

Critique

The author of "Asians, Jews, and the Legacy of Midas" presents a provocative comparative analysis of Asians and Jews. Spector utilizes both a cultural and economic basis for understanding the function of Asian stereotyping and applies his analysis to the Jewish situation. While the American context provides the locus of his research, he does present his argument in an international context. Spector illustrates how the categorization of Asians and Jews as the "model" for economic success is dehumanizing as such a perception "drain(s) the life out of human beings and concretizes them into non-human statues." The conclusion of this author's work in dealing with oppression based in stereotype is actually a starting point which scholars should begin addressing. To be sure, the model minority, as applied to Asians and Jews, has generated numerous articles and papers, and yet scholars have failed to develop analyses which reflect an interdisciplinary and historical approach to the reasons for propagating such stereotypes.

While Spector presents both economic, biological, and cultural theories focusing on Asian and Jewish "malleability" in different economic situations internationally, he does not really develop the arguments within an historical context. We do not receive an analysis which illustrates focused scholarship in the field of race/ethnic realities within the human societal context. Much like the neo-conservative scholar, Thomas Sowell, Spector uses historical incidents selectively to prove the cultural impact of stereotyping. Sowell, however, develops a different conclusion concerning Asians and Jews as he lauds their "human capital" and supports the "model minority" belief. And while I agree that such stereotyping is devastating for both Asians and Jews, ethnic studies research must begin to address the sources of such stereotyping and not be entrapped by using the same methods as neo-conservative scholars.

Neo-conservative and liberal scholars alike have tended to collapse the experiences of ethnic and racial groups, addressing their similarities and differences. In some instances, Thomas Sowell and Nathan Glazer, for example, in *Ethnic America* and *Affirmative Discrimination*, have subsumed racial groups within the rubric of ethnic and applied their theoretical models to both groups indiscriminantly. The ahistorical approach used is the dehumanizing factor proposed by the author of this article. The history of racial groups at least in the United States is decidedly different from the history of ethnic immigrant groups. The law of 1790 clearly defined who were allowed to become naturalized U.S. citizens. People of color were denied the right of naturalization until the 1950s. Historical and legal factors must be addressed if comparative analyses are attempted. The differences between the Jewish experience and the Asian American experience must be dealt with historically in

order to understand the use and abuse of the “model minority” stereotype.

Another aspect which must be considered in attempting comparative analysis such as presented in this article is to understand the economic realities and the infrastructures used to create and “push” the success stereotype. The stereotype which has a fundamental basis in a neo-conservative ideology tends to focus only on culture, hard work, and individual merit—so-called American principles. While such a cultural force is operant, the U.S. is in the throes of deindustrialization where large corporations are moving out and into third world countries in search of cheap labor. The gap between the “underclass” and the “middle class” widens in the wake of deindustrialization¹ and the “blame” falls not on corporations but the “underclass” because they do not have the right values to be competitive. Here, the stereotype is abused and used to keep poor whites and people of color in line, i.e., if Jewish immigrants and Asians are economically successful, then why aren’t other minority groups doing equally as well?² It therefore becomes imperative for ethnic studies research to examine within the historical context both the cultural and economic factors under which such stereotypes are created.

Spector in his analysis did not go far enough in developing the impact the “model minority” stereotype has for Asians and Jews. And while only exploratory in nature, the article failed to present a dialectical relationship between the cultural and economic forces behind such stereotypes. Asians and Jews are, perhaps, being used as pawns within a socio/economic structure which empowers corporate capitalists to use stereotypes as a tool to control immigrants and racial minorities. The questions asked and the focus of ethnic studies research must address and examine racial inequality as cultural and economic realities and contextualize such research within an historical framework.

Notes

¹For an examination of the effects of deindustrialization upon the underclass, see William Julius Wilson, *The Truly Disadvantaged: Inner City, the Underclass, and Public Policy*. (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1987).

²William Raspberry promotes the Asian American success stereotype as a model for other minorities to follow. See “Beyond Racism,” *Washington Post*, November 19, 1984.

—Barbara Hiura