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Asian Americans and Social Welfare *Issue Brief*

Keywords

Model Minority Myth, Employment Discrimination, Small Business, Otherness, Internment

Description

This issue brief clarifies many of the misperceptions surrounding the current state of the Asian American community. The brief notes current social welfare programs in place, and the absence of such aid due to stereotypes and preconceived notions.

Key Points

- Social welfare programs often overlook the Asian American population and do not target the group as one of particular need.
- The Model Minority Myth paints Asian Americans as a completely thriving population within the United States, while in essence, the group would benefit from formalized governmental aid.
- Asian American immigrants have faced discrimination historically in attempts to enter the workforce and assimilate into culture and society.
- Many immigrants are forced into low paying jobs, which possess increasingly less value with heightened technology.
- Japanese Internment during World War II is a key instance of discrimination against Asian Americans, and serves as a key example of the population's designation of the "other" in American society.

Issue Brief

The status of Asian Americans in the United States today and the historical journey of the population are clouded by judgment and misperception. The application of social welfare to the Asian American population is affected strongly by the model minority myth, in which the Asian American community is seen largely as one without need for governmental help and programs (Herrick, 34). Thus, while any current social welfare programs are very relevant to the state of the Asian American population, the absence of such programs is equally notable, as these stereotypes serve as a roadblock to providing proper aid. Many Asian Americans are faced with a loss of self-identity through assimilation within the United States, and are forced to look within the Asian American population for help in bettering their own status (Herrick, 35).

Contrary to any inherent misconceptions, the Asian-American population is in need of formalized aid. In 2007, statistics demonstrated a 10.2% family poverty line within the community, and in 2008, 16% of Asian Americans lacked health insurance (Chen, 91-92). Attempts to better economic status through various employment opportunities are often met with obstacles. Many Asian Americans, often limited by the language barrier, are forced into low-

paying positions in the service industry. Consequently, with technological advances and a forward-moving economy, such service jobs are becoming obsolete and expendable. Other Asian immigrants to the United States become self-employed, starting businesses and promoting them as leaders of their own small corporations. Nevertheless, many have faced criticism of labor and health conditions in the businesses, with health codes that are not always compatible with domestic norms (Chen, 94). Nonetheless, institutional programs are in place to aid the Asian American population. For example, the Asian Pacific American Labor Alliance, first instituted in 1992, serves to help Asian Americans in the workforce (Herrick, 34). This group helps to better working conditions and to improve employment opportunities. Many motions, however, come strictly from within the Asian American population. For example, Japanese Americans have fought to successfully gain support and compensation for losses suffered during the Japanese internment in the United States during World War II (Herrick, 34). What is truly lacking is an abundance of formalized, governmental aid aimed directly at improving the lives of Asian Americans.

Many welfare programs that are in place have actually been detrimental to the Asian American population and at the very least, have not served to truly benefit the community. The perception that Asian Americans do not truly need aid has led many programs to actively protect against those who overuse welfare, instead of trying to benefit the group to the greatest degree possible (Wong, 1). Furthermore, any success achieved by the Asian American population in improved economic status is offset by discrimination or by a distinct sense of otherness within the greater United States (Herrick, 33). The formation of this image can be traced through the history of Asian Americans as the population has immigrated to the United States. The first immigrants arrived in the mid-1880s, coming to the west coast as laborers (Herrick, 31). Negative sentiments immediately began to brew as Americans feared that the immigrants would take away employment opportunities (U.S. Society, 1). During World War II, Japanese were confined in internment camps on the west coast of the United States, and this widespread fear of the “other” was only heightened by the attacks on Pearl Harbor. Additionally, initiatives affected the population as well, such as housing discrimination, which occurred throughout California in the 1950s. President Roosevelt’s New Deal did little for Asian Americans during the Depression (Fang, 1). Later, Asian immigrants began to stay in America in order to better their lives and economic status. Thus, many pursued professions such as law or medicine, but existing discrimination made this difficult, and many launched businesses instead (Herrick, 34). Thus, the history represents a struggle with persistent stereotyping and discrimination.

Today, it is clear that overarching stereotypes do not mask the need for social welfare within the Asian American population. The population stands at a threshold between full acceptance and “otherness,” and yet, successes do continue within the United States. Social welfare, however, is a necessary path to an even higher standard of living and the achievement of equal footing within the United States.



Japanese Internment, www.colorado.gov



www.britannica.com

APALA

Asian Pacific American Labor Alliance, AFL-CIO



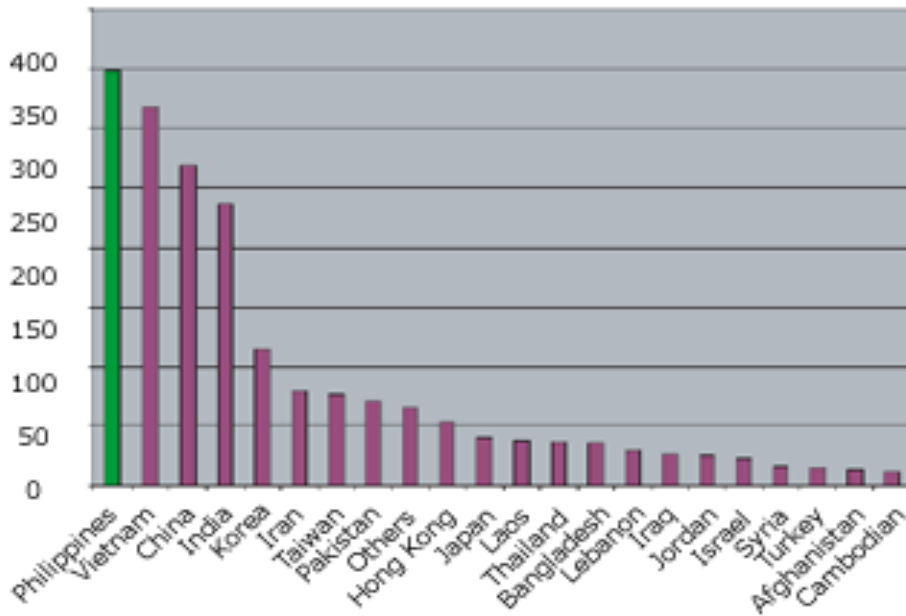
Organizing

Civil Rights

Economic Justice

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Asian Immigration to the US, By Country, 1981-1998



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Relevant Websites

1. Coalition for Asian American Children and Families, <http://www.cacf.org/>
2. Asian American Voices, <http://www.asianamericanvoices.org/>
3. Asian American Federation, <http://www.aafny.org/>
4. Asian Pacific American Labor Alliance, <http://www.apalanet.org/>
5. Asian American Arts Centre, <http://www.artspiral.org/about.html>

