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ABSTRACT

As part of a symposium on issues related to diversity and American education reform in the context of Goal 3 of the National Education Goals, this paper summarizes the general educational achievement of Asian American students (excluding Pacific Islanders). The diversity of the group is discussed and it is noted that simple generalizations do not provide information on the large number of low achievers and their needs for better and more appropriate instructional programs. Data are presented to show that recent immigrant students in U.S. secondary schools are making slower progress in English than other groups, in spite of comparatively high achievement in mathematics. Three factors affecting Asian American students' academic achievement are discussed: immigration and refugee policy, time spent on learning, and sensitivity to job openings under conditions of equal employment opportunity. The following questions are raised: (1) Who are the Asian American students meeting and not meeting the mathematics competencies and what accounts for the differences? (2) If many Asian Americans are not doing well in American schools, is there anything wrong with the schools? (3) What happens to the large number of Asian American students in higher education? and (4) How do Asian Americans perform when compared to students in other countries? Contains 12 references. (LB)

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ASIAN AMERICAN EDUCATION AND THE NATIONAL EDUCATION GOALS

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On September 22, 1992, the Council of the Great City Schools issued a report examining the performance of the nation's urban schools and the educational well-being of the students in those schools. The report concluded that urban schools are making slow progress, but noted that the graduation rates among blacks and Hispanics are still well behind the national average. The reason I am bringing up this news item is that the report failed to mention the large numbers of Asian American students enrolled in urban schools. The 1990 U.S. Census identified over 7.5 million Asian and Pacific Americans, or 3 percent of the total U.S. population. Of these, 94 percent live in metropolitan areas and 45 percent live inside the central cities of metropolitan areas (Bennett, 1992).

One of the reasons Asian American students are not mentioned in the report may have to do with the general conception that this population is doing exceptionally well educationally. In fact, success stories involving Asian American students seem to have been played up as recurring features in the news media in recent years.

If Asian American students are performing so well academically, how do they fare with respect to National Education Goal 3? The 1991 National Education Goals Report provides us with some achievement data for comparisons (Table 1).

The results show that only 29 percent to 39 percent of Asian American fourth, eighth, and twelfth graders are competent in mathematics. These percentages, although from 10 percent to 17 percent higher than those of white students, are not exciting by themselves and surely do not match the glowing academic success stories portrayed by the news media. For some

Table 1 Percentage of Asian/Pacific Islander and White Students Competent in Mathematics, 1990

| | Grade 4 | Grade 8 | Grade 12 |
|------------------------|---------|---------|----------|
| Asian/Pacific Islander | 29% | 39% | 34% |
| White | 19% | 22% | 19% |

Source: National Education Goals Panel, 1991

unexplained reason, the English reading and writing proficiency results of Asian and Pacific Islander students were missing from the same report.

My review of the literature (National Assessment of Educational Progress, High School and Beyond, National Education Longitudinal Study of 1988, Scholastic Aptitude Tests) also indicates that on average Asian American students perform better than white students in mathematics and at about the same level in English. For example, baseline data of the National Education Longitudinal Study of 1988 (NELS:88) provide a summary of some of the achievement findings (Table 2). I will revisit these results in the latter part of this paper.

While the rosy generalizations purport to illustrate the educational experience of Asian American students as an overall success story, I would like to examine the phenomenon in greater detail, put forward some hypotheses, and ask some policy questions.

The first issue involved in examining achievement data of Asian American students is the definition of the term "Asian American." The U.S. Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census uses the term

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Table 2 NELS: 88 Mathematics and Reading Scores of Eighth Graders

| | Sample N | Reading | | Math | |
|------------------------|-------------|---------|------|-------|-------|
| | | Mean | S.D. | Mean | S.D. |
| Asian/Pacific Islander | 1,495 | 10.78 | 6.25 | 19.86 | 12.21 |
| White, Non-Hispanic | 15,753 | 11.36 | 5.89 | 17.99 | 11.05 |

Source: Rock, et al., 1990

"Asian and Pacific Islander" and defines the term as including Chinese, Filipino, Hawaiian, Korean, Vietnamese, Japanese, Asian Indian, Samoan, Guamanian, and other APIs, which is further clarified as Thai, Laotian, Cambodian (Kampuchean), Pakistani, Indonesian, Hmong, Polynesian, other Micronesian, and Melanesian. This definition aggregates into one group those indigenous to the Pacific Islands and people whose ancestry originates from East and South Asian countries, in spite of the fact that Asians and Pacific Islanders share little in racial/ethnic, cultural, language, or social backgrounds. This practice of grouping Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders has been generally accepted by the Asian Pacific American community for reasons of solidarity. The definition also confirms the accepted connotation of "Asian American" to mean those with ancestry from East, Southeast, and South Asia, and not the whole Asian continent. (The definition has changed over the years; for example, Asian Indians were first counted as Asian Americans in the 1980 census.) In practice, researchers seldom provide a clear definition of their usage of the term Asian American and they often include Pacific Islanders in their term without specifying this.

For example, the National Center for Education Statistics (Bradby, 1992; see also Table 2) includes the following subgroups as Asian eighth graders: Chinese, Filipino, Japanese, Korean, Southeast Asian (Vietnamese, Laotian, Cambodian/Kampuchean, Thai, etc.), Pacific Islander (Samoan, Guamanian, etc.), South

Asian (Asian Indian, Pakistani, Bangladeshi, Sri Lankan, etc.), West Asian (Iranian, Afghan, Turkish, etc.), Middle Eastern (Iraqi, Israeli, Lebanese, etc.), and Other Asian. This definition classifies all those from the Asian continent and the Pacific Islands as Asian Americans (including those with Jewish and Russian backgrounds).

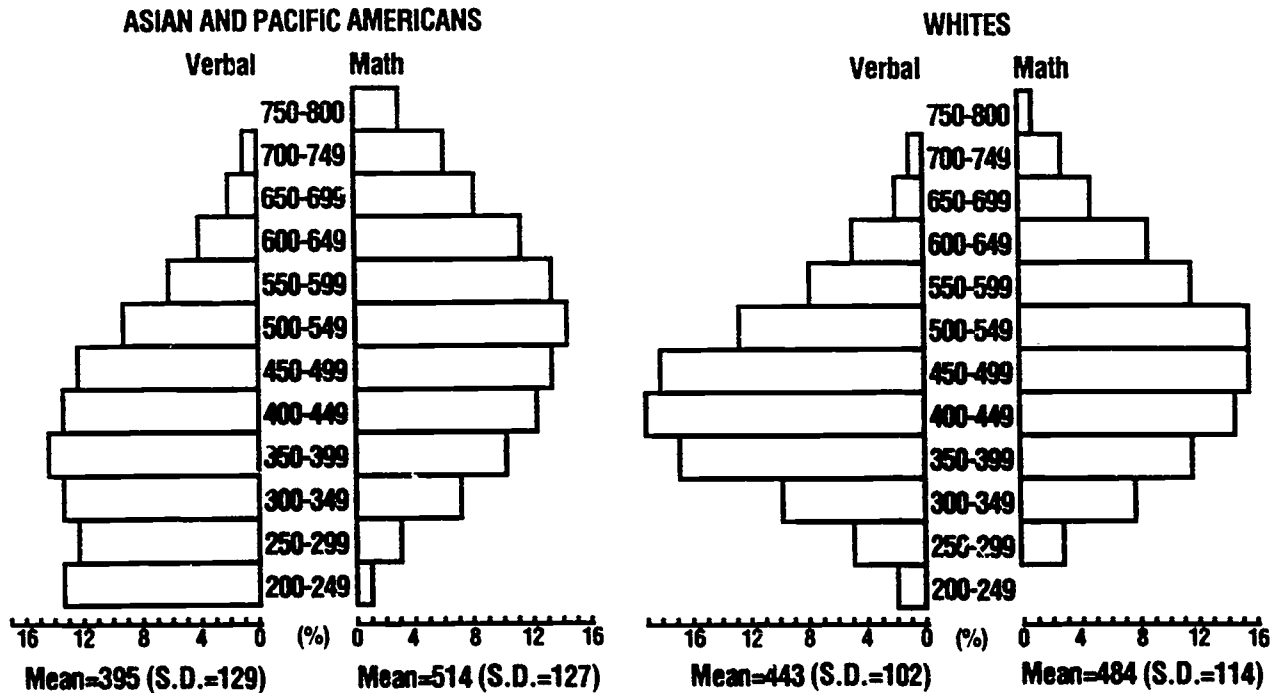
In addition to this confusing use of terms, researchers have also taken other problematic approaches in their treatment of the Asian American sample. For example, many studies (including NELS:88) exclude from their samples students who are deemed as lacking the English proficiency needed to perform the required tasks, even though this subgroup makes up a significant portion of the Asian American population. Studies that assign sampling weights often use weights that are calculated for the national sampling frame without adjustment to account for the larger proportion of Asian Americans living in urban areas. The College Entrance Examination Board, in its annual report of the SAT, even includes test takers in Asian countries in its Asian American subgroup.

Because of the general lack of rigor in the treatment of the Asian American subgroups, it becomes very difficult to accept with confidence the findings from many of the national data sets, longitudinal studies, and large-scale studies. For the purpose of this paper, the term Asian American does not include Pacific Islanders unless specified.

As we can see from the above discussion, Asian Americans make up an extremely diverse group. This fact is further illustrated by their achievement data distributions, which usually have larger standard deviations than other ethnic/racial groups (see Table 2). Their distribution curves show a flatter shape than normal, which indicates that Asian Americans usually have a larger proportion of both low and high achievers than the other groups. Figure 1, taken from the College Board report of the 1982-83 SAT results (Ramist & Arbeiter, 1984), exemplifies the spreading out of the distribution curves. The spread is especially prominent for the English achievement of Asian and Pacific American students.

Let us examine in more detail the distributions of the Asian and Pacific American achievement data. Table 3 shows the reading and math scores of Asian and Pacific Islander (API) subgroups from the NELS:88 baseline data. The data show that, except for Filipinos and Pacific Islanders, all API subgroups are performing at or above the white students in mathematics. All subgroups except for Koreans and Pacific Islanders also have larger standard deviations. On the other hand, the reading scores are more divergent, with five subgroups scoring above the white students and six below. However, we must be reminded that an unknown number of students who are deemed as lacking the English proficiency needed to perform the required tasks have been excluded from the baseline sample.

Figure 1 Distributions of 1982-83 Verbal and Mathematics SAT Scores for APAs and Whites



Source: Ramist & Arbeiter, 1984

Table 3 NELS: 88 Mathematics and Reading Scores of Eighth Graders

| | Sample* N | Reading | | Math | |
|---------------------|--------------|---------|------|-------|-------|
| | | Mean | S.D. | Mean | S.D. |
| API | 1495 | 10.78 | 6.25 | 19.86 | 12.21 |
| Chinese | 302 | 11.48 | 6.40 | 23.64 | 11.84 |
| Filipino | 283 | 10.90 | 5.88 | 17.74 | 11.74 |
| Japanese | 86 | 11.71 | 6.05 | 23.34 | 11.23 |
| Korean | 185 | 13.14 | 5.79 | 25.55 | 10.27 |
| Southeast Asian | 235 | 9.73 | 5.89 | 19.08 | 11.27 |
| Pacific Islander | 101 | 5.69 | 4.95 | 10.19 | 9.74 |
| South Asian | 123 | 13.52 | 5.77 | 23.54 | 12.24 |
| West Asian | 31 | 12.35 | 5.03 | 23.46 | 11.74 |
| Middle Eastern | 42 | 11.18 | 6.23 | 20.06 | 11.87 |
| Other Asian | 84 | 10.26 | 6.04 | 17.40 | 11.23 |
| White, Non-Hispanic | 15,753 | 11.36 | 5.89 | 17.99 | 11.05 |

* Low English proficient students were excluded from sample, percentage unknown.

Source: Rock, et al., 1990

Table 4 1988 CAP Reading and Written Expression Scale Scores of APA Eighth Graders in Six California School Districts

| Ethnicity | N | Percent | Reading | Written Exp. |
|------------------|------|---------|---------|--------------|
| Chinese | 1843 | 32 | 239 | 272 |
| Japanese | 229 | 4 | 294 | 330 |
| Korean | 449 | 8 | 292 | 307 |
| Vietnamese | 600 | 10 | 234 | 261 |
| Hmong | 231 | 4 | 208 | 225 |
| Laotian | 178 | 3 | 165 | 205 |
| Cambodian | 113 | 2 | 183 | 204 |
| Asian Indian | 81 | 1 | 291 | 300 |
| Pacific Islander | 357 | 6 | 196 | 224 |
| Filipino | 1740 | 30 | 246 | 279 |
| Total | 7475 | 100 | 244 | 272 |
| Norm | | | 250 | 250 |

Source: Lai, et al., 1989

Table 5 1988 CAP Reading and Written Expression Scale Scores of APA Eighth Graders by Generations

| Generation | N | Reading | Written Exp. |
|-------------------|----------|----------------|---------------------|
| First | 3569 | 223 | 250 |
| Second | 1399 | 291 | 320 |
| Third | 153 | 272 | 303 |
| Fourth | 67 | 334 | 346 |
| Fifth | 43 | 251 | 268 |
| Norm | | 250 | 250 |

Source: Lai, et al., 1989

Lai, et al. (1989) examined the reading and writing performance from the California Assessment Program (CAP) for Asian and Pacific American (APA) students from six large school districts in California (Fresno, Los Angeles, Sacramento, San Diego, San Francisco, and San Jose). Table 4 is a summary of the results. The data show that within the Asian Pacific American group, the different ethnic subgroups vary drastically in their performance. Average scale scores range from a low of 165 (for the Laotian) to a high of 294 (Japanese) in reading, and from a low of 204 (Cambodian) to a high of 330 (Japanese)—a range of almost 130 points—in written expression.

Table 6 1988 CAP Reading and Written Expression Scale Scores of First Generation APA Eighth Graders

| Ethnicity | N | Percent of Subgroup | Reading | Written Expression |
|------------------|----------|----------------------------|----------------|---------------------------|
| Chinese | 1306 | 71 | 217 | 247 |
| Japanese | 48 | 21 | 205 | 259 |
| Korean | 327 | 73 | 279 | 293 |
| Vietnamese | 538 | 90 | 236 | 262 |
| Hmong | 194 | 84 | 201 | 222 |
| Laotian | 164 | 92 | 161 | 204 |
| Cambodian | 105 | 93 | 180 | 199 |
| Asian Indian | 39 | 48 | 245 | 241 |
| Pacific Islander | 53 | 15 | 166 | 189 |
| Filipino | 644 | 37 | 229 | 268 |
| Norm | | | 250 | 250 |

Source: Lai, et al., 1989

When the same data set is grouped by the students' generations in the United States (Table 5), a similar picture of diversity appears.

The distribution of the average scores ranges from a low of 223 to a high of 334 for reading, and from 250 to 346 for written expression, a difference of 111 points for reading and 96 points for written expression. The scores for first generation APA students (Table 6) are especially alarming. All except the Koreans scored below the 250 norm in reading, with the Laotian and Pacific Islander students scoring the lowest, at 161 and 166 respectively.

In summary, while the average achievement data of Asian American students demonstrate a high level of competence when compared with other racial/ethnic groups in the United States, they also show that the achievement levels of the different ethnic subgroups differ greatly. The data further show that within certain ethnic subgroups, the achievement levels also differ according to their generations in the United States.

For the next section, I am providing a general discussion of some of the factors which relate to the educational achievement of Asian American students. I do not include Pacific Americans in this discussion because of my limited knowledge of this diverse group.

Factors Related to Educational Achievement of Asian Americans

Immigration and Refugee Policy

The present immigration policy of the United States was passed into law in 1965, when Congress enacted a bill which admitted 20,000 immigrants per country per year. The law, which took effect in 1968, reversed nearly 80 years of exclusion of Asian immigrants. Not only did the new policy have a major impact on the size and ethnic diversity of the Asian American popu-

lation, it also influenced the educational characteristics of those admitted. Since immigrants represent a majority among Asian Americans, the educational characteristics of the overall population are similarly a function of the country's immigration policy.

Asians first began to come to the United States in large numbers in the late 1840s, when Chinese came to California during the Gold Rush. In later years, other Chinese, Japanese, Filipinos, and a small number of Koreans also immigrated to the United States, mainly to the West Coast and Hawaii. They provided the manual labor that made possible the phenomenal economic growth of the American West. However, these early immigrants were also the targets of pervasive and often violent anti-Asian sentiment. Institutionalized discrimination included a series of national policies which at first restricted and then completely curtailed Asian immigration.

In 1882, Congress forbade immigration of Chinese laborers when it enacted the Chinese Exclusion Act. In 1907, the Gentlemen's Agreement curtailed the immigration of Japanese laborers. Then, in 1924, the National Origins Act excluded immigrants who were "aliens ineligible for citizenship." Since the right to apply for American citizenship had previously been denied to Asian immigrants, this act in effect brought to an end the immigration of all Japanese, Koreans, and Chinese. The National Origins Act did not pertain to Filipinos, because of their country's status as an American colony. In 1934, however, the Tydings-McDuffie Act limited Filipino immigration to 50 per year. These measures, when combined with other discriminatory laws (including anti-miscegenation laws and the fact that most Chinese and Filipinos had come to the United States as single males) had the effect of limiting the Asian population in the United States in size, social interaction, and political and economic opportunity.

During the World War II years, Congress began to remove restrictions on Asian immigration and naturalization. In 1943, the Chinese Exclusion Act was repealed, possibly as a gesture of friendship towards China, an American ally during World War II. While the repeal finally made Chinese immigrants eligible for American citizenship, it also contained a provision which limited Chinese immigration to 105 persons per year. In 1952, Congress enacted the Walter-McCarran Act which allowed Japanese to immigrate and apply for citizenship, but restricted Japanese immigration to 185 persons per year. The United States also began to admit Chinese refugees during this period. For example, when the People's Republic of China (PRC) was formed in 1949, a number of Chinese refugees who had supported the Nationalist Chinese government were permitted to come to the United States; in 1962, 15,111 Chinese who had been allowed to leave the PRC gained entrance to this country as refugees. However, effective exclusion of Asian immigrants did not end until the present immigration policy was enacted in 1965.

Immigration policy has the dual objectives of reunifying families and increasing the supply of needed labor. Based on these objectives, wives and minor children of U.S. citizens are admitted on a non-quota basis; and the 20,000 slots allotted to each country are rationed between two groups: (1) other relatives of U.S. citizens and lawful resident aliens; and (2) professional and other workers needed by American employers. Thus, the first cohorts of Asian immigrants admitted under this system consisted of relatives of Asians who had come here much earlier, and of skilled, highly educated workers for whom there were employment opportunities in this country. The first group, whose admission was based on their relationship to relatives who came to this country primarily as unskilled, uneducated laborers from rural regions, probably came from lower socioeconomic backgrounds. The second group, by occupational defini-

tion, came from higher socioeconomic backgrounds. Over time, this dichotomy has become less well defined as the relatives of the professionals and other skilled workers began immigrating under the family reunification categories. In short, the socioeconomic background of present day Asian immigrants is extremely diverse.

Contributing to this phenomenon are the Asian foreign students and Southeast Asian refugees. A large number of Asians come to the United States for higher education and do not return to their homelands. Foreign students are typically subject to much higher tuition and fees than American residents, and they must be able to afford expensive transportation costs to and from their home countries and American universities. Furthermore, their opportunity to earn income while enrolled in American schools is severely limited by the federal government. Thus, it is likely that most of these students come from relatively high socioeconomic backgrounds.

A substantial proportion of recent Southeast Asian refugees might also be categorized as middle class. Many of the first wave Southeast Asian refugees, those who were admitted to the United States between 1975 and 1979, belonged to economically well-off and well-educated families. Among them were former government officials and scholars trained at prestigious universities in France.

The first wave refugees, foreign student immigrants, professional and other skilled workers and their relatives undoubtedly contribute to the high proportion of the Asian American population with four or more years of college. They come to the United States having already obtained postsecondary educations in their home countries. For many, it is precisely because of their high level of training that the United States accepts them as immigrants. In other words, recent immigration and refugee policy—as opposed to any

high innate ability among Asian Americans—has had the effect of inflating the college attainment of this population.

The high level of education and socioeconomic status of the first wave of refugees, foreign student immigrants, professional and other skilled workers and their relatives was likely to influence their children's education in two ways. First, because of family socioeconomic status, the academic achievement of the children is likely to be relatively high. Second, because of the occupational status of their parents, the career preparation of the children is likely to be oriented towards professional occupations. Thus, current immigration and refugee policy probably has a positive, intergenerational impact on Asian Americans' preparation for college while in high school, on their college attendance, and on their choice of field of study.

In addition, immigration and refugee policy may be linked to the large standard deviations for the test scores described earlier. That is, while there is a greater proportion of high scores among Asian Americans compared to whites, there is also a comparatively greater proportion of low scores among Asian Americans. These low scores may be those of immigrant students from families with relatively low socioeconomic backgrounds. According to the 1990 census, 12.2 percent of Asian Americans were living in poverty, compared to 10.7 percent of the white population. Many second wave Southeast Asian refugees, those admitted since 1979, come from rural, preliterate societies. It is also likely that the influx of immigrants who are related to early Asian immigrants, who also come from rural areas, has not yet come to an end.

Recent immigration and refugee policy—as opposed to any high innate ability among Asian Americans—has had the effect of inflating the college attainment of this population.

Finally, the high proportion of immigrants among the Asian American population means that most of them acquire English as a second language. This is undoubtedly a major factor contributing to the relatively low verbal test scores among members of this population. Moreover, if mathematics is considered to be a universal language, and since English is likely to be an obstacle to more language-based disciplines, then the non-English language background of immigrants is reflected in the tendency of Asian American students to concentrate on mathematics, resulting in high scores on mathematics tests.

Time Spent on Learning

Asian Americans appear to spend more time on learning than other high school students. Data from the High School and Beyond study show that, compared to white seniors, Asian American seniors took one-and-a-half more years of the "new basics"—that is, academic subjects; and a higher percentage of the Asian American sophomores spent five or more hours per week on homework (Tsang & Wing, 1985). Asian Americans were also less likely than other students to be absent from school (Peng et al., 1984). While 26 percent of white sophomores had perfect attendance, 45 percent of Asian American sophomores did so. As the SAT data indicate, even among high school students who were college bound, Asian Americans reported they had 16.80 years of academic study, compared to 16.32 for all students (Ramist & Arbeiter, 1984).

The extra time Asian American high school students appear to devote to learning is probably related to their academic achievement and educational attainment. For example, Peng et al. (1984) found that the

number of credits earned in high-level mathematics courses is the second best predictor for mathematics achievement (after previous mathematics achievement scores). Furthermore, many of the reports on educational reform argue that academic learning time is an important factor in student achievement.

As to why Asian American students spend more time on learning than other students, a study by Stevenson (1983) suggests one possibility. In his longitudinal comparative study of students in Taiwan, Japan, and the United States, Stevenson asked the mothers if luck, ability, or effort were the critical factor underlying their children's academic performance. Most Asian mothers chose effort, while most American mothers selected ability. The belief that achievement depends more on effort than ability may be similarly prevalent among Asian American parents and transmitted to their children. If so, the greater amount of time Asian American students spend on learning may represent extra effort expressly for the purpose of doing well. However, emphasizing the importance of effort is not particular to Asian culture. One of the reputed virtues of American culture is the belief that hard work leads to success. Stevenson's finding about American mothers' perceptions of the role of innate ability warrants further investigation.

The cost, if any, of the extra time spent on learning and emphasis on academic achievement among Asian Americans is unknown. That is, one might hypothesize that there is a trade-off between time spent on academic learning and time spent on student and community activities. Participation in extracurricular activities might be necessary to one's social and personal development in some way. The High School and Beyond study indicates that the percentages of Asian Americans who participated in sports, artistic activities, and community activities were lower than the figures for whites. In fact, the Asian American

figures were lower than those for every racial/ethnic group in nearly every one of these three types of activities (Peng et al., 1984).

At the same time, Asian American high school students generally participated in "intellectual activities" at higher rates than other students. Twenty-one percent of Asian Americans were involved in student council and government, compared to 16 percent of whites. There was only a one percent difference between the percentages of Asians and whites who reported participation in school newspaper and yearbook activities. Since participation in student council, government, newspaper, and yearbook activities may be more closely associated with leadership, social interaction, and communication skills than with so-called academic skills, these figures suggest that Asian American students do not spend time on learning at the expense of pursuing other areas of personal development and accomplishment. Moreover, Asian Americans who took the SAT in 1982-1983 were more likely to have participated in social, ethnic, or community organizations than other SAT candidates (Ramist & Arbeiter, 1984). It does not appear, therefore, that the time Asian Americans spent on learning entails the sacrifice of involvement in other student activities. However, no assessment of the cost in terms of stress, anxiety, and similar factors has been studied.

Historical Labor Market Discrimination and Asian American Sensitivity to Job Openings Under Conditions of Equal Employment Opportunity

Early Asian immigrants in the United States worked primarily in low-level manual labor jobs in agriculture and in the incipient urban-based industries of the west. These could be called "immigrant jobs"—low-paying and low-status jobs that domestic workers shunned. Upward occupational mobility was difficult. Unions, which act as gatekeepers for many types of jobs for skilled workers, have historically been unre-

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ceptive to immigrant workers. For example, the American Federation of Labor (AFL), organized in 1881 as a confederation of crafts unions, actively campaigned in favor of the 1882 Chinese Exclusion Act and the 1924 National Origins Act. Not surprisingly, the AFL also rejected Asian immigrants as union members. In 1903, for example, when Japanese immigrant sugar beet workers in California organized a union with their fellow Mexican workers, they applied to join the AFL. The AFL advised the Mexican workers that the sugar beet union would be admitted provided that it excluded Japanese and Chinese members. The sugar beet union declined to join the AFL under this condition.

Among employers, early Asian immigrants were welcomed as workers when there were labor shortages. However, when the shortages disappeared, or if an economic recession appeared imminent, the immigrants were the first to suffer layoffs and other negative consequences. Thus, the jobs immigrants did secure tended to be of short-term duration and were dead ends in terms of upward mobility. Over time, Asian Americans seem to have developed a particular strategy to deal with employment discrimination and to secure upward mobility. This strategy has had an impact on their educational profile.

Beginning with World War II, war-related industries enjoyed an economic boom, and when the first federal equal employment opportunity policies were adopted, second generation Asian Americans found new occupations open to them just as other minorities and women did. But because skilled, industrial, union jobs had long been closed to Asian Americans, Asian American youth sought employment in other sectors of the economy. There was a new and growing need

for science- and engineering-trained workers, which was not being met by the majority population, and—perhaps because hiring appeared to be based on merit—Asian Americans began to enter these professional and technical occupations. In order to qualify for these types of jobs, they invested in college. They faced few financial barriers in doing so; most Asian Americans lived on the West Coast (as they do now), where an excellent postsecondary educational system is publicly financed.

Between 1940 and 1950, there was a threefold increase in the number of Chinese American males employed as professional, technical, and kindred workers (Lee, 1960). Although 110,000 people of Japanese ancestry were imprisoned during World War II, early releases were permitted for college attendance in the Midwest and East; and according to Kitano (1969), Japanese Americans were able to capitalize on professional job opportunities in the post-internment years.

These first entrants into professional and technical fields became role models for subsequent cohorts of Asian Americans, who exhibited the same sensitivity to opportunities in professional fields during the Sputnik era and the present period of growth in high technology industries. Furthermore, once the 1964 Civil Rights Act was passed, the more blatant forms of employment discrimination became illegal. Altogether, historical job discrimination, job market sensitivity, and equal employment opportunity policies appear to have encouraged Asian Americans to do well in school in preparation for college and subsequent careers in professional occupations.

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Conclusion

This paper has summarized the general educational achievement of Asian American students and pointed out the diversity of the group, stressing that simple generalizations do not provide information on the large number of low achievers and their needs for better and more appropriate instructional programs. Data from the High School and Beyond study show that recent immigrant students in the nation's secondary schools are making slower progress in English than other groups (Tsang & Wing, 1985). The data presented in this paper also reveal the low English achievement of many first generation Asian subgroups. This low performance is in spite of their comparatively high achievement in mathematics. More research is necessary to investigate the discrepancy in these achievement levels and to guide the improvement of English language programs for Asian newcomers.

Three factors affecting Asian American students' academic achievement were also discussed. All three are extrinsic factors resulting from the historical background of the Asian American population in the United States. These factors together have influenced the Asian Americans to adopt education as the path to upward mobility.

Again, one must be cautious about invoking these factors as explanations for a particular Asian American group's academic achievement profile. For example, current immigration policy does not have a large impact on the Japanese American educational profile; and the influence of past job discrimination on ethnic groups such as the Vietnamese, who have a comparatively short history in the United States, is uncertain.

To close this discussion, I would like to raise some questions:

1. The National Education Goals Report of 1991 shows that many Asian American students are meeting the mathematics competence. Who are these students? Who are the Asian American students who are not meeting the competence level? Why are they achieving differently?
2. If many Asian Americans are not doing well in our schools, is there anything wrong with our schools?
3. What happens to the large number of Asian American students who are in higher education? Again, we have plenty of anecdotal evidence of success stories of Asian American students entering our best universities. But are they achieving at these top universities? How do the others fare, especially those in our two-year college system? For example, Asian and Pacific Americans make up 18 percent of the California State University system and 11 percent of the California Community College District in 1989 (California Postsecondary Education Commission, 1990), but there is no research on their performance. Are they receiving an education that is meeting the National Education Goals?
4. How do Asian Americans perform when compared to students in other countries? Many Asian Americans immigrate to the United States because of the oppressive and competitive education systems of their home countries and the availability of opportunities in this country. In light of this fact, do we want to compete with those countries in educational achievement?