

Reject Victim Politics

by Kenneth Lee

I'm glad that my article has sparked some badly-needed interaction in the Asian-American community at Cornell, but once again Asian-Americans such as Ms. Huang and the *Parallax* staff have distorted my message. First of all, she accuses me of calling people names. After perusing through my article, I have yet to see any epithets. However, I do apologize for calling her a "leftist" (after all, why would any sane person want to be a leftist?)

Ms. Huang offers statistics of her own, but she fails to grasp the gist of my article: that statistics can often be misleading when not handled properly. Case in point: She quotes an EEOC report that Asians with professional degrees earn less than similarly educated Whites. But we must remember that there are qualitative factors; not

all PhD's (or law degrees, etc.) are created equal. For example, someone with a doctorate from Cornell University will likely earn more money than someone with a doctorate from Cornell College in Iowa.

Today, most adult Asians in America are immigrants who have frequently earned their degrees in their native homeland, not the United States. And in America, people (and thus employers) tend to have higher esteem for people with degrees from American colleges than graduates from foreign universities. A Yale graduate will likely enjoy more prestige and earn more money than, say, a Seoul National University graduate in America. This despite the fact that Seoul

University's admissions standards are far more rigorous than Yale's, and that Seoul University enjoys more prestige than Yale in Korea. The EEOC report, alas, fails to take these qualitative factors into account.

But Ms. Huang's most serious error is her belief that whenever certain ethnic groups are "underrepresented", then it is *de facto* proof of racism. Ms. Huang states that Asians represent only 0.3 percent of the top corporate management level, and there are only six

Americans represent only 12% of the population, but dominate professional basketball. Why aren't 80% of professional basketball players white, considering whites represent 80% of the American population?

Is racism responsible for the paucity of Asians in the corporate world and the government? We may never know. But is racism the sole factor for it?

Absolutely not.

As for median family income, Asian income may be higher partly because they have larger families, but this effect is exaggerated. A larger portion of Asian families use their children to help out in the 'mom and pop' stores, and therefore they do not bring addi-

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"[Special treatment] will never end discrimination"

Asians in Congress. Therefore, according to her logic, racism is culpable for these statistical anomalies.

We live in a complex world, and there are numerous factors and conditions that account for "underrepresentation." To demonstrate the silliness of Ms. Huang's reasoning, consider Cornell's racial demographics. Asians account for nearly 20% of the Cornell student population, although Asians comprise only 3% of the American population. Following Ms Huang's logic, Cornell admissions officers must have a special affinity toward Asians — being Asian must virtually guarantee acceptance to Cornell. But why aren't there any Asian-Americans in the NBA? Black

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tional income. One needs to only look at Los Angeles stores to see this.

Ms. Huang also chastises me for using a "selective example" in mentioning Congressman Jay Kim's electoral success. But she is also culpable for the same offense when she includes anecdotal evidence of Mr. Matsui, et al. And I see no relevance of Jay Kim's occupation — He was an Asian-American who beat two wealthy white males in a very conservative congressional district that is nearly 80% white.

In one of the nefarious distortion of my words, she accuses me of being complacent and unwilling to fight discrimination in America. This is patently false. I, like any other level-minded person, abhor racism and hatred. And Asians-American do face discrimination in America (although not to a large extent as Ms. Huang claims) because in a country of 250 million people, there are bound to be bigots. But I believe that portraying oneself as a victim (and asking for preferential treatment) is demeaning and counter-productive.

One hundred years ago, recent Irish immigrants faced virulent discrimination: Shopkeepers would display signs such as "Irish need not apply." But today Irish-Americans hardly face discrimination. And the same goes for Jewish-Americans. Until recently, anti-Semitism ran rampant in America, but such sentiment has been subsiding, albeit slowly, over the years (except for hate-mongers like Louis Farrakahn).

Does anybody believe that Irish and Jewish immigrants would have overcome discrimination had they cried "victim", and labeled other people as insensitive oppressors and demanded preferential treatment? Of course not. Those actions would have exacerbated racial tensions and created a backlash against them, thus reinforcing negative stereotypes and fueling a vicious cycle. But this is exactly what is happening today. And empirical evidence — from the US to Malaysia to Nigeria — shows that preferential treatment inflames racial tensions.

Ms. Huang obviously deploras racism and stereotyping of Asians as "techno-nerds." But programs such as affirmative action only typecasts Asians into such stereotypes because it treats people not as individuals but as monolithic groups. According to the doctrine of affirmative action, it doesn't matter if you are a third-generation of Japanese American from an affluent family or if you're a recent Cambodian immigrant from a peasant family — we are all the same. But I, like many others, consider myself to be an individual over all else.

As evident by the gradual decline of anti-Semitism in America, ending discrimination is a slow process. But we will never end discrimination in America as long as we demand different treatment because of our race.

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