it a “disingenuous stereotype” (because whites do not really believe that Asian Americans are a

¹³² Chew, *supra* note __, at 33 (citing Lawrence Bobo & James R. Kluegel, *Modern American Prejudice: Stereotypes, Social Distance, and Perceptions of Discrimination Toward Blacks, Hispanics, and Asians*, 33-38 (Aug. 1991) (unpublished paper presented at the Annual Meetings of the Am. Soc. Ass'n)33-38; See Tom W. Smith, *Ethnic Images*, Gen. Soc. Surv. Topical Rep. No. 19, 7-8 (1990).)

¹³³ Cf. Chris Iijima, *The Era of We-Construction: Reclaiming the Politics of Asian Pacific American Identity and Reflections on the Critique of the Black/White Paradigm*, 29 COLUM. HUM. RTS. L. REV. 47, 77 (1997) (“It would be a supreme irony” if the conclusion drawn from the model minority stereotype is that government should do less for other minority groups).

¹³⁴ See, e.g., Chew, *supra* note __, at 71-72 (“Minorities who accept [the implicit] criticisms [of the model minority stereotype] may be demoralized—questioning whether their efforts actually have been inadequate and their capabilities are inferior. Minorities who reject this reasoning may be angered by the comparisons[, and] . . . they may direct their animosity toward Asian Americans, resenting their apparent successes.”)

¹³⁵ Frank Wu, *From Black to White and Back Again*, 3 ASIAN L.J. 185, 195 (1996) (book review) (“At the political level, it can be done by coalition movements that build bridges among African Americans, Asian Americans, and Latinos.”).

¹³⁶ Note, *Racial Violence against Asian Americans*, 106 HARV. L. REV. 1926, 1931 (1993).

¹³⁷ S. LEE, UNRAVELING, *supra* note __, at 9.

¹³⁸ Howard G. Chua-Eoan, *Strangers in Paradise*, TIME, Apr. 9, 1990 at 32, 35 (quoting Reed Ueda, Professor of History, Tufts University). See also WU, YELLOW, note __, *supra* at 28 (“There is a real risk . . . that inserting [Asian Americans] into debates over race could make them a wedge group that divides rather than unites” people of color).

“model”) “created to perpetuate the dominance of white Americans.”¹³⁹ “[T]he ‘model minority myth’ plays a key role in establishing a racial hierarchy that denies the reality of Asian American oppression, while accepting that of other racial minorities and poor whites.”¹⁴⁰ Being accepted as a model minority is a poisonous prize, because the stereotype will “only be wielded in defense of the racial status quo.”¹⁴¹ Whites will remain on top; African Americans on the bottom; Asian Americans sandwiched in between. Angela Oh, a member of President Clinton’s Race Relations Commission characterized the problem this way. “To put it bluntly, to many blacks and Latinos, we’re honorary whites, right? But to whites, we’re more of ‘those people,’ you know, people of color.”¹⁴²

Asian Americans have been used most obviously in affirmative action debates. Dana Takagi argues that in the 1980s, “differences in academic achievement between Asian American students and black students were . . . translated into competing interests between the two groups in the admissions process.”¹⁴³ Moreover, Takagi argues that Asian Americans became scapegoats in the arguments about ethnic diversity on college campuses: Asian Americans caused the diversity crisis by applying to and enrolling in college at an extraordinary rate. She points the rhetoric of some college administrators that explicitly pitted Asian Americans’ interests against African Americans’ and Latinos’.¹⁴⁴

By the late 1980s and continuing into the 1990s, the portrayal of Asian Americans in affirmative action debates shifted from blaming Asian Americans for the decline in diversity to

¹³⁹ Gee, *Asian Americans*, *supra* note ___, at 76. Along similar lines, Frank Wu argues that the model minority stereotype is robust because

it serves a purpose in reinforcing racial hierarchies. Asian Americans are as much a “middleman minority” as we are a model minority. We are placed in the awkward position of buffer or intermediary, elevated as the preferred racial minority at the expense of denigrating African Americans. . . . DePaul University law professor Sumi Cho has explained that Asian Americans are turned into “racial mascots” giving right-wing causes a novel messenger, camouflaging arguments that would look unconscionably self-interested if made by whites about themselves. University of California at Irvine political scientist Claire Kim has argued that Asian Americans are positioned through “racial triangulation” much as a Machiavellian would engage in political triangulation for maximum advantage. Law professor Mari Matsuda famously declared, “we will not be used” in repudiating the model minority myth.

Whatever the effects are called, Asian Americans become pawns.”

WU, *YELLOW*, note ___, *supra* at 58.

¹⁴⁰ Gee, *Asian Americans*, *supra* note ___, at 77. See also Chris Iijima, *Reparations and the “Model Minority” Ideology of Acquiescence: the Necessity to Refuse the Return to the Original Humiliation*, 40 B.C. L. REV. 385, 425 (1998) (Whites use “the carrot of model minority status for Asian Pacific Americans . . . as a sword against other people of color.”)

¹⁴¹ Iijima, *Reparations*, *supra* note __ at 425.

¹⁴² Quoted in Frank Wu, *Not Just Black and White*, *ASIAN WK.*, Feb. 11, 1998, at 12.

¹⁴³ TAKAGI, *supra* note ___, at 148.

¹⁴⁴ *Id.* at 70-74. Angelo Ancheta has argued that the debates about affirmative action in the 1980s and the 1990s portrayed Asian Americans as a universally successful racial group; by doing so, the debates obscured the need to include some Asian American national origin groups in race-based remedial programs. ANGELO ANCHETA, *RACE RIGHTS, AND THE ASIAN AMERICAN EXPERIENCE* 162 (1998).

portraying Asian Americans as affirmative action's victims.¹⁴⁵ Asian critical scholars claim that Asian Americans' academic success meant that conservatives no longer had to put whites in the victim role,¹⁴⁶ a tack that had always seemed somewhat unattractive and self-serving. Portraying Asian Americans as affirmative action's victims gave conservatives a further advantage: they could now argue that affirmative action's promise of racial equality was a sham.¹⁴⁷

Asian critical scholars worry that this rhetoric worked. "The emergence of a 'good' minority—Asians—suffering discrimination as a result of preferences for 'underrepresented minorities,'" Asian critical scholars contend, eroded support for affirmative action among liberals who had previously favored it.¹⁴⁸ The model minority stereotype "was an important part of the reason many liberals ultimately moved to get rid of racial preferences or, at best, offered only qualified support for affirmative action."¹⁴⁹

E. The Model Minority at the New "Yellow Peril"

One consistent theme in the Asian critical literature on the model minority stereotype is the concern that the model minority stereotype is an updated and disguised version of the fear of the "Yellow Peril" that exemplified the exclusionary and discriminatory laws of the late-Nineteenth and Early-Twentieth Centuries. Asian critical scholars argue that the successes that make Asian Americans a model minority also make Asian Americans threatening. Put simply, the "model minority myth . . . is two-faced. Every attractive trait matches up neatly to its repulsive complement, and the aspects are" easily reversed.¹⁵⁰

1. Resentment about competing against Asians.

Recalling the Asian Land Laws enacted in California in the 1920s as a measure by white farmers against overly successful and hardworking Japanese immigrant farmers, Floyd Shimomura, then-Deputy Attorney General of the State of California, observed that

Asian Americans are seen as *unfair competitors* who pose an unwelcome economic threat. At times politicians and business executives characterize Asians as unfair competitors and blame . . . East Asian countries, such as Japan, for American economic

¹⁴⁵ TAKAGI, *supra* note ___, at 148 (arguing that "refurbished neoconservative claims projected Asians as the new 'victims' of affirmative action. . . . [B]lack remained the beneficiaries of racial preferences, but in the late 1980s, the color of the victims changed").

¹⁴⁶ *Id.* at 138-39 (arguing that in the early 1980s, "whites were projected as 'victims' of preference for blacks").

¹⁴⁷ *See id.* at 119-20 (arguing that Asian Americans gave conservatives "an excellent opportunity to energize their vision of individual merit and the free market approach to admissions" based on "individual merit, not race" and that Asian Americans became "ethnic champions with which to disarm liberalism in higher education").

¹⁴⁸ *Id.* at 176.

¹⁴⁹ *Id.*

¹⁵⁰ WU, YELLOW, *supra* note ___, at 67.

woes. Workers who face unemployment also resent Asian immigrants for supposedly stealing jobs from ‘real’ Americans.¹⁵¹

One only needs to think back to the late 1970s and early 1980s when “Buy American” was a hot slogan in the Midwest. It was especially popular with autoworkers who were fighting to hold onto their jobs, as American auto makers faced stiff competition from Japanese car manufacturers who seemed better able to produce the smaller, more reliable cars that consumers were snapping up. As Professors Omi and Winant point out, “Domestic economic woes are attributed to unfair foreign competition—with Japan receiving an inordinate amount of blame.”¹⁵² Negative attitudes about Japan rose during the 1980s, as expressed in opinion polls; politicians and labor leaders used “racist clichés redolent of World War II propaganda” in making demands for restrictions on Japanese imports.¹⁵³ The horrific 1982 beating death of Vincent Chin, a young American man of Chinese descent, by enraged, venomous autoworkers who mistook him for Japanese revealed the depth, passion, and violence of American resentment of perceived unfair competition from the Japanese.

Although the ongoing Asian financial crisis overshadows the successes of the Japanese economy and “Asian Tigers” in the 1980s and early 1990s, Japanese business methods were extolled not that long ago as an exotic blueprint for success. In the late 1980s and early 1990s, Japanese businessmen and corporations had a lot of spare cash to spend on pricey American real estate, like Rockefeller Center. News-weeklies ran article after article about the inability of America to compete and the inevitability that Asians would dominate the United States. Michael Crichton’s best seller, *Rising Sun*, both captured and capitalized on fears of Japanese domination of the United States. Robert Lee observed that “*Rising Sun* is less a detective thriller than a jeremiad against an economic and cultural threat from Japan.”¹⁵⁴ Asians have been blamed for everything: from precipitating the Beatles’ breakup (Yoko Ono),¹⁵⁵ to Japan’s conquering of the American auto industry and flagrant piracy of American copyrighted works by Chinese, Asians “hover as a threat to Americans.”¹⁵⁶ Professor Wu writes that the contemporary version of the Yellow Peril shows itself in fears about “the threat of Japan, Inc.” and the “rise of the East and decline of the West.”¹⁵⁷

These examples convince Asian critical scholars that even today, “if Asian Americans become too ‘model,’ they become unwelcome threats.”¹⁵⁸ Professor Wu argues that a morphing of the model minority stereotype into its more threatening guise is

¹⁵¹ Note, *Racial Violence against Asian Americans*, 106 HARV. L. REV. 1926, 1931 (1993) (citing *Hearings on Anti-Asian Violence: Oversight Hearing Before the Subcomm. on Civil and Constitutional Rights of the House Comm. on the Judiciary*, 100th Cong., 1st Sess. 10 (1987) (statement of Floyd Shimomura, Deputy AG of California)).

¹⁵² OMI AND WINANT, *RACIAL FORMATION IN THE UNITED STATES: FROM THE 1960S TO THE 1990S* 115-16 (2d ed. 1994).

¹⁵³ *Id.* at 116.

¹⁵⁴ ROBERT G. LEE, *ORIENTALS: ASIAN AMERICANS IN POPULAR CULTURE* 209 (1999).

¹⁵⁵ See Keith Aoki, *Foreign-ness & Asian American Identities: Yellowface, World War II Propaganda and Bifurcated Racial Stereotypes*, 4 UCLA ASIAN PAC. AM. L.J. 1, 44-45 (1996).

¹⁵⁶ Saito, *supra* note ___, at 86 (quoting Keith Aoki).

¹⁵⁷ *Id.* at 80 (quoting Frank Wu).

¹⁵⁸ Note, *Racial Violence*, *supra* note ___, at 1943.

inevitable during a military crisis or economic downturn. To be intelligent is to be calculating and too clever; to be gifted in math and science is to be mechanical and not creative, lacking interpersonal skills and leadership potential. To be polite is to be inscrutable and submissive. To be hard working is to be an unfair competitor for regular human beings and not a well-rounded, likable individual. To be family oriented is to be clannish and too ethnic. To be law abiding is to be self-righteous and rigidly rule-bound. To be successfully entrepreneurial is to be deviously aggressive and economically intimidating. To revere elders is to be an ancestor-worshipping pagan, and fidelity to tradition is reactionary ignorance.¹⁵⁹

Asian critical scholars argue that the controversy raised by skyrocketing Asian college admissions discussed above illustrates this point. Professor Keith Aoki explains, “Garbled and two-dimensional American readings of how Confucian values supposedly produce ‘model minority’ Asian American schoolchildren can ‘flip’ at the drop of a hat into a belief that Asian American high school students pose a threat to the continued interest in the ‘whiteness’ of elite institutions of higher learning such as Berkeley or M.I.T.”¹⁶⁰

2. Fears about immigration

Asian critical scholars point to recent anti-immigration initiatives, such as Proposition 187 in California, English-only laws, and restrictions on the receipt of government benefits by legal immigrants as evidence of growing hostility toward immigration generally, and to Asian immigration particularly.¹⁶¹ Asian critical scholars worry that aspects of the model minority stereotype contribute to anti-immigration sentiment. Robert Lee has written, “[t]he very cultural difference that mark[s] Asian Americans as role models . . . defines Asian Americans as inauthentic and the potential agents of a dreaded de-Westernization of American society. . . . [Cultural conservatives argue] that regardless of the economic advantages that accrue from immigration, non-European immigrants represent a threat to the nation’s cultural core.”¹⁶²

Immigration appears more threatening today, Asian critical scholars argue, because of the fact that “after the year 2050, Blacks, Asians, Latinos, and Native Americans will” comprise a “majority population”¹⁶³ in the United States. California has already become a “majority

¹⁵⁹ WU, *YELLOW*, *supra* note __, at 68.

¹⁶⁰ Aoki, *Foreign-ness*, *supra* note __, at 15 (citations omitted).

¹⁶¹ Iijima, *Reparations*, *supra* note __, at 416 (“White fears of declining power are illustrated by the recent voter initiatives in California which curtail benefits to immigrants and eliminate affirmative action.”).

¹⁶² R. LEE, *ORIENTALS*, *supra* note __, at 208-09. Mia Tuan has expressed similar misgivings about the effect of stereotypes of Asians as a model minority has had on attitudes towards immigration. “In the case of Asian-Americans, material success has actually hastened greater resentment. . . . Asian-Americans across the country have increasingly become the scapegoats for a range of economic and social ills. Shifting international relations with the Pacific Rim along with renewed Asian immigration have further contributed to a growing perception among Americans from various walks of life of an imminent ‘Asian invasion.’” MIA TUAN, *FOREVER FOREIGNERS OR HONORARY WHITES? THE ASIAN ETHNIC EXPERIENCE TODAY* 41 (1998).

¹⁶³ Iijima, *Reparations*, *supra* note __, at 416.

minority” state.¹⁶⁴ Chris Iijima asserts that “Whites in America are already visualizing themselves as a racial minority. They fear their status is eroding and that people of color are usurping their traditional positions of power and privilege.”¹⁶⁵ The fact that many whites now underestimate the actual percentage of whites in the United States (“the actual percentage of the white population in the United States is 74%, whites believe the percentage is under 49.9%”¹⁶⁶) demonstrates the fever pitch of white hysteria at losing racial hegemony.¹⁶⁷

3. Perpetual Foreigners

Asian critical scholars suspect that, regardless how positively the model minority stereotype portrays Asian Americans, Asian Americans will always be viewed as “foreigners” in the United States. This has historically been true, Asian critical scholars point out. “As a group, [Asian Pacific Islanders] historically occupied a particular position within the economy and society—feared and unwanted cheap labor, unassimilable heathens, and more generally, the ‘yellow Peril.’”¹⁶⁸ The presumption of foreignness continues to dog Asian Americans today: Even as “[o]vert bigotry and anti-Asian hostility have waned since World War II” two stereotypes of Asians as the “Model Minority” or the “Gook” continue to impose an “externally defined [racial] identity . . . that continues to be predicated on the notion of a race of permanent aliens.”¹⁶⁹ Beyond the compliments Asian Americans receive on how good their English speaking skills are or queries about where someone is “really” from,¹⁷⁰ Asian critical scholars point to more serious incidents that they believe demonstrate the perception that Asian Americans are not truly American.

Most recently, some Asian American scholars and political activists decried the Justice Department’s treatment of Wen Ho Lee, the former Los Alamos scientist charged with mishandling classified information. The government’s harsh treatment of Dr. Lee—he was held shackled in solitary confinement for nearly a year pending legal proceedings because of the government’s stated fear that he might “spirit nuclear secrets to a hostile country”¹⁷¹—and the subsequent chastisement of the Justice and Energy Departments by District Judge Parker for holding Dr. Lee without bail,¹⁷² led many Asian American activists to charge that Dr. Lee was suspected of spying largely because he was ethnically Chinese.¹⁷³

¹⁶⁴ According to 2000 census figures, whites make up only 46.7% of the population of California. Asian Americans comprise 10.9% of the population, Pacific Islanders 0.3%, African Americans 6.7%, and Latinos 32.4%.

¹⁶⁵ Iijima, *Reparations*, *supra* note ___, at 415-16.

¹⁶⁶ *Id.* at 415 n. 114.

¹⁶⁷ *Id.* 414-20 (discussing white anxiety about becoming the “white” minority).

¹⁶⁸ THE STATE OF ASIAN PACIFIC AMERICA: TRANSFORMING RACE RELATIONS (EXECUTIVE SUMMARY) 4 (Paul M. Ong, ed.) (2000).

¹⁶⁹ *Id.*

¹⁷⁰ “Where are you *really* from? Often asked of Asian Americans, this question implies that they are strangers in the land, as European Americans seldom accept an American locality as an answer.” WEI, *supra* note ___, at 44.

¹⁷¹ James Sterngold, *Accused Scientist Has Bail Blocked at Last Minute*, N.Y. TIMES at A1 (Sep. 2, 2000) (reporting that the U.S. Attorney has said that Wen Ho Lee’s “confinement, in harsh conditions, is essential because of concerns that he might find a way to spirit nuclear secrets to a hostile country.”)

¹⁷² The *New York Times* reported that

Much of the controversy surrounding the 1996 presidential campaign fundraising scandal centered around potential illegal actions by Asian Americans and Asian immigrants. Al Gore's troubles sprang from reported illegal fundraising at the Hsi Lai Buddhist Temple in Southern California, which had been organized by Maria Hsia, a Taiwanese immigrant. Ms. Hsia raised for the Democrats over one hundred thousand dollars from Asian donors—many of whom were citizens of Taiwan and could not legally contribute to American campaigns.¹⁷⁴ There was also John Huang, who raised millions of dollars for the Clinton reelection campaign, much of it illegally from Chinese nationals.¹⁷⁵ Some also charged that Chinese government improperly funneled money to the Clinton campaign, presumably to garner favorable trade status from the Clinton Administration.¹⁷⁶

Many Asian American leaders worried that Asian *American* contributors were treated with suspicion, whether or not they were American-born or naturalized citizens. Money from any contributor with an Asian last name was suspect as being from an illegal foreign source, they

Judge James A. Parker of Federal District Court stunned a suddenly hushed courtroom by implicitly singling out Attorney General Janet Reno, Energy Secretary Bill Richardson and senior officials in the Clinton White House for what he said was a questionable indictment, for misleading him about Dr. Lee's supposedly deceptive behavior and then for ignoring his urgings that the government ease the 'demeaning, unnecessarily punitive conditions' under which Dr. Lee was being held. . . . Judge Parker said the 'top decisionmakers' handling the case 'have not embarrassed me alone. They have embarrassed our entire nation.'

James Sterngold, *Nuclear Scientist Set Free After Plea In Secrets Case; Judge Attacks U.S. Conduct*, N.Y. TIMES, Sept. 14, 2000, at A1.

¹⁷³ The novelist Gish Jen charged,

Whether or not it can be proved he was a victim of racial profiling, Mr. Lee's case dramatizes what many Americans believe to be true: There is opportunity here, but justice? Equality before the law? No, not for the model minority, it appears. We cannot know if Wen Ho Lee was singled out because of his race. But the experience of many Asian-Americans, myself included, is such that we would be more surprised to discover that he had not than to learn that he had. We know too well the associative nature of the mainstream imagination, which manages to link Asian-Americans of any type to whatever Asian phenomenon might be momentarily tweaking its poor gray noodle.

Gish Jen, *For Wen Ho Lee, a Tarnished Freedom*, N.Y. TIMES, Sep. 15, 2000, at A35. See also Neil A. Lewis, *Searching Only in Profiles Can Hide a Spy's Face*, N.Y. TIMES, Sept. 17, 2000, at Sec. 4 pg. 6 (discussing suspicions that Wen Ho Lee was victim of racial profiling); James Sterngold, *Asian-Americans Demanding Bias Inquiry in Scientist's Case*, N.Y. TIMES, Sept. 18, 2000, at A12 (describing demands by Committee of 100, a group of Chinese-American scientists, and other Asian American political leaders that Clinton administration investigate charges of racial profiling in Wen Ho Lee case).

¹⁷⁴ Jeffrey Toobin, *Adventures in Buddhism: What really happened at the Hsi Lai temple?*, NEW YORKER, Sep. 18, 2000, at 76, 76. Largely because of her role in the Buddhist-temple episode, Hsia was convicted last March of five felonies in federal district court in Washington.

¹⁷⁵ David E. Rosenbaum, *Campaign Finance: Developments So Far*, N.Y. TIMES, at B9 (Apr. 3, 1997).

¹⁷⁶ *Id.* See also, Toobin, *supra* note __, at 78 (explaining that the Buddhist Temple scandal fueled "accusations that the Clinton-Gore team received foreign money funneled through straw donors."); see also R. LEE, *ORIENTALS*, *supra* note __, at 224 (arguing that the attempt by the contributors John Huang brought to the Democratic Party "demonstrates how limited . . . the liberal-multiculturalist approach [is] in establishing a place for Asian Americans in the body politic.")

claimed. One critical scholar put it this way, “Asian Americans are increasingly implicated in contemporary Orientalist rhetoric especially resonant in the recent debacle about their alleged role in the intrusion of ‘foreign interests’ in Democratic Party fund raising. In the middle of a surge of anti-immigrant sentiment in the 1990s, Asian Americans are rendered in the media and political arena as spies and illegal ‘aliens.’”¹⁷⁷

Even if many of the allegations of illegal foreign campaign contributions were true, some of the rhetoric used to describe the scandal was shocking in its casual use of racist images of Asians. Political cartoons routinely made use of caricatured depictions of Asians with exaggerated slanted-eyes, sharp eyebrows, and buckteeth. Perhaps the most notorious of these caricatures appeared on the cover of the *National Review*. As Professor Wu details, “The conservative *National Review* published a cover story ‘The Manchurian Candidates,’ with an illustration of President Clinton, First Lady Hillary Clinton, and Vice President Al Gore caricatured as Asians, including buck teeth and slant eyes, in stereotypical Chinese garments.”¹⁷⁸ The casual use of “yellow-face” is disturbing. Had the campaign finance scandal involved allegations of improper contributions from African nations political cartoons would never have caricatured foreign donors as cartoon cannibals and the *National Review* would probably not have pilloried Bill, Hillary, and Al on their cover by putting them in “blackface.”

Less serious incidents, such as Senator Alphonse D’Amato’s tasteless adoption of a mock Asian accent to ridicule Judge Lance Ito (though Judge Ito was no more a foreigner than Senator D’Amato)¹⁷⁹ and MSNBC’s gaffe headline—“American beats Kwan”—when figure skater Tara Lipinski beat Michelle Kwan in the 1996 Winter Olympics,¹⁸⁰ only confirm to Asian critical scholars that the perception of Asian Americans as foreigners runs very deep. This perception of Asian Americans as foreigners, in their view, bears an uncanny resemblance to the early stereotypes of Asians as “unassimilable heathens” who would “overrun” the United States.¹⁸¹

The characterization of Asian Americans as foreign is at the heart of the model minority stereotype, according to many Asian critical scholars. Professor Frank Wu points out that the 1966 New York Times article, “Success Story,” explained the success of Japanese Americans “by reference to their foreign roots and non-American culture.”¹⁸² The more recent articles from the 1980s similarly explain Asian students’ success in terms of eastern belief structures. Other Asian critical scholars point out parallels between “positive” stereotypes and more negative stereotypes: “Hardworking and industrious become unfairly competitive; family-oriented

¹⁷⁷ Martin F. Manalansan IV, *Introduction: The Ethnography of Asian America: Notes toward a Thick Description*, CULTURAL COMPASS 1, 1 (2000); see also WU, YELLOW, *supra* note ___, at 105 (arguing that even though some of the allegations of improper foreign campaign contributions were founded, “the allegations were also accompanied by racial stereotyping, as politicians and pundits charged . . . that Asian Americans were by their very nature likely to engage in bribery, or that their behavior implied that all individuals with Asian-sounding surnames should be suspected of illegal conduct.”)

¹⁷⁸ WU, YELLOW, *supra* note ___, at 112.

¹⁷⁹ TUAN, FOREVER FOREIGNERS, *supra* note ___, at 1.

¹⁸⁰ *Id.* at 40.

¹⁸¹ This quote comes from the *Chinese Exclusion Case, Chae Chan Ping v. United States*, 130 U.S. 581, 585 (1889): “Our country would be overrun by them.”

¹⁸² Wu, *From Black to White*, *supra* note ___, at 212.

becomes clannish; mysterious becomes dangerously inscrutable.”¹⁸³ Put differently, Robert Lee argues that the “Asian American model minority” thus “becomes the enemy within, economically productive but culturally inauthentic, and thus unsuitable as [a] model for national restoration.”¹⁸⁴ If Asians are perceived as “foreigners,” a whole “range of possible [negative] inferences” are possible: “disloyalty, language and accent, dress and demeanor.”¹⁸⁵

F. *The Two Faces of the Model Minority Stereotype?*

In the next section, we interrogate the model minority stereotype and investigate some of the criticisms of and fears about it expressed by Asian critical scholars. Before addressing our findings, we want to be clear about what questions we are investigating and what questions and claims we are not addressing.

First, we do not deny that Asian Americans as a group or individual Asian American Critical scholars have experienced serious racial discrimination and have been the butt of insensitive and ignorant remarks about their “real” country of origin or about their English-language facility. Nor do we dispute that such remarks and comments suggest that the questioner presumes Asian Americans are foreigners. In fact, our data confirm the existence of positive and negative stereotyping of Asians. There are also aspects of current American popular culture that seem to reflect “yellow-peril” stereotypes about Asian Americans. Yellow-peril (and other negative) stereotypes about Asian Americans appear still to persist, as the “yellow-face” *National Review* cover demonstrates. Asian Americans also appear to be the targets of racial hate crimes at a fairly high rate, some of which are probably tied to perceptions that Asian Americans are “alien.”¹⁸⁶

We are, however, curious whether the model minority stereotype generally contains within it an aspect of “foreignness” and whether whites who hold model-minority like beliefs find it to be frightening or threatening. To that end, we have investigated whether whites who hold model minority beliefs perceive Asian Americans as less patriotic,¹⁸⁷ whether they perceive Asian Americans to have too much influence on government and politics,¹⁸⁸ and whether they are more or less likely to oppose intermarriage among Asian Americans and whites.¹⁸⁹

Nor do we dispute that during the 1980s and 1990s some politicians and political activists tried to play on nativist impulses and anti-immigration sentiment—indeed, the previous sections of this article document how prevalent such arguments have been. We do want to know,

¹⁸³ Saito, *supra*, note ___, at 72.

¹⁸⁴ R. LEE, ORIENTALS, *supra* note ___, at 191.

¹⁸⁵ Neil Gotanda, *Asian American Rights and the “Miss Saigon Syndrome”*, *supra* note ___, at 1098-99.

¹⁸⁶ Accurate statistics on hate crimes are notoriously hard to compile due to varying methods of information gathering and record keeping at the local level and underreporting by victims. The National Asian Pacific Americans Legal Consortium published reports in 1999 and 2000 describing hundreds of attacks on Asian Americans that appeared to be racially motivated. See Executive Summary of 1999 Audit of Violence against Asian Pacific Americans at http://www.napalc.org/literature/annual_report/1999.html; and Executive Summary of 2000 Audit of Violence against Asian Pacific Americans at http://www.napalc.org/literature/annual_report/2000.htm

¹⁸⁷ See text at notes ___-___, *infra*.

¹⁸⁸ See text at notes ___-___, *infra*.

¹⁸⁹ See text at notes ___-___, *infra*.

however, what relationship the model minority stereotype has had to anti-immigration sentiment. To that end, we investigated whether whites who hold model minority views have a greater fear of immigration or its effects on American life.

Finally, there is no doubt that conservative pundits and politicians have used the model minority stereotype to further their own political agendas—to fan opposition to affirmative action, for example, or to dispel the thought that discrimination continues to suppress the opportunities of racial minorities in the United States. But we have wondered, are such arguments typical views of persons who hold positive model minority beliefs about Asian Americans? To this end, we have investigated whether model minority beliefs are typically accompanied by greater opposition toward affirmative action, or accompanied by hostility toward greater government assistance for other minority groups. We turn now to a discussion of our results.

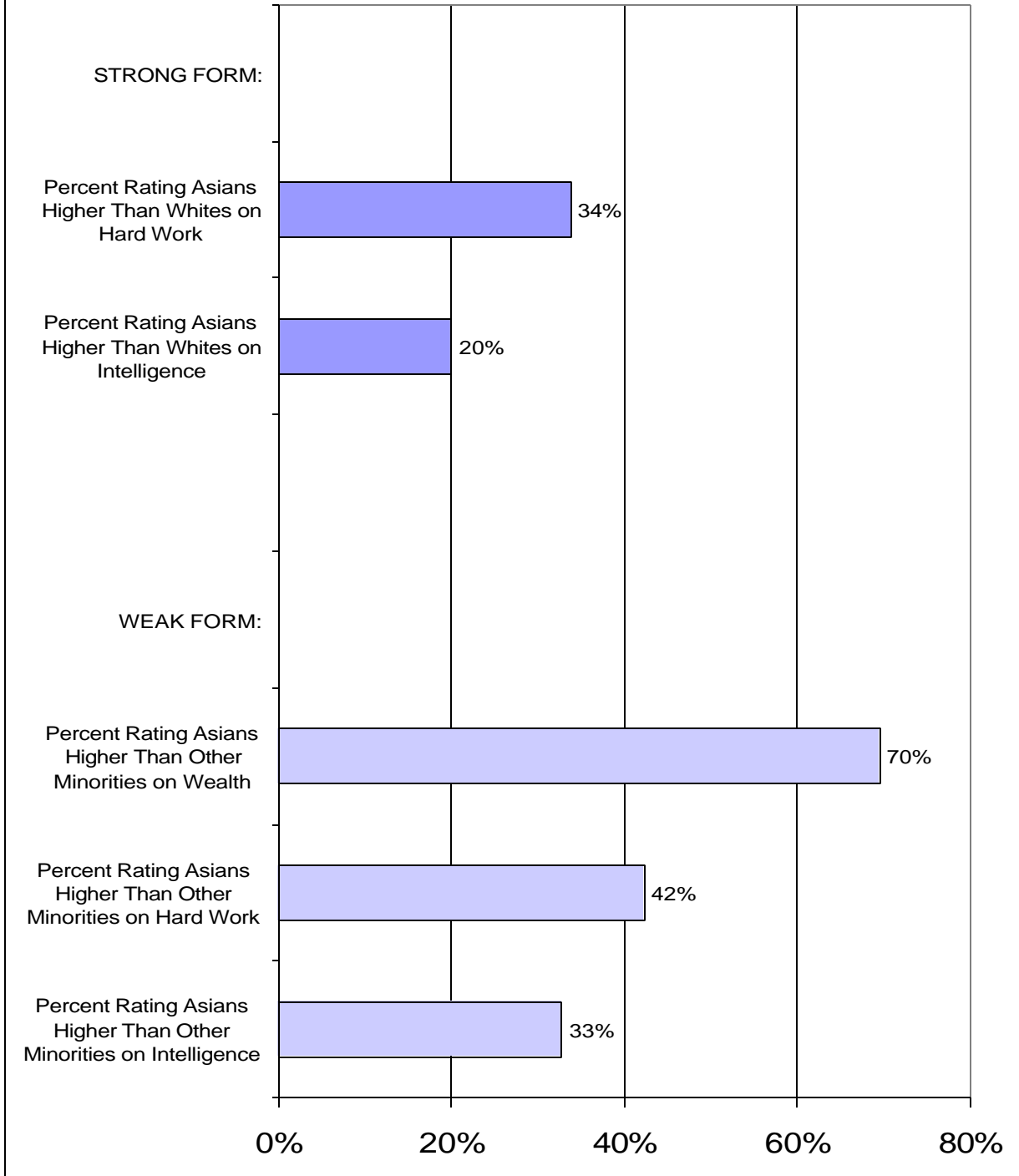
IV. UNTANGLING THE THREADS OF THE MODEL MINORITY STEREOTYPE

Some people have positive views of Asian Americans as intelligent, hardworking, and financially successful. Some people have negative views. The Model Minority Hypothesis posits that positive views of Asian Americans as intelligent, hardworking, and successful are tied to negative views about Asian Americans and to hostility to immigration and programs assisting Asian and African Americans. This is a fascinating hypothesis—that negative stereotypes inhere in positive ones—but is it true? For our study, we modeled two versions of the positive side of the model minority stereotype, which we call the “strong form” and the “weak form.” Because most descriptions of the stereotype focus on whites’ views, we analyzed the extent to which non-Hispanic whites subscribe to either the strong or the weak form of the stereotype.

A. *Who Holds Positive Model Minority Beliefs?*

The strong form of the Model Minority Hypothesis involves claims that Asian Americans are superior to whites. The weak form involves claims that Asian Americans are superior to other minorities (chiefly African Americans and Hispanics). When asked separately to rate various groups, 20% of non-Hispanic whites rated Asian Americans as more intelligent than whites; and 34% of non-Hispanic whites rated Asian Americans as harder working than whites. Non-Hispanic whites were generally more likely to rate Asian Americans positively as compared with other minority groups: 70% ranked Asian Americans as wealthier than other minority groups, 42% rated Asian Americans as harder working, and 33% rated Asian Americans as more intelligent.

Chart 1: Strong and Weak Form of the Model Minority Hypothesis
Non-Hispanic Whites Rating Asian Americans Higher Than Whites or Higher Than Other Minorities
 1990, 1994, 2000 General Social Surveys, n=1169-1829



The group of white respondents who ranked Asian Americans as harder working than whites or than other minorities are a slightly different group than the respondents who ranked Asian Americans as more intelligent. Believing that Asian Americans *work harder* correlated strongly¹⁹⁰ with one's socioeconomic status. One's education (highest degree attained), performance on a vocabulary test, individual income, and occupational prestige all correlated positively and strongly with believing that Asian Americans work harder than whites and work harder than other minorities.¹⁹¹ Such respondents were also more likely to live in the twelve largest metropolitan areas and in the Pacific region of the United States. As for those who believe that Asian Americans are *richer* than other minorities, strong positive predictors are education, parental education, income, performance on a vocabulary test, and living in the Pacific region.

In contrast, ranking Asian Americans as more *intelligent* than whites correlated strongly with only two measures of socioeconomic status—highest educational degree and score on a vocabulary test. Similarly, a high score on a vocabulary test correlated with finding Asian Americans smarter than other minorities, but having a very high prestige job made one substantially less likely to believe that Asian Americans are smarter than other minorities. The other predictors were either weak or statistically insignificant.

This pattern suggests that stereotyping the positive work habits and financial success of Asian Americans rises with education and socioeconomic status, but that stereotyping the intelligence of ethnic groups is largely unrelated to socioeconomic status. Moreover, only thirty-three percent of non-Hispanic whites responded that Asian Americans were more intelligent than other minority groups and only twenty percent responded that Asian Americans were more intelligent than whites. Respondents were far less likely to report that Asian Americans were more intelligent than other racial groups than they were to report that Asian Americans were harder working or wealthier. This reluctance to characterize Asian Americans as more intelligent probably reflects the greater societal taboo against ascribing inherent personal characteristics to racial groups. Wealth and hard work, in contrast, are characteristics over which an individual exercises some control.

B. *Do Model Minority Beliefs Mask Whites' Fear of the Yellow Peril?*

Asian critical scholars express concern that perceptions of Asian Americans as a model minority mask more negative, fearful views about Asian Americans and Asian immigrants. Specifically, some Asian critical scholars worry that whites really think that extraordinarily hard working Asian Americans will run "Americans" out of jobs and take places from Americans in colleges and universities. Some also fear that whites perceive Asian Americans and Asian immigrants to be undesirable and alien, a people that cannot possibly assimilate to American culture and beliefs. Finally, and most perniciously, some Asian critical scholars worry that white Americans fear that "crafty" Asian immigrants are overrunning America, changing America permanently for the worse, and parasitically sucking the lifeblood from the American economy and from American culture. Several sets of questions on the General Social Survey allow us to

¹⁹⁰ All relationships mentioned in this section are statistically significant at $<.05$; most are significant at $<.0005$.

¹⁹¹ In addition, for working harder than whites, strong predictors include socioeconomic index and father's education.

examine whether there is any connection between superficially positive “model minority” beliefs and these more pernicious attitudes towards Asian Americans and Asian immigrants.

1. Do Model Minority Beliefs Accompany the Belief that Asian Americans are Alien or Foreign?

a. Questioning the Patriotism of Asian Americans.

First, do those who have positive views of Asian Americans also have negative views of Asian Americans as foreign, cliquish, and unpatriotic? Both from narratives of Asian Americans and from survey data, there is little doubt that Asian Americans are sometimes treated by other Americans as foreigners¹⁹²—even those Asian Americans born in the United States. Yet are those who hold positive views of Asian Americans more likely to hold this view of Asian Americans as somewhat less patriotic than white Americans?

When asked separately to rate how patriotic Asian Americans and whites are, fifty-five percent of non-Hispanic whites rate whites higher than Asian Americans on patriotism. But only forty-four percent of those who consider Asian Americans harder working than whites hold that view, while sixty percent of the rest consider whites more patriotic.¹⁹³ In other words, those who believe Asian Americans to be hardworking are *less* likely to view Asian Americans as less patriotic than whites. As one of the strongest relationships in this study, it is presented in Chart 2. This, of course, is contrary to the strong form of the Model Minority Hypothesis, which suggests that those who believe that Asian Americans are harder working than whites would view Asian Americans as more foreign and less patriotic than whites.

On the other hand, one of the tests of the weak form of the hypothesis supported the hypothesis. For those who believed that Asian Americans were more intelligent than other minorities, 63% rated Asian Americans as less patriotic than whites, compared to 53% of the rest rating Asian Americans less patriotic.¹⁹⁴ For the other three aspects of the Model Minority Hypothesis, there were no significant relationships.

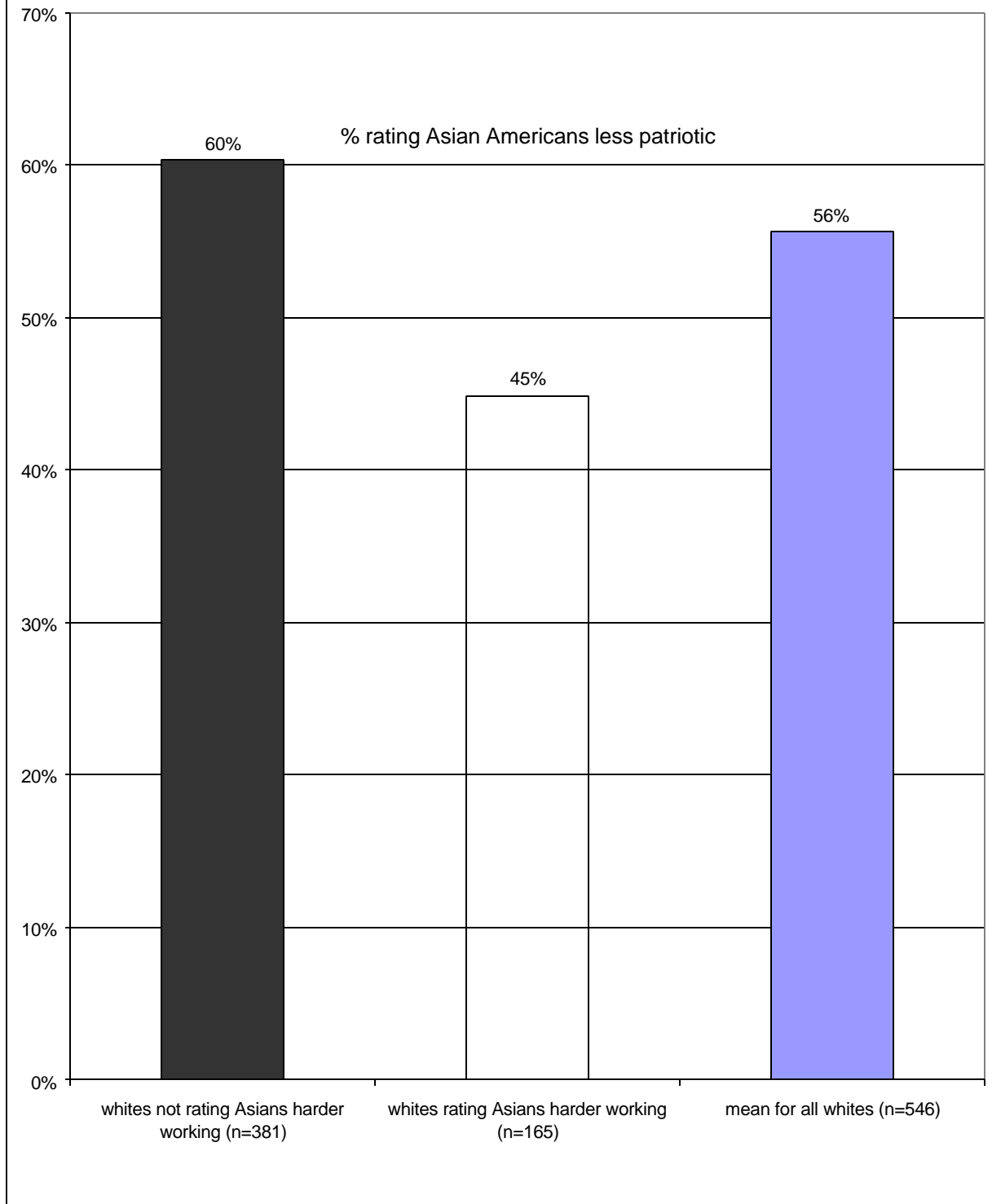
¹⁹² See Part III.F *supra*.

¹⁹³ P=.001 (2-tailed exact test).

¹⁹⁴ P=.035 (2-tailed exact test).

Chart 2: Percentage of Non-Hispanic Whites Rating Asian Americans as Less Patriotic Than Whites by Views on Asians Being Hard Working

1990, 1994, 2000 General Social Surveys; n=546



b. **Acceptance of Asian Americans.**

Three GSS questions investigate respondents' acceptance of Asian Americans. First, the GSS asks, "*In general, how close do you feel towards Asians?*" Second, it asks respondents whether they would be willing to live in a neighborhood that was half Asian American. Third, it asks whether respondents would favor or oppose a close relatives' marriage to an Asian American. Results showed either a positive relationship or no relationship between "model minority" beliefs about Asian Americans and feelings of acceptance of Asian Americans.

(1) **Feelings of Closeness to Asian Americans.** Data on non-Hispanic whites' responses to the question, "*In general, how close do you feel toward Asians?*" undercut the Model Minority Hypothesis. If Asian critical scholars are right, positive views of Asian Americans should accompany fearfulness of Asian Americans or the belief that Asian Americans are alien or foreign. But the data showed no relationship between non-Hispanic whites' feelings of closeness to Asian Americans and positive characterizations of Asian Americans as wealthier, more intelligent, or harder-working.¹⁹⁵

(2) **Living with Asian Americans.** What about being willing to live in a neighborhood that is half Asian American? Whites who believe that Asian Americans are harder working than whites tend to be more positive (77% to 68%) about living in half Asian American neighborhoods,¹⁹⁶ not less likely as the Model Minority Hypothesis would predict. Similarly, those who think that Asian Americans are wealthier than other minorities also tend to be more likely to want to live in a neighborhood that is half Asian American (74% to 67%).¹⁹⁷ The other three positive views of Asian Americans—that Asian Americans are smarter than other minorities, that they work harder than other minorities, and that they are more intelligent than whites—are unrelated to the willingness to live in half Asian American neighborhoods. Thus, on neighborhood preference the Model Minority Hypothesis is unsupported for all five positive views of Asian Americans.

(3) **Marrying an Asian American.** Opinions about a close relative marrying an Asian American among non-Hispanic whites show the same pattern as in the neighborhood question. Those who believe that Asian Americans are harder working than whites tend to be more positive about a close relative marrying an Asian American, not less likely as the Model Minority Hypothesis would predict (28% opposing such a marriage for those who view Asians as hardworking vs. 37% opposing such a marriage for those who don't).¹⁹⁸ Similarly, those who think that Asian Americans are richer than other minorities also tend to be more positive about a close relative marrying an Asian American (30% opposing such a marriage), compared to those

¹⁹⁵ The data actually showed a borderline significant relationship ($p=.075$, 2-tailed exact test) between the view among non-Hispanic whites that Asian Americans were richer than other minorities and feelings of closeness towards Asian Americans: 48% of those who ranked Asians as richer than other minorities felt close to Asian Americans, while only 37% of those who did not consider Asians richer did. If the difference were significant, it would tend to undercut the model minority hypothesis.

¹⁹⁶ $P=.003$ (2-tailed exact test).

¹⁹⁷ $P=.023$ (2-tailed exact test).

¹⁹⁸ $P=.002$ (gamma test) for 5-category variable.

who don't view Asian Americans as richer (38% opposing this marriage).¹⁹⁹ The other three positive views of Asian Americans are unrelated to the willingness to have a close relative marry an Asian American. Thus, on marrying into the family, the Model Minority Hypothesis is unsupported for all five model minority views of Asian Americans.

2. Hostility to Immigration

Three questions address another aspect of “yellow peril” fears—that immigration threatens American culture. One question—“*How likely is it that more immigrants coming to this country will make it harder to keep the country united?*”²⁰⁰—investigates whether the respondent perceives immigrants to be so alien that American culture and political life cannot successfully absorb them. “*Do you think the number of immigrants from foreign countries who are permitted to come to the United States to live should be increased a lot, increased a little, left the same as it is now, decreased a little, or decreased a lot?*”²⁰¹ is another way of asking, in essence, whether the respondent believes that immigration is generally a positive thing and that America can successfully absorb and accommodate more immigrants. It is fair to assume that people who favor increasing immigration to the United States do not feel threatened by it.

Three GSS questions probe the economic side of “yellow peril” fears: do non-Hispanic whites who hold model minority views believe that immigration hurt America economically and take jobs away from “Americans?” The first question—“*Is it very likely, somewhat likely, not too likely, or not at all likely that more immigrants coming to this country will lead to higher unemployment?*”²⁰²—is another way of asking whether immigrants will take jobs away from Americans. In the same vein, “*Is it very likely [. . .], or very unlikely that more immigrants to this country will lead to higher economic growth?*”²⁰³ asks whether Americans in general will benefit or suffer as a result of immigration. And even more bluntly, “*Is it very likely, [. . .], or very unlikely that you or anyone in your family won't get a job or promotion while an equally or less qualified immigrant employee receives one instead?*”²⁰⁴ investigates whether the respondent feels personally threatened by immigrants. Though these are questions about immigration and immigrants generally, and not specifically about Asian immigrants, we think they are still very instructive. Most immigrants to the United States in the last few decades have been from Asia and from Mexico, Central and South America, and some of the most highly publicized immigrations have been from Asia (Cambodian “boat people” from the 1970s, Vietnamese refugees, and more recently, illegally “smuggled” Chinese immigrants).

Finally, three questions investigate whether immigrants are seen as parasites—on balance, do they take more away from American life than they give back? One question asks whether immigrants today should overcome bias without help from the government as earlier immigrants to the United States did.²⁰⁵ This question investigates whether the respondent feels sympathetic

¹⁹⁹ P=.006 (gamma test) for 5-category variable.

²⁰⁰ GSS mnemonic IMMUNITE.

²⁰¹ GSS mnemonic LETIN.

²⁰² GSS mnemonic IMMUNEMP.

²⁰³ GSS mnemonic IMMECON.

²⁰⁴ GSS mnemonic RIMMDISC.

²⁰⁵ Specifically, it asks: “The Irish, Italians, Jews, and many other minorities overcame prejudice and worked their way up. Today's immigrants should do the same without any special favors.” Respondents are asked whether they

toward the difficulties immigrants face, and the extent to which government can and should help them adjust to life in America. If immigrants are seen as “parasites,” we would expect to see a reluctance to expend scarce resources on helping them adjust to American life. Similarly, “*Do you think immigrant who are here legally should be entitled for [government assistance such as Medicaid, food stamps, or welfare] as soon as they come [to the United States], or should they not be eligible?*”²⁰⁶ inquires whether the respondent thinks that immigrants are likely to take advantage of governmental largesse and drain society’s scarce resources. Finally, asking whether the respondent agrees or disagrees with the statement, “*Immigrants are getting too demanding in their push for equal rights,*”²⁰⁷ examines whether the respondent is anxious that immigrants are demanding more than their fair share.

On nearly every question, the respondent’s perception that Asian Americans work harder than whites correlated with positive views about immigrants, immigration, and the effect immigration has on American life. First, rating Asian Americans as working harder than whites corresponds strongly with a tendency to believe that immigration is not very likely to fuel unemployment (62% to 51%).²⁰⁸ The same pattern obtains for those who rate Asian Americans as richer than other minorities (63% to 53%).²⁰⁹ In other words, fear and anxiety about immigrants’ threatening economic security is negatively, rather than positively, associated with the perception that Asian Americans are harder workers than whites or richer than other minorities.

Second, the data suggest the perception that Asian Americans are harder working than whites does not mask more pernicious attitudes about immigrants. People who believe that Asian Americans work harder than whites are less apt to agree that immigrants are demanding too many rights (52% to 66%).²¹⁰ Similarly, there were no significant relationships between positive views toward Asian Americans and beliefs about how likely immigrants are to go on welfare or whether they should work their way up without help.

Finally, there is a somewhat mixed picture on concerns that immigration will weaken national unity. The belief that Asian Americans work harder than whites or than other minorities is not accompanied by heightened concerns that immigrants will weaken national unity. Yet those who perceive Asian Americans as richer than other minorities are *less* likely to believe that immigrants will affect national unity (62% to 68%),²¹¹ while those who see Asian Americans as more intelligent than other minorities are *more* likely to see immigrants as affecting national unity (64% to 52%).²¹² As to increasing immigration, for four tests there is no relationship, but for one—whether Asians are more intelligent than other minorities--the Model Minority

“strongly agree,” “agree,” “neither agree nor disagree,” “disagree,” or “strongly disagree.” GSS mnemonic IMMWRKUP.

²⁰⁶ GSS mnemonic IMMFARE.

²⁰⁷ GSS mnemonic IMMPUSH.

²⁰⁸ P=.009 (gamma test) for 4-category variable.

²⁰⁹ P=.021 (gamma test) for 4-category variable.

²¹⁰ P=.004 (gamma test) for 5-category variable.

²¹¹ P=.003 (gamma test) for 4-category variable.

²¹² P=.007 (gamma test) for 4-category variable.

Hypothesis is supported. Those who view Asians as more intelligent than other minorities are more likely to favor a decrease in immigration (55% to 43%).²¹³

In short, there appears to be little evidence for the notion that model minority beliefs mask more insidious, “yellow-peril”-like beliefs. For the 22 hypothesized relationships between positive views of Asian Americans and negative views of immigrants, only two support the Model Minority Hypothesis. On the contrary, four relationships point significantly in the opposite direction. Those non-Hispanic whites who view Asian Americans as smart, hardworking, and successful do not generally have hostility or fears toward immigrants. Respondents generally disagree that immigrants will endanger their personal well-being and the general good of the United States. Indeed, non-Hispanic whites who believe that Asian Americans are harder working than whites are more likely to think immigration benefits the American economy and American life more generally. These findings are important because they tend to suggest that some whites who perceive differences among different racial and ethnic groups do not equate “different” with “bad”; for them “different” can indeed be *better*.

C. Are Model Minority Beliefs Associated with a Lack of Awareness of Problems Faced by Asian Americans?

Asian critical scholars have charged that “model minority” beliefs have blinded Americans to the problems Asian Americans face. Specifically, Asian American scholars have made two claims. First, Asian critical scholars have claimed that the Asian American success story of Chinese, Japanese, Korean, and Vietnamese immigrants have given Americans the impression that all Asian Americans have flourished in America and need no assistance in making a successful transition. Second, they have charged that model minority beliefs blind Americans to the fact that race discrimination against Asian Americans persists.

1. Support for Increasing Government Attention and Perceptions of Asian Americans Influence on American Life and Politics.

To explore the first charge, we examined whites’ responses to two GSS questions, *Do Asian Americans get more attention from government than they deserve?*²¹⁴ and *Do Asian Americans have too much influence in American life and politics?*²¹⁵ Non-Hispanic whites who hold positive views of Asian Americans tend to be no different from others on these two questions—with two important exceptions. Those who view Asian Americans as harder working than whites tend to believe that Asian Americans should have more influence in American life (52% to 40%).²¹⁶ They also tend to think that the government doesn’t pay enough attention to the needs of Asian Americans (32% to 23%).²¹⁷ Of course, both of these findings are contrary to the predictions of the Model Minority Hypothesis.

²¹³ P=.008 (gamma test) for 5-category variable.

²¹⁴ GSS mnemonic ASNGOVT.

²¹⁵ GSS mnemonic INFLUASN.

²¹⁶ P=.013 (gamma test) for 3-category variable.

²¹⁷ P=.007 (gamma test) for 3-category variable.

These results are notable for a few reasons. First, the GSS question asks about proper government attention for Asian Americans generally; the question does not distinguish more recent immigrants from more established Asian Americans or American-born Asian Americans. In other words, the question “lumps” all Asian Americans together. That a sizable proportion of those who responded that Asian Americans get less attention than they deserve also believe that Asian Americans work harder than whites suggests that the reported success of some Asian American groups doesn’t necessarily undermine the claims of other Asian Americans for increased government assistance or blind whites to their needs.

Second, among those who believe that Asians work harder than whites, the perception that Asian Americans need greater government attention does not appear to be based in a notion of desert—that those who work hard should be rewarded by increased government support; and those that do not work as hard deserve less government help. For example, believing that Asian Americans work harder than whites does not appear to make whites less sympathetic to *Blacks*’ need for greater government assistance. Put slightly differently, the belief that some Asian Americans have “pulled themselves up by their own bootstraps” does not necessarily accompany the view that all groups should do the same or a wholesale belief in the American dream of hard work leading to one’s reward.

2. Views about Discrimination Against Asian Americans.

Supporters of the Model Minority Hypothesis argue that those who consider Asian Americans smart, hardworking, or successful tend to think that Asian Americans are not discriminated against. Significantly, on this issue *the data here strongly support their claim, particularly for the weak form of the hypothesis*. Among non-Hispanic whites, the belief in each of the five positive model minority stereotypes correlated very strongly with the perception that Asian Americans faced little or no discrimination in the job market.²¹⁸ Chart 3 shows this relationship: there are significant 4-8% differences in the number of non-Hispanic whites who think that there is no job discrimination against Asian Americans at all, based on beliefs that Asian Americans are smart, hardworking, or successful. For example, 22% of those who think that Asian Americans work harder than whites see no job discrimination against Asian Americans, while only 14% of those who do not see Asians as harder working think there is no job discrimination.²¹⁹ Thus, just as the Model Minority Hypothesis would predict, those holding positive views of Asians Americans in comparison to other ethnic groups tend to be sanguine about the continued existence of job discrimination.

Similarly, those non-Hispanic white respondents who believed that Asian Americans were wealthier or harder working than other minorities also tended to believe that Asian Americans faced little or no housing discrimination.²²⁰ Again, these results support the Model Minority Hypothesis. These significant results are presented in Chart 4, along with insignificant differences for intelligence comparisons and comparisons with whites.

²¹⁸ The question asked specifically, “How much discrimination is there that hurts the chances of Asian-Americans to get good paying jobs? Would you say that there’s a lot, some only a little, or none at all?” GSS mnemonic ASNJOBS.

²¹⁹ $=.01$ (gamma test) for 4-category variable.

²²⁰ The GSS question asked, “How much discrimination is there that makes it hard for Asian Americans to buy or rent housing wherever they want?” GSS mnemonic ASNHOUSE.

Chart 3: Non-Hispanic Whites Believing Asian Americans Not Discriminated Against at all in Jobs by Views on Asians

Data Source: 1990, 1994, 2000 General Social Survey; n=526-534

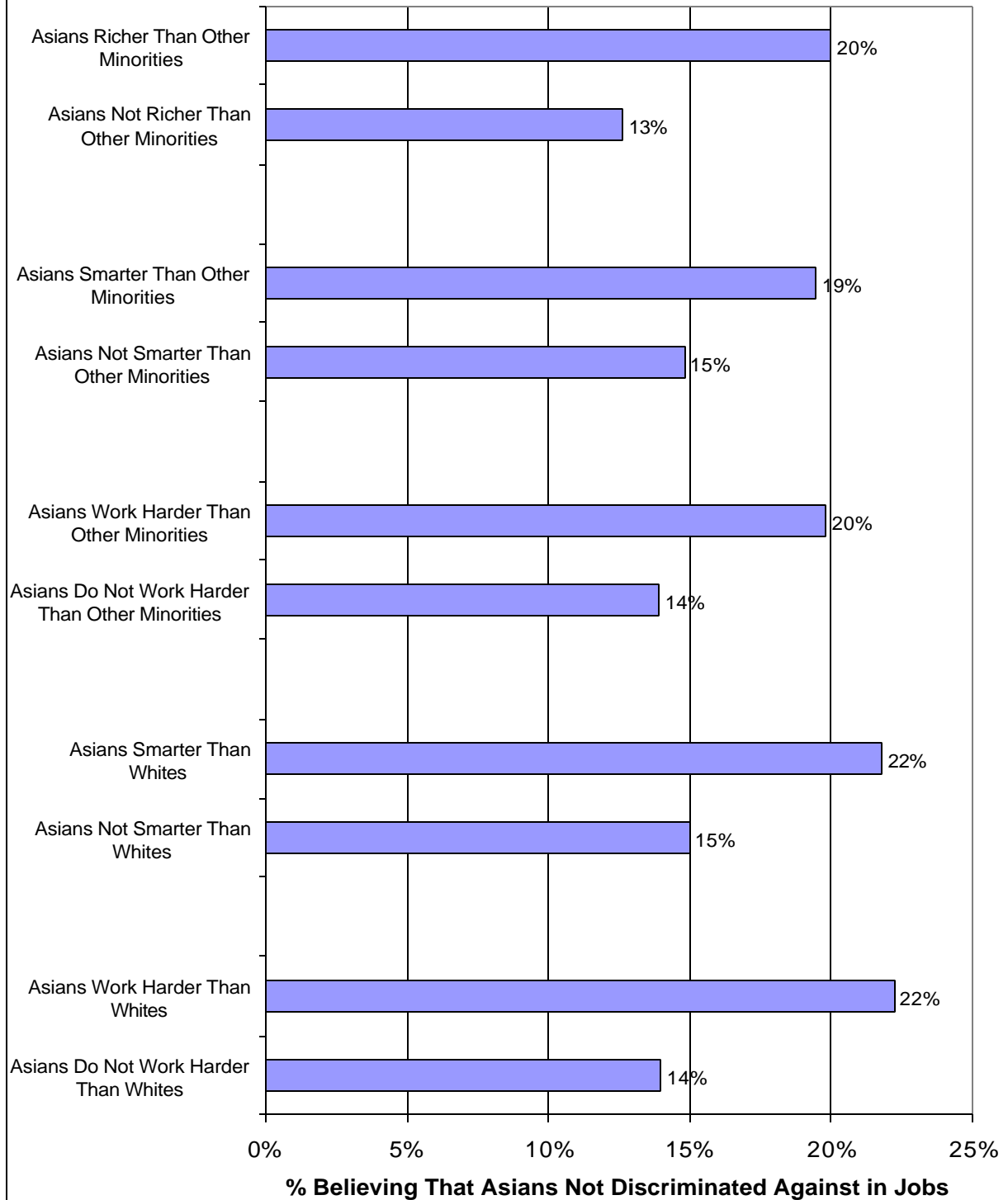
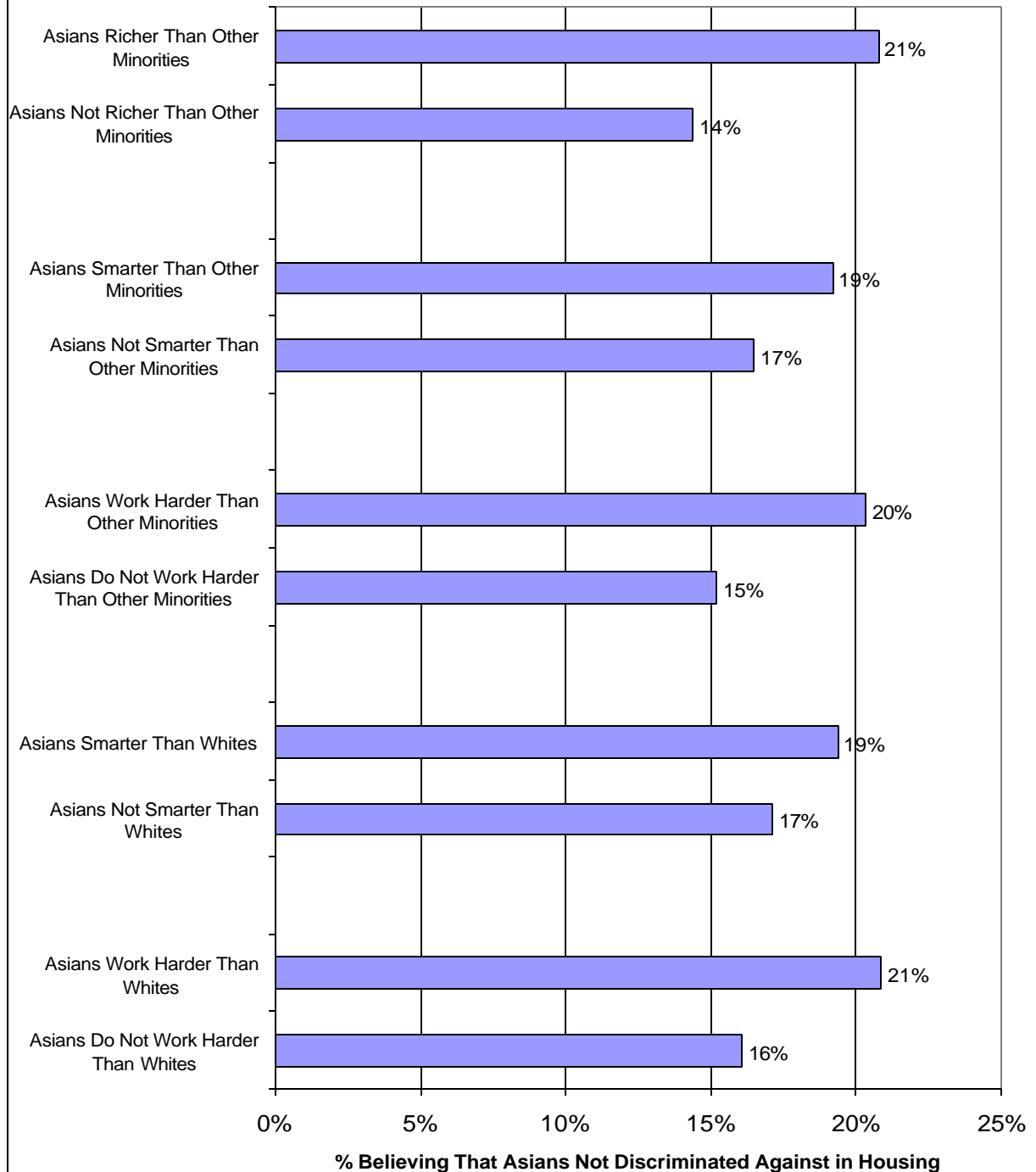


Chart 4: Non-Hispanic Whites Believing Asian Americans Not Discriminated Against in Housing at all by Views on Asians

Data Source: 1990, 1994, 2000 General Social Survey; n=523-530



These are very strong results in support of the Model Minority Hypothesis on the issue of perceptions of discrimination against Asian Americans. Interestingly, however, the perception that Asian Americans face little or no discrimination in jobs and housing does not accompany opposition to increased government aid for Asian Americans, or for Blacks, for that matter.

D. Relationship between Model Minority Beliefs and Attitudes towards African-Americans.

Asian critical scholars fear that the model minority stereotype masks hostility to minorities generally and reinforces beliefs in the mythical American Dream—that hard work and talent are equally rewarded in America regardless of one’s race or national origin. Our data show a complicated picture on this issue, but one that on balance does not generally support the hypothesis.

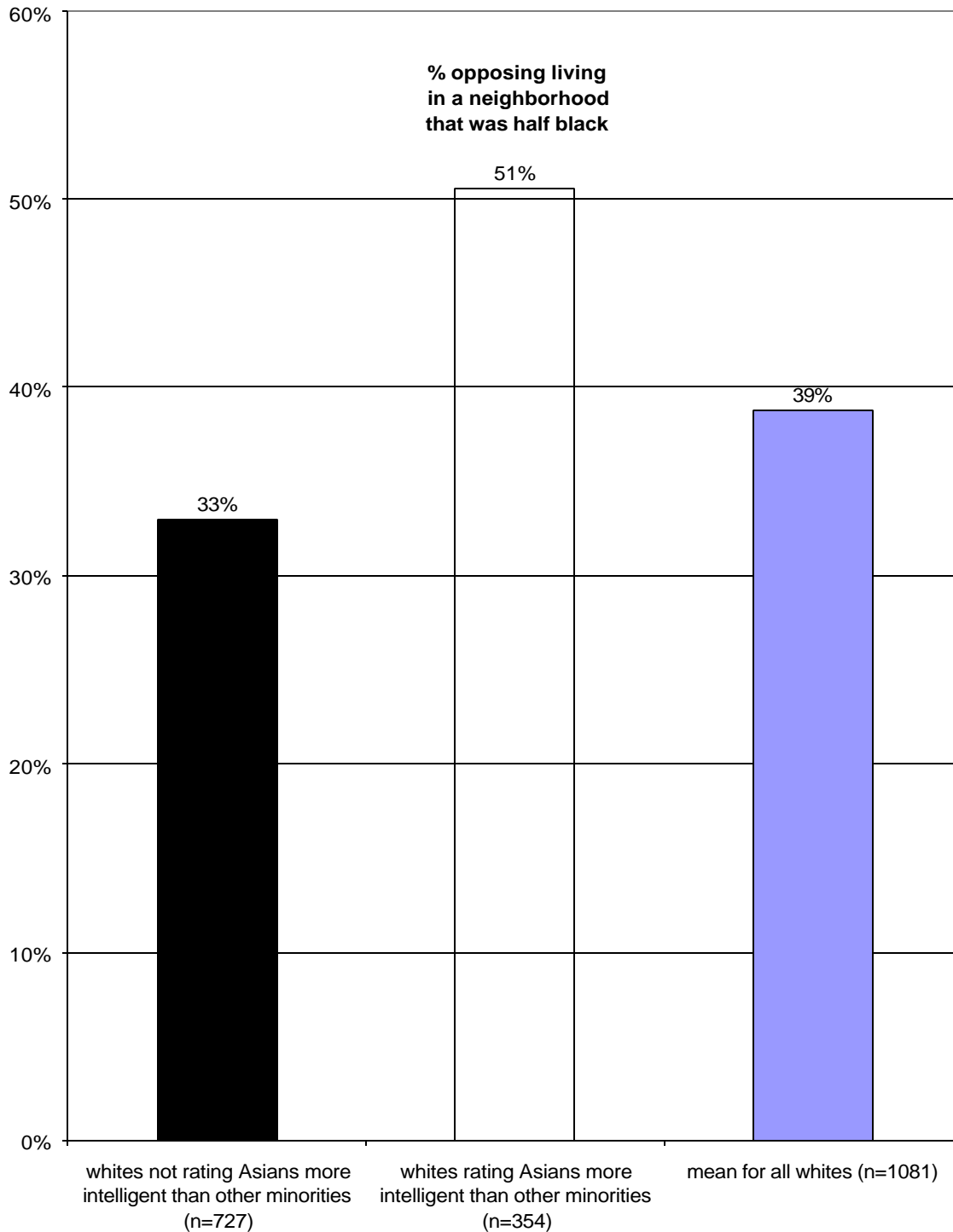
According to those who favor the Model Minority Hypothesis, the belief that Asian Americans are smart, hardworking, and relatively rich should be tied to opposition to minorities and government programs to aid minorities, particularly African-Americans. That is a testable hypothesis; we tested 14 GSS questions that concerned African-Americans, with 68 different links between variables tested. Just four of these 68 links support the Model Minority Hypothesis, while nine of the 68 links reject the hypothesis. The rest of the tests provide no support for the hypothesis.

The strongest links supporting the Model Minority Hypothesis on these issues involve white concerns over living in a neighborhood that was half African-American. As Chart 5 shows, 51% of non-Hispanic whites who view Asian Americans as more intelligent than other minorities oppose living in a neighborhood that was half Black, while only 33% of those who do not hold this view of Asian Americans would oppose living in such a neighborhood.²²¹

²²¹ $P < .00001$ (2-tailed exact test).

Chart 5: Percent of Non-Hispanic Whites Opposing Living in a Neighborhood That Was Half Black by Views on Asians Being More Intelligent Than Whites

1990, 1994, 2000 General Social Survey; n=1081



A similar pattern supporting the hypothesis obtains for those who view Asian Americans as harder working than other minorities, 46% of whom oppose living in a half black neighborhood, compared to 34% opposing such a neighborhood among those who do not see Asian Americans as harder working).²²²

On the question whether African Americans get too much government attention, one of the three tested relationships bore out the Model Minority Hypothesis. Those non-Hispanic whites who view Asian Americans as harder working than other minorities were more likely by 58% to 49% to believe that blacks get too much government attention.²²³ The other two tests on this issue showed no differences.

On whether respondents would object to a close relative marrying an African-American, the results were mixed. Those who rate Asians more intelligent than other minorities object to such marriages by a 55% to 47% margin compared to those who do not rate Asians as more intelligent.²²⁴ This tends to support the Model Minority Hypothesis. On the other hand, those who rate Asians as harder working than whites show the opposite pattern, being less likely than others to object to such marriages, by a 45% to 52% margin.²²⁵

Several strong form tests for those who view Asian Americans as harder working than whites tend to reject the Model Minority Hypothesis—not seeing blacks as too demanding or pushy (Chart 6), not favoring a right to segregated neighborhoods (Chart 7), and opposing laws against racial intermarriage (Chart 8). These latter two issues involve some of the strongest effect sizes in this study, each rejecting the Model Minority Hypothesis.

²²² P=.0001 (2-tailed exact test).

²²³ P=.033 (gamma test) for 3 category variable.

²²⁴ P=.008 (gamma test) for 5-category variable.

²²⁵ P=.004 (gamma test) for 5-category variable.

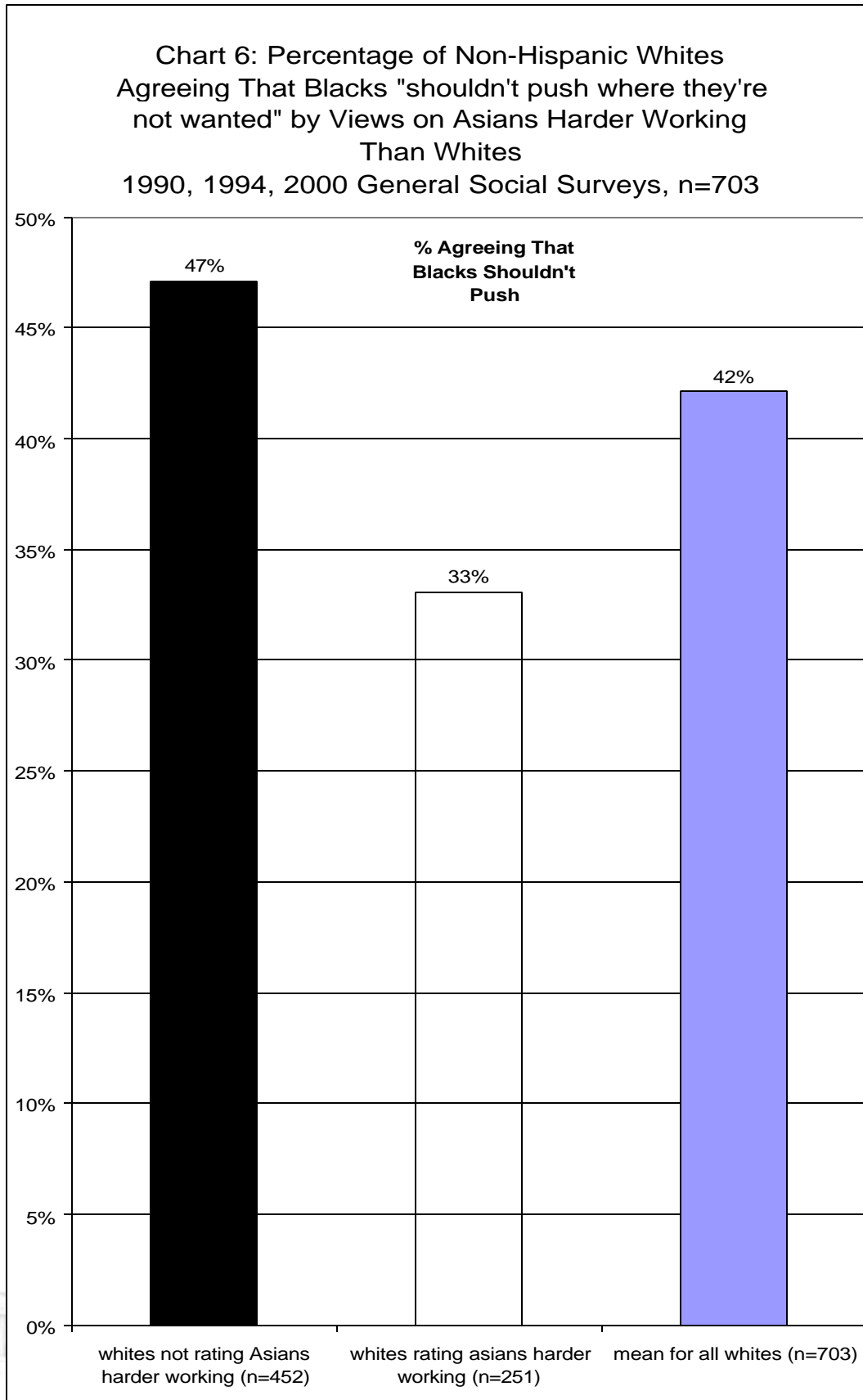


Chart 7: Percentage of Non-Hispanic Whites Favoring the Right of Whites to Segregated Neighborhoods by Views on Asians Being Harder Working Than Whites

1990, 1994, 2000 General Social Surveys, n=774

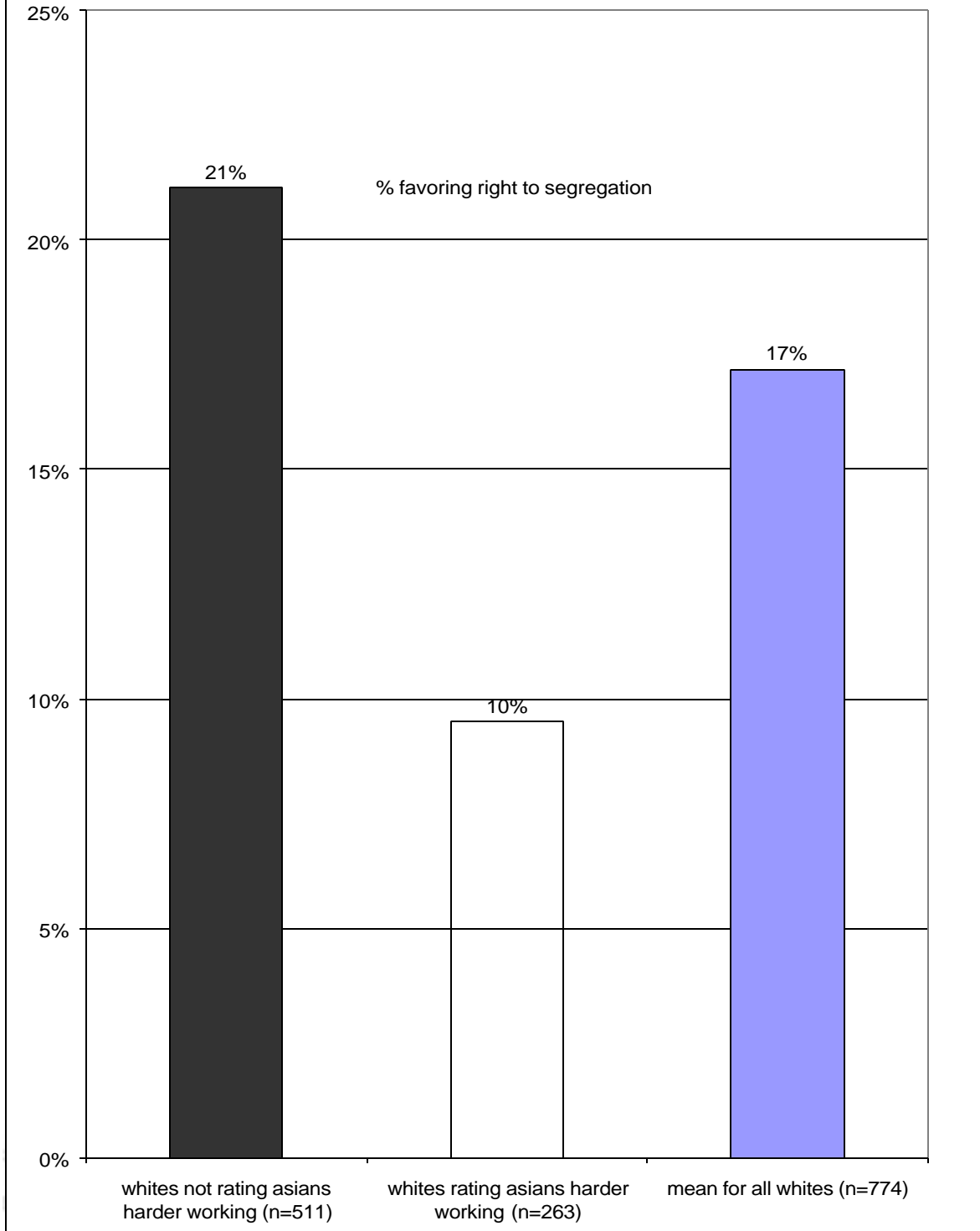
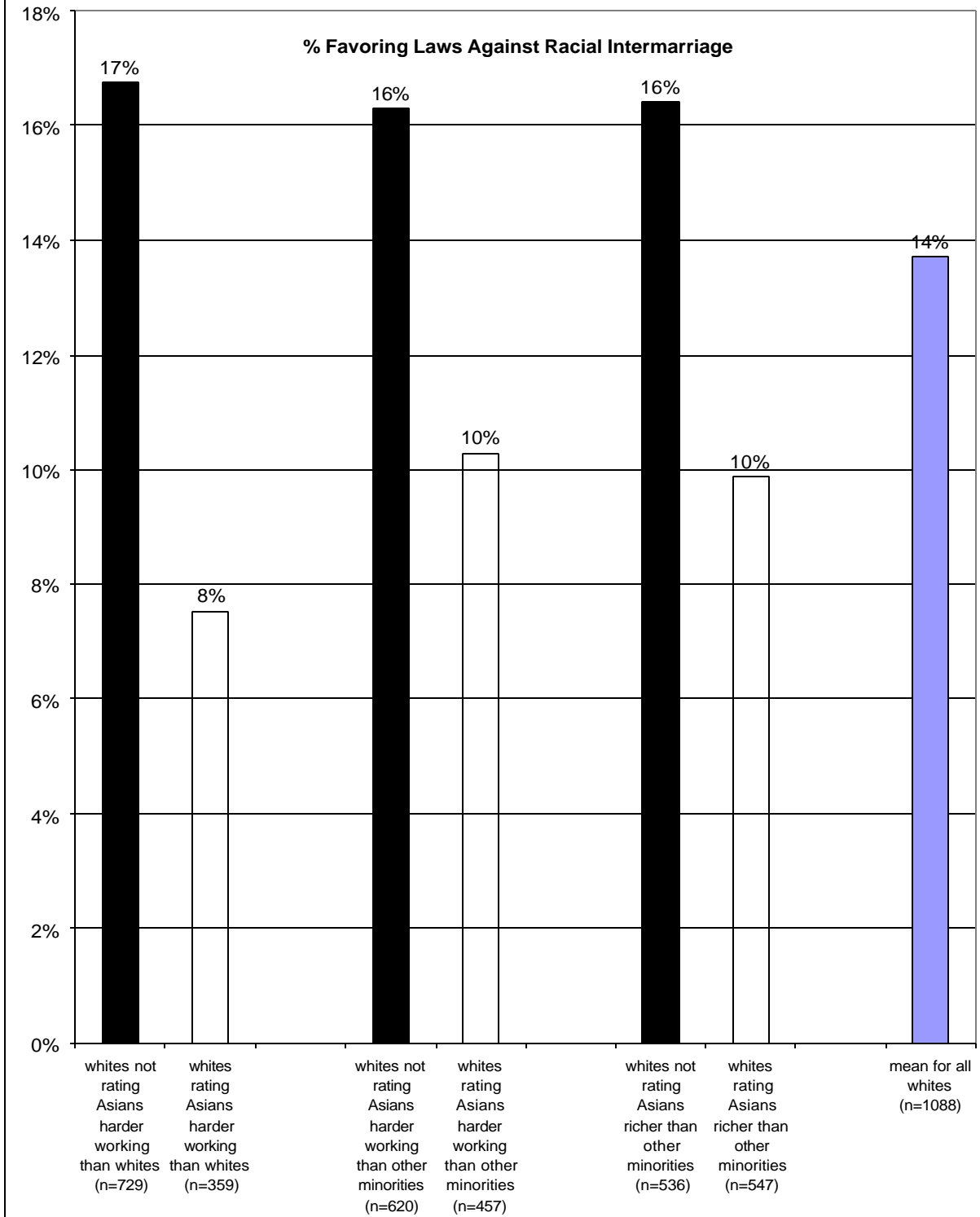


Chart 8: Percentage of Non-Hispanic Whites Favoring Laws Against Racial Intermarriage
 by Views on Asian Americans and Whites
 1990, 1994, 2000 General Social Surveys, n=1088



For all other questions involving African Americans, there are no significant relationships. Thus the Model Minority Hypothesis is unsupported for views on affirmative action for African-Americans in employment, black influence on government, spending on schools in black neighborhoods, college aid for African Americans, tax breaks for black neighborhoods, whether conditions for African Americans have improved, and black job and housing discrimination (Tables 1 and 2).

Overall, we tested 68 relationships between positive views of Asian Americans and views about African Americans. For nine tests, the significant relationships were opposite to those that would be consistent with the Model Minority Hypothesis: whites who rated Asian Americans as smart, hardworking, or relatively rich tended to have positive views of blacks or government help for blacks. For four tests, the Model Minority Hypothesis was supported: those who considered Asian Americans smarter or harder working than other minorities opposed affirmative action or close contact with blacks. For the rest of the 55 tests, there were no significant relationships. Overall, there is no relationship between positive views of Asian Americans and views of African-Americans. Where significant relationships exist, they usually tend to undercut the Model Minority Hypothesis, rather than support it.

E. Summary of Bivariate Tests of the Model Minority Hypothesis

We made 126 tests of whether the positive side of the Model Minority Hypothesis tended to be associated with the academic critique of the negative side of the Model Minority Hypothesis. In other words, we tested whether positive views of Asian Americans as intelligent, rich, and hard working tended to be associated with negative views of Asian Americans, immigrants, and minorities. On 20 of the 126 tests, the significant relationship was the opposite of that hypothesized. On 12 of the 126 tests, significant results support the Model Minority Hypothesis, but half of these are for just one cluster of issues—perceptions of discrimination against Asian Americans.

If one looks only at the signs (direction) of the 126 relationships, not whether they are significant, 48 support the Model Minority Hypothesis and 78 support the opposite. Using a binomial test to determine whether one is as likely to find a confirming sign as a nonconfirming sign, a nonconfirming sign is significantly ($p < .01$) more likely than 50% to occur. Thus, the negative side of the Model Minority Hypothesis is not only unconfirmed; there is significant (though weak) evidence to the contrary—the data suggest that positive stereotypes of Asian Americans are significantly associated with support for Asian Americans, immigrants, and African Americans.

The pattern is actually a bit more complex. For one positive view of Asian Americans—that they are harder working than whites, the Model Minority Hypothesis was significantly rejected for nearly half of the variables about Asian Americans, African-Americans, and immigrants. In other words, it is particularly those who hold the stereotype of Asian Americans as hard working compared to whites who show intermittent favoritism for immigration, immigrants, Asian Americans, African-Americans, and government programs to help them—no “yellow peril” here.

In general, the strong form of the hypothesis (rating Asian Americans higher than whites) was rejected soundly, as Table 1 illustrates. Indeed, as just noted, there is some evidence that those who hold one strong form view—that Asian Americans work harder than whites—are less likely to display hostile attitudes toward Asians, immigrants, and African-Americans.

The weak form of the hypothesis (rating Asian Americans higher than other minorities) fared somewhat better, as Table 2 shows, though even here there was as much evidence supporting a relationship opposite to the one hypothesized than the supposed pattern of the Model Minority Hypothesis. There is no general pattern linking the weak form hypothesis to hostility to immigrants, Asian Americans or African-Americans.

In one pocket, however—perceptions of job and housing discrimination against Asian Americans—there is strong support for the Model Minority Hypothesis. People who think that Asian Americans are smart, hardworking, or rich tend to be less likely to think that Asian Americans are discriminated against. Notably, this relative complacency about discrimination does not translate into perceptions that African-Americans are not discriminated against; nor does it translate into hostility against Asian Americans, immigrants, or programs to help them.



Table 1: Tests of the Strong Form of the Model Minority Hypothesis

	Asian Americans work harder than whites	Asian Americans more intelligent than whites
Link Tending Partly to Confirm the Model Minority Hypothesis		
Asians not discriminated against in jobs	.135 ^	.230 ***
Links Tending Partly to Reject the Model Minority Hypothesis		
whites more patriotic than Asians	-.304 ***	.114
oppose relative marrying an Asian	-.154 ***	.016
oppose living in half Asian area	-.219 ***	-.148 ^
Asians have too much influence	-.218 **	-.061
Asians get too much govt attention	-.196 ***	
immigrants will fuel unemployment	-.200 ***	
immigrants demand too much	-.184 ***	
whites have right to segregated areas	-.437 ***	-.061
oppose relative marrying a black	-.137 ***	-.003
blacks demand too much	-.250 ***	-.032
favor law v. racial intermarriage	-.424 ***	-.178
Links Not Confirming the Model Minority Hypothesis		
Asians not discriminated against in housing	.098	.131
does not feel close to Asians	-.124	-.208
immigrants will affect natl. unity	-.074	.091
let in fewer immigrants	-.042	.096
oppose help for immigrants facing bias	-.053	
immigrants should be ineligible for welfare	-.054	
blacks not discriminated against in housing	-.071	-.013
conditions for blacks improved	-.076	.009
blacks not discriminated against in jobs	-.144 ^	-.074
no tax breaks for black areas	-.123	-.067
oppose spending more on black schools	-.197 ^	-.143
blacks get too much govt attention	-.012	
oppose living in half black area	.019	.090
oppose college aid for blacks	-.148	-.165 ^
blacks have too much influence	-.138 ^	.118
oppose preferences in hiring blacks	.060	.252

Numbers are computed Gammas for ordinal by ordinal variables

Negative numbers trend against the MMH

^ p<.10 (borderline significant)

** p<.05

*** p<.01

Table 2: Tests of the Weak Form of the Model Minority Hypothesis

	Asians work harder than other minorities	Asians more intelligent than other minorities	Asians richer than other minorities
Links Tending Partly to Confirm the Model Minority Hypothesis			
whites more patriotic than Asians	.010	.200 **	-.135
Asians not discriminated against in housing	.149 **	.122	.211 ***
Asians not discriminated against in jobs	.195 ***	.181 **	.232 ***
let in fewer immigrants	.047	.198 ***	-.044
oppose living in half black area	.245 ***	.350 ***	.046
blacks get too much govt attention	.154 **		.028
Links Partly Confirming and Partly Rejecting the Model Minority Hypothesis			
immigrants will affect natl. unity	.030	.198 ***	-.138 ***
Links Tending Partly to Reject the Model Minority Hypothesis			
oppose relative marrying an Asian	.029	.064	-.128 ***
oppose living in half Asian area	.060	.071	-.155 **
immigrants will fuel unemployment	-.099		-.173 **
oppose relative marrying a black	.082	-.127 ***	-.092 **
blacks demand too much	-.040	.098	-.129 **
favor law v. racial intermarriage	-.259 ***	-.060	-.284 ***
Links Not Confirming the Model Minority Hypothesis			
does not feel close to Asians	-.077	.002	-.223 ^
Asians have too much influence	-.037	.019	.102
Asians get too much govt attention	-.034		.037
immigrants demand too much	-.028		-.110 ^
immigrants should be ineligible for welfare	.115		.058
oppose help for immigrants facing bias	.037		-.089
whites have right to segregated areas	-.165 ^	.267 ^	-.151
oppose preferences in hiring blacks	.156	.252	-.154
blacks have too much influence	-.009	.096	-.038
oppose college aid for blacks	-.050	.058	-.040
oppose spending more on black schools	-.102	-.062	-.091
no tax breaks for black areas	-.031	-.083	-.162 ^
blacks not discriminated against in jobs	-.058	-.109	-.038
conditions for blacks improved	-.069	.063	-.127 ^
blacks not discriminated against in housing	-.120 ^	-.104	-.033

Numbers are computed Gammas for ordinal by ordinal variables

Negative numbers trend against the MMH

^ p<.10 (borderline significant)

** p<.05

*** p<.01

We used bivariate tests rather than multiple logistic or linear regression for three reasons. First, the story that we wanted to test is whether the positive and negative sides of the model minority stereotype tend to be found together, as the Asian critical scholars have claimed.²²⁶ For the most part, they do not. If we controlled for other variables, we might reveal why they don't tend to be found together (perhaps another variable suppresses what would otherwise be present), but we wouldn't change the fact that in these data people who hold most positive stereotypes are not more likely to hold most negative stereotypes. Second, regression theoretically requires a causal relationship from a predictor (independent) variable to an outcome (dependent) variable. We do not hypothesize the direction of any causal link. We could test whether positive stereotypes lead to negative stereotypes or instead whether negative stereotypes lead to positive stereotypes, but that would involve hundreds of regression equations, given the extraordinary number of dependent variables in this study. Still, both positive and negative stereotypes might arise simultaneously from some other cause. Or both positive and negative views could cause each other. Without a causal story, regression is not fully appropriate.

There are multivariate techniques that do not assume causality, such as some forms of loglinear analysis, but the arcane nature of the loglinear model notation and the unfamiliarity of law professors and most economists to such techniques makes them on balance not sufficiently enlightening to use in this article for a law review. One of us was recently the first to use hierarchical loglinear modeling (which tests all interactions of all levels of all variables) in a law review article,²²⁷ yet even with the small number of loglinear models presented in that article, statistically trained economists had trouble understanding the extraordinarily complexity of these models. Third, the hundreds of such models that would need to be run and reported to express the relationships between the five positive stereotypes and 28 negative stereotypes, controlling for interacting variables, would make the article prohibitively long and confusing for all but the most statistically sophisticated.²²⁸ Such analysis would be more appropriate for an article assessing in more detail a smaller subset of the relationships presented here.

V. IMPLICATIONS OF THE RESULTS

We draw three main conclusions from our data. *First*, generally the data do not confirm the hypothesis that non-Hispanic whites who hold positive model minority-type views fear or hold negative opinions about Asian Americans or about immigration more generally. *Second*, the belief among non-Hispanic whites that Asian Americans work harder than other minorities does not usually correlate with increased antagonism toward government assistance for African Americans or opposition to affirmative action. We interpret this result as inconsistent with the notion that model minority attitudes sustain or complement a facile faith in the so-called Horatio

²²⁶ See text at notes 51-149 *supra*.

²²⁷ James Lindgren & Justin Heather, Counting Guns in Early America, 43 WM. & MARY L. REV. 1777 (2002) (believed to be the first law review article to use hierarchical loglinear modeling and one of the first few history articles to do so).

²²⁸ One could, of course, use variable reduction techniques, but this would move the analysis away from the relationships between particular stereotypes that form the basis of the model minority stereotype.

Alger²²⁹ narrative of socio-economic success in America. The data simply do not support the thesis that people who hold model-minority beliefs generally think that all minority groups must pull themselves up by their own bootstraps. *Third*, our results do confirm one very important aspect of the model minority critique—people who hold model minority views are indeed less likely to believe that Asian Americans are the victims of discrimination in employment or housing.

Further, the data generally show that model minority beliefs are not a modern, “politically correct” version of the fear of the “Yellow Peril.” As we discussed in Part III, the historical fear of Asian Americans as the “Yellow Peril” was deeply anti-Asian immigrant at its core. In very simple terms, white Americans feared that extraordinarily hard working Asian immigrants would work harder and for less money than white-Americans, putting white-Americans out of jobs or running white farmers out of business.

Our research reveals little evidence that model minority beliefs mask “yellow-peril”-like beliefs. Several correlations indeed suggest that non-Hispanic whites who hold positive model minority beliefs feel sanguine about immigration. First, the view among non-Hispanic whites that Asian Americans work hard and are relatively rich correlates with the belief that immigration does not cause unemployment (Tables 1-2). The data do not confirm the hypothesis that fear and anxiety about immigrants’ threatening economic security is associated with the perception that Asian Americans work harder than whites. Nor are non-Hispanic whites who rate Asian Americans as harder-working than whites more likely to fear that immigrants will imperil national unity—the opposite appears to be true: they are more likely to disagree that immigration will weaken national unity.

Indeed, believing that Asian Americans work hard strongly correlates with support for increasing immigration to the United States. The perception among non-Hispanic whites that Asian Americans work harder than whites does not mask more pernicious attitudes about immigrants. People who believe that Asian Americans work harder than whites are less disposed to agree that immigrants are demanding too many rights,²³⁰ and there is no significant correlation between the belief that Asian Americans are harder working than whites and the opinion that immigrants should make it on their own without help. In short, it is fair to conclude that for the most part, non-Hispanic whites who believe that Asian Americans work harder than whites think that immigration is a positive effect in the American economy and in American life more generally.

Furthermore, non-Hispanic whites who rate Asian Americans as either harder working than whites or than other minorities, as well as non-Hispanic whites who rate Asian Americans as tending to be wealthier than other minorities, tend to hold other positive beliefs about Asian Americans. Specifically, such respondents were more willing to accept having neighbors who were Asian American and to accept a close relative marrying someone who is Asian. Model minority beliefs also did not correlate with the view that Asian Americans were unpatriotic. Each of these results undermines the claims that “model minority” views conceal other negative

²²⁹ The Horatio Alger books in fact often told stories of social graces or social or romantic contacts helping the poor hero to succeed. The influence of hard work in these stories is often less prominent than social climbing.

²³⁰ Table 1 *supra*.

opinions about Asian Americans or that holding “model minority” views heightens white anxiety and animosity towards Asian Americans. We should probably accept that people can (and usually do) celebrate the social and economic achievements of Asian Americans without worrying that it masks animus towards policies directed toward other minority groups.

It is also interesting that there are some positive correlations among model minority-like opinions and other positive beliefs about Asian Americans particularly and immigration more generally. They suggest that some non-Hispanic whites who perceive differences among racial and ethnic groups do not necessarily equate “different” with “bad”—“different” can be considered *good*. We should be clear, however, that we are not taking the position that racial or ethnic stereotyping in any form is a good thing. As we will discuss below, we agree with Professor Frank Wu’s point that racial and ethnic stereotyping is inherently problematic because it tends to dehumanize its subjects, effaces individuality, and asserts a power to ascribe characteristics to others, which they may not ascribe to themselves.

As we documented in Part III, Asian critical scholars are certainly correct that some conservatives have tried to use the model minority stereotype to argue against affirmative action and government programs that favor minorities. Our results tend to show that these efforts have largely failed: it appears that the model minority stereotype generally has *not* been deployed successfully by conservatives to influence the views of the general public.

Asian critical scholars fear that the model minority stereotype reinforces the view that members of minority groups can succeed in America if only they are willing to work hard enough, with the implied view that a failure to succeed bespeaks laziness or profligacy. Model minority-type views among non-Hispanic whites do correlate with one aspect of the American Dream—that instilling in children a belief in the value of hard work is important to later life.²³¹ According to the GSS, the emphasis on instilling such hard work values in children (rather than instilling thinking for oneself) is itself a view that immigrants tend to hold more than other Americans.

Significantly, however, beliefs in most other aspects of the American Dream do not correlate with model minority views. For example, a twisted version of the American Dream could suggest that the blame for persistent poverty among African Americans lies at their own feet. Finally, we found no significant correlation between a belief that Asian Americans work harder than whites and support for (or opposition to) affirmative action.

Each of these findings should assuage anxiety that model minority beliefs encourage or accompany adherence to a simplistic version of the American Dream or that conservatives have employed the model minority stereotype successfully against social-welfare or antidiscrimination programs in the minds of the general public. While Asian critical scholars may be justified in objecting to the use of the model minority stereotype in support of anti-affirmative action initiatives or to suggest that racial discrimination does not bar socio-economic success in America, our findings tend to suggest that such arguments from the model minority stereotype

²³¹ The question asks specifically, “If you had to choose, which thing on this list would you pick as the most important for a child to learn to prepare him or her for life? To obey? To be well-liked or popular? To think for him or herself? To work hard? To help others when they need help?” GSS mnemonic WORKHARD.

have not persuaded non-Hispanic whites. In fact, the significant relationship between non-Hispanic white's belief that Asian Americans work harder than whites and the perception that African Americans suffer from a great deal of job discrimination is more consistent the opposite view.²³²

Non-Hispanic whites who hold model minority views are less likely to perceive that Asian Americans suffer from discrimination; but they also favor more government attention and assistance to Asian Americans. Our research confirms one important aspect of the model minority critique: that among non-Hispanic whites model minority-like opinions correlate strongly with the view that Asian Americans do not suffer from discrimination in employment or housing.

We do not know why whites who believe that Asian Americans are harder working than or more intelligent than whites would tend to think Asian Americans currently face little if any discrimination, and the data only hint at reasons why. It might be that people who have strongly positive opinions about Asian Americans find it hard to believe that others would practice discrimination against them (the familiar tendency to generalize the universal from one's own particular experience). It might also be that Asian Americans' apparent socio-economic success appears inconsistent with persistent racial discrimination. Our finding that model minority beliefs about Asian Americans correlate with the perception that African Americans suffer from employment and housing discrimination lends support to the latter explanation. Regardless of the cause, to the extent that racial discrimination continues to suppress the opportunities of Asian Americans, more effort needs to be focused on defining and combating this problem.²³³

At the same time—and surprisingly in light of the decreased perception of discrimination—non-Hispanic whites who believe that Asian Americans work harder than whites also think that Asian Americans get *less* government attention than they deserve.²³⁴ We found this correlation notable for a few reasons. First, the GSS question asks about proper government attention asks about Asian Americans generally and does not distinguish between recent Asian immigrants and more established Asian Americans or between American-born and foreign-born Asian Americans. The question “lumps” all Asian Americans together. That a sizable proportion of those who responded that Asian Americans get less attention than they deserve also believe that Asian Americans work harder than whites suggests that the reported success of some Asian American groups doesn't necessarily undermine other Asian Americans' claims for increased government assistance or blind whites to their needs. This correlation therefore tends to undercut the suspicion that the model minority stereotype inherently obscures difficulties faced by some Asian American ethnic groups.

²³² Table 1 *supra*.

²³³ In our opinion, the answer to whether Asian Americans' employment opportunities are suppressed by racial discrimination is a complicated one, and one we may investigate further in future work. Our preliminary research using federal occupational data suggests that, when education is controlled for, Asian Americans may hold somewhat higher prestige jobs than white Americans, but may get somewhat lower income returns for education than do white Americans.

²³⁴ Compared to others, non-Hispanic whites who believe that Asian Americans work harder than whites favor more government attention to Asian Americans by 32% to 23%. $P=.007$ (gamma test) for 3-category variable.

VI. CONCLUSION

The academic critique of the model minority myth is both powerful and evocative. It ties two very real phenomena together into a plausible narrative. Rather than positive beliefs about Asian Americans as smarter, richer, or harder working than other groups being benign, most Asian critical scholars see these views as linked to hostility to Asians, immigrants, and other minorities. Inherent in seemingly positive views, some see an almost pathological hatred that echoes the “yellow peril” fears of an earlier era.

In most respects, we find a different link between positive and negative views than the standard critique would predict. There is substantial evidence that some non-Hispanic whites rate Asian Americans higher than whites (the positive side of the Strong Form of the Model Minority Hypothesis) or rate Asian Americans higher than other minorities (the positive side of the Weak Form of the Hypothesis). On the other side, we also find strong evidence of varying levels of hostility to Asians, immigrants, and African-Americans, and to government support of these groups. What we don’t find, however, is that these ideas are linked in the way hypothesized by most Asian critical scholars. Indeed, on balance, there is weak support for the contrary position—that those who rate Asian Americans higher than other minorities, or particularly higher than whites, are *more likely to hold other positive views* about Asians, immigration, African-Americans, and government programs supporting these groups.

In retrospect, of course, this should not be such a surprising conclusion—that those who view Asian Americans as hard working, for example, might actually be *more likely* to view Asian Americans as patriotic, be willing to have a family member marry one, be willing to live in a half-Asian neighborhood, think that government should pay more attention to Asian Americans, think that immigration does not lead to unemployment, oppose racial segregation, favor racial intermarriage, and so on. Some whites might see Asian Americans in comparatively positive terms because they like them—or like them because they see them in comparatively positive terms.

Even in the one area where the Model Minority Hypothesis is strongly supported, the link suggests a relatively uncomplicated mindset. Non-Hispanic whites who rate Asian Americans higher than other minorities are indeed complacent about continuing job and housing discrimination against Asian Americans, just as many Asian critical scholars hypothesize. If one rates Asian Americans higher than other groups, one is less likely to think that there is any job or housing discrimination against them. This complacency does not generally translate into hostility toward government programmatic help for Asian Americans or African Americans.

Ultimately, we find ourselves condemning the seemingly positive model minority stereotype, even if it is not usually linked with pernicious beliefs towards Asian Americans or other racial minorities. Frank Wu explains why:

Whatever else might be said about the myth, it cannot be disputed that it is a racial generalization. As such, it contains the premise that people can be arranged by racial group, and, furthermore, that the differences between racial groups are more significant than either the similarities between racial groups or the differences within them. It makes

race the main feature of an individual as well as the leading division among people.²³⁵

Even apparently positive stereotypes run counter to the American embrace of liberal-individualist beliefs, which support norms against racial stereotyping.²³⁶ Whether or not the model minority stereotype can be characterized as being comprised of generally positive or negative characteristics, it still is no exception to this general conclusion about stereotyping: It ascribes characteristics to an individual that she may not possess in reality and creates expectations about an individual that may not be justified in her particular case. By doing so, the model minority stereotype circumscribes an individual's capacity for self-creation and definition.

We think that the results of our research are multifaceted enough to resist simple classification and characterization. We do think that our results illustrate that the generally negative picture painted by some Asian critical scholars about the motives and attitudes of people who have positive model minority beliefs about Asian Americans is inaccurate (and the scholars' views perhaps suffer from the weaknesses that generally befall stereotypes). We found nothing to suggest that people who hold generally positive views about Asian Americans' hard work, wealth and intelligence are trying to conceal their actual feelings of fear, envy, and resentment toward Asian Americans. At the very least, our research suggests that characterizations such as these are unlikely to portray individual beliefs accurately.

Asian critical scholars' efforts to combat stereotypes should be lauded. The business of combating stereotypes, however, is tricky. Any model or generalization (even a relatively accurate one) contains some of the characteristics of stereotyping—models and generalizations are inevitably reductionist. Is it a stereotype or just a generalization to say that most whites oppose affirmative action? Is it a stereotype or just a generalization to say that Asian Americans on average have higher incomes than most other minorities? Both generalizations might be true of most (but not many) people being described and both generalizations are embedded into a larger set of troublesome beliefs about how people of that ethnic group live or think, which at least raise issues of stereotyping. Yet being able to generalize about the world is necessary to any model building and most forms of scholarship. We worry that some of the critics of the model minority stereotype might prefer to replace this stereotype with other generalizations or stereotypes, some of which may suffer from inaccuracies that make the new stereotypes misleading and unhelpful. Some Asian critical scholars, for example, have portrayed Asian Americans as outsiders and in natural solidarity with other people of color, or even as naturally having left-wing political sympathies. As with any stereotyping, these generalizations may (or may not) be true on average, but in any event are not true for many individuals.

Asian critical scholars' work has effectively highlighted the unique problems, struggles, and challenges of different Asian ethnic groups and cohorts of immigrants in an effort to encourage the creation of public policies that are more responsive to the actual needs of these groups. If this approach is correct—that we need to pay attention to the problems faced by particular Asian national origin subgroups and groups of refugees—then perhaps focusing on

²³⁵ WU, YELLOW, *supra* note __, at 55.

²³⁶ *Id.*

color and race in forging a pan-racial coalition of “people of color”²³⁷ could divert attention from particular subgroups. Such efforts could also mistakenly categorize problems faced by particular Asian ethnic groups or immigrant cohorts as “racial” problems,²³⁸ when they might be cultural or historical problems. Both those who support the model minority critique and those who reject it—as well as those of us who both support it in many respects and question it in others—need to be careful to present our generalizations, not as essences or necessities, but as conclusions that are true to the extent that they fit the world and untrue to the extent that they don’t fit what they claim to capture.

²³⁷ Moreover, coalitions can only fruitfully exist when groups have actual common interests. Some of the exhortations for pan-people of color coalitions rely on the premise that potential members of such coalitions share a commitment to left-wing political causes. In reality, such a shared commitment to political causes may not exist, and efforts to forge such coalitions may simply substitute the model minority stereotype for a stereotype that all racial minorities face identical challenges and share the same political commitments.

²³⁸ The line between pernicious stereotyping and useful generalizations can be an elusive one. We believe that some generalizations about racial and ethnic groups are essential to the formulation of effective public policies. As a practical matter, policymakers cannot be alive to the unique characteristics and circumstances of each individual American, even if we might encourage individuals to have just such an open mind when dealing with other individuals. At the policymaking level, we tend to favor distinguishing among Asian national origin subgroups when groups have different salient experiences and characteristics (in formulating educational policies, for example); and for treating Asian Americans as a group when group distinctions are not as salient (in formulating and enforcing anti-discrimination policies, for example). In research settings, similar considerations apply, but one should also consider sample sizes that might not permit potentially relevant distinctions.