UNI DIVERSITY

OPEN DOORS...OPEN MINDS

Spring 2005

Asian Americans; the model minority

http://faculty.ncwc.edu/toconnor/soc/355lect10.htm

Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders number about 9 million in the U.S., constituting about 3% of the U.S. population and mostly reside in California, New York or Hawaii. They make up about 65% of the world population. They have been stereotyped as the "model minority" because a substantial majority are college-educated with middle- or upper-income occupations.

However, there is an unfortunate tendency to make faulty assumptions about Asian Americans. One belief is that because they look alike, they are similar. The fact is, there is incredible diversity among different groups, and some groups are wrongly classified.

"An Asian American is one and a half times more likely to have a bachelor's degree than a white non-Latino."

Portrayals in movies and television have also created persistent stereotypes of Asians as cunning and savage. They play roles such as "master criminal" in James Bond-type movies, master detective in Charlie Chan movies, or super cops in Jackie Chan movies. Asian men are often stereotyped as broken-English speaking immigrants or Kung-Fu Masters, nerdy bookworms, or strict patriarchal husbands, asexual and unromantic. Additionally, Asian women are often depicted as submissive or docile women to the White American male or abuse-tolerant and obedient wives to over bearing Asian husbands.

In three major wars in U.S. history -- WWII, the Korean War and the Vietnam War -- the enemies were Asians. These experiences have fostered a sense of enmity towards Asians, especially towards Asian men since they were the ones who fought with U.S. soldiers.

Asian Americans are acutely aware that they come from enemy nations or nations where the U.S. has fought hot or cold wars. There are interesting patterns of homeland-bashing which may be driven by the deep drive to assimilate. There's a term, called the *Hansen effect*, to describe rebellious children of Asian American immigrants who reject their parent's assimilation and want to learn about their ancestral homeland.

Asian Americans in business report a glass or "bamboo ceiling" where they cannot aspire to higher positions of management. They have been accused of various things, including being too aggressive, having poor communications skills, and suffering from a megalomania that they can do anything given the model minority myth. They are pigeonholed in technology jobs, and are not deemed to have many non-technical abilities.

The final, but most obscure, catalyst to Asian discrimination is that it is socially accepted by all Americans that the Black population was discriminated against in American history through slavery, lynching and forced segregation. The racism towards Blacks was reported on a large scale by the news media with coverage of Martin Luther King, the Civil Rights movement in the 1960's, Presidential recognition by the likes of President Kennedy and Truman, and Supreme Court rulings founded on the injustice of racism suffered by Blacks.

The presence of the NAACP also helps to solidify the cause and serves as a reminder to the White American population and other ethnic groups alike. Asians do not have a nationally recognized organization to deal with racism. There has been racism towards Asians such as the Japanese Internment, and the racism posed towards Chinese, Koreans, and Japanese students in San Francisco in 1906.

But many of these events in American history are transient. The mention of blatant racism mainly reflects the suffering by Black Americans in U.S. History books while racism towards Asians is brief, if present at all.

As the Asian population burgeons across the nation and as issues native to their community enter the consciousness of the public, you would think misperceptions surrounding the Asian-American community would be on the decline.

Yet if you ask the average person to define the term "Asian," the likely response would be someone of either Chinese or Japanese descent -- and more often than not, that is where the distinction ends. Those from the Indian subcontinent, for example, are not really thought of as being Asian.

The fact is, Asian Americans comprise a vast array of cultures, languages and religions -- just ask the millions of Koreans, Indians, Pakistanis, Vietnamese, Indonesians, Filipinos and Sri Lankans in this country.

COMING UP...

APR 21

Soup & Substance

Thursday, April 21

11:00 a.m. - Lee Room

APR 28

U in the C Closing Ceremony

Thursday, April 28

3:30 p.m. - Lee Banquet Room

Engage

One of the goals of *U in the C* is to promote healthy, open dialogue among people with varying perspectives on issues. Feel free to forward comments to the author of this editorial at waclaypool@ccis.edu

Unidiversity

attemps to enlighten readers and provoke discussion on featured articles. We hope to present many points of view on subjects in upcoming issues. If you have a topic you would like to see explored, please let us know.

Submit!

To share stories, articles, reviews, editorials, thoughts, ideas, or (whew)... suggestions for the newsletter, please direct submissions to Pattie Strong at pjstrong@ccis.edu

The wisdom of Pearl Jam

By Anthony Claypool, CC Staffer

I'm glad that my grandfather is dead. Or at least I'm glad he died when he did. There's something unbelievably lonely and sad when you learn bad things about people you adore. Inevitably we're all bound to do something to hurt others. I just wish I'd never known about my "Paw-paw."

When I was really young (before my fifth birthday, I'm sure) my grandpa would pull M&M's out of my ears. Nothing was more magical. He'd let us climb in his lap while he sat in his busted up leather recliner. We'd snuggle up next to him as he'd tell us tall tales about World War II, which always ended with us begging, "What happened? What happened?," and him pacifying us with a quick, "Oh, I died."

We slobbered in his gigantic glasses of tea, and squirmed when we had to pull the fish off the hook. He let us steer the old, rusty Case International tractor as we fed the cows. He cautioned us to put our fingers in our pockets while we "helped" chop firewood. He answered my "why's" and "how's" with the patience of a saint. More than that, my grandfather was a God when I was young.

To hear that he repeatedly cheated on my grandmother was a little bit of a shock. And surely my "paw-paw" didn't make my mother feel like a worthless person. It is absolutely preposterous to suggest that he beat my uncles. The man I knew was far too kind and gentle to do such things.

My grandpa died when I was eleven. I cried harder than I've ever cried before or since when they closed his casket for the last time. He was the first loved one to pass on, at least the first once I began to understand what that term meant. By the time I was seventeen, as I approached adulthood, I realized that I might not always think of him as godlike. He was a racist, a poor husband and a lackluster father.

A favorite song of mine when I was in college was, "I'm Open," by Pearl Jam. One lyric reads, "When he was six he believed that the moon overhead followed him. By age nine he deciphered the illusion trading magic for fact, with no trade-backs." It's twice now that their song catalyzed an epiphany in me.

A few years ago it urged me to quit working in a cube and be a part of someone's life. Now it makes me lament my loss of innocence. At times in my life, it has felt as if my problems would be solved if only I could make my brain simpler. It has seemed, often, that the more complex our lives become--the harder it is to center oneself. It seemed the richer my base of knowledge, the poorer my understanding. More is less. But, perhaps I'm mistaking the beauty of simplicity. I suppose that living in a black and white world isn't necessarily always more comforting.

If simplicity isn't necessarily a friend, I suppose complexity isn't necessarily an enemy. In a world without grey, my grandfather's love and kindness towards me surely couldn't mitigate the mistakes he made with his family. An "either/or" world forces people to judge. Black or White. Liberal or Conservative. Rich or Poor. Male or Female. Straight or Gay. What value is there in this logic?

Our society seems to thrive on polarity. Not only do we separate and categorize as a species (or residents of the western hemisphere), I would argue we create certain juxtaposition between groups. A Red Sox fan doesn't root for the Yankees. I suppose there are benefits for a society in competition. But how does an individual continue to build relationships with folks who might be on the other side of an issue?

We're all capable of great things and awful things. The most abusive and hateful person has vulnerability. The kindest soul can be pushed to violence. We cannot trade-back our maturity for simplicity. We can't retrieve our "magic" in exchange for "fact". However, maybe we can constantly challenge ourselves to recapture that openness and innocence that existed in us as children, by seeing the good in people.

"The highest result of education is tolerance."

--Helen Keller

STUDENT SPOTLIGHT

Meet JONI BRAMON

By Pattie Strong, CC Staffer

You may not have seen her but you've definitely heard her. While Joni Bramon's raucous, infectious laugh is one of her most identifiable and endearing characteristics, there's more to this girl than meets the eye.

Taking time off after high school to travel and find herself, Joni became a full-time Columbia College student in the fall of 2000. The thing she loves most about Columbia College is being around people who love what they do and who are intense and curious.

"The variety of experiences that students and professors from varying backgrounds brings to campus adds a richness to all of us," says the sophomore Biology major.

To come back to college as a 23-year old and still have scholarship opportunities and the chance to fully embrace college life has definitely made Joni appreciate her experiences more.

By sixth grade, Joni knew she had found her calling in medicine and set her sights on becoming a pediatrician. However, after realizing her days would likely be filled fighting fierce battles against runny noses and ear infections, armed only with lollipops and amoxicillin, she decided to explore other career options.

Then came eighth grade. After months of saving her money, not to mention some serious convincing of her parents, Joni was off to France, Spain and England for three glorious weeks. The first one in her family to venture outside the country, the travel bug bit hard, and she's never looked back.

"Travel has a way of challenging my senses and making me vulnerable in ways surprising and invigorating. It withdraws me from my comfort zone and I like that," says Bramon. "It heals me and allows me to understand a part of me I'd never otherwise known."

Raised in a traditional Baptist home, Joni grew up the second of four daughters, all of whom remain tightly connected. Her parents encouraged her and her sisters to explore not only themselves, but the moutains and valleys around them as well. Joni feels her parents realized early on how transforming travel was for her and applauds them for trusting her to make that first journey.

With a natural curiosity about human nature, she has chosen to take the values of respect and tolerance that her parents instilled in her and apply them to her life and her travels.

Her trips around the world have taught her about richness, political ire, beauty and chaos. Seeing poverty first-hand is much more powerful than reading about it in a book.

When asked her favorite thing about travel, Bramon throws her head back and lets out her trademark laugh before drumming her fingers against her chin and growing quite introspective. Because she speaks with such passion and reverence about all the places she's visited, for a brief moment it's actually possible to feel the warmth of the setting sun against a castle in the remote walled city of Marvao`, Portugal.

"Travel teaches you diversity. It engages all your senses. It throws you into chaos and forces and challenges you to face it," Bramon says. She still remembers the chemistry experiment a proud merchant named Jesus performed in her hand in the middle of a crowded south Mexican market. Mixing dyes, dried bugs, water, lemon juice and baking powder, she learned first-hand about the ancient art of textile color and weaving.

"We didn't talk much to one another, but were still able to have an entire conversation sharing our lives," Joni recalls. "We did a lot of laughing."

Reminded of the value of forming relationships, she says she is often transported back to that day. "It reminds me of the beauty of letting someone into your life, if even for a moment."

As for future plans, her travels have brought her back to her first love -- medicine. While she has a deep respect for local customs, she hopes to one day bring a degree of traditional medical practice to all those who have had such a positive impact on her life.

Flight without Fear

The awe of living with wild wanderlust;
Her soul exposed, her life breathed fresh, eyes bright
Senses confused...yet surprise brings delight
Exploring, laughing--there's new life, unhushed!
Inside, beyond pain, was a Light she did trust.
She leapt from great height, indeed with true fright,
Yet the wistful dreamer dared, she took flight...
Bravely, boldly, breaking that mold of "must".

"Believe," she shouts, begs. (What? My voice I hear?)
Spoken with love]: "To Survive, you did flee..."
Those years of fears, confused with tears--My past...
...Fears, which nearly engulf, still vibrate here...
With resolve] I shout aLoud: "She is ME!"
Fear won't reign, MY anchor I will not cast!"

--Jonie Bramon

BOOKS

The Difference a Day Makes: 365 Ways to Change Your World in Just 24 Hours

by Karen M. Jones

Donate a toy to a homeless shelter. Walk a lonesome dog at your local SPCA. Jones offers a year's worth of simple, yet significant things you can do to make the world a better place. Each action takes just a few minutes to a few hours; none requires a cash donation; all are designed to improve the planet -- and your piece of mind.

A Bookshelf of Our Own: Works that Changed Women's Lives

by Deborah G. Felder

Felder mixes literary insight and historical detail in this fascinating survey of the 50 most important books by and about women. For instance, she describes Scarlett O'Hara as doomed to exist between autonomy and dependence, a dilemma author Margaret Mitchell saw as the core problem of Southern women. Felder also tells us that Mitchell's first choice for her character's name, Pansy, was rejected by her publisher because of its homosexual connotation. In each brief chapter, Felder focuses on a different book and explains how it illuminates the experiences of contemporary women.

Bury the Chains: Prophets and Rebels in the Fight to Free an Empire's Slaves

by Adam Hochschild

Long before slavery cam to an end in the U.S., it was banned by the British Empire, a remarkable feat of activism engineered by a group of men who first met in a printing shop in London in 1787. Hochschild, author of the prizewinning King Leopold's Ghost, tells the story of the first grassroots human rights campaign in evocative and riveting style. This book is not only a historical thriller but an inspiration for anyone engaged today in a struggle to change the world.

David Kopay Story

by David Kopay & Perry Deane Young

Originally published in 1977, this book was an earth-shattering event. Twenty-eight years after publishing his story, David Kopay remains the only NFL player who has publicly acknowledged his homosexuality. After a ten-year career as a running back for the San Francisco 49ers, the Detroit Lions, the Washington Redskins, the New Orleans Saints and the Green Bay Packers.

Exhausted by the agony of living a double life, Kopay bravely talked to the *Washington Star* and took his place in history as the first prominent male athlete to come out of the closet. In his book, he reveals the conflicting emotional states that both prevented him from living openly and finally drove him to total honesty.

From psychotherapy to hypnosis to heartbreaking family confrontations to finally surprising acceptance from former teammates and coaches, this is a story of denial leading to acceptance, and finally to pride.

FILMS

The Best Years of Our Lives

directed by William Wyler (1946)

Three American servicemen return home to Boone City after the war, to find their lives irrevocably changed by their military experience. Homer Parrish has lost his hands, and has become distant from his fiancee and family as he struggles to overcome his disability. Al Stephenson returns to a family which has grown and changed during his three years away. And Fred Derry finds himself stuck in a lousy job and a loveless marriage, while at the same time falling in love with Al's daughter. Together, the three must find a way to come to terms with their experiences and pick up the pieces, lest wartime turn out to be "the best years of their lives".

Schindler's List

directed by Steven Spielberg (1993)

Oskar Schindler is a vain, glorious and greedy German businessman who becomes unlikely humanitarian amid the barbaric Nazi reign when he feels compelled to turn his factory into a refuge for Jews. Based on the true story of Oskar Schindler who managed to save about 1100 Jews from being gassed at the Auschwitz concentration camp. A testament for the good in all of us.

Normal

directed by Jane Anderson (2003)

After being married to Irma for 25 years, Roy decides the stress of being a woman in a man's body has grown intolerable. He unburdens himself to Irma and their pastor, shocking them both. Roy's decision to pursue a sex-change operation is greeted with intolerance and disgust by some of his co-workers and members of his church. Irma eventually comes to some understanding, and supports Roy through his journey to becoming "Ruth."

Billy Elliot

directed by Stephen Daldry (2000)

In a northern England mining town, miners are on strike and the atmosphere is tense. Eleven-year old Billy Elliot, whose father and brother are participating in the strike, whose mother has died quite some time ago and whose grandmother is not completely aware of what's going on, doesn't like the brutal boxing lessons at school. Instead, he falls for the girls' ballet lessons. When his folks find out about this unusual love of his, Billy is in trouble. Being supported by the ballet teacher, Mrs. Wilkinson, he keeps on training secretly while the work situation as well as the problems at home get worse. Finally, Mrs. Wilkinson manages to get Billy an audition for the Royal Ballet School, but now he also has to open his heart to his family.

Travelers and Magicians

directed by Khyentse Norbu (2005)

In an isolated Himalayan village, a government official who idealizes the West is invited by a friend to join him in America. After missing the bus to the capital, he reluctantly joins a group of hitchhiking strangers — including a chatty monk, a rice paper maker, and his clever daughter. The director conjures comedic, uniquely Buddhist tensions — between waiting and having, damnyen and boombox, the allure of women abroad and the routine surprises of home.

Two steps forward; reversing the gender gap

Joel Wendland is managing editor of *Political Affairs*

"Boys are becoming the second sex" proclaimed a May cover story in *Business Week*, titled "The New Gender Gap." *Business Week's* article appeared as part of a spate of articles and television news segments on the subject of increased educational opportunities for women. The basics of the story are that in the education system, teachers have become so conscious of catering to the needs of girls and young women that boys are being left behind. Boys, they say, are being punished for "boyish" behavior. They are being put more often into special education programs or disciplinary classes, and the outcome is that boys have a negative educational experience. This trend translates into poorer high school performances and perhaps college as well.

According to statistics offered by *Business Week*, 57 percent of all new bachelor's degrees and 58 percent of master's degrees are awarded to women. This "education grab," according to the article, was the source of the "new gender gap." Though, the article did hint that even with the new trend in the numbers, women still had some ways to go in order to catch up after 350 years of being almost entirely excluded from the university.

The average woman, according to the AFL-CIO, will lose $523,000 in her lifetime due to unequal pay.

So what does the real gender gap look like? Barbara Gault, director of research at the Institute for Women's Policy Research, recently told Women'sWallStreet.com that there are several explanations for and holes in the current data on the educational experiences of men and women. First, high-paying occupations that do not require college degrees, such as skilled trades, are still male dominated. Second, women need a college degree in order to earn roughly what men do with only high school diplomas, giving them stronger motives to make a special effort to obtain financial security. Third, among African Americans, where the difference between women and men earning college degrees is the widest among all racial or ethnic groups, it is clear that institutional racism directed at African American men plays a large role in keeping them out of college. Fourth, in the crucial field of information technology, women continue to earn only about one-third of the degrees awarded and get only about one-third of the jobs available. Finally, men continue to outpace women in completing doctoral and professional degrees (81 women for every 100 men), resulting in continued male dominance in corporate board rooms, the seats of political power, the highest positions in universities, etc.

The successes of the women's equality movement, progressive changes in attitudes about roles women can have and the implementation of affirmative action policies (which benefited women as a whole most) have had a tremendous positive impact on the access women have had in education. Just 30 years ago, women earned advanced or professional degrees at a rate of only 23 women per 100 men. In other arenas, such as the workforce or the political field, the gender gap, in sheer numbers, has largely narrowed.

But the numbers still don't paint the whole picture. While higher education is a major factor in gaining financial security, it is something that is only available to about one-fifth of the adult population. So for the vast majority of women, this supposed "new gender gap" means absolutely nothing. Other data on the condition of women's economic security paint another picture altogether. About eight of ten retired women are not eligible for pension benefits. When retired women do get a pension, it is typically far less than retired men get. Fifty percent of women who receive pension benefits get only about 60 cents for every dollar of male pensioners. On the average, retired women depend on Social Security for 71 percent of their income, and about 25 percent of retired women rely solely on Social Security for their income.

In the work force, women's pay averages only 76 percent of men's pay (at a cost of about $200 billion for working families annually). A report produced by the General Accounting Office last October shows that since 1983, the wage differential has actually increased. 60 percent of all women earn less than $25,000 annually. Women are one-third more likely to live below the poverty level. Black women and Latinas are between two and three times more likely to live below the poverty line than men are. For women of color, facing the double oppression of racism and sexism, pay losses are even greater: 64 cents on the dollar at a loss of about $210 a week.

Even more costly to women, is the "price of motherhood," as journalist Ann Crittenden argues in her recent book of that title. In almost every case, women lose income, jobs, job experience and retirement income (while work hours increase) when they decide to have children. With some slight improvements, women remain the primary caregiver in nearly every family. For many mothers, single or married, the economic inequalities described above are exacerbated. For married women, dependence on men is heightened and the threat of economic hardship enforces interpersonal inequality and conflict. Divorced mothers and their children have among the highest rates of poverty of any demographic.

As for the fallacy of female supremacy, the gains made by women through struggle and implementation of policies such as affirmative action point to the necessity of broader systematic change. But if female supremacy is a fallacy, does this mean that men go unhurt by gender inequalities? No. Men and boys are hurt when their families suffer because pay inequity causes their mothers, grandmothers, sisters and aunts to lose income, get fired, face hiring discrimination, are refused pensions, don't have equal Social Security benefits, lose out on promotions or have limited access to higher education. Additionally, if the average woman loses $523,000 in income in her life, does this mean that the average man is enriched by $523,000 in his lifetime? If pay inequity costs women $200 billion yearly, does this mean that men are enriched by $200 billion? The answer is no. These billions are savings in labor costs to employers. Employers enjoy the profits of male supremacy and gendered divisions among working people. So it makes sense that the right tries to portray the benefits of progressive social change toward equality as bad. It cuts into their bottom line.

Greetings-

So many times I have sat down to write an editorial for **Unidiversity** and I never actually make it to putting words on paper. My mind begins to flood with images and ideas. I think about our community and the interactions of its members. I think about my life experience -- and the times I have felt supported and the times when I could have used more support. I think about the relationships we have with one another in our day-to-day activities, as well as our relationships to each other across the world. Obviously this list could go on and on.

Like waves lapping the shore, I find my mind works in a similar pattern. Moments of constant change layering over previously conceived notions until the perspective changes, over and over again. How great it is that we as humans have an option to change. We have the ability to open ourselves daily to new insights and experiences and choose how we want to perceive the world around us.

My thoughts return to the winter of 2001. It had been very cold and grey for a number of days and it was starting to wear on everyone. I had a number of students coming to see me in crisis, friends calling after work all disheveled and broken down and my own mental health feeling somewhat like the rubber band that had lost its ability to "bounce back". It was in that moment that the seed was planted for what has now become *Unity in the Community*. I began working on a project called Safe Space. The idea in its simplicity was to create a safe environment where individuals within the Columbia College community could feel supported.

It wasn't until years later, with the help of many other students, faculty and staff, that the program, *Unity in the Community*, was born. I watched it grow from a seed into this beautiful form it has taken today. I look back at the process and remember feeling tightness in my chest when someone challenged the idea of Safe Space (much like when someone challenges a personal value). Now I realize it was those challenges, the recruitment of others to deal with those challenges and my ability to embrace change that allowed it to manifest as it is today…a program that serves our entire community. I am so appreciative to all of the people who spent hours in discussion to figure out what our community needed, contributed their creativity to inventing its components and stayed with the program in its first year to see its success.

We have 58 Open Door Open Mind members, made up of students, faculty and staff and a number of other individuals that participate in the *Soup and Substance* and *KITE Coffeehouse* programs. I am so grateful that the waves appeared in those moments as dedicated individuals, each with a contribution; and that together we built something that will continue to evolve and meet the needs of our community. Much like the process of how *Unity in the Community* came to be, I would like to challenge each of you to expand your boundaries. When you feel that tightening in your chest, investigate why you are having that reaction. Chances are, it is alerting you to the fact that you may have room to grow. Be open to the change, and see the endless possibilities before you.

--Kim

Kim Kinyon is the Unity in the Community Chair and Director of Student Development at Columbia College.