

neutron stars, as well as their physical properties such as neutrino emission processes and the heat quantities of the interior and exterior, provide information about the states of matter at supernuclear densities. A student of Charles W. Flanagan High School, Pooja is active in both the math club and debate team. The daughter of Sunil and Kiran Jotwani, she was born in India and is head of the youth group in the Sindhi Association of South Florida.

- Po-Ling Loh, 18, of Madison, Wisconsin, explored finite group theory in mathematics. The group  $H$  is said to be a *closed* subgroup of a finite group  $G$  provided any homomorphism of  $H$  into  $G$  extends uniquely to all of  $G$ . Po-Ling studies the group  $D_{2p}$  of symmetries of a regular polygon with  $p$  sides, where  $p$  is an odd prime number. Ranked first in her class of 523 students at James Madison Memorial High School, Po-Ling has perfect SAT scores. She has been a gold prize winner in the USA Math Talent Search for three consecutive years, has won awards in music and forensics, and is copy editor of the school newspaper. The daughter of Dr. Wei-Yin Loh and Theresa Loh, she enjoys singing, cross-stitching, and playing frisbee.
- Albert Tsao, 17, of Brookline, Massachusetts, designed, fabricated, and studied the optical properties of silicon nanofiber ring resonator loops that are thinner than the wavelength of light and almost long enough to fit around a strand of human hair for his materials science project. Albert is one of only a handful of researchers worldwide who can pull ultrathin silica nanofibers with a diameter smaller than hundred nanometers. He hopes one day to find a way to manipulate nanofibers using magnetic bacteria. He hopes to attend Caltech. His hobbies include football, violin, and reading. The son of Dr. Thomas Tsao and Susan Chung, Albert cites his sister as the most influential person of his scientific career.<sup>1</sup>

Although Sho Yano and Devi Sridhar were never finalists in the Intel Science Talent Search—they are equally, if not even more, precocious. Yano became a full-time premed student at Loyola University in Chicago at age 9. He is the youngest student ever at the school and perhaps the youngest full-time college student in the United States. Standard tests cannot measure Yano's IQ because the tests cannot measure past 200. He made worldwide headlines in 2003 when he was accepted to medical school at the University of Chicago at the age of 13. Yano lives with his mother and 7-year-old sister in graduate student housing on campus and has adjusted to life at medical school. In one celebrated media event, Yano met with Dr. James Watson, who was just 15 when he was accepted to the University of Chicago in 1943. In 1953 Watson and colleague Francis Crick discovered DNA double helix, and both shared a Nobel Prize in Physiology in 1962. Watson told Yano: "You should concentrate on making a big discovery and not getting a girlfriend. The main thing is to have dreams. You should concentrate on something that no one has solved. Forget about being a prodigy and just try and find people you can learn from."<sup>2</sup>

At the age of 18, Sridhar became the youngest U.S. Rhodes Scholar in the organization's one hundred-year history. Rhodes Scholarships are among the

### 3

## The Right to Excel: Asian Americans and Educational Opportunity

### VISIBILITY AND INVISIBILITY

On January 26, 2005, Intel Corporation announced the forty finalists in their Intel Science Talent Search. This contest is the oldest and most prestigious pre-college science competition, often considered the "Junior Nobel Prize." Alumni of this contest hold more than hundred of the world's most coveted science and math honors including six Nobel Prizes, three National Medals of Science, and ten MacArthur Foundation Fellowships. The selected finalists vie for the top prize, a \$100,000 scholarship. The second-place finalist receives a \$75,000 scholarship and the third-place finalist receives a \$50,000 scholarship. Among the forty finalists, seventeen were Asian American. They included the following:

- June-Ho Kim, 17, of Cupertino, California, studied the ability of antibodies to reduce the symptoms of experimental autoimmune encephalomyelitis (EAE), a murine model of multiple sclerosis (MS). He is on the debate team and co-president of the Future Physicians of America Club at Monta Vista High School. An accomplished pianist, June-Ho is a founding member of both the Perfect 5th Ensemble and the Appassionato Club, which entertains senior citizens, and he is Youth Committee co-chairman for the Santa Clara Valley Red Cross. June-Ho is the son of Dr. Youngbae and Jiyeon Kim.
- Pooja Sunil Jotwani, 17, of Pembroke Pines, Florida, researched the effects of a quark matter core on neutron star cooling. Her observations of cooling

most prestigious academic awards, which provide two to three years of study at Oxford University in England and are the oldest international study awards given to U.S. students. Selection of Rhodes Scholars is based not only on intellectual distinction but potential for leadership and greater service to the world. Among the many famous Rhodes Scholars are former President Bill Clinton and Supreme Court Justice David Souter. Before her Rhodes Scholarship Sridhar was in the Medical Honors Program at the University of Miami (which offers early admission to medical school). Her career aspiration includes medical school as well as international health policy. Fluent in five languages, she is also an accomplished solo violinist and a ranked tennis player. She was captain of her high school varsity tennis team, which won two state championships as well as three regional titles. In addition she has written a children's book on Indian myths and is working on a book of short stories exploring the confusion of growing up in two cultures.<sup>3</sup>

All these are just a few recent high-profile examples of what *Time* magazine has called "The New Whiz Kids." The seemingly phenomenal success of Asian Americans in education from kindergarten through graduate school has humbled other students, impressed their teachers, fascinated researchers, and drawn tremendous media attention. Asian American over achievers was a particularly popular topic in major newspapers and magazines throughout the 1980s. A small sample of these news stories shows the use of provocative titles such as "Confucian Work Ethic" (*Time*, 1983); "A Formula for Success" (*Newsweek*, 1984); "An American Success Story: The Triumph of Asian Americans" (*New Republic*, 1985); "Why Asians Are Going to the Head of the Class" (*New York Times Magazine*, 1986); "When Being Best Isn't Good Enough" (*Los Angeles Times Magazine*, 1987); "The New Whiz Kids" (*Time*, 1987); and "The Model Minority Goes to School" (*Phi Delta Kappan*, 1988).<sup>4</sup> Today, such stories are almost passé.

Much of the early mainstream media coverage made comparisons between the experiences of Asian American students of the 1980s and Jewish American students of the 1920s and 1930s. During this latter period, there was noticeable educational mobility among second- and third-generation Jewish Americans, compared to other ethnic groups. For example, by the late 1930s nearly half of all Jewish students in New York City completed high school, a remarkable achievement that only a quarter of all other students were able to accomplish at the time. In addition, although Jewish Americans represented just 3.7 percent of the U.S. population at the time, they represented 9 percent of all college students in the nation.<sup>5</sup>

The recent phenomenon of Asian American success in schools is very much a result of the large influx of post-1965 Asian immigrants from Asia and the 1975 first-wave Southeast Asian refugees who were largely middle class and educated in their home countries. It is generally the offspring of these immigrants and refugees who are doing so well in school. According to the U.S. Census report, *Educational Attainment in the United States: 2003*, just over 50 percent of foreign-born persons from Asia are college graduates, compared to 27.2 percent of all U.S. foreign-born (see Table 3-1). "Foreign-born professionals have been a double gift to the United States," writes Leon F. Bouvier and David Simcox,

**Table 3-1** Educational Attainment of the Population 25 years and Over by Nativity, Race, and Hispanic Origin 2003

	High School Graduate or more	Some College or more	Bachelor's Degree or more
Total Population			
Native	87.5	54.2	27.2
Foreign-born	67.2	42.7	27.2
Non-Hispanic Whites			
Native	89.6	56.4	29.7
Foreign-born	86.1	56.8	37.6
Black			
Native	80.3	44.4	16.3
Foreign-born	77.3	47.6	25.4
Asian			
Native	91.8	72.7	48.3
Foreign-born	86.6	66.1	50.1
Hispanic			
Native	73.5	40.4	13.5
Foreign-born	44.7	21.5	9.8

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, "Educational Attainment in the United States: 2003," issued June 2004 at <http://www.census.gov/prod/2004pubs/p20-550.pdf>.

authors of the report *Foreign-born Professionals in the United States* (1994). "They have helped meet the needs of under-served populations and enriched scientific research and education. Moreover, they tend to have children who perform well academically and in many cases will themselves become professionals."<sup>6</sup>

This sentiment is confirmed in the research work of University of Chicago researchers Marta Tienda and Grace Kao. The two researchers conducted a national survey of nearly 25,000 eighth graders and found that Asian, Latino, and African American children with immigrant parents indeed out-perform other racial minority groups whose parents were born in the United States. The study showed that first- and second-generation Asian Americans had the highest achievement levels when compared to third-generation Asian Americans. First- and second-generation Asian American eighth graders tended to have higher grade point averages, and scored about five points higher on standardized reading and math tests than their more Americanized third-generation Asian American peers. Similar, but less spectacular, findings were true for first- and second-generation blacks, primarily immigrants from the Caribbean. Conversely, Latino immigrants did not show significant scholastic achievement compared with third-generation Latinos. However, the first- and second-generation Latinos did express a greater desire to graduate from college.<sup>7</sup>

Scholastic Aptitude Test (SAT) scores have often been used as evidence that Asian Americans are, in fact, the "model minority" when it comes to

**Table 3-2** SAT Average Scores by Race/Ethnicity 2002-2004

Group	2002	2003	2004
<b>Verbal</b>			
African American	430	431	430
Asian American or Pacific Islander	510	508	507
Hispanic or Latino Background	446	448	451
Puerto Rican	455	456	457
Latin American, South American, Central American, or Other	458	457	461
Hispanic or Latino	527	529	528
<b>White</b>			
<b>Math</b>			
African American	427	426	427
Asian American	569	575	577
Hispanic			
Mexican or Mexican American	457	457	458
Puerto Rican	451	453	452
Latin American, South American, Central American or Other			
Hispanic or Latino	464	464	465
White	533	534	531

Source: The College Board at [http://www.collegeboard.com/about/news\\_info/cbsenior/y2004/reports.html](http://www.collegeboard.com/about/news_info/cbsenior/y2004/reports.html).

academic achievement. Results from the 2004 SAT showed Asian-Americans scored an average of 1084 (out of a total of 1600) on the combined verbal and mathematics sections. Compare this to the 1059 average for whites, 857 average for African Americans, and overall 915 average for Hispanic or Latino Americans (see Table 3-2). Although the high SAT scores for Hispanic or Latino Americans (tallying a low verbal score (507) with a high mathematics score (577), some claim the SAT scores of Asian Americans show the objective and unbiased nature of the test, and the inherent fairness of the U.S. educational system. "Before throwing out in toto America's schools as we have known them, it would be productive to look at how and why these very schools seem to work so well for what can only be considered a most singular and unlikely minority, the Asian Americans," writes Daniel B. Taylor, former vice president of the College Board. In a rather twisted compliment to Asian Americans, Taylor adds, "It is more than a little ironic . . . that American schools seem to serve best the *most inherently alien* of their clientele. . . . 'Miraculous' might be a more apt descriptor," (emphasis mine).

Although overall educational achievement among immigrant and native-born Asian Americans is impressive, this does not mean there are no serious issues that need to be confronted and addressed. This chapter will first focus on

the contrasting theoretical perspectives that try to answer the vexing question why Asian Americans seem to do so well in school. Second, this chapter will examine some of the most important educational issues for Asian Americans in primary school (K-12). These issues include students with limited English proficiency, parental pressure and stress on young Asian American students trying to live up to the "model minority" image, and racial violence against Asian Americans in school. Lastly, this chapter will highlight the backlash against Asian American educational "success" that emerged on college campuses across the nation. Particular emphasis here will be on alleged quotas in elite colleges and universities that became the biggest issue in higher education throughout the 1980s. It is important to note that all of these issues are closely related to, and often manifested in, all levels of education. For example, the lack of services for limited English proficient Asian American immigrant students in primary school just a few years ago has made it all the more difficult for these students to perform successfully in college today—if they've gotten there at all. Also, alleged quotas against Asian Americans in higher education in the 1980s have been ironically revisited today but this time on the high school level.

### WHY ASIAN AMERICANS DO SO WELL IN SCHOOL

There have been many scholarly attempts to explain what appears to be an uneasy Asian American mastery of the American educational system. Theories in this matter can easily be broken down into three general categories: (1) nature, or innate genetic superiority; (2) nurture, or cultural advantages versus cultural disadvantages; and (3) relative functionalism, or a complex combination of primarily both situational and structural forces. All three perspectives have been hotly debated and are by no means limited to just Asian Americans. However, these three perspectives do offer distinct philosophical and practical challenges to education policy in the United States.

#### Nature/Genetics

For centuries both biological and social scientists have made attempts to "prove" genetic superiority and inferiority of certain racial groups. "Scientific racism" can be traced back to the work of Count de Gobineau, Houston Chamberlin, Madison Grant, Samuel Morton, and many others in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. These writers tried to argue that physical differences were a reflection of intellectual differences. In 1849, for example, Morton collected eight hundred crania from all over the world and attempted to show that cranial size equated intelligence. He filled each cranium with sand, measured the capacity, calculated the average, and came up with the following hierarchy: English (96 cubic inches); Americans and Germans (90 cubic inches); African Americans (83 cubic inches); Chinese (82 cubic inches); and American Indians (79 cubic inches). Because the English had the largest average cranial capacity,

Morton theorized, they must be the most intelligent. Conversely, Chinese had a much smaller average cranial capacity, so they must be generally less intelligent. Flawed as Morton's research was, attributing the inferiority of certain racial groups to inherent genetic deficiencies was used to help justify the institution of slavery, the spread of European colonialism throughout the world, and restrictive immigration laws.<sup>9</sup>

This theoretical perspective of genetic superiority/inferiority is not an anomaly of the past, but is a contemporary issue that continues to gain attention. In *Educability and Group Differences* (1973), University of California educational psychologist Arthur Jensen speculated that differences in Intelligence Quotient (IQ) scores between blacks and whites was due in substantial part to biological inheritance. Jensen, however, did not stop at looking at just blacks and whites. Although Samuel Morton may have concluded that Chinese were intellectually inferior because of their smaller cranial capacity, Jensen's research found "Orientals" (mostly Chinese) to be highly intelligent. Jensen tested nearly ten thousand children in kindergarten through fourth grade in twenty-one California schools and found "Orientals" exceeded all other groups.<sup>10</sup> Since the publication of his book and in other studies, Jensen's work has been thoroughly criticized on many counts. One area of criticism focuses on the methodological flaws in Jensen's research in that he failed to consider important variables such as historical disadvantage, cultural bias, social class, and geography. Another area of criticism comes from Jensen's heavy reliance on IQ test scores that are generally acknowledged to be very ineffective and inconclusive measures of anything that could be considered innate intelligence.

Despite these criticisms, others have followed Jensen's research and tried to control for variables in hopes of presenting better evidence of genetically based intelligence. One of the most notable is Richard Lynn, from the University of Northern Ireland, whose research claims that Chinese, Japanese, and Koreans score higher on standardized IQ tests than whites. For example, in his article, "The Intelligence of Mongoloids: A Psychometric Evolutionary and Neurological Theory" (1987), Lynn cited a number of studies that confirmed his conclusions.<sup>11</sup> The one work that did not agree that Asians had a higher mean IQ score was a six-year study headed by University of Michigan psychologist Harold Stevenson (1985). Stevenson and his colleagues' research is significant, however, because it carefully compared kindergarten, first-grade, and fifth-grade students of similar socioeconomic backgrounds in three similar sized cities—Minneapolis, Sendai (Japan), and Taipei (Taiwan). "This study offers no support for the argument that there are differences in the general cognitive functioning of Chinese, Japanese, and American children," the authors wrote. "Positing general differences in cognitive functioning of Japanese and Chinese children is an appealing hypothesis for those who seek to explain the superiority of Japanese and Chinese children's scholastic achievement, but it appears from the present data that it will be necessary to seek other explanations for their success."<sup>12</sup>

The genetic superiority/inferiority debate was rekindled with the publication of two controversial books: *Race, Evolution and Behavior* (1995) by J. Philippe

Rushton and *The Bell Curve* (1994) by Richard J. Herrnstein and Charles Murray. *The Bell Curve* received the most media attention and critical response with its provocative assertions. The authors have five interrelated arguments. First they claim 60 percent of every individual's IQ is genetic in origin; second, IQ is a reliable predictor for social, economic, and educational success or failure; third, blacks have the lowest average on IQ tests relative to other groups; fourth, it is unlikely that environmental factors can account for racial group differences in IQ; and lastly, any attempts to improve group performance on IQ tests by making environmental changes will fail.

While *The Bell Curve* focuses primarily on blacks and whites, the authors could not avoid studies that looked at Asian IQ scores. Herrnstein and Murray freely cite Lynn's studies that show Asians consistently have higher IQ scores than whites, but they are contradictory about what the findings really mean. On one hand, Herrnstein and Murray believe Asians "probably" have higher IQs because they tend to do better in "visual/spatial" versus verbal abilities. This is exaggerated for non-English-speaking immigrants but tends to be true even for Asian Americans who are monolingual English speakers. According to Herrnstein and Murray, this is why Asian immigrants and Asian Americans tend to abound in fields such as engineering, medicine, and the sciences, rather than literature, law, or politics. On the other hand, the authors acknowledged that the Asian/white IQ differences are small and any general comparisons are subject to error without proper controls. Within this, Herrnstein and Murray agreed with the work of Harold Stevenson that when you do control for socioeconomic differences, the distinctions between Asian and white IQ scores disappear.<sup>13</sup>

Overall, like the work of Arthur Jensen twenty years earlier, *The Bell Curve* created controversy but proved nothing. The book's faulty logic, overreliance on problematic studies, uncritical faith that IQ test scores equate to general intelligence, and ignorance of studies showing the important value of early educational intervention in raising educational performance and achievement levels are all pointed out in numerous reviews.<sup>14</sup> Innate ability is obviously an area of heated argument. A less controversial—and more accepted—reason why Asians and Asian Americans seem to perform well academically is quite simple: Asians work harder.

Data from a 1980 national survey of 58,000 students in 1,015 high schools conducted by the U.S. Department of Education show that roughly half of Asian American sophomores spend five or more hours per week on homework. Only about a third of the white students and a quarter of the black students put as much time into their homework. In addition, the survey found that 45 percent of the Asian Americans never missed a day of school, and 42 percent said they were never late.<sup>15</sup> A follow-up survey of 25,000 eighth graders, their parents, teachers, and school administrators throughout the nation was conducted in the spring of 1988, and it came up with very similar results. Researchers Samuel S. Peng and DeeAnn Wright (1994) analyzed the follow-up information in detail and concluded that home environments and educational activities account in large part for the differences in student achievement between Asian Americans and other minority students. They found that Asian

Americans were more likely to come from stable, two-parent home environments, spent more time at home doing their homework, and spent less time watching television. Asian Americans were also found to be involved in educational activities that are more conducive to learning outside of school (e.g., language, art, music), and took part in more educational activities (e.g., visiting the public library and going to museums) than other minority students. Lastly, Peng and Wright found that Asian American parental expectations were the highest of any other group. The average Asian American parents expected their child to complete 16.7 years of education, which means education beyond a baccalaureate degree (see Table 3-3). The researchers highlighted the fact that about 80 percent of Asian American parents expected their children to have at least a bachelor's degree compared with 62 percent of white, 58 percent of black, and only half of the Hispanic parents.<sup>16</sup>

### Nurture/Culture

Studies show that Asian Americans do work harder, so the question now becomes *why* do Asian Americans work harder? A great deal of attention has been focused on Asian cultural values that place a high priority on education, hard work, and family honor as the main reason for Asian American academic success. Anthropologists William Caudill and George DeVos (1956) described how Japanese American students excelled in school, despite the overt prejudice

**Table 3-3** Percentage or Average Score on Select Variables by Race/Ethnicity

Variable	Asian	Hispanic	Black	White	Native American
<i>Demographics</i>					
% living with both parents	79.4	65.2	38.8	68.2	53.5
% of parents with > BA +	22.2	5.5	5.5	13.9	4.2
% with income < \$15,000	17.8	37.5	47.0	18.1	40.1
<i>Discipline</i>					
Hours per week doing homework	6.8	4.7	5.2	5.7	4.7
Hours per week watching TV	20.6	22.0	26.7	20.3	22.7
<i>Additional Lessons/Activities</i>					
% having outside lessons	65.6	44.6	45.1	61.6	42.6
% having outside activities	91.5	79.9	83.2	91.1	78.4
<i>Educational Expectations/Pressure</i>					
Number of years of education	16.70	15.25	15.24	15.32	15.11

Source: Samuel S. Peng and DeeAnn Wright, "Explanation of Academic Achievement of Asian American Students," *Journal of Educational Research* 87:6 (1994): 349, Table 2. Reprinted with permission of the Dwight Reed Educational Foundation. Published by Heldref Publications, 1319 Eighteenth St. N.W., Washington, DC 20036-1802.

and discrimination they faced during World War II. The authors pointed to the strength and persistence of Japanese culture, as well as strong parental involvement, as the two main reasons for this phenomenon. Sociologist Betty Lee Sung also underscored the importance of culture in academic success. "Chinese respect for learning and for the scholar is a cultural heritage," Sung writes in her book *The Story of the Chinese in America* (1967). "Other minorities have not had the benefit of this reverence for learning."<sup>17</sup>

Research conducted by Nathan Caplan, Marcella H. Choy, and John K. Whitmore (1989, 1991) focused on recent Southeast Asian refugees, and their conclusions serve to further reinforce the cultural argument. The University of Michigan team surveyed 6,750 Vietnamese, Laotian, and Chinese-Vietnamese in five urban areas (Orange County, Seattle, Houston, Chicago, and Boston). The survey population represented the second wave of refugees from Southeast Asia and generally had limited exposure to Western culture, had virtually no English-language proficiency, and often arrived in the United States with little more than the clothes on their backs. From the large sample, two hundred nuclear families and their 536 school-age children were randomly chosen to be part of more intensive interviews.<sup>18</sup>

The researchers concentrated on the children's academic achievements including grade-point averages (GPA) and standardized test scores. Despite the fact that many of the Southeast Asian children faced traumatic situations leaving their home countries, faced language barriers, and often lived in poverty after they arrived in the United States, their grades and test scores were generally superior to other American students. It was found that 27 percent of the Southeast Asian immigrant students had a GPA in the A range, and 52 percent were in the B range. Just 17 percent of the GPAs were in the C range and only 4 percent had a GPA below the C range. On standardized tests, 27 percent of the Asian immigrant students scored in the top ten in math.<sup>19</sup>

However, the researchers did not believe that the high GPAs and test scores occurred in a vacuum. Caplan, Choy, and Whitmore credit Asian cultural values that are deeply rooted in Confucian and Buddhist traditions for the success of Southeast Asian immigrant students. Central to these traditions, they argue, is the family. The researchers found that both the parents and the children have a strong sense of obligation to the entire family. One example the researchers cite is how homework time served as a mutually satisfying family affair in many of the Southeast Asian households studied. After dinner, the table is cleared and parents encourage their children to study. In most of these cases, older siblings helped younger siblings while doing their own homework. The researchers were also impressed by the fact that Southeast Asian high school students spent an average of three hours and ten minutes on their homework on weeknights, while Southeast Asian junior high school students averaged two hours and five minutes.<sup>20</sup>

Caplan, Choy, and Whitmore also found that Southeast Asian students seemed to have a high sense of completion gratification, which the researchers attribute to traditional Asian culture. At the same time, both the parents and children believed that learning came from hard work and effort, rather than

from innate intelligence. This attitude differs considerably from findings in a 1992 U.S. Department of Education study, *Hard Work and High Expectations: Motivating Students to Learn*. The study concluded that most American students attributed academic achievement with intelligence and that success in school is easy if you are smart. Conversely, if you do not do well in school you must not be smart and, therefore, there is no use in trying. Most students said they preferred to be seen as smart rather than as hardworking because if you have to put a lot of effort into your work, it is a sign of being a slow learner.<sup>21</sup>

Recent works by Asakawa and Csikszentmihalyi (1998 and 2000) offer confirmation of earlier studies. In a study of 1,109 randomly chosen sixth, eighth, tenth, and twelfth graders, the researchers found Asian American adolescents had more positive experiences when they were engaged in activities perceived to be more work-like and future-oriented (doing homework, studying, listening to the teacher, etc.); Asian Americans were significantly happier, enjoyed themselves more, and felt better about themselves than their white counterparts. The internalization of cultural values was suggested as a factor for promoting the educational success of Asian American students. The researchers also found Asian American parents "structured" their children's lives for academic success more than white parents. Structured activities for academic success included planning where the child should go to college, discussing ACT/SAT preparation, limiting TV and video games, and assigning fewer household chores. Asian American parents also tended to leave their children alone when engaged in academic related activities, but overtly exercised control when engaged in nonacademic related activities.<sup>22</sup>

The cultural perspective is the most commonly cited and easy to understand reason for Asian American academic achievement. However, the cultural perspective does have its own controversial aspects. The most important is the logical extension in the cultural argument: If Asian Americans have the "right" cultural values, does it mean that other minority groups are culturally "deficient"? This prickly side of the cultural argument can be divided into two types. First, there is cultural deficiency based on *socioeconomic* status, known as the "culture of poverty." This was the thesis Edward Banfield focused on in his book *The Unheavenly City* (1970), in which he argues that "lower class" culture includes having an extreme present orientation rather than a future outlook on life, lack of self-discipline, and a heightened sense of hopelessness and powerlessness. People in this "culture" tend to do poorly in school, are unable to maintain steady employment, and live in poverty. While the culture of poverty may be a phenomenon with a long history of prejudice and discrimination for some groups, this is not the center of Banfield's work.<sup>23</sup>

The other type of cultural deficiency argument is based on the idea that *certain groups* of people either lack the right kind of cultural values, or they accentuate the wrong parts of their culture, which would inhibit their social, economic, and educational mobility. A key proponent of this notion is prominent conservative African American economist Thomas Sowell. This argument was forwarded in his book *Ethnic America* (1981), where he writes, "cultural inheritance can be more important than biological inheritance, although the

latter is more controversial." In terms of education, for example, Sowell believes history shows that Chinese, Japanese, and Jews have different attitudes toward educational achievement than Mexicans, blacks, and Puerto Ricans. At the same time, some aspects of culture are best kept under wraps. He writes: "Some groups (such as Jews and the Japanese) have enjoyed and maintained their own special culture, but without making a public issue over it (as blacks and Hispanics have)." Although Sowell makes a point that cultures are neither "superior" nor "inferior," he does believe they need to be flexible and appropriately adapted to different circumstances. Some cultural groups, according to Sowell, are more adept at this than others. Sowell's arguments have remained unchanged over the years and are highlighted in his more recent publication *Race and Culture* (1994).<sup>24</sup>

### Relative Functionalism

Attitudes and values are clearly emphasized within the cultural perspective, but are they enough to explain Asian American educational achievement? The cultural perspective has been criticized for being ahistorical, relying too heavily on stereotypes, and lacking in any acknowledgment of social context. With this in mind, two Asian American psychologists, Stanley Sue and Sumie Okazaki, have developed a third theoretical perspective they call "relative functionalism." Relative functionalism does not deny the influence of culture, but it does add other *structural* factors that also deserve attention. In their article "Asian-American Educational Achievements: A Phenomenon in Search of an Explanation" (1990), Sue and Okazaki contend that Asian American educational achievement is a result of limited opportunities in noneducational areas. In other words, education becomes important when there are great limitations in noneducational areas. This is particularly true for groups that are culturally oriented toward education and have a history of academic success.<sup>25</sup>

Relative functionalism takes a broad interdisciplinary approach to explain Asian American educational achievement and draws from the work of sociologist Stephen Steinberg, education specialist Bob Suzuki, and anthropologists John Ogbu and Maria Matute-Bianchi. Sue and Okazaki first cite from Steinberg's book *The Ethnic Myth* (1981) because he significantly undermines the thesis that certain ethnic groups succeed because they possess innately superior cultural values. Steinberg argues that socioeconomic class factors in the home country, economic necessity, and historical accident in the new host country converge to move ethnic groups up or down the economic and educational ladder. In the chapter "The Jewish Horatio Alger Story," Steinberg examines the Jewish experience in the United States in the 1880s during the industrial revolution.

Steinberg agrees that thousands of Eastern European Jews arrived in the United States materially poor. At the same time, however, many Jewish immigrants were literate and brought with them a variety of occupational skills that corresponded remarkably well to the needs of an expanding American economy. These factors gave Jewish immigrants an advantage over other immigrants in the labor market and in public school at the time. Steinberg asserts

that literacy was a valuable asset for Jewish immigrants for three reasons. First, the fact that many Jewish immigrants were literate in their language helped to facilitate the acquisition of a new language. Second, being literate obviously helped Jews enter into business and more lucrative occupations that required an ability to read and write. Third, literacy provided an educational head start for Jewish children. "In terms of their European background, Jews were especially well equipped to take advantage of the opportunities they found in America," writes Steinberg. "It is this remarkable convergence of factors that resulted in an unusual record of success."<sup>26</sup>

This parallels the situation for the highly educated and skilled middle-class Asian American immigrants' experiences in the United States since 1965. In addition, the types of skills brought by Asian immigrants do tend to be science and technology oriented, which offer the best opportunities for gainful employment and upward mobility in a highly competitive, postindustrial economy. This attention to education, and to professions that are in demand, does not go unnoticed in the children of immigrants.

Sue and Okazaki next refer to Bob Suzuki's provocative article, "Education and the Socialization of Asian Americans: A Revisionist Analysis of the 'Model Minority' Thesis" (1977), where he posits that Asian Americans pursue a narrow education and professional training because of their "status as a minority group." In other words, Asian Americans gravitate to quantitative fields such as engineering, medicine, and the sciences because of their own perceived (whether conscious or not) limitations. These limitations may be linguistic, in the case of Asian immigrants, or racial, as in the case of more assimilated Asian Americans. In short, Suzuki believes that Asian Americans excel in education because they believe it will get them a better job, higher income, and higher status. According to Suzuki, Asian Americans realize they would have difficulty in other avenues for advancement because of discrimination. Suzuki's thesis contradicts Herrnstein and Murray's argument that Asians and Asian Americans are genetically more inclined to enter the science and technology fields. Suzuki also challenges the widely accepted idea that Asian Americans do not face discrimination, have achieved middle-class status, and have almost completely assimilated into the American mainstream.<sup>27</sup>

But the fundamental question arises, "Why don't other racial minority groups adopt education as a means of socioeconomic mobility?" Sue and Okazaki confront this question by stating that different minority groups have different historical and contemporary experiences. Here they cite the work of John Ogbu and Maria Matute-Bianchi (1986), who have forwarded the idea that individuals and groups develop "folk theories" of success. For example, it is generally assumed that if one works hard and gets a good education, one will get a good job and succeed. However, this belief is not true for everyone. Folk beliefs are influenced by a variety of factors such as past history of success, past history of discrimination, availability of successful role models, cultural values, and the like. As a result, some may develop a folk belief that "it doesn't matter how hard I work or how much education I receive, I will still be discriminated against." Sue and Okazaki contend that different racial minority groups have different folk

beliefs about education. They cite the work of Roslyn Arlin Mickelson (1990), who found that African Americans generally believe in the importance of education, but they are less likely than whites to believe in the value of education in their own lives. Sue and Okazaki argue that the folk belief for Asian Americans may very well be: "If I study hard, I can succeed, and education is the best way to succeed" (emphasis theirs).<sup>28</sup> Sue and Okazaki's relative functionalism theory takes into consideration the complex factors of class (Steinberg), race (Suzuki), and sociohistorical context (Ogbu and Matute-Bianchi) in their analysis of Asian American academic achievement.

Criticisms of Sue and Okazaki's relative functional theory were published in the August 1991 issue of the *American Psychologist*. One writer, David Fox, from the California School of Professional Psychology and the Loma Linda University School of Medicine, even advanced a theory that Asians and Jews excel in education because their native languages are read and written from right to left. According to Fox, right-to-left writing leads to increased and flexible cerebral functioning that affects intellectual performance. Richard Lynn also wrote a sharp rebuttal to Sue and Okazaki's conclusions and reiterated his own arguments in favor of innate biological differences. In their response to the critics, Sue and Okazaki dismissed Fox's views as "speculative," highlighted many of the "problematic" assumptions of Lynn's genetic research, and maintained that relative functionalism is an "important consideration" in the debate over Asian American educational achievement.<sup>29</sup>

## EDUCATIONAL ISSUES FACING ASIAN AMERICANS

Theoretical questions aside, the relative "success" of Asian Americans in education does give the impression that Asian Americans do not face any significant educational and personal issues. However, limited English proficiency, parental pressure and stress, and racial violence in school are three issues that are especially acute for Asian American students. These three issues impact all Asian Americans from all socioeconomic lines to some degree. Of course, limited English proficiency is particularly important to the increasing number of Asian immigrant students entering public schools across the country.

### *Limited English Proficiency (LEP)*

As early as 1982 the U.S. Department of Education estimated there were 3.6 million school-aged limited English proficient (LEP) students across the nation and the 2005 U.S. Department of Education "Title III LEP Biennial Report to Congress" estimated approximately 5.1 million LEP students nationwide.<sup>30</sup> Asian Americans are not the majority of LEP students in the United States, but because of the large influx of Southeast Asian refugees and continued immigration from Asia, there is an overrepresentation of Asian American LEP students based on their percentage in the population. Dramatic statistics from

the latest available Language Census Summary from the California Department of Education showed just 53 certified bilingual Vietnamese-speaking teachers and 41,456 Vietnamese-speaking students, a ratio of 1 to 113. There were 44 certified Hmong-speaking teachers to 29,474 Hmong students, a ratio of 1 to 670. Lastly, there were just 2 certified Khmer-speaking teachers to 17,637 to Khmer-speaking Cambodian students, a ratio of 1 to 8,818!<sup>31</sup>

The most important legal precedent related to the rights of all LEP students goes back to the U.S. Supreme Court case *Lau v. Nichols* (1974). The case involved a San Francisco student, Kinney Lau, who was failing school because he could not understand the language of instruction. A class action lawsuit was filed in 1970 on behalf of Lau and about 1,800 other Chinese American students. At the time of the case, the San Francisco Unified School District was serving more than 100,000 students, 16,574 of whom were Chinese American. Almost 3,000 Chinese American students in San Francisco were in need of special help in English, but the district had fewer than two dozen remedial teachers who were fluent in both Cantonese and English. The suit originally lost in a federal district court but was appealed all the way to the U.S. Supreme Court. In 1974 the high court ruled unanimously to overturn the lower court's decision, finding that the San Francisco Unified School District failed to provide equal opportunity for LEP students. After the Lau decision, the impact on LEP students has been mixed. The primary problem has been inconsistent implementation and enforcement of programs intended to benefit immigrant students.<sup>32</sup>

Certainly there have been success stories of remarkable acquisition of English as a second language by some Asian American immigrant and refugee students. This was the case for A-Bo, who emigrated from Taiwan to San Jose, California, when she was 15 years old. She had been an exceptionally gifted student in her home country, but was immediately placed in the English as a Second Language program because of her inability to read and write English. Fortunately, A-Bo was very well educated in all basic subjects prior to entering the United States, and she was able to learn very quickly. Her advanced knowledge of mathematics was obvious and she soon started helping her teacher solve problems. Within just one year she became quite comfortable in English and even joined the debate team. A-Bo's success can be explained by studies that show students with a strong educational background in their own primary language (speaking, reading, and writing) can more readily transfer that information, and this forms a solid foundation for learning a new language.<sup>33</sup>

This example, however, cannot be generalized and may be misleading because there is a great range of educational experience among Asian immigrant and refugee students, and their own abilities to acquire a second language. It is important to remember that not all Asian American immigrant children come from well-educated, urbanized, middle-class and above families, nor do all Asian Americans glide effortlessly through school. Indeed, many Asian American immigrant children, especially those who come from families at the lower end of the socioeconomic levels, face considerable educational and acculturation challenges throughout their educational careers. Nonetheless, many LEP students face tremendous struggles, whatever their backgrounds.

The case of Shia-chi is illustrative of this fact. Shia-chi was also 15 years old when she arrived in Los Angeles from Taiwan. Her parents were well-to-do owners of a clothing factory in Taipei who sent Shia-chi to live with an aunt in order to have a good education in the United States. Shia-chi was not an exceptional student in Taiwan, and her solo relocation to the United States only exacerbated her academic troubles and low self-esteem. Even though she took three years of English in a Taiwanese school, Shia-chi was unable to speak, read, or write adequately enough and was unable to adjust to her new situation. She did attend English as a Second Language classes but continued to have difficulty mastering a new language. Although Shia-chi graduated from high school, she is considered "LEP-forever," ill-prepared for the rigors of college and lacking in the language skills needed for meaningful employment.<sup>34</sup>

Concerns over Asian American LEP students prompted an early call for action by the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights (1992). "Our investigation has revealed that these needs of Asian American LEP students are being dramatically under-served," the report stated. "They need professional bilingual/bicultural counseling services to help them in their social adjustment and academic development."<sup>35</sup>

However, on June 2, 1998, California voters overwhelmingly approved Proposition 227, which mandated an end to bilingual education in favor of English immersion, or English-only, instruction for LEP students. The vote was decisive—61 percent of voters supported the measure, while just 39 percent opposed it. On one hand, Proposition 227 reflected anti-immigrant sentiment among California voters that had been boiling since the mid-1980s when voters passed Proposition 63, declaring English the official language of the state.<sup>36</sup> Since that time public schools have become a prominent battleground, as the enrollment of LEP students more than doubled over the past decade.<sup>37</sup> By 1998 one quarter of California public school students and one third of first graders were LEP. Voters in the election were overwhelmingly white and resentful about paying taxes for "other" people's children.<sup>38</sup> An exit poll by the *Los Angeles Times* showed 69 percent of the voters statewide were white, 14 percent were African Americans, 12 percent were Latino, and 3 percent Asian American. As expected, 67 percent of whites voted in favor of Proposition 227, while 52 percent of African Americans and 63 percent of Latinos were opposed. Asian American voters, it is interesting to note, supported Proposition 227 by a 57 to 43 percent margin.<sup>39</sup>

The results are in from standardized tests required by all students in grades two through eleven since California ended bilingual education. Overall, the percentage of students scoring at or above the 50<sup>th</sup> percentile was greater in 1999 than 1998, and the results would generally be seen as "better." Continued improvements were seen in the 2004 test results. Opponents of bilingual education claim success in the scores and credit Proposition 227. Proponents of bilingual education are not so sure of the results and say there are several factors to be considered before deciding that the differences are real and not random fluctuations. Table 3-4 shows the improvements for LEP students, but also highlights the wide achievement gap between LEP students



and non-LEP students. At this time there are no separate results or studies focusing specifically on Asian American LEP students.

**Parental Pressure and Stress**

The research of Peng and Wright cited earlier touched upon the fact that Asian American parents have higher academic expectations for their children compared with other parents. Although high expectations are important in encouraging excellence, excessive high expectations can create undue pressure and unhealthy levels of psychological and emotional stress on young students. One case involved a 17-year-old Korean high school student who was reportedly beaten by her father because her grade-point average dropped below a perfect 4.0. The father was arrested for child abuse and pled not guilty.<sup>40</sup> This is an extreme example, of course, but several studies have shown many Asian American parents commonly express their displeasure when their children bring home anything less than a straight-A report card.<sup>41</sup> When one Asian American student showed her parents a report card with all As except for one B, the parents focused only on the B grade and chastised their child for not working harder. The student became resentful because she had brought home a report card of which any other parent would be proud.<sup>42</sup>

For many Asian American children growing up in traditional Asian families, filial piety—respect and obedience toward one's parents—is expected. Although more acculturated Asian American parents do allow their children greater independence and freedom than immigrant Asian parents, studies show that Asian American parents do tend to exercise more control over their children's lives than non-Asian parents. Parental control may extend as far as choosing what courses to take in school, what school they should go to, and what their college major should be. In addition, Asian American parents are far more controlling of their children's social lives. A comprehensive 1992 survey of high school seniors found only 40 percent of Asian American students dated at least once a week, compared with 64 percent of whites, 52 percent of blacks, and 58 percent of Hispanics.<sup>43</sup> Asian American parents use guilt and shame rather than physical abuse to keep their children in line and to reinforce the fact that their children have strong obligations to the family. Their children often feel extremely self-critical and alienated when they fail in their parents' eyes. In some cases, young Asian Americans become so distraught they attempt suicide. This is what happened to young Paula Yoo, whose parents saved her just before she slit her wrists with a razor blade. "I wasn't class valedictorian and yes, I flunked calculus," Yoo wrote in a very personal essay published in *A Magazine*. "I was stupid because I didn't make all A's. I was absolutely convinced I was destined for failure."<sup>44</sup> Conversely, Asian American parents feel extremely responsible for their children's success in school and in their future careers. Their children's successful academic achievements are a direct reflection of their own parenting abilities. If their children do well in school, then they have been good parents; if their children do poorly in school, then the parents are to blame because they didn't do enough. A volatile situation may erupt when the young

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**Table 3-4** Score Summary Reports for State of California, Spring 1999, 1998, and 2004 Percentage Scoring at or Above 50<sup>th</sup> National Percentile Rank

Spring 2004 Grade Level	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11
Reading LEP	28	13	11	14	14	10	7	12	12	11
Non-LEP	57	45	46	49	55	54	51	57	57	53
Math LEP	46	37	29	26	25	17	19	17	23	18
Non-LEP	65	60	55	57	60	55	55	52	57	50
Language LEP	26	22	21	17	11	11	12	15	13	12
Non-LEP	51	52	53	54	51	51	52	55	56	53
LEP Students Tested: 1,194,998										
Spring 1999 Grade Level	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11
Reading LEP	19	12	11	9	9	7	8	3	3	4
Non-LEP	56	53	53	53	54	54	57	41	39	41
Math LEP	33	28	21	19	22	16	15	19	20	22
Non-LEP	57	56	52	53	59	52	52	55	49	50
Language LEP	24	19	20	19	18	17	12	15	7	11
Non-LEP	58	54	57	57	58	60	57	57	45	53
LEP Students Tested: 911,489										
Spring 1998 Grade Level	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11
Reading LEP	15	9	9	8	7	7	7	3	3	4
Math LEP	26	21	17	16	18	14	13	19	17	19
Language LEP	19	14	18	17	15	15	12	14	6	10
LEP Students Tested: 806,419										

Source: California Department of Education, California STAR State Summary Reports 1998, 1999, 2004 at <http://istar.cde.ca.gov/>.

student's desires do not match his or her parents' high and sometimes rigid expectations. A good example of this can be seen in Audrey Teoh's experience after she told her father she didn't want to study engineering like he wanted her to. After a heated argument, Teoh's flustered father finally said, "You have given up!" She sadly recalls the way her father said those words "just made me feel so small." For his part, Teoh's father believes his "lifetime of experience" gives him the right to tell his daughter what is best for her. At the same time, the episode did leave Mr. Teoh very distraught. He asks, "Was I too strict on my children? Do I overreact? I really have no reference by which to compare my child-rearing methods, and I will never really know for sure what I'm doing is right."<sup>45</sup>

Recent attention on the pressures placed on young Asian Americans by their parents came in the form of the biographical book *An Extreme Asian-American Upbringing* (2003), written by Emily Guey under the pseudonym Mei Jyu-Chwang Lee. Guey was a former National Spelling Bee contestant and accomplished musician who graduated with honors from the University of Florida. In her book Guey describes her mother as physically and emotionally abusive in an obsessive drive to make her daughter a superachiever. Although the names of the family members were changed, Guey has been increasingly open about the issue of child abuse and neglect in Asian American homes. She wrote an online essay on the topic where she wrote: "Depression, suicide, and performance anxieties should not permeate Asian Americans to such a frightening degree. Surely they should respect and honor their parents after all of the hard sacrifice they have made for them, but respect should not mean bowing down to extremely unrealistic expectations, pressures that can permanently damage their mental health."<sup>46</sup>

Some Asian American parents not only will pressure their children to excel in school, but also may go through extreme hardships to ensure the very best educational opportunities. One Chicago-area study found more than eight out of ten Asian American parents said they would sell their house and give up their own future financial security to support their children's education. Only three out of ten white parents were willing to make this sacrifice.<sup>47</sup> In Fullerton, California, Sunny Hills High School is recognized as one of the truly elite public schools in the United States. The school has been nicknamed "high pressure high" and is known for its zero dropout rate, the fact that students compete for A+ grades, and as a place where all-night study sessions are considered a badge of honor. Sunny Hills is affiliated with the International Baccalaureate (IB) Organization, a Swiss foundation with headquarters in Geneva, Switzerland. The IB diploma program is a comprehensive, rigorous pre-university course of study for the academically talented. Students in the program are required to pass three higher and three subsidiary level exams that are graded externally. Students are also required to take the course "Theory of Knowledge" that culminates in a twenty-page research paper. In addition, students in the IB program are required to perform one hundred fifty hours of community service.<sup>48</sup>

Sunny Hills High has also seen a dramatic increase of Asian American students in recent years. In 1985, whites represented 72 percent of the student population, while Asian Americans represented 18 percent. Today, the Asian

American student population at Sunny Hills High is over 50 percent, while the white population has declined to just over 20 percent. The percentage of Asian American students at Sunny Hills is remarkable considering Asian Americans represent less than 20 percent of the school district's population. Korean Americans are the largest Asian ethnic group at Sunny Hills, and many Korean parents pay a steep price—sometimes as high as \$1 million—to buy a home within Sunny Hills' boundaries. Other parents are known to stay in Korea but send their children to live in Fullerton and attend the school. Still other parents borrow addresses from people who live within the district to make their children eligible. "There are Korean parents here who don't even speak English but know the SAT cutoff to get into Stanford," exclaims astonished English teacher Kimberley Stein. "When I was in high school, my parents didn't even know what the SAT was."<sup>49</sup>

Asian American parents not only sacrifice but also some are willing to fight for their children's education. In San Francisco, an extremely contentious situation emerged at the city's academic preparatory school, Lowell High. Lowell High School was founded in 1856 and is the oldest public high school west of the Mississippi River. In 1978, the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) sued the San Francisco Unified School District (SFUSD), charging racial segregation. A U.S. district judge issued a consent decree in 1983 after an agreement was reached between the two parties that no ethnic group exceed more than 45 percent of enrollment at any one school. Chinese American parents long denounced the enrollment cap because it forced a limit on the number of Chinese American students who could go to Lowell High. Since 1978, the Chinese American student population has grown to 25 percent of the SFUSD, which makes it the largest single racial group in the district and an important constituency to reckon with. Chinese American parents became especially outraged in 1993 when they learned that higher entrance standards were placed on their children applying to Lowell relative to other groups. The initial plan required Chinese American students to score 66 out of 69 points on a scale that was based on a combination of grade-point average and standardized test scores in order to gain admission to the school. Meanwhile, 59 was the cutoff score for whites, and 56 for African Americans and Hispanics. The following year, the Chinese American Democratic Club (CADC) filed a class action lawsuit against the California Board of Education and the San Francisco Unified School District challenging the 1983 consent decree.<sup>50</sup>

The lawsuit created a firestorm of debate within the Chinese American community. On one hand, Roland Quan, vice president of the Chinese American Democratic Club, argued that the admission criteria for all students should be based solely on merit, which simply means that those with the highest point totals should be accepted to Lowell High regardless of race. "Opportunities and success based on individual dedication and hard work are the hallmark of America," Quan said. "Unfortunately, the public education system in this country sets its standard at mediocrity."<sup>51</sup> On the other hand, long-time civil rights activist Henry Der looked beyond the issue of individual merit and standard test scores. "Chinese Americans are too hung up on these basic-skills test scores," he

argued. "(T)he difference between a student who scores a 59 and another who scores a 64 is practically negligible. There's nothing magical about these point scores. . . . There's such an inordinate amount of pressure being placed on these Chinese kids by their parents to get into Lowell that when they get rejected, they feel so debased."<sup>52</sup>

Der prefers to focus attention on the broader issue of educational fairness and equity in a society stratified by both race *and* class. He contends that a strict merit-based system serves only to perpetuate inequality among students who are forced to attend inferior schools, who have limited English skills, and who are poor. Der conducted a study of the Chinese students in San Francisco and found that three quarters of Chinese applicants to Lowell High School in 1993 lived in the most affluent parts of San Francisco. Der contends these students have more options in terms of school choice, access to alternative schools, and associations with high-achieving students than most other students. "Asian Americans can and should acknowledge internal class differences that impede low-income Asian Americans from achieving success," Der writes. "To the extent that low-income Asian students are bused or assigned to other low-income racial minority schools, the educational needs of all low-income racial minorities deserve the highest public priority and diverse set of remedies."<sup>53</sup>

The arguments of both Quan and Der were apparently taken into consideration when the San Francisco school board voted in a new admission policy for Lowell High School. In February 1996, the city school board voted unanimously to use a single cutoff score of 63 out of 69 to apply to all ethnic groups beginning in the 1996–1997 school year. However, to comply with court-monitored desegregation, the new policy allows for up to 30 percent of the incoming class to be reserved for low-income students. Students in this group will be allowed to enter Lowell even if they score less than 63 points, but no student will be admitted if they score below 50. The new admissions policy at Lowell High is generally acknowledged to be a compromise offer, and not everyone is completely happy. Roland Quan of the CADC complemented the board for moving "in the right direction," but made it clear that his organization, which represents the parents suing the school district, will continue on with their lawsuit.<sup>54</sup>

In February 1999, the Chinese American plaintiffs reached a settlement in their case over Lowell High School's admission policies. The SFUSD agreed not to use race as a primary factor in school admissions and assignments and would eventually phase out the 1983 consent decree altogether. Despite the settlement, the controversy is far from over, and the war of words continues. On November 24, 1999, the SFUSD submitted its revised plan to U.S. District Judge William Orrick that did not include race as a primary factor for admission, but did include race as a factor among several others. Amy Chang of the Asian American Legal Foundation, a group that supports the plaintiffs in this case, complained that the alternative policy "is an incredible disappointment."<sup>55</sup> Henry Der is particularly concerned that the lawsuit and continued fighting over the settlement make Chinese Americans look short-sighted and selfish. He sees some Chinese American parents being "obsessive" and acting "as if students of other racial backgrounds cannot or do not deserve to benefit from a Lowell education."<sup>56</sup>

Implementation of a new school admissions plan began in 2001. Parents were allowed to choose five schools they wanted their children to attend, but a "diversity index" formula of six socioeconomic factors determined a student's school placement: family income, the primary language spoken at home, mother's education, preschool experience or standardized test scores, and the student's prior school's ranking would determine the final placement. Problems began from the very beginning, including a "computer glitch" that eliminated the preference of keeping siblings together at one school. By far the loudest complaints were from Chinese American parents who did not get assigned to a school of their choice, saying their children would have to commute for hours across town to get to school. The pressure peaked in 2003 when a group of Chinese American parents called for a boycott of the schools. One of the group's leaders was John Zhao, an immigrant from Shanghai, China, working two jobs as a cook, and a parent of a then-13-year-old daughter. In a blistering editorial published in the May 29, 2003, issue of *Asian Week* Zhou wrote: "My daughter was assigned to Philip and Sala Burton High School, which is about 10 miles from my residence. I live just a few blocks away from Lincoln High School. I decided to rally the community, parents, students and relatives so we can collectively demonstrate to the San Francisco Unified School District and the school board that their decisions are wrong and unjust. . . . I certainly feel that I speak out because I am a responsible parent who cares for the health and well-being of my daughter. If the SFUSD expects me to shut up and look the other way, they are asking me not to be a parent."<sup>57</sup>

While parent indignation over the school admission plan is not unreasonable, some of the Asian American students did not feel the arguments focused on the root of the problem, which is to have their children attend only the prestigious and high-performing schools in the city. "Many Asian parents don't want their kids going to schools that don't have the words Lowell, Lincoln or Washington in them," said 17-year-old high school senior Delores Lee. "They think that if their kids go to a school with a perceived bad reputation, then their kids will be looked down upon and lose face." Another high school senior, Crystal Cao, agreed. "It's not the distance they're worried about," she said noting that parents would not complain if they lived far away from Lowell or Lincoln high schools. "Why do they want to send their kids to Harvard or UC Berkeley or faraway schools?" Social worker and school counselor Yen Dinh adds that protesting parents may create even more stress for their children and some may begin to act out. "(T)hese kids can only take so much that something bad is going to happen," she explained. "These kids are not only trying to juggle school, but also trying to fit in and cope with puberty and, if they've recently immigrated to the United States, learning the new language and culture."<sup>58</sup>

The stress created by parental pressure is significant, but it is by no means the only source of conflict for Asian Americans in school. Another cause comes from the school environment itself. This leads to the third major educational issue facing Asian Americans. A major survey of eighth, tenth, and twelfth-grade students found a high percentage of Asian American students did not feel safe in school and often witnessed fights between different racial or ethnic

groups. Just under 16 percent of Asian American students surveyed did not feel safe in school. This figure is second only to black students (16.1 percent), but is higher than Hispanics (14.7 percent) and whites (8.6 percent). More than 30 percent of Asian American students often witnessed fights between different racial or ethnic groups, which was second only to Hispanics (31.9 percent), but higher than blacks (22.2 percent) and whites (20.9 percent).<sup>59</sup>

### ***Racial Tensions and Violence in Schools***

Daily verbal and physical clashes have, unfortunately, become a part of life for many Asian American youth. Although anti-Asian sentiment and violence will be covered in greater detail in Chapter 5, special attention on racial tension and violence in schools is placed here. Because Asian Americans are racially different, sometimes speak with an accent, are viewed as perpetual foreigners, and are seen as clannish overachievers by jealous schoolmates, they have become targets of harassment and bigotry.

The most horrific example of racial violence against Asian Americans in schools did not come from another student or a teacher. It came from an outside intruder wearing military camouflage clothing and armed with an AK-47 style assault rifle, who opened fire into a schoolyard full of children in Stockton, California. On the morning of Tuesday, January 17, 1989, one day after the Martin Luther King, Jr. holiday, Edward Patrick Purdy came to the Cleveland Elementary School and fired off 105 rounds into a playground filled with children on recess break. Five children were shot and killed, and thirty-one others were wounded. Of the children who died, the oldest was 9 and the youngest was 6. Four of the children were Cambodian and one was Vietnamese. After a few minutes of mayhem, Purdy heard police sirens. He dropped his rifle, pulled out a 9-mm pistol, and killed himself with a single shot in the head.<sup>60</sup>

For several years prior to the killings, the city of Stockton witnessed a large increase in the number of Southeast Asian refugees. At the time of the shooting, about one out of six residents in Stockton were born in Southeast Asia, which is one of the highest proportions of Southeast Asian refugees in the country. The Cleveland Elementary School's enrollment was more than 70 percent Southeast Asian and was a reflection of the broader changes in the community. An October 1989 report to the California State Attorney General concluded that Purdy "focused a particular dislike on Southeast Asians," and the selection of Cleveland Elementary School for the site of the attack was not a random choice. Indeed, Purdy had once attended Cleveland Elementary School, which was by 1989 "dominated by Southeast Asian children, the offspring of those who were the current target of his resentment."<sup>61</sup> The Stockton schoolyard killings are an extreme example of how anti-immigrant and anti-Asian resentments infiltrate the primary and secondary schools.

The above incident confirms what was highlighted in three of the most often cited studies on immigrant students in public schools. The research of John Willshire Carrea (1988), Laurie Olsen (1988), and Ruben G. Rumbaut and Kenji Ima (1988) all found racial and ethnic hostility, as well as anti-immigrant

sentiment, to be a part of the social environment in many schools and communities.<sup>62</sup> Although most of the abuse toward immigrants is from other students, sometimes teachers also openly express their antagonism and bigotry. In addition, there are serious conflicts between native-born and foreign-born students of the same racial and/or ethnic group. American-born Asian Americans often look down upon, and want to disassociate themselves from, immigrant "FOB" (fresh off the boat) students. The immigrants, of course, are not immune to nor ignorant of these attitudes around them. "Almost every student in our sample reported the first school year included incidents of being called names, pushed or spat upon, deliberately tricked, teased and laughed at because of their race, language difficulties, accent or foreign dress," Olsen writes. "Comments like, 'they look down at us,' 'they think we are going to take over,' 'they wish we'd go back where we came from,' or 'they think we are taking their jobs and money' were most common."<sup>63</sup>

Incidents of racial intolerance occur against both immigrant and U.S.-born Asian Americans, and in crowded inner-city schools as well as in seemingly secure suburban schools. Unfortunately, taunting and fighting between students are frequently dismissed by school administrators either because of their insensitivity, or because they do not want to raise the specter of serious racial problems on or near their campuses. In the summer of 2003 a group of fifteen to twenty high-school-aged white youths brutally beat five Asian American teenagers on the streets of San Francisco. The assault was not only physical but included the use of racial slurs against the victims. Despite the seemingly obvious hate-motivated nature of the crime, it wasn't until community organizations applied public pressure to force an investigation by the San Francisco Police Department and finally a district attorney prosecution. Only one of the fifteen to twenty assailants, "Matthew M.," was officially identified and charged with a crime and he refused to identify any of the others involved in the attack. It took a year before the case went to trial and in the end "Matthew M." was convicted of two felony assaults with felony-hate crime enhancements. He was sentenced to a year of probation and hundred hours of community service.<sup>64</sup>

The negative reaction to the soft sentence was sharp and swift. "This case has caused me to become disheartened with the community that I live in," said one of the victims, Ken Zeng. "I have never seen such hate out of anyone's eyes like Matthew M. It has left me wondering if I will be safe at all, even at my own church."<sup>65</sup> The last comment referred to the fact that Matthew M. was a student at Sacred Heart Cathedral Preparatory, an elite private high school in San Francisco, and the irony of the light sentence for a serious hate-motivated violence was not lost to *AsianWeek* columnist, Emil Guillermo. Guillermo argued that the Sacred Heart had a vested interest in a light sentence for Matthew M. to protect the school's image among its affluent student body and governing board members. In addition, it was Sacred Heart that recommended Matthew M. do his hundred hours of community service at On-Lok, a senior care facility serving primarily Asian Americans. It turned out that Matthew M. is related to a member of the San Francisco Health Commission. "Smell any potential conflict here?" Guillermo asked. "Connections count in San Francisco when it comes to

rehabbing an upper-crust hate criminal. The lesson in this hate crime seems to be: You can get away with one fairly easily if you're rich, white and know the right people." Guillermo also quoted the victims' attorney Edwin Prather, who said, "Yeah, I'm upset. It's San Francisco. It's the haves and the have-nots."<sup>66</sup>

This incident in San Francisco and its results highlight the need for communities and students to organize and force change away from entrenched denial by school administrators, law enforcement, and some parents. Along with interracial conflicts, there is also increasing attention to youth violence among Asian and Pacific Islanders in schools. The Asian & Pacific Islander Youth Violence Prevention Center (API Center), a partnership between the University of Hawaii and the National Council on Crime and Delinquency (NCCD) is the leader on research, evaluation, and training in this area. The aims of the API Center are to

1. Mobilize and collaborate with community-based organizations, social services agencies, educational institutions, and juvenile justice agencies to develop a comprehensive strategy and community plan to reduce API youth violence.
2. Develop and conduct research on prevention of API youth violence using sophisticated methods and state-of-the-art technology, in collaboration with human and social service agencies.
3. Disseminate research findings and provide a national resource for prevention research, and promising effective prevention programs for API youths.
4. Train and develop new researchers in the area of violence prevention research.
5. Develop a training curriculum for health professionals on API youth violence prevention.<sup>67</sup>

Asian American and Pacific Islander youth violence and victimization have not been seen as significant problems to law enforcement or academic researchers. There are a number of factors for this including the image of Asian Americans, especially the youth, as the "model minority," the broad diversity that make up the Asian American and Pacific Islander communities, the underutilization of social services, and limited interaction with law enforcement and the judicial system. In a comprehensive review of thirty-four studies on Asian American and Pacific Islander delinquency (Le, 2001), it was concluded that researchers have only begun to examine this issue, and recommendations were made for future studies. Among the recommendations was the need to focus on the relationship between culture (both an individual group's culture and the culture of the dominant society) and delinquency: "What we do know about the sociocultural aspects of delinquency is mostly based on findings from research conducted on White, African American and some Hispanic youths. In fact, in three of the largest longitudinal studies on risk/protective factors related to delinquency . . . not only was culture egregiously omitted, but APIs were not even considered in the sample pool."<sup>68</sup>

The API Center is fully aware of the diversity among Asian American and Pacific Islander groups and has been examining the idea of "cultural competence" commonly used in mental health, social work, and health care, and applying it to the area of youth violence and prevention. "Cultural competency" is defined as "a set of congruent behaviors, attitudes, and policies that come together in a system, agency or among professionals" specifically addressing various needs in a cross-cultural environment for a variety of services and treatments.<sup>69</sup> The projects the API Center concentrates on are collaborative efforts with community-based organizations, policymakers, and law enforcement in specific cities (Honolulu, Oakland, and San Francisco) to assess the needs, issues, and possible solutions to Asian and Pacific Islander youth violence. Along with an impressive body of academic research, there have been other important results from this work. For example, in Hawaii the emphasis has been placed on developing a curriculum for health care professionals on all levels of higher education (undergraduate, graduate, and post-graduate). The curriculum emphasizes culturally effective care and application of knowledge gained from reviewed research on violence prevention.<sup>70</sup>

The report "Culture Counts: How Five Community-Based Organizations Serve Asian and Pacific Islander Youth (2003)," identified in Oakland and San Francisco culturally competent characteristics of programs whose primary clientele was Asian Pacific Islander youth. The studied programs provided a model of best practices that (1) increased the understanding of a variety of issues pertaining to Asian and Pacific Islander youth violence; (2) enhanced communication among clients, staff, and parents; (3) implemented interventions that truly address the needs, interests, growth and development, and perspectives of youth; and (4) produced outcomes that contribute to Asian and Pacific Islander health and welfare.<sup>71</sup> Most recently the API Center partner, the NCCD, and the California State Attorney General sponsored a Statewide Dialogue on Asian and Pacific Islander Youth Violence on August 17, 2005. The event facilitated discussions that address the diversity of Asian and Pacific Islander groups and promote dialogue among youth, community members, advocates, law enforcement, legislators, media, and foundations. Through these efforts of the API Center, risk and protective factors for Asian and Pacific Islander youth violence and victimization is becoming an important issue in today's society.<sup>72</sup>

This section has shown examples, from Stockton schoolyard killings to the violence in the streets of San Francisco, that both anti-immigrant and anti-Asian resentments as well as co-ethnic conflicts, infiltrate primary and secondary schools. Unfortunately, the same types of attitudes and structural inequalities have also reached deep into higher education in both overt and covert ways. Foremost among them have been concerns of alleged quotas against Asian American applicants to the most elite and prestigious college campuses in the country.

## BACKLASH IN HIGHER EDUCATION

At the State University of New York-Binghamton, three Korean American students and one Chinese American student were attacked outside their dormitory

allegedly by a group of white students. During the attack racial slurs like "You damn chinks!" and "This is what you get for being a chink!" were made. The incident took place on February 27, 2000, and resulted in one student, John Lee, suffering a fractured skull. Angered by what they considered to be the university's slow response to the assault, more than three hundred students staged a rally and a sit-in to call attention to the case. The demonstrations were led by the Asian Student Union (ASU), an umbrella organization of several Asian American groups on campus. ASU also demanded an apology from the school and the immediate expulsion of the suspected attackers. ASU's efforts helped to hold attention on the case and several months later two white Binghamton students pled guilty to charges stemming from the attack. Nicolas Richetti pled guilty to attempted assault and was sentenced to eight consecutive weekends in prison and five years probation. He also agreed to make financial restitution to the victims. Christopher Taylor pled guilty to disorderly conduct and was sentenced to fifty hours of community service and a \$250 fine. A third student, Chad Scott was charged with just a misdemeanor in the incident. Richetti was expelled from the university. Taylor was suspended for two years, and Scott was allowed to remain in school. "My friends and I were singled out and attacked because of the color of our skin," said an angry John Lee during a press conference following the announcement of the plea bargains and what many considered to be light sentences. "(H)ad I been white, this would not have happened to me." Lee continues to suffer from his injuries and requires on-going medical treatment.<sup>73</sup>

In March 1992, a small group of Asian American students at Pomona College, an expensive and exclusive liberal arts college in Claremont, California, unveiled a banner that read: "Asian American Studies Now!" That evening, under the cover of darkness, the banner was defaced and altered to read: "Asian Americans die Now!" This message of hate shook the tiny campus and in one swift move undermined six years of work by Asian American students to bring an Asian American perspective to the college community and into the general curriculum. This incident is indicative of a backlash that had been brewing against the increasingly conspicuous presence of Asian Americans on college campuses throughout the United States for several years. Despite the setback, Pomona College now houses part of what is known as the Intercollegiate Department of Asian American Studies. The program offers a rich interdisciplinary curriculum that is available to students within the Claremont Colleges (Claremont McKenna, Harvey Mudd, Pitzer, Scripps, and Pomona).<sup>74</sup>

Another notable incident occurred in December 1987 at the University of Connecticut (UConn) when four Asian American couples boarded a bus to attend a formal dance. The couples were humiliated throughout the ride by taunts and threats and were spat upon by a rowdy group of four male students sitting in the back of the bus. Two of the students reported the terrible episode to campus police, university administration, and the local law enforcement authorities, but felt they were given the "run around." The incident was given attention only when the two students threatened to contact the press. Eventually, one of the offending students was expelled from the school for one year.

The other student, a star football player, was mildly punished and was still allowed to play for the football team. The handling of the case so enraged Asian Americans on campus that one Asian American faculty member, Paul Bock, staged a one-person demonstration at UConn's commencement in May 1988 holding a picket sign reading, "Please Reduce Institutional Racism at UConn." Professor Bock also held an eight-day hunger strike to draw attention to what he felt was continuing anti-Asian sentiment on campus.<sup>75</sup>

Bock later resigned his position at UConn and formed the Asian American Council of Connecticut. In 1990 Bock filed a complaint with the U.S. Department of Education's Office of Civil Rights (OCR), charging that Connecticut illegally excluded Asian Americans and American Indians from a program to recruit and retain minority students and faculty. The OCR ruled in Bock's favor in 1993, and the Connecticut Board of Governors for Higher Education agreed to comply with recommended changes. Asian American leaders across the nation applauded the OCR's ruling, and said the decision sets an important precedent against many colleges that exclude Asian Americans for stereotypical reasons. "Connecticut had the worst record against Asian Americans in higher education of any state," Bock said.<sup>76</sup>

### *Alleged Quotas in Higher Education*

Universities and colleges across the nation historically have welcomed a small number of the most privileged young people from Asian countries. The goal of these foreign students was to obtain the best education available and return to their home countries as government officials, educators, business, military, and church leaders. Following World War II, many foreign graduate students in the United States, especially those studying in science and engineering fields, chose to stay in this country because of the opportunities for gainful employment in industry and at research universities. Their skills were in great demand during the Cold War-era competition with the then-Soviet Union. Since the late 1970s, Asian Americans have made tremendous inroads into the most prestigious centers of post-secondary education. Although Asian Americans today represent only about 4 percent of the U.S. population, they made up 13 percent of the undergraduate population at Princeton (2004), 16 percent of the undergraduate population at Harvard (2003), and 24 percent of the undergraduate population at Stanford (2004). In California, where Asian Americans represent about 12 percent of the state's population, the percentage of Asian American undergraduate enrollment is even more impressive. As early as 1981 Asian Americans at the University of California, Berkeley, represented 21.5 percent of the undergraduate class, while whites represented 65.0 percent of the class. By 2004, Asian Americans made up 41.0 percent of the undergraduates at UC Berkeley compared to just under 30 percent white.<sup>77</sup>

Despite these seemingly positive statistics, it was not long ago that American-born Asian students confronted subtle discrimination policies that had the very real effect of limiting their numbers and participation. A major controversy erupted in 1983 when the Asian American Students Association at

Brown University (AASA) issued a statement claiming "a prima facie case of racial discrimination against Asian Americans."<sup>78</sup> The primary focus of the group's charge was the clear decline in the admissions rate of Asian American applicants to Brown relative to the university as a whole. The AASA had been monitoring Brown University admissions since 1979 and was deeply disturbed by several findings. Chief among them was that in 1975 the admit rate for Asian Americans at Brown was 44 percent, but by 1983 the admit rate for Asian Americans was just 14 percent. During this same period, the number of Asian Americans applying to Brown increased eight-and-a-half times. The AASA's report also found that Asian American and white applicants were comparable in their academic qualifications, and saw no reason to "justify such a drastic decrease in the admit rate."<sup>79</sup>

Across the country, UC Berkeley professor L. Ling-chi Wang happened to be scanning the university's fall 1984 admissions figures and was taken aback by what he saw. To his surprise, Wang found that the absolute numbers of first-year Asian Americans dropped from 1,303 in 1983 to 1,031 in 1984. This drop of 21 percent was quite an anomaly considering the numbers and percentages of Asian American freshmen at Berkeley had been rising steadily for several years, and this was projected to continue through 1990. Wang began reviewing admissions figures after attending several meetings in which disparaging comments were made about the number and quality of Asian American students at UC Berkeley. "I began to feel very uncomfortable that all these people from different departments are saying things about Asians," Wang admitted. "(S)ome English department professor said that we should do something about these Asian students who are really deficient in the English language."<sup>80</sup> What began as an uneasy feeling quickly gathered momentum and became one of the most heated controversies in higher education in years.

Soon the specter of quotas against Asian Americans spread across the country. "I don't want to say it was a conspiracy, but I think all of the elite universities in America suddenly realized they had what used to be called a 'Jewish problem' before World War II, and they began to look for ways of slowing down the admissions of Asians," Wang told the *New York Times*. "As soon as admissions of Asian students began reaching 10 or 12 percent, suddenly a red light went on."<sup>81</sup> The "Jewish problem" Wang refers to is the restrictive quotas placed on Jewish Americans at a number of elite colleges and universities from the 1920s through the 1950s. During this period, the percentage of Jewish admissions dropped and even the most qualified Jews were excluded from faculty positions in higher education. As greater media attention began to focus on the Asian American admissions issue in the mid-1980s, universities such as Yale, Princeton, Cornell, Stanford, UCLA, among others, came under close scrutiny and even federal investigation.

Not surprisingly, no university admitted to any conscious wrongdoing or deliberate quotas against Asian Americans. However, Brown University acknowledged a "serious problem," and Stanford found "unconscious bias." In 1989, UC Berkeley chancellor Ira Michael Heyman publicly apologized for admissions policies that caused a decline in Asian American undergraduate enrollments.

"It is clear that decisions made in the admissions process indisputably had a disproportionate impact on Asians," Heyman said to a gathering of Asian American leaders. "That outcome was the product of insensitivity. I regret that occurred."<sup>82</sup> In 1993, UCLA was cleared of any wrongdoing by the U.S. Department of Education's Office of Civil Rights, but the school was ordered to offer admission to five Asian American students who were unfairly denied entrance into the mathematics department.<sup>83</sup> Investigations at Ivy League schools like Harvard and Princeton found admission rates for whites were indeed higher than for Asian Americans. The differences, however, were not interpreted as bias. In both cases, the lower admission rate for Asian Americans was due primarily to high admission rates to legacy students (children of alumni) and athletes, which are not illegal. Harvard and Princeton argued that legacy privileges are necessary because they serve the institutional goal of obtaining financial and service support from alumni.

A report from the U.S. Department of Education, Office for Civil Rights agreed that if the children of Harvard alumni are rejected, "affection" for the college could decline. If children of alumni were admitted, however, alumni "involvement" will be "renewed." This relationship is deemed crucial to a private, tuition-driven institution of higher education. The discrepancy between white and Asian American admits to Harvard was not extremely high, but did vary from year to year. For example, in 1983 the admission rates ranged from just 1.8 percent higher for whites (16.9 percent) than for Asian Americans (15.1 percent), to 6.3 percent higher for whites (17.6 percent) than for Asian Americans (11.3 percent) in 1990. However, admissions differences between whites and Asian Americans disappeared at Harvard when legacies and athletes were removed from the statistical analysis. These findings were verified in the research work of Stephen S. Fujita and Marilyn Fernandez (1995) using a rigorous and sophisticated statistical analysis.<sup>84</sup>

An even more dramatic case of special privileges given to children of alumni occurred at Princeton University. Between 1981 and 1985 the admission rate for legacy students at Princeton was approximately 48 percent, compared with a 17 percent overall admission rate for whites and 14 percent rate for Asian Americans. A 1985 internal student-and-faculty investigation at Princeton found Asian American applicants were rated higher than whites in terms of academic qualifications in four out of the five years between 1981 and 1985. During these years Asian Americans were rated "below average" in terms of the school's nonacademic criteria (legacy, athletics, affirmative action, extracurricular activities). Like most elite private universities, Princeton based its admission decisions not only on objective factors like grades and test scores but also on subjective and arbitrary factors, which, again, are not illegal and not deemed as an indicator of bias.<sup>85</sup>

### Problems with Subjectivity

How poorly do Asian Americans rate in terms of the "subjective," nonacademic criteria? In "Diversity or Discrimination? Asian Americans in College," authors

John H. Bunzel and Jeffrey K. D. Au (1987) cited one study of 30,000 Asian American and white high school sophomores and 28,000 seniors that found minimally lower participation differences in sports and artistic activities among Asian Americans and whites. For varsity athletics, the participation rate of Asian Americans was 30 percent compared to 34 percent for whites. Similarly, 9 percent of Asian Americans participated in debating and drama, compared to 13 percent of whites. At the same time, Asian Americans tended to participate more than whites in other extracurricular activities like honorary clubs, school newspapers, and specific subject matter clubs (i.e., science club, math club, history club, French club, etc.). This was also the case for participation in social, ethnic, and community organizations. Bunzel and Au concluded there was no evidence to "support the common stereotype that Asian Americans have significantly lower rates of participation in extracurricular activities than do Caucasians."<sup>86</sup> This conclusion is confirmed in the most recently available major survey of high school seniors that found Asian Americans are, indeed, quite active in school and community-related extracurricular activities (see Table 3-5).

Bunzel and Au's report also found other forms of racial stereotyping against Asian Americans by some university officials. Comments like Asian

Americans lack an appreciation for a "well-rounded liberal education," were made. Bunzel and Au heard statements like Asian Americans lack an interest in "public service," indicating a perception of greater selfishness and career-orientation among Asian Americans compared to whites, which is not confirmed in the survey cited above. When Bunzel and Au asked administrators why Asian American admission rates tend to be so low, the frequent response was that Asian Americans were an "over-represented minority" relative to their national population. Within this, admissions officers also acknowledge that "diversity" on their campuses was an important goal. This line of thinking is dangerous for three reasons. First and foremost, this statement shows an obvious ignorance of the tremendous social, economic, and ethnic diversity among Asian Americans, which has already been detailed in this and in earlier chapters.

Second, the notions of diversity and overrepresentation are selectively applied against Asian Americans. For example, there was never any talk about limiting the numbers of children of alumni at elite private universities such as Harvard or Princeton, even though they represent only a small percentage of the U.S. population. The Asian American Students Association at Brown University directly confronted this stereotype in its original 1983 report: "(T)ry limiting the number of alumni sons and daughters in the University to their overall national representation. The point here is not that we wish to cut (the number of) alumni children, but that this argument which Brown used to justify limiting acceptance of Asian Americans is invalid and inconsistent. . . . Indeed, such an argument for limiting admissions to reflect the national population levels only reinforces the idea that there exists an unwritten quota for Asian Americans at Brown."<sup>87</sup>

Third, and easily most controversial, conservative politicians and pundits saw the admissions controversy as a convenient vehicle to dismantle liberal affirmative action policies. Conservatives argued that admissions policies should be based only on merit, and framed the issue as Asian Americans fighting against blacks and Hispanics over limited space in the nation's most prestigious universities. "(A)ffirmative action discriminated against Asian-Americans by restricting the social rewards open to competition on the basis of merit," wrote conservative political columnist George Will. "(I)t is lunatic to punish Asian-Americans for their passion to excel."<sup>88</sup> This argument may seem persuasive at face value, and it is precisely the same argument used by Chinese American parents in the Lowell High School controversy in San Francisco. However, Asian American leaders in higher education flatly rejected eliminating affirmative action, and rejected the idea that the issue was a competition between racial minority groups. They said the real issue was that changes in, and subjective interpretations of, admission policies at various universities were used primarily to benefit whites. "I am not opposed to the use of additional criteria to bring in promising students, especially those who were currently under-represented," wrote L. Ling-chi Wang. "(But) the admission of larger numbers of whites under various color-blind, but protected, categories in fact account for the disparity between white and Asian American students at UC-Berkeley and other elite private institutions."<sup>89</sup>

**Table 3-5** Percent of High School Seniors in Extracurricular Activities by Race/Ethnicity, 1992

Activity	White	Black	Hispanic	Asian	Native American
<i>Athletics</i>					
Interscholastic team sport	30.8	32.3	25.8	28.3	30.4
Interscholastic individual sport	20.9	21.2	14.9	21.6	20.7
Inter-mural team sport	22.3	25.8	20.8	24.9	27.9
Inter-mural individual sport	12.5	16.7	14.0	14.7	18.2
<i>Performance</i>					
Cheerleading	7.4	10.6	6.7	5.1	11.9
Band/Orchestra	19.6	24.4	16.9	17.7	16.8
Play/Musical	16.1	15.9	10.6	13.7	14.0
<i>School</i>					
Student government	15.4	16.7	14.7	14.6	14.3
Honor society	19.6	14.0	12.5	27.2	13.6
Yearbook/Newsaper	19.7	14.3	16.8	18.9	21.2
Service clubs	13.6	13.6	14.4	19.3	11.6
Academic clubs	25.8	20.7	22.6	32.3	17.7
<i>Community</i>					
Religious	31.4	33.7	26.9	30.4	14.6
Youth groups	22.5	23.3	18.5	26.4	22.1
Community service	11.1	12.1	10.9	14.0	9.2

Source: National Center for Education Statistics, *Digest of Educational Statistics, 1995* (Washington DC: U.S. Department of Education, Office of Research and Improvement, 1995) Tables 140 and 142.



By the early 1990s admissions policies at many college and university campuses were reviewed and changed in response to challenges raised by Asian Americans. Constant vigilance must be maintained, however, to prevent any repeat of past problems. "If Asian American admissions should suddenly rise at a university," concluded Bunzel and Au, "it would be essential for all to understand that such an increase is not the result of 'unfair advantages' being given to Asian Americans, but rather the effect of unfair disadvantages being removed."<sup>90</sup>

**The Admissions Controversy Continues**

By the mid-1990s direct attacks on affirmative action swept the nation creating tremendous polarization of Asian Americans, especially in higher education. In 1995 the Board Regents of the University of California passed two resolutions eliminating the use of race, religion, sex, color, ethnicity, or national origins in its admission process, contracting, and employment. The following year, California voters passed Proposition 209, which prohibited the state from using most affirmative action programs. The passage of these policy measures had an immediate impact on freshman enrollments. There were 222 new African American, 531 Hispanic (Chicano/Latino Americans), and 63 Native American new freshman registrants at UC-Berkeley in fall 1995. By 2000 there were 148 African American, 320 Hispanic, and 20 Native American freshman registrants. During the same period, Asian American freshman increased from 1,268 to 1,629 and the number of white freshman increased from 1,018 to 1,122. Interestingly, the number of unidentified students or those with no ethnic data increased from 151 in 1995 to 341 in 2000. Table 3-6 provides figures from 1995 to 2004 and shows the number of African American, Mexican American, and Native American registrants continue to lag. UC-Berkeley is considered the flagship station for the UC system and, as a result, is the most competitive institution to gain admission to.

**Table 3-6** University of California, Berkeley, New Freshman Registrants by Ethnicity Fall 1995, 2000-2004

UC-Berkeley	1995	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004
African American	222	148	143	141	149	108
Native American	63	20	22	14	16	16
Hispanic	531	320	388	401	393	340
Latino						
Asian American	1268	1629	1688	1639	1598	1611
White	1018	1122	1134	1062	1050	1168
Unknown						
No Ethnic Data	151	341	343	276	299	282
Other	47	63	54	32	44	49

Source: University of California, Berkeley, at [http://www.berkeley.edu/news/media/releases/2004/12/02\\_enroll\\_table.shtml](http://www.berkeley.edu/news/media/releases/2004/12/02_enroll_table.shtml).

At UC-Berkeley the freshman admission rate, or the percentage of applicants actually being accepted, is 30 percent. The freshman admission rate for the UC system overall is 80 percent. As a result, figures from the entire UC system do not show as dramatic a change as with UC-Berkeley. The controversy over affirmative action and access to elite institutions of higher education is far from over.

This is evidenced by the boisterous 1998 debate between UC Regent Ward Connerly, who successfully led the effort to end affirmative action programs in the state, and Ethnic Studies professor Ronald Takaki, who is leading an effort to reinstate race-conscious social policy. Connerly argued that improving kindergarten through twelfth-grade education is the only fair way underrepresented minorities can successfully enter the university system. He said that university enrollment should be based solely on merit and objective criteria, such as grades and test scores. Takaki agreed that improvement in K-12 is necessary, but in the meantime, affirmative action is still needed especially for underrepresented minorities, many of whom lack the opportunity for college advance placement and test preparation classes that more privileged and affluent students take for granted. He noted that SAT scores only reliably predict family income rather than college preparedness.

During the debate Takaki announced that he is attempting to gather one million signatures to support what he called the "California Equality Initiative." The initiative states: "To act affirmatively in promoting equality of opportunity, it shall be lawful for the state to consider race, gender or socioeconomic class disadvantages in the selection of qualified individuals for university admission, employment and contracting." Connerly scoffed at the notion saying: "Professor Takaki opposed the action of the regents. He lost. He opposed 209. He lost. . . . At some point I would think he would get the message that the voters of California want to end preferential treatment." Takaki responded quickly to Connerly's challenge. "Let's put it out there. I might be able to prove you wrong."<sup>91</sup>

In response to the end of affirmative action and its effect on student enrollments, the University of California system has developed several proposals to change admissions policies that may serve to increase student diversity. One plan has been to eliminate the SAT requirement and give extra weight to applicants who participate in the university's outreach and academic preparation programs for low-income and first-generation students. There are also calls for UC campuses to admit more students based on factors such as a student's educational opportunities and socioeconomic background rather than focus only on grades and test scores. Nonetheless, many African American, Hispanic, and Native American students see the University of California as a hostile environment and are choosing to go elsewhere.<sup>92</sup>

**Broad Enrollment Trends in Higher Education**

Although the focus of this section has been on the rights of Asian American students in the elite universities, it is important to remember that many Asian Americans do not fit the model minority stereotype. Indeed, many Asian Americans are from poor and working-class backgrounds who must struggle for

access to a basic college education necessary to survive in a competitive job market. Their road is far afield from the students in elite institutions of higher education described above. For example, the San Francisco Bay Area has one of the largest concentrations of Asian Americans and is the location of two of the most prestigious universities in the United States. But while Asian American enrollments are high at both UC-Berkeley and Stanford University, they pale compared to City College of San Francisco (CCSF).

CCSF is a two-year community college that serves more than 110,000 full-time and part-time students through an Associate of Arts program and the city's adult education system. Asian Americans make up about half the students at CCSF. Lower-income students are drawn to the publicly funded community college that charges only a modest amount per academic unit. Students are most interested in attaining general education credits to transfer to a four-year college, obtaining job training or re-training, and learning English as a Second Language (ESL). In fact, the largest single block of Asian American students are enrolled in ESL classes. In 2004, CCSF was honored for its excellent service to immigrant students and at the same time the college opened a first-of-its-kind Asian Pacific American Student Success Center (APASS) aimed at working with students "at risk" for dropping out of the school. "APASS will provide API students with additional bilingual and bicultural counselors, instructors and tutors," explains Lawrence Wong, president of the CCSF board of trustees.<sup>93</sup> According to the latest available online figures, there are far more Asian American students in the community college system, and in the California State University (CSU) system, relative to the University of California system (see Table 3-7). A special report on Asian Americans in the CSU system also highlighted the need to address ESL needs of immigrant students. "While the issue of ESL support for students is a major concern on all CSU campuses, response to the needs of ESL students are just being initiated on many campuses and have not yet been addressed by others," the report states. "With notable exceptions, campuses of the CSU have not approached the language skill needs of immigrant students in a systematic manner that reflects the increased presence and importance of these students in the CSU."<sup>94</sup> The high numbers of immigrant students entering

**Table 3-7** Total College Enrollment in California Public Colleges and Universities by System and Ethnicity, Fall 2004

Group	University of California	California State University	Community Colleges
White	79,145	148,443	603,395
African American	6,103	22,585	116,686
Hispanic/Latino	24,771	84,179	454,536
Asian American	60,520	69,843	261,317
Native American	1,232	2,904	13,996
Not Stated/Unknown/Other	14,516	N/A	124,585

Source: University of California, California State University, and California Community College Web sites.

the CSU system with limited English proficiency is very much related to the lack of programs in K-12 to help these students improve their English language skills. Other serious issues raised by the CSU report include problems in campus climate and racial harassment and the need to diversify and incorporate multicultural and international perspectives into the curriculum. The report also highlighted the lack of Asian Americans in the faculty and in administrative or management positions, as well as the need for greater outreach to, and retention of, underrepresented Asian American groups.

In his article, "Trends in Admissions for Asian Americans in Colleges and Universities" (1993), L. Ling-chi Wang finds these enrollment patterns to be representative of the socioeconomic realities within the Asian American population, and the class hierarchies present in higher education. That is, students from upper-middle-class and above families tend to be drawn to the elite public and private universities. More often than not, students from poor, working-, and middle-class backgrounds head for the options that best suit their academic abilities, career aspirations, and their family's financial abilities to pay.<sup>95</sup>

## CONCLUSION

This chapter has shown that the super-achieving Asian Americans in education present a prominent but superficial image that needs to be analyzed in much more detail. Attention to Asian American "whiz kids" continues today, and is still drawing as much scorn as praise. Attention is only now being given to the issues and concerns of many Asian Americans in education as witnessed by the creation of the "Asian Pacific Islander American Scholarship Fund" (APIASF), a coalition of corporate and community organizations that have come together with the goal of raising and giving away \$3 million in scholarships. In 2005 APIASF awarded \$330,000 in scholarships to first-year college-bound students. APIASF leaders have set a goal to see all APIAs who wish to pursue higher education have that opportunity, regardless of their cultural backgrounds or economic means. Furthermore, APIASF leaders hope to encourage students to become future leaders in their respective communities, which, in turn, will help to strengthen the leadership of the country. Federal legislation has been proposed to authorize grants for colleges and universities that serve a high number and percentage of Asian and Pacific Islander American students to improve and expand their capacity to serve this specialized population. Colleges and universities that serve primarily low-income Asian and Pacific Islander American students would have preference in the grant approval process. This legislation would add an Asian and Pacific Islander American designation in the Higher Education Act that is already approved for colleges and universities that serve large numbers of African American and Hispanic students.<sup>96</sup>

This chapter focused on a variety of important educational issues facing Asian Americans from primary to post-secondary education. The controversy of affirmative action in enrollment at Lowell High School and at the University of California has served to polarize Asian Americans and pit them against other

groups. The "success" of Asian Americans in education has been, and continues to be, a complex and vexing issue for educators, social scientists, and political leaders. This notwithstanding, this chapter has shown that both race and class are important factors in understanding the relative success and difficulties faced by Asian American students in all levels of education. It is true that many Asian Americans have performed amazingly well in school and have a great deal to be proud of. At the same time, this should not take away from those Asian Americans who work extremely hard to accomplish what they have, and who must continue to struggle to make it through. Asian Americans, like most Americans, generally believe in education as the key to get ahead, believe in hard work and meritocracy, and believe that people should recognize their accomplishments. The experiences of Asian Americans described in this chapter challenge an uncritical faith in these beliefs.

## NOTES

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