

Issue Brief: Cultural Exclusion for Latinos and Asian Americans

Key Words

Asian Americans, Latinos, Ethnoracial Pentagon, postethnic perspective, cultural inclusion

Description

This issue brief outlines the Ethnoracial Pentagon, a more culturally inclusive form of racial identification, which proved to be exclusionary instead. Legislation, such as, Affirmative Action, addresses and compensates for ethnoracial inequalities, however, the problem extends beyond the inequalities that Affirmative Action accounts for.

Key Points

- The Ethnoracial Pentagon inaccurately represents different cultures and nationalities in the United States.
- The “cultural inclusion” of the Ethnoracial Pentagon, proved to be cultural *exclusion*, failing to recognize differences between individuals in the same racial category.
- Policy, such as Affirmative Action Act of 1964, address some ethnoracial inequalities, but do not account for larger, systematic forms of inequalities.
- Leaders who are culturally aware and diverse cannot emerge until ethnoracial inequalities are fully addressed.

Issue Brief

Asian Americans and Latino-Americans experience misconceptions about their racial identity in the United States. Created to provide a voluntary form of racial identity, the Ethnoracial Pentagon limits definitions of ethnoracial identities and fails to account for the full complexities within racial/ethnic groups. The Ethnoracial Pentagon gave the United States an awareness of its historicity and the ways in which ethnocentrism played a significant role in the formulation of “privileged” identities in American culture (Hollinger 128). In attempting to dismantle racial inequalities, the U.S. Census Bureau created the Ethnoracial Pentagon. Legislation resulted, such as the Affirmative Action Act of 1964, to help mediate inequalities between whites and non-whites. The Ethnoracial Pentagon provides 5 ethnoracial categories

from which to identify and/or be identified by: Native American/American Indian, Asian/Pacific Islander, Latino/Hispanic, Black/African-American, and White/European American.

A benefit of this new racial construct was that it allowed for a “postethnic perspective” on educational policy, such as Affirmative Action in college admissions (Hollinger 128). The Affirmative Action Act of 1964 sought to “outlaw discrimination based on race, ethnicity or gender” (CQ Researcher). However, Affirmative Action does not remove the color-consciousness or inequalities that exists in the United States, even though the government is more “racially” and “culturally” aware due to the Ethnoracial Pentagon (Rubenfield 428). Figure 1 illustrates how Affirmative Action fails to compensate and create a more equal society for ethnoracial minorities as it does not address deeper and fundamental inequalities.

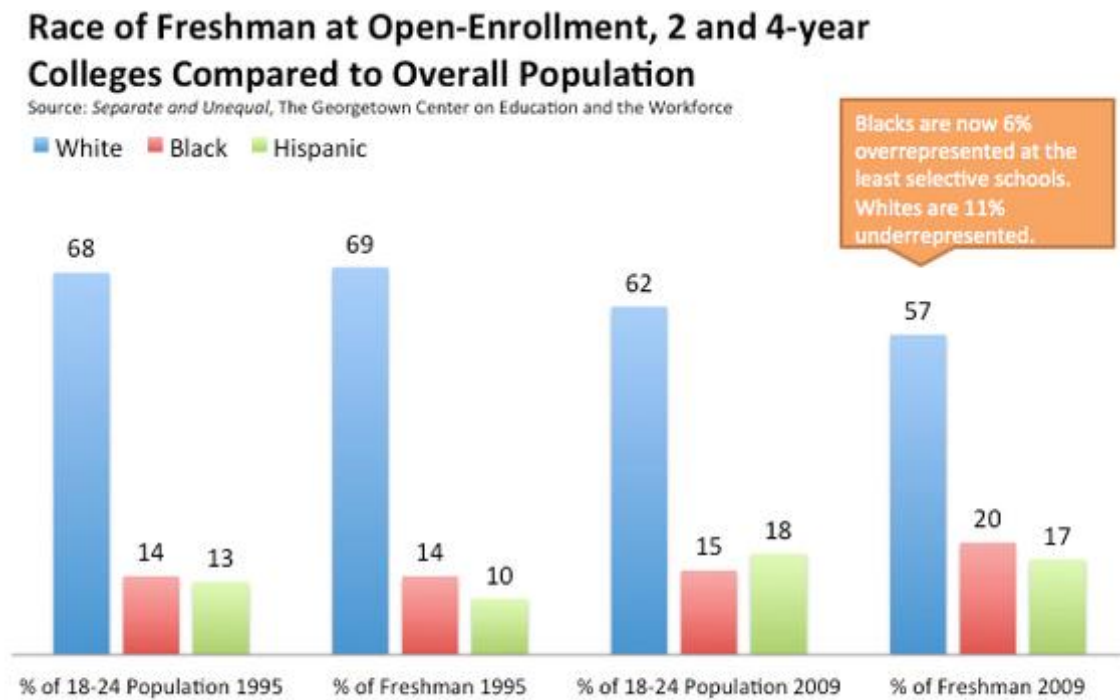


Moreover, the Ethnoracial Pentagon’s racial identification did not distinguish prevalent cultures and subcultures within pre-determined ethnoracial categories. The Ethnoracial Pentagon for Asian Americans and Latino-Americans, served to identify “people who need[ed] protection

from discrimination,” thus, determining who qualifies for Affirmative Action in college admissions (Hollinger 128).

Politicians, however, framed the Ethnoracial Pentagon as a racial construct that provided more flexibility and “choice” for underrepresented minority groups in the United States. Furthermore, even with these new ethnoracial categories, minorities still experienced discrimination that neither the law nor this new racial construct protected them from in American society. For example, Figure 2 demonstrates that Latinos/Hispanics comprise only 18% of enrollment at 2 and 4-year colleges.

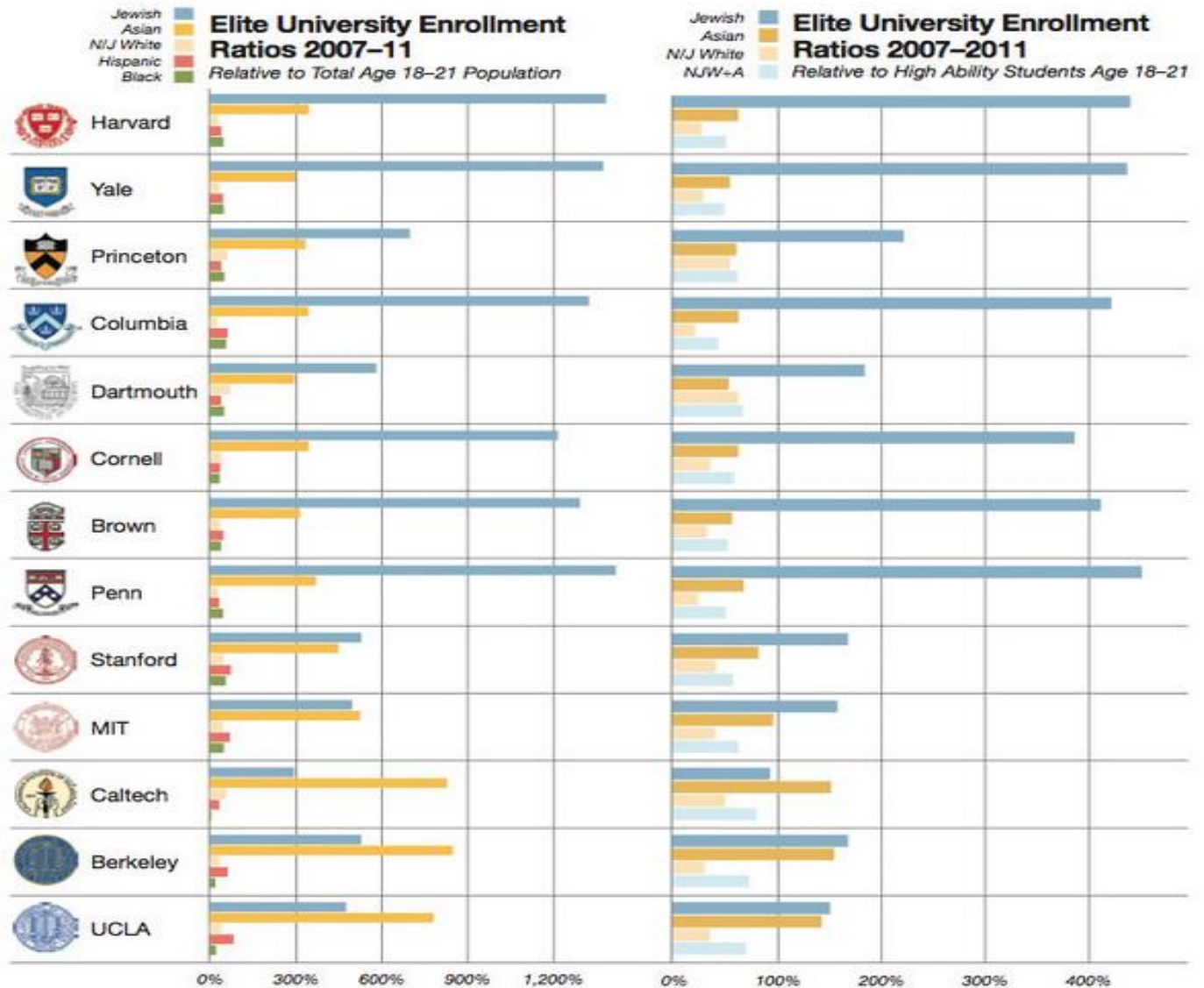
Figure 2.



Despite this presentation of a “cultural choice” with the Ethnoracial Pentagon, Asian Americans and Latino Americans still experience significant limitations on self-identification. David Hollinger argues in his book *Postethnic America: Beyond Multiculturalism*, that the ethnoracial category “Asian” represents Americans whose ancestors “were Koreans,

Cambodians, Chinese, Vietnamese, and Japanese” (27). Similarly, while the Hispanic or Latino category of the Ethnoracial Pentagon has more “linguistic cohesion” than Asian Americans do, this grouping also embodies a multitude of Hispanic countries (Hollinger 27). Thus, “cultural inclusion” becomes cultural *exclusion*, as these new ethnoracial categories excluded all semblances to culture.

This notion of cultural exclusion and the federal government’s failed attempt to include variances in identities becomes critical for the Affirmative Action Act of 1964. Figure 3 demonstrates that Affirmative Action is not necessarily beneficial in eradicating or addressing ethnoracial inequalities. Asian Americans in the United States are seen to have almost twice the representation in elite and private universities than Latinos/Hispanics do. In effect, ethnoracial inequality is far too complex to address through college admissions only. Similar to the flaws in the Ethnoracial Pentagon, Affirmative Action does not rectify the discrimination of a color-conscious society. **Figure 3.**



Note that the ethnic enrollment ratios for Berkeley and UCLA are based on the national demographics, but their students are primarily drawn from within California, whose racial distribution is very different: the white student population is half the national average, while Asians and Hispanics are more numerous by a factor of two, implying different parity ratios. The underlying data for these charts is drawn from Appendix H.

Sandra Day O’Connor in her article “Affirmative Action,” states that Affirmative Action is necessary to “cultivate a set of leaders with legitimacy” (5). Such leaders can only arise from a society that is racially and culturally diverse. While it is true that a more diverse society leads to diversity in leadership, unless the government enacts legislation that truly addresses the inequalities that ethnoracial minorities experience, then the chance for a “better tomorrow” seems impossible.

Work Cited

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