

November 1977

The Forgotten Minority: Asian Americans in New York City



—A report of the New York State Advisory Committee to the United States Commission on Civil Rights prepared for the information and consideration of the Commission. The report will be considered by the Commission and the Commission will make public its reaction. In the meantime, the findings and recommendations of this report should not be attributed to the Commission but only to the New York State Advisory Committee.

The Forgotten Minority: Asian Americans in New York City

—A report prepared by the New York State Advisory Committee to the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights

ATTRIBUTION:

The findings and recommendations contained in this report are those of the New York State Advisory Committee to the United States Commission on Civil Rights and, as such, are not attributable to the Commission. This report has been prepared by the State Advisory Committee for submission to the Commission, and will be considered by the Commission in formulating its recommendations to the President and the Congress.

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LETTER OF TRANSMITTAL

NEW YORK STATE ADVISORY COMMITTEE
TO THE U.S. COMMISSION ON CIVIL RIGHTS
November 1977

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Sirs and Madam:

The New York State Advisory Committee submits this report "The Forgotten Minority: Asian Americans in New York City," as part of its responsibility to advise the Commission on relevant civil rights problems within the State.

This report reviews the difficulties faced by the Asian American communities in immigration and employment. It also studies the problems faced by this minority group stemming from stereotyping in the media.

On July 11-13, 1974, the Advisory Committee held an informal, public hearings in New York City. Spokespersons from four Asian American communities—Chinese, Japanese, Pilipino, and Korean—discussed their concerns before the Advisory Committee. In addition, testimony was received from local, State, and Federal officials and representatives of the press, radio, and television.

New York City has a population of 7,894,862 persons. According to the Advisory Committee's estimate, approximately 2.1 percent of that population is Asian American. Yet, the Advisory Committee found that Asian Americans were underrepresented on the staffs of many State and city agencies and that (except for the Chinese) few programs were operated on their behalf by public and private agencies.

Testimony before the Advisory Committee suggested that Asian Americans experienced much of the social and economic exclusion which affects other minority Americans. For example, although they are represented in the labor force of New York City (as compared to their population) in greater ratio than any other ethnic group, many of them tend to be concentrated in low paying and unstable occupations.

On May 27, 1976, the New York State Advisory Committee invited representatives of several Asian American organizations to participate in a press conference at which time the Advisory Committee released a summary of its investigations into the problems of Asian Americans in New York City. At that time we stated some of the positive developments which had taken place since our informal public hearing of 2 years earlier. We said:

We hope that the release of this statement, and the subsequent release by the Commission of our report, will be important steps in creating an awareness among the citizens of this community of the unmet needs of the Asian American population, and will contribute to meaningful action by public and private agencies to meet those needs.

The Advisory Committee makes several recommendations in its report. We urge the Commission to support our recommendations and to assist this Advisory Committee in ensuring that these Americans can more fully participate in the mainstream of American life.

Respectfully,

Franklin H. Williams
Chairman

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THE UNITED STATES COMMISSION ON CIVIL RIGHTS

The United States Commission on Civil Rights, created by the Civil Rights Act of 1957, is an independent, bipartisan agency of the executive branch of the Federal Government. By the terms of the act, as amended, the Commission is charged with the following duties pertaining to denials of the equal protection of the laws based on race, color, sex, religion, or national origin: investigation of individual discriminatory denials of the right to vote; study of legal developments with respect to denials of equal protection of the law; appraisal of the laws and policies of the United States with respect to denials of equal protection of the law; maintenance of a national clearinghouse for information respecting denials of equal protection of the law; and investigation of patterns or practices of fraud or discrimination in the conduct of Federal elections. The Commission is also required to submit reports to the President and the Congress at such times as the Commission, the Congress, or the President shall deem desirable.

THE STATE ADVISORY COMMITTEES

An Advisory Committee to the United States Commission on Civil Rights has been established in each of the 50 States and the District of Columbia pursuant to section 105(c) of the Civil Rights Act of 1957 as amended. The Advisory Committees are made up of responsible persons who serve without compensation. Their functions under their mandate from the Commission are to: advise the Commission of all relevant information concerning their respective State on matters within the jurisdiction of the Commission; advise the Commission on matters of mutual concern in the preparation of reports of the Commission to the President and the Congress; receive reports, suggestions, recommendations from individuals, public and private organizations, and public officials upon matters pertinent to inquiries conducted by the State Advisory Committee; initiate and forward advice and recommendations to the Commission upon matters in which the Commission shall request the assistance of the State Advisory Committee; and attend, as observers, any open hearing or conference which the Commission may hold within the State.

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Final production of the report was the responsibility of Deborah A. Harrison, Vivian Hauser, Audree Holton, Rita Higgins, and Vivian Washington, supervised by Bobby Wortman, in the Commission's Publications Support Center, Office of Management.

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Chapter 1

Introduction

Asian Americans are a forgotten minority in the New York City area. They suffer much of the social deprivation and economic discrimination experienced by other minority Americans, but often their plight has been ignored by Federal, State, and local agencies responsible for providing services to all Americans.

In 1974 the New York State Advisory Committee to the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights undertook a study of selected problems related to the civil rights of Asian Americans¹ in New York City. The study, conducted by the Asian American Subcommittee under the leadership of Dr. Willie Kaiming Yee, included a review of problems confronting Asians in immigration, employment, and stereotyping in the media. The study gained impetus through the support of Asian American groups, such as Asians for Equal Employment, Asian Americans for Action, Asians for a Fair Media, and the Asian American Caucus. These groups began publicly to protest the lack of equal opportunity for Asians in manpower training and other social service programs, the underrepresentation of Asians in public and private employment, their portrayal in the media, and the inadequate funding by local, State, and Federal Governments.

Advisory committee members and Commission staff collected information on four Asian groups in New York: Chinese, Japanese, Pilipinos, and Koreans, and conducted interviews with Asian community leaders, public officials, and concerned citizens. An informal, public hearing was held in New York City, June 12–14, 1974.² This hearing, believed to be the first governmental forum held in the city on Asian Americans, gave Asian groups the opportunity to express their perceptions of problems that denied them equal opportunity.

As an additional source of information, subcommittee members reviewed several studies on Asian Americans. The most comprehensive analysis of Asian groups is *A Study of Selected Socio-Economic Characteristics of Ethnic Minorities* conducted by Urban Associates, Inc., for the U.S. Department of

Health, Education, and Welfare (HEW).³ Additional studies are Betty Lee Sung's *Chinese Americans: Manpower and Employment*, a study funded by the U.S. Department of Labor (DOL);⁴ the *Asian American Field Study* funded by HEW;⁵ and Chia-Ling Kuo's dissertation on the Chinese of Chinatown, an anthropological study to be issued by the Ford Foundation.⁶ Subcommittee members and Commission staff also obtained other papers from students and community groups which detailed the exclusion of Asian Americans from existing Government programs and funds.⁷ Most of these reports were based on questionnaires and door-to-door head counts.

Most of the available socioeconomic data are on the Chinese population. For instance, the Betty Lee Sung and Chia-Ling Kuo studies were limited to the Chinese. Although the Urban Associates and the Asian American Field Study reports cover the Japanese, Pilipinos, Koreans, and the Chinese, these studies do not always include data on specific Asian groups in New York City.

Indeed, one of the overriding concerns of the Koreans, the Japanese, and the Pilipinos who testified before the Advisory Committee was the lack of available factual information on their groups in New York City. These witnesses strongly urged that private and government institutions conduct studies of their communities.⁸

Notes to Chapter 1

1. In this report, the term "Asian" and "Asian American" are used interchangeably.

2. New York State Advisory Committee to the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights, Transcript of Public Hearing, June 12–14, 1974, New York City, N.Y. (hereafter cited as Transcript). Available in the Commission's Northeastern Regional Office (NERO).

3. Urban Associates, Inc., *A Study of Selected Socio-Economic Characteristics* (July 1974). Study based on the 1970 census and funded by the U.S. Department of Health, Education, and Welfare. Urban Associates is now known as R.J. Associates, Inc.

4. Betty Sung Lee, *Chinese American Manpower and Employment* (1975). A report prepared for the Manpower Administration (renamed the Employment and Training Administration in

November 1975) of the U.S. Department of Labor under research and development grant no. 21-36-73-13.

5. Chi-Wing Ho, "Some of the Findings of the National Asian American Field Study to the New York Advisory Committee." The study received funds from the Department of Health, Education, and Welfare. Available in NERO files.

6. Chia-Ling Kuo. *The Chinatown Exploratory Project* (New York: Praeger Press, 1976).

7. These papers include: George Yuzawa, "The Japanese Aging in New York, New York" (1975); Tino Calabia, Tania Azores, and Angela Cruz, "Report on Pilipinos in New York City" (1974); Irving Chin, Project Proposal (1973); and M.B. Lee, "Findings of the Chinese Consolidated Benevolent Association Study on Asian Americans in New York, N.Y." (1975).

8. Transcript, vol. I, pp. 114-19, 150-53, and 160-64.

Chapter 2

An Overview of the Asian American

An overview of the Asian American population will be presented in this section in alphabetical order: the Chinese, the Japanese, the Koreans, and the Pilipinos.

The Asian Experience

The experience of the Asians in the United States is similar in many ways to the experience of black Americans. Historically, although they were not legally enslaved, Asians were deprived of many legal and civil rights. Those who were admitted as residents in this country were often victims of racial hatred and discrimination. Others were prohibited on the basis of race from coming into the United States. While the treatment of blacks and other racial minorities often reflected social and economic conditions in the country, the experience of Asians often reflected American foreign policy. For instance, many Americans are familiar with the sordid and shameful history of the internment of Japanese Americans during the early days of World War II. Dr. Michio Kaku, chairman of Asians for a Fair Media, remembers those years:

The entire Japanese-American population on the West Coast, citizens as well as non-citizens, were given short notice (often***24 hours) to get rid of their personal belongings. Japanese Americans had all their bank savings confiscated, lost virtually all their real estate holdings, were deprived of their civil rights.¹

The Chinese, the first Asians to be excluded, were restricted from entering the country as early as 1882.² The Japanese escaped the first exclusion act through the so-called "gentleman's agreement" in which the Japanese Government agreed with the United States to limit the immigration of Japanese nationals to this country.³ In 1924 Congress passed a law that prohibited the immigration of Japanese to this country.⁴ This policy was extended to cover Pilipinos in 1934 with the passage of the so-called Philippine Independence Act.⁵ Because China was an ally of the United States in

World War II, Chinese were granted the right to citizenship in 1943.⁶ The Japanese, however, were not granted that right until 1952.⁷

The confusion continues to this day. There is still no consistent policy at most levels of government mandating the same treatment for all Asian groups and equal treatment with other minority groups. Until the recent Supreme Court decision in *Hampton v. Mow S. Wong*, a Pilipino alien who held residency in the United States was permitted to hold a competitive position with the Federal Government; a Japanese, Korean, or Chinese alien with similar residency was not.⁸

There is also no consistent policy of classifying Asians. All Asians do not "look alike" nor are their heritages the same. Yet the distinction among Asian groups is not considered for enumeration. The U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC), for example, lumps all Asians together in the enumerations it requires from public and private employers.⁹ The Census Bureau enumerates Japanese, Chinese, Pilipinos, Koreans, and Hawaiians separately. Guamanian, Samoan, Malayan, Polynesian, and Thai are categorized as "other."¹⁰

In New York the nomenclature varies in different State and city authorities. The New York State Department of Civil Service classifies all Asians simply as "Asians."¹¹ The New York State Department of Employment places Asians in the category of "other."¹² In the most recent ethnic survey of the New York City Commission on Human Rights, Chinese were classified separately and Japanese and other Asians were placed in the category of "Other minorities."¹³

Asians, other than the Chinese, are completely ignored in many funding programs for minority groups. In New York State, no Pilipino, Japanese, or Korean group has ever received municipal or State funds.¹⁴ In New York City no Asian group received any of the so-called "ethnic grants." White ethnic groups which received funds under this program (which is now defunct) included

HANAC (a nonprofit Greek organization); the Metropolitan Coordinating Council on the Jewish Poor; the Congress of Italian-American Organizations; the Council of Belmont Organizations (a mostly Italian group in the Bronx); and the Polish and Slovak Center in the Greenpoint section of Brooklyn.¹⁵

The Emergency School Aid Act of 1970,¹⁶ sponsored by Senator Jacob A. Javits of New York, is an example of what public and private policy should be with respect to the funding of aid programs. The act states:

The term "minority group" refers to (1) persons who are Negro, American Indian, Spanish-surnamed American, Portuguese, Oriental, Alaskan natives, and Hawaiian natives***and***as determined by the Assistant Secretary, persons who are from environments in which a dominant language is other than English and who, as a result of language barriers and cultural differences, do not have equal educational opportunity***.¹⁷

By defining minority groups specifically to include Asian Americans, the act permits these groups to receive funds for educational programs and provides Asians the right to seek judicial relief if they are illegally denied participation in such programs.

National Immigration Trends and Population Statistics

In 1970 the official population count of the United States was 203,211,926. Of this total, 2,089,932 or 1.03 percent were identified as Americans of Chinese, Pilipino, Hawaiian, Korean, and Japanese descent, and those categorized as "Other."¹⁸ The "Other" category included Guamanian, Samoan, Malayan, Polynesian, Thai, etc.

The Chinese who came to this country in the early 1800s were the first Asian group to come to the United States. In the middle of the 19th century, following the Taiping Rebellion in China, thousands of Chinese laborers were recruited to work the gold mines of California. To this day, many Chinese Americans refer to the United States as "Gim-San,"¹⁹ the "Golden Mountain." In the second half of the 1800s—the period that historian Mary Coolidge calls "Free Immigration"—approximately 10,000 Chinese were

brought to this country to help build the Transcontinental Railroad.²⁰

Japanese laborers immigrated to Hawaii in 1894 under contract with Hawaiian sugar plantation owners. Because of the Oriental Exclusion laws, Japanese immigration was limited until the United States annexed Hawaii at the turn of the century. At that time, according to testimony by Rev. Alfred J. Akamatsu, executive director of the Japanese Mutual Aid Society of New York, there were 27,440 Japanese in the country.²¹ In 1907 the United States prohibited the immigration of Japanese to the United States through Hawaii, Mexico, and Canada.²² In 1908 the Japanese Government signed the "gentlemen's agreement" with the United States to limit new immigrants.²³ In 1924 the Federal Immigration Act was passed which put an absolute bar on Japanese immigration.²⁴

Unlike the Chinese and the Japanese, Koreans did not come to this country in large numbers until after 1960. In 1970, the first year that Koreans were enumerated as a separate ethnic group in the census, there were 69,510 in the U.S.; Koreans were then the fifth largest Asian American subgroup in the United States.²⁵ According to the Urban Associates Study, the Korean population settled throughout the United States, but one-half of all Koreans born in the United States live in the West.²⁶

The first major immigration of Pilipinos followed the Spanish-American War when Spain ceded the Philippines, along with Puerto Rico and Guam, to the United States. Pilipino men were recruited to work the sugar plantations in Hawaii and the farmlands of the San Joaquin and Imperial Valleys in California. These migratory farm laborers established Pilipino settlements or "Manila Towns" in Seattle, Portland, San Francisco, Stockton, Delano, Los Angeles, and elsewhere in the farmlands along the West Coast.²⁷

The Tydings-McDuffie Act of 1934 established a Philippines Commonwealth and provided for independence in 1946.²⁸ The United States national quota laws applied to countries with commonwealth status and limited Pilipino immigration to 50 persons a year. When the Philippines became an independent state in 1946, the annual immigration quota for the Philippines was raised to 100. Many of the Philippine Scouts²⁹ who had fought

alongside American troops in World War II migrated to the United States and later sent for their families. As an inducement to Pilipino immigration, the Philippine Trade Act of 1946 granted nonquota immigrant status to Philippine citizens who had resided in the United States for a continuous period of 3 years prior to November 30, 1941. The nonquota status was also granted to their spouses and unmarried children under 18 years of age.³⁰

Prior to 1964 immigration quotas for Eastern Hemisphere countries prevented large-scale Asian immigration to the United States. The national origins quota system permitted groups to immigrate according to their representation in the population in 1920. Thus, the major share of the allocations went to those countries who were racially and ethnically close to the majority population—the Western Hemisphere countries.

Reform legislation in 1965 eliminated discriminatory quota provisions and opened up Asian immigration to the United States.³¹ As a result, immigration from Asia and the Pacific increased rapidly. The Chinese population grew from 237,292 (or 0.1 percent of the total) in 1960 to 435,062 (0.2 percent) in 1970, an increase of 83.3 percent. The Japanese population grew from 464,332 (0.3 percent) to 591,290 (0.3 percent) in 1970, an increase of 27.4. The Pilipino population grew from 176,310 (0.1 percent) to 343,060 (0.2 percent). This increase of 94.9 percent is the highest growth rate of any racial or ethnic group enumerated separately by the census.

The Immigration and Nationality Act of 1965 established three major categories of immigrants: the immediate relatives of United States citizens, natives of Eastern Hemisphere countries and their dependencies, and "special" immigrants, comprised primarily of natives of independent countries in the Western Hemisphere. The act also established preferences for specified relatives of U.S. citizens and resident aliens³² and established two preferences for persons with specific occupational qualifications, including professionals and skilled and unskilled workers.

Immigration continues to play a large role in the growth of Asian American communities in the United States. Exhibit A indicates the immigration of Asian ethnic groups from 1971 through 1973. Koreans are the second largest Asian group im-

migrating to the United States and the group with the largest rate of increase since 1970.

Asian Americans in New York City

According to the census, there were 7,894,862 persons living in New York City in 1970. Among these were 69,324 (0.9 percent) Chinese, 13,698 (0.2 percent) Japanese, 11,207 (0.1 percent) Pilipinos, and 4,685 (0.1 percent) Koreans (see exhibit B). The Chinese population had grown from 32,831 in 1960, a growth rate of 111.1 percent. The Japanese in New York increased by 133 percent and the Pilipinos by 161.6 percent. The Commission estimates that the 1970 census undercounted ethnic groups by at least 7 percent;³³ therefore, it is assumed that the total Asian population was at least 179,734 or 2.1 percent of the total.

As indicated in exhibit A, Asians, particularly Koreans and Pilipinos, have continued to immigrate to the United States at a very fast rate since 1970. The New York City Planning Commission estimates that the number of Koreans, Pilipinos, and other Asian Americans in New York City has doubled since 1970, and that the Chinese population has increased by at least 25 percent.³⁴ Based on the increase, the Asian population (or nonwhites excluding blacks, Puerto Ricans, other Spanish-speaking persons and American Indians) was estimated to be 2.9 percent in 1975.³⁵ That figure does not take into account the higher birth rate of these Asian groups or the number of aliens in New York City whose status has not yet been legalized.³⁶ One further indication of the increase in the Asian population since 1970 is the increase in the students classified as "Oriental" in the public elementary schools. According to the planning commission, the number of Oriental elementary school students increased from 9,945 in 1970 to 11,821 in 1973, an increase of 18.9 percent in 3 years.³⁷

The Chinese

Traditionally, the Chinese in New York City have settled along Mott Street and the surrounding areas on the lower east side. At the turn of the century, the Chinese lived only in Chinatown. This 15-block area was inhabited by many "extended families" and served to help newly arrived im-