

Frank Wu, "The Model Minority Myth"

What exactly is the "model minority myth?"

Is it that *on the average*, Asian Americans do better academically than any other racial or pan-ethnic group? No. Wu thinks this generalization is true.

Is it that

- 1) Asian Americans outperform other groups because of their *race* (i.e. because they are racially superior)?
- 2) Asian Americans outperform other groups because their *culture* encourages academic success more than does the culture of other groups?
- 3) What explanation does Wu provide for why Asian Americans do better academically, given that he seems to reject (1) and (2)?

Is Wu criticizing the association between Asian Americans and academic achievement *as a stereotype*, but not *as a true, statistical generalization*? What is involved in criticizing a stereotype?

Part of Wu's criticism seems to be that the association between Asian-Americans and academic achievement damages groups of people

1. It damages Asian Americans by
 - a. masking discrimination and violence against Asian Americans [NOTE: a group that is doing better than other groups can still be discriminated against.]
 - b. does not give credit to individual Asian Americans for their achievements
 - c. It conflates different Asian American subgroups (e.g. Chinese, Vietnamese), i.e. does not appreciate the important differences between them with respect to advantage and disadvantage.
 - d. although the association attributes a positive quality (academic success), it tends to suggest negative associations (nerd, geek, socially inept, etc.) when applied to Asian Americans. The good qualities seem to suggest bad ones.
 - e. harming Asian Americans' relationships with less successful minority groups (Latinos and blacks)
2. It damages blacks and Latinos by holding Asian Americans as an (inappropriate) model for them, thus masking the real bases for black and Latino underachievement.
3. It lets white people off the hook
 - a. by implying that black and Latino underachievement stems from their failure to emulate Asian Americans
 - b. by thereby masking white responsibility for the discriminatory regime that has caused black and Latino underachievement
4. Thus in an overall way, the MMM reinforces the existing racial hierarchy