EIGHT

# Critical Issues in Latinx, Native, Asian and Pacific Islander, and Middle Eastern / North African Identity Development

*"There's more than just Black and White, you know."*

To get to know my culture, I would tell teachers to understand my language. Take a course or something. . . . The other way they can learn about our culture is by asking us about it. Ask us.[1]

—Alicia, a Chicana high school student

There's a certain amount of anger that comes from the past, realizing that my family, because they had to assimilate through the generations, don't really know who they are.[2]

—Don, an American Indian college student

Being an Asian person, a person of color growing up in this society, I was taught to hate myself. I did hate myself, and I'm trying to deal with it.[3]

—Khanh, an Asian American college student

I'm not really sure I understood what was going on when 9/11 happened, but I was old enough to feel the world shift on its axis that day and change everything forever.[4]

—Amani, a Muslim girl of Middle Eastern heritage

Like the African American and European American students I have described, each of the young people quoted above has experienced a process of racial or ethnic identity development, an internal process triggered by external events and interactions with others. Although conversations about race, racism, and racial identity tend to focus on Black-White relations, to do so ignores the experiences of other targeted racial or ethnic groups. When we look at the experiences of Latinxs, Native Americans, Asian and Pacific Islanders (APIs), and, more recently, Middle Easterners and North Africans (MENAs) in the United States, we can easily see that racial and cultural oppression has been a part of their lived experiences and that it plays a role in the identity development process for individuals in these groups as well.[5]

In this multiracial/multiethnic context, Jean Phinney's model of adolescent ethnic identity development is particularly useful. Grounded in both an Eriksonian understanding of adolescence and research studies of adolescents from various racial or ethnic groups, Phinney's model is made up of three unique phases: (1) unexamined ethnic identity, when race or ethnicity is not particularly salient for the individual; (2) ethnic identity search, when individuals are actively engaged in defining for themselves what it means to be a member of their own racial or ethnic group; and (3) achieved ethnic identity, when individuals are able to assert a clear, positive sense of their racial or ethnic identity.[6] Phinney's model shares with both Cross' and Helms' models the idea that an achieved identity develops over time and that race-related encounters often lead to the exploration, examination, and eventual internalization of a positive, self-defined sense of one's own racial or ethnic identity.

While Phinney's work describes the identity process for adolescents of color in general, it is important to continually keep in mind the cultural diversity and wide range of experience represented by the groups known as Latinxs, APIs, Native peoples, and MENAs. Because of this tremendous diversity, it is impossible in the space of one chapter to detail the complexities of the identity process for each group.[7] Therein lies my dilemma. How can I make the experiences of the Latinx, API, Native, and MENA students visible without tokenizing them? I am not sure that I can, but I have learned in teaching about racism that a



sincere, if imperfect, attempt to interrupt the oppression of others is usually better than no attempt at all. In that spirit, this chapter is an attempt to interrupt the frequent silence about the impact of racism on these communities of color. It is not an attempt to provide an in-depth discussion of each group's identity development process, an attempt that would inevitably be incomplete. Rather, this chapter highlights a few critical issues pertinent to the identity development of each group, particularly in schools, and points the reader to more information.

## What Do We Mean When We Say "Latinx"?

Latinxs now represent the largest "minority" group in the United States, a position formerly held by African Americans. According to the US census, as of 2015, Hispanics (so labeled by the federal government) numbered approximately fifty-seven million, representing 17.6 percent of the total US population.[8] Though the largest community of color in size, the Latinx population is no longer the fastest-growing demographic segment in the US, a designation now held by Asian Americans. Since the onset of the Great Recession in December 2007, there has been both a drop-off in immigration from Latin America and a declining birth rate among Latinx women in the US, slowing the growth rate of the Latinx population. Still, Latinxs have accounted for 54 percent of the total US population growth thus far in the twenty-first century (2000–2014).[9] Over the last two decades of the twentieth century (1980–2000), the Latinx immigrant population jumped from 4.2 million to 14.1 million; however, between 2000 and 2014, it was the increase in babies born to Latinx families in the US that drove the population growth. In the first decade of the twenty-first century, there were 9.6 million Latinx births as compared to 6.5 million new immigrants.[10] Consequently, as of 2014, two-thirds of all Latinxs living in the US were born in the US, and nearly half of those US-born were under the age of eighteen. With a median age of twenty-eight, Latinxs are the youngest major racial or ethnic group in the US. (By comparison, the median age of Whites in 2014 was forty-three; for Blacks and Asians, the median age was thirty-three and thirty-six, respectively.)[11]

Approximately 67 percent of Latinxs are of Mexican ancestry, a population that includes US-born Mexican Americans (also known as Chicanxs), whose families may have been in the Southwest for many generations, as well as recent Mexican immigrants. Approximately 9.5 percent of Latinxs are Puerto Rican, 3.8 percent are Salvadoran, 3.7 percent are Cuban, 3.3 percent Dominican, and 2.4 percent Guatemalan. The remaining 10.3 percent are from other Central or South American countries.[12] Each of these groups is a distinct population with a particular historical relationship to the United States.

In the case of the Chicanx population, the US conquest and annexation of Mexican territory (a geographical area extending from Texas to California) following the Mexican-American War (1846–1848) created a situation in which people of Mexican ancestry became subject to White domination. Like African Americans and Native peoples, Mexican Americans were initially incorporated into US society against their will. It was the general feeling among White settlers that they were superior to Mexicans, who were descendants of Native peoples or mestizos, with a combination of Native and European ancestry. The question of how Mexicans should be classified racially was decided in 1897 by Texas courts, which ruled that Mexican Americans were not White. In California, they were classified as "Caucasian" until 1930, when the state attorney general decided they should be categorized as "Indians," though "not considered 'the original American Indians of the US.'"[13] In both Texas and California, Mexican Americans were confined to segregated schools, and in both states legislation was passed in the nineteenth century outlawing the use of Spanish for instruction in the public schools. During that time, Mexican families sought to preserve their culture and language by sending their children to Catholic schools or private Mexican schools where bilingual instruction was maintained.[14]

Though the Mexican population in the contested territory declined immediately after the conquest due to forced relocations, it increased again during the early twentieth century when US farmers actively encouraged an influx of Mexicans across the border as an inexpensive



source of agricultural labor. Since then, political and economic conditions in Mexico have fueled a steady stream of immigrants to the United States.[15]

While people of Mexican descent are often stereotyped as undocumented immigrants, the fact is that most Mexican-origin Latinxs are legal residents. Most Mexican Americans continue to live in the West and Southwest, particularly California and Texas. According to the most recent census data, Mexican-origin Latinxs are the youngest of all Latinx subgroups. Among Latinxs younger than eighteen in 2014, 69 percent are Mexican.[16] Educational attainment and family income remain below the US average. Only 9 percent of Mexican Americans age twenty-five and older have earned at least a bachelor's degree (compared to 13 percent of all Latinx adults and more than 30 percent of all US adults over twenty-five).[17] In 2014 the median household income in the US was roughly $51,400, but it was only $38,000 for Mexican families. The median income for Puerto Ricans, the second largest Latinx group in the US, was even lower—$36,000.[18]

Like the conquered Mexicans in the Southwest, Puerto Ricans did not choose to become US citizens, it was imposed upon them. Puerto Rico became an unincorporated territory of the United States in 1898, ceded by Spain at the conclusion of the Spanish-American War. Puerto Rico, which had struggled to become independent of Spain, did not welcome subjugation by the United States. An active policy of Americanization of the island population was implemented, including attempts to replace Spanish with English as the language of instruction on the island. The attempts to displace Spanish were vigorously resisted by Puerto Rican teachers and students alike. In 1915, resistance to the imposition of English resulted in a student strike at Central High School in San Juan, part of a rising wave of nationalism and calls for independence. Rather than let the Puerto Rican people vote on whether they wanted citizenship, the US Congress passed the Jones Act of 1917, imposing citizenship and the obligation to serve in the US military but denying Puerto Ricans the right to vote in national elections. In 1951, Puerto Ricans were allowed to vote on whether to remain a territory

or to become a commonwealth. Though there were those who urged a third option, Puerto Rican independence, commonwealth status was the choice. Commonwealth status allowed Puerto Ricans greater control of their school systems, and Spanish was restored in the schools.[19]

Economic conditions on the island have driven many Puerto Ricans to New York and other northeastern US cities. Many came in the 1940s and 1950s to work in the factories of the Northeast, but as industry left the region many Puerto Rican workers were displaced. Fluctuating employment conditions have contributed to a pattern of circular migration to and from Puerto Rico, which is made easier by US citizenship. However, since 2005, more Puerto Ricans live on the US mainland than on the island of Puerto Rico. By 2013, the number on the mainland had grown to 5.1 million, compared to 3.6 million on the island. Mainland Puerto Ricans (sometimes referred to as Nuyoricans or Diasporicans)[20] are concentrated in the Northeast (51 percent), primarily in New York, and in the South (31 percent), mainly in Florida.[21] A multiracial population descended from European colonizers, enslaved Africans, and the indigenous Taíno Indians, a significant number of Puerto Ricans are dark-skinned. Consequently, on the mainland they have experienced patterns of residential and school segregation similar to that of African Americans.[22]

Salvadorans and Cubans are the next largest populations of Latin American origin living in the United States. As of 2016, Salvadorans had surpassed the Cubans in population, representing 3.8 percent of the US population while Cubans are 3.7 percent.[23] Of the two groups, Cubans have a longer history in the US. Although Cuban communities have existed in Florida and New York since the 1870s, nearly 60 percent of Cubans in the US are foreign-born, most having been in the country for twenty years or more.[24] Cuban immigration to the United States increased dramatically following the 1959 revolution led by Fidel Castro. The first wave of immigrants were upper-class, light-skinned Cubans who left in the very first days of the revolution. They were able to bring their personal fortunes with them and established businesses in the United States. The second major group left after Castro had been in power for a few months and largely consisted of middle-class



professionals and skilled workers. Though many were unable to bring possessions with them, they received support from the US government and charitable organizations.[25]

Cuba's close proximity to the US mainland and the tense political relationship between the two countries has led to unique immigration policies specifically for Cubans escaping its communist regime. In 1966, the Cuban Adjustment Act was passed by the US Congress to provide an accelerated pathway to permanent residence for Cuban refugees.[26] In 1980, another major group of Cuban immigrants arrived as part of the Mariel boatlift. These Cubans had lived most of their lives under a socialist government and were more impoverished, less educated, and darker-skinned than earlier refugees. Another surge of immigrants arriving by boat occurred in 1994, prompting an agreement between the United States and Cuba known as the "wet foot, dry foot policy," whereby those Cubans who were intercepted on the water ("wet foot") would be returned to Cuba but those who made it to the US shore ("dry foot") would be allowed to remain and given permanent resident status after one year, putting them on a faster path to citizenship than most immigrants experience. As of 2013, 59 percent of Cubans living in the US were naturalized US citizens. In December 2014, US president Barack Obama and his Cuban counterpart, Raúl Castro, agreed to normalize relations between the two countries, opening the door for potential changes to the pattern of Cuban migration to the US.[27] In fact, in January 2017, just a few days before the end of his term, with the encouragement of the Cuban government, President Obama announced an end to the wet foot, dry foot policy, stating, "Effective immediately, Cuban nationals who attempt to enter the United States illegally and do not qualify for humanitarian relief will be subject to removal, consistent with U.S. law and enforcement priorities. . . . By taking this step, we are treating Cuban migrants the same way we treat migrants from other countries."[28]

When compared to other Latinx communities in the US, Cubans are more concentrated geographically—77 percent live in Florida.[29] They also have the highest education levels—approximately 25 percent of Cubans over age twenty-five are college graduates. A majority (60

percent) of Cubans over the age of five speak English fluently, but despite the longevity in the United States, more Cubans speak Spanish at home: 79 percent, compared to 73 percent of Latinxs as a group.[30] Perhaps because the early Cuban immigrants viewed themselves as people in exile who might return to Cuba when the government changed, they have worked to keep Spanish an integral part of their lives in the United States.[31]

In the wake of civil war and natural disasters, hundreds of thousands of Salvadorans have fled El Salvador to come to the United States. The first wave came between 1980 and 1990, resulting in a fivefold increase in population—from 94,000 to 465,000.[32] In the two decades that followed, the number of Salvadoran immigrants continued to grow as families sought to reunite and to escape the aftermath of additional hurricanes and earthquakes. As of 2016, approximately two million Salvadorans were living in the US. More than half live in California and Texas, but they are also concentrated in New York and the metropolitan DC/Maryland/Virginia area. Nearly two-thirds of immigrants from El Salvador (64 percent) arrived in the US in 1990 or later. Only 29 percent of Salvadoran immigrants are US citizens. Almost half (48 percent) of Salvadorans ages five and older speak English proficiently, compared to 66 percent of Latinxs overall.[33]

Like the four groups described here, those Latinxs who do not trace their family background to Mexico, Puerto Rico, Cuba, or El Salvador are an extremely heterogeneous group. They include South Americans as well as other Central Americans, well-educated professionals as well as rural farmers, those who immigrated for increased economic opportunities as well as those escaping civil war and other violence. Venezuelans are the most likely to have a college degree (51 percent) while Guatemalans and Salvadorans are among the least likely (7 percent). Argentineans have the highest annual median household income ($55,000) while Hondurans have the lowest ($31,000).[34]

Just as the White settlers in the nineteenth century were initially uncertain how to classify the Mexicans racially, the US Census Bureau has also struggled. The term *Hispanic* was used by the Census Bureau as an ethnic label and not to denote a "race," because Hispanics are a racially



mixed group, including combinations of European White, African Black, indigenous peoples, and, in some cases, Asian. It is possible for an individual to identify as ethnically Hispanic and racially Black, White, or Asian at the same time.[35] As in African American families, there can be wide color variations in the same family. *Racismo* within Latinx communities is akin to colorism in Black American communities, advantaging lighter-skinned individuals.[36] Although a majority of Latinxs share the Roman Catholic faith and speak Spanish, not all do. Researchers Gerardo Marín and Barbara VanOss Marín argue that cultural values—not demographic characteristics—help Hispanics self-identify as members of one panethnic group.

## All in the Family: Familism in Latinx Communities

In particular, the cultural value of *familism,* defined as "a set of normative beliefs . . . that emphasize the centrality of the family unit and stress the obligations and support that family members owe to both nuclear and extended kin,"[37] has been identified as a characteristic shared by most Latinx families independent of their national background, birthplace, dominant language, or any other sociodemographic characteristic.[38]

In a carefully designed comparative study of four groups of adolescents—Mexicans living in Mexico, immigrant Mexicans in the United States, US-born Mexican Americans, and White Americans—researchers Carola and Marcelo Suárez-Orozco investigated the nature of familism among the four groups. In particular, they examined perceptions of the degree of emotional and material support provided by the family, the sense of obligation to provide support to one's family, and the degree to which families served as one's reference group (as opposed to peers, for example). They predicted that the three Latinx groups would demonstrate more familism than White American adolescents and that Mexican immigrants would demonstrate the highest level of familism, because immigrants frequently turn to the family for support and comfort. They found that the Latinx groups were indeed more family oriented than the White American group but that there was no significant difference among the three Latinx groups. All the

adolescents of Mexican ancestry had a strong family orientation that expressed itself in a variety of ways.

For example, achieving in school and at work was considered important by Latinx teens in the study because success would allow them to take care of family members. Conversely, White American teens considered education and work as a means of gaining independence from their families. The researchers concluded that "in Mexico the family seems to be a centripetal force; in the United States it is a centrifugal force."[39] Because both immigrant and nonimmigrant Latinx adolescents expressed this value, the researchers also concluded that familism is related to enduring psychocultural features of the Latinx population, not only the stresses of immigration. Similarly, Fabio Sabogal and his colleagues found that Mexican Americans, Central Americans, and Cuban Americans all reported similar attitudes toward the family, this familism standing in contrast to the rugged individualism so often identified with White Anglo American culture.[40] Researchers have found that the values of familism support positive academic outcomes for Latinx students and mitigate against the negative influence of peers engaged in delinquent behavior.[41]

Though familism is not caused by immigration, it is reinforced by it. The ongoing influx of new Latinx immigrants and the circular migration of some populations (Puerto Ricans, for example) help to keep cultural values alive in the US mainland communities. The Suárez-Orozcos write, "For many second- and third-generation Latinos the immigrant past may also *be* the present. . . . Among Latinos the past is not only kept alive through family narratives but unfolds in front of our very eyes as recent arrivals endure anew the cycle of deprivation, hardship, and discrimination that is characteristic of first-generation immigrant life."[42] In this context, perhaps the most critical task facing the children of immigrants is reconciling the culture of home with the dominant American culture.

Drawing on the work of social identity theorist Tajfel and others, Phinney describes four possible outcomes for coping with this cultural conflict: *assimilation, withdrawal, biculturalism,* and *marginalization.* Assimilation is the attempt to blend into the dominant culture as much



as possible, distancing oneself from one's ethnic group. Individuals using this strategy may actively reject the use of Spanish. Withdrawal results in an emphasis on one's ethnic culture and an avoidance of contact with the dominant group. This strategy is seen in highly segregated communities where English is rarely spoken. Someone with a bicultural identity incorporates selected aspects of both the home culture and the dominant culture, often achieving bilingual fluency in the process. The bicultural strategy can be a very positive one, but it is not easily achieved. For some, the attempt to bridge two worlds may result in alienation from both. Having rejected the "old country" ways of the family yet unable to find full acceptance in the dominant culture, these adolescents often experience marginalization. These alienated young people, relying on their peers for a sense of community, may be at particular risk for gang membership. School programs that help bridge the gap between the culture of home and the culture of the dominant society can reduce the risks of alienation.[43]

## "Who Are You If You Don't Speak Spanish?" Language and Identity Among Latinx Youth

As is suggested above, language is inextricably bound to identity. Language is not only an instrumental tool for communication but also the carrier of cultural values and attitudes. It is through language that the affect of *mi familia*, the emotions of family life, are expressed. Richard Rodriguez, in his classic memoir, *Hunger of Memory*, describes what happened in his family when the nuns at his parochial school told his Mexican parents to stop using Spanish at home, so their children might learn English more quickly. Gradually, he and his parents stopped speaking to each other. His family was "no longer so close; no longer bound tight by the pleasing and troubling knowledge of our public separateness. . . . The family's quiet was partly due to the fact that as we children learned more and more English, we shared fewer and fewer words."[44] What did it mean to his understanding of familism and other aspects of ethnic identity when he relinquished his Spanish?

For Jose, a young Puerto Rican man, the answer to this question is clear.

> I think that the only thing that Puerto Ricans preserve in this country that is Puerto Rican is the language. If we lose that, *we* are lost. I think that we need to preserve it because it is the primordial basis of our culture. It is the only thing we have to identify ourselves as Puerto Rican. If you don't know your language, who are you? . . . I believe that being Puerto Rican and speaking Spanish go hand in hand.[45]

This sentiment was echoed repeatedly by other young Puerto Rican adults who were interviewed by Maria Zavala as part of a study of language and ethnic identity among Puerto Ricans.[46]

However, these young people had also learned that their language was devalued by the dominant culture. Those who had spent their childhoods in the United States in particular recalled feeling ashamed to be bilingual. Said Margarita,

> In school there were stereotypes about the bilingual students, big time. [Since] they don't speak "the" language, they don't belong here. That's number one. Number two, they were dumb, no matter what. . . . Everyone said "that bilingual person," but they didn't realize that bilingual means they speak *two* languages. To them bilingual was not a good thing. There was a horrible stigma attached to them and I think I fell in the trap sometimes of saying "those bilingual people" just because that was what I was hearing all around me.[47]

A common coping strategy in childhood was to avoid the use of Spanish in public, a strategy akin to the "racelessness" adopted by some African American students, particularly in a predominantly White environment. Said Cristina, a young woman raised in the United States, "I remember pretending I didn't know how to speak Spanish. You know, if you pretended that you were that American then maybe you would get



accepted by the White kids. I remember trying not to speak Spanish or speaking it with an [English] accent."[48]

However, avoiding the use of Spanish does not guarantee acceptance by the dominant society. A growing awareness of this reality and the unfolding process of adolescent identity development led these students to reclaim their Spanish, a process integral to their exploration of Puerto Rican identity. Cristina was able to do that as a college student, explaining:

> I'm a lot more fluent with English. I struggle with Spanish and it's something that I've been trying to reclaim. I've been reading a lot of literature written by Latinos lately, . . . some Puerto Rican history. Before [college] I didn't even know it existed. Now I'm reading and writing more and more in Spanish and I'm using it more in conversations with other Puerto Ricans. Now I have confidence. I don't feel inferior any more. I used to in high school, I did. People don't want you to speak Spanish and before I was one of those that's very guilty of not speaking it because I didn't want to draw attention to me, but now you can't tell me not to speak Spanish because for me that's the biggest form of oppression. My kids are going to speak Spanish and they're going to speak it loud. They're not going to go with the whispering stuff. As a matter of fact, if a White person comes by, we're going to speak it even louder. I am going to ingrain that in them, that you need to be proud of that.[49]

Zavala effectively demonstrates that while these young people are still in the process of exploring identity, the resolution of their feelings about the Spanish language is a central dimension of the identity development process. The linguicism to which they all had been subjected had been internalized by some and had to be rejected in order for them to assert a positive sense of identity.

While Zavala's study focused only on Puerto Ricans, a similar pattern was described by Paul, a young Chicano, reflecting on his early adolescence:

> When I was in middle school me and my sister we were the only Latinos in the whole school. You know, all my friends were White just because I assimilated myself with White folks because I had moved out of my neighborhood and into a White neighborhood. You know I wanted to be like them. I started to lose my Spanish. . . . I really wanted to change my name, I just didn't want to be Mexican. You know, so my middle school years I really had a hard time because I wanted to assimilate my whole life to like White culture. But then as soon as I hit high school that changed cause there were so many Latinos, and so then I wanted to be more Chicano than ever. I lost my self-identity during my middle school.[50]

Vasti Torres in her qualitative study of Latinx college students, extending over a two-year period, heard similar sentiments echoed by Elizabeth, a young Cuban American whose exploration of ethnic identity was integrally connected with reclaiming her Spanish. In her first year, she felt "like an outsider" among other Latinx students because she no longer spoke fluent Spanish. Yet by her second year, she had become eager to change that.

> I was in a class this past semester with a professor. . . . And there are a lot, like tons, of Hispanic kids in that class. And my last name is [common Spanish surname], so everyone looks at me, even at [the food court on campus], the people that work there will speak Spanish to me, and I'm just like, I can understand them but I can't really speak back. . . . So, in that class, I just really felt Whiter than White, like more American than ever, and they would stay afterwards with the professor and speak Spanish and . . . oh, I just hurt. I really want to be able to do that and that's like a really big deal why I am studying [abroad] the entire year, because my Spanish is horrendous and . . . I want to be fluent by the time I get back. I want to be able to read in Spanish, write in Spanish, and be good at it. And it's been really hard because the Hispanic kids don't look at me as very Hispanic. But the White kids or the American kids, [with] their racism issue, they'll look at me and they'll hear me sing a Spanish song or listen to Spanish music . . . or I want to eat Spanish food and they look at me like, "oh God, she is so Spanish," you know, and I am not. . . . It's hard.[51]



The racism of the White students and the discomfort with Spanish-speaking Latinx students left her in a lonely spot. Affirming her identity through her reengagement with Spanish as well as taking courses on Latin America is consistent with the phase of active exploration Phinney describes. Elizabeth elaborated on her identity quest:

> My quest or journey to learn Spanish is a really big deal but also the education I get and the different classes in Latin America . . . they all kind of deal with like the same things, like cultural identity, and that's why I am really, really interested in anthropology. But that's like a really big deal, how people see themselves, how people [self-identify] because it really has an effect on your whole outlook on life.[52]

Though these young people clearly connect the Spanish language to their ethnic identity, a 2016 poll by the Pew Research Center found that while 95 percent of Latinxs said it was important for future generations to speak Spanish, most Latinx adults (71 percent) said it is *not* necessary to speak Spanish to be considered Latinx. It may be that the adult poll respondents are at a level of maturity and comfort with their own ethnic identity—and define it more broadly—than the adolescents in the interview studies cited here. In the active exploration stage of ethnic identity, visible symbols of one's identity—in this case one's spoken language—are very important, but they may be less so later on. While it may not be considered essential by all, the Pew researchers conclude, "Spanish is still a characteristic that, for the most part, unites much of a group. About three-quarters of Latinos, no matter where they are from, speak Spanish at home."[53]

Given the strong connection between language and identity, it seems very important for educators to think carefully about how they respond to Latinx children's use of Spanish at school. As Sonia Nieto points out, schools often work hard to strip away the child's native language, asking

parents to speak English to their children at home, punishing children with detention for using their native language at school, or even withholding education until children have mastered English. While of course fluency in English is a necessary educational goal, the child's fluency in Spanish need not be undermined in order to achieve it.[54]

The bilingual education programs of the late twentieth century have largely been eliminated. In 1998, California voters approved Proposition 227, replacing bilingual education with Structured English Immersion (SEI), an approach that involves separating English-language learners from their English-speaking classmates and teaching them not only the English language but some of their academic content in English, rather than using the foundation of the child's first language to build understanding of academic content. In 2002, with the introduction of the federal No Child Left Behind law, signed by President George W. Bush, the Bilingual Education Act of 1967 was effectively repealed. Regrettably, research indicates that the elimination of bilingual education programs has had a negative impact on student learning.[55]

All good teachers know that learning builds on prior knowledge and experiences. In the case of language-minority students, this means that their native language can be a strong foundation for future learning. If we think of language development as the concrete foundation of a building, it makes sense that it needs to be strong to sustain the stress of many tons of building materials that will be erected on top of it. This is analogous to what takes place when English-speaking students enter school: they use the language they know as a foundation for learning the content of the curriculum. Because they know the majority language, this is usually a seamless process. For English-language learners, however, not knowing English is a tremendous disadvantage, not because their native language is ineffectual for learning but because schools do not generally view languages other than English as a resource for learning. Extending the metaphor further, it would be as if the strong foundation that had been created were abandoned and the building materials were placed on top of a sandlot across the street. Needless to say, the building would crumble quickly.[56]



Nieto and others are quick to point out that bilingual education alone could not completely reverse the history of school failure that Latinx students have experienced. But it does challenge the alienating and emotionally disruptive idea that native language and culture need to be forgotten in order to be successful.

## Living in the Shadows: The Undocumented Immigrants

In the days following Donald Trump's victory in the 2016 presidential election, there were reports of schoolchildren teasing their Mexican American classmates that they could be deported.[57] The Los Angeles Unified School District launched a hotline to help immigrant students and their families deal with their fears about the incoming president's campaign promise to deport millions of undocumented immigrants.[58] Though the vast majority of Mexican Americans are US citizens, in some cases for many generations, Latinxs in general and Mexican Americans in particular are often stereotyped and suspiciously regarded as "illegals." For that reason alone, all are impacted, directly or indirectly, by the rhetoric and attitudes toward undocumented immigrants.

According to the Pew Research Center, as of 2014 there were 11.1 million unauthorized immigrants in the US, representing 3.5 percent of the total population, a number that has been relatively stable since 2009. At that time, Mexicans made up 52 percent of all unauthorized immigrants (5.8 million people).[59] Keep in mind that the total Latinx population in 2015 was 56.6 million and of that the Mexican American population was 63.4 percent, or approximately 36 million people. Since 2009 the number of unauthorized immigrants from Mexico has been declining while the number of immigrants without authorization has increased from Central America (i.e., Guatemala, El Salvador, and Honduras) and Asia (primarily China), as well as sub-Saharan Africa.[60] The population of unauthorized immigrants is concentrated in six states—59 percent live in California, Texas, Florida, New York, New Jersey, and Illinois.[61] Sixty-six percent of adult immigrants without legal status in 2014 had been living in the US for at least ten years. During

that time, many had given birth to children, who, due to their birth in the US, are citizens.[62]

There are approximately 5.5 million children who have at least one undocumented parent. Of those children, 4.5 million (81 percent) are US-born citizens. So-called mixed status families, where some members are citizens or legal permanent residents and others are not, suffer tremendous anxiety about the possibility of a family member's deportation.[63] "The most damaging family event associated with parental unauthorized status is the removal of a parent from the United States. . . . Between July 2010 and September 2012, 205,000 noncitizens who were deported claimed to have at least one US-citizen child, representing an annual average of about 90,000 parental deportations."[64]

The impact of a parent's removal on children is significant both emotionally and in terms of their physical security. The loss of a parent's income is devastating to the remaining family members' economic well-being, and fears of additional government action may lead families to flee or to keep children out of school. Even if there has been no arrest or parental removal, the chronic fear and toxic stress experienced by parents can manifest as behavioral problems, anxiety, and depressive symptoms in children.[65]

For the population of children who are themselves unauthorized immigrants, brought to the US in early childhood by their parents, their awareness of their undocumented status becomes part of their identity development in adolescence and young adulthood in very painful ways. Sociologist Roberto G. Gonzales studied the transition to adulthood experienced by undocumented Latinx young adults, twenty to thirty-four years of age, who came to the US before the age of twelve and live in California, still the state where the largest population of undocumented immigrants live.[66] It is worth noting that undocumented children may grow up unaware of their immigration status. Out of a desire to protect them from worry or to prevent them from exposing the family's secret, parents may not tell their children that they are undocumented. The Supreme Court ruled in 1982 (*Plyler v. Doe*) that undocumented children have a right to a K–12 education, and schools are required by the Federal Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA) to keep students' records confidential, so immigration authorities do not have access to them. Consequently, children's immigration status has little impact on life at school until adolescence; they are in what Gonzales calls a state of "suspended illegality."[67] They sit alongside US-born peers, learn to speak English, socialize with friends, participate in school activities, and make plans for their future as all young people do.



It is around age sixteen, when US-born peers start to drive, get part-time jobs, and fill out financial aid forms for college applications, that undocumented teens' awareness of their dilemma becomes acute. All of these activities require a Social Security number, which they can't get. When the realization hits, the emotional response is anger, frustration, confusion, and despair—a "period of paralyzing shock." Miguel describes his response: "During most of high school, I thought I had my next 10 years laid out. College and law school were definitely in my plans. But when my mom told me I wasn't legal, everything was turned upside down. I didn't know what to do. I couldn't see my future anymore."[68]

Cory, a young Latina, first felt shock, then anger toward her parents for not telling her the truth earlier.

> They thought that by the time I graduated I would have my green card. But they didn't stop to think that this is my life. . . . Everything I believed in was a big lie. Santa Claus was not coming down the chimney, and I wasn't going to just become legal. I really resented them. . . . I feel as though I've experienced this weird psychological and legal-stunted growth. I'm stuck at 16, like a clock that has stopped ticking. My life has not changed at all since then. Although I'm 22, I feel like a kid. I can't do anything adults do.[69]

As Gonzales writes, "Illegal status places undocumented youth in a developmental limbo."[70]

It is a natural response to seek comfort from friends when one learns upsetting news, but in this case, undocumented adolescents may be afraid of revealing their newly discovered status because of the stigma and the legal risk. One study participant described hearing a teammate

using derogatory terms to describe players on an opposing team, assuming that they were undocumented. What would this friend say about him if he knew his status? What would teachers say?

Feeling scared and alone, some of the adolescents Gonzales studied lost hope for the future and dropped out of school. Others confided in a trusted adult and were encouraged to stay in school, and in some cases, they were able to get to and through college with the assistance of mentors who helped them find financial assistance. Sadly, whether they successfully completed high school and college or not, eventually they hit an occupational dead end due to their legal limbo. Gonzales found that by their midtwenties, both college-goers and school dropouts held similar occupations—the same low-wage jobs that their parents held. They had few legal choices even if they had earned advanced degrees. Coming to that realization was like "waking up to a nightmare."[71]

Gonzales closes his study with these words: "We must ask ourselves if it is good for the health and wealth of this country to keep such a large number of U.S.-raised young adults in the shadows. We must ask what is lost when they learn to be illegal."[72] These questions are exactly the questions the nation is facing as of this writing in January 2017 as the transition of presidential power goes from Barack Obama to Donald Trump. The Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) program created by President Obama's executive order in 2012 has allowed more than 750,000 young unauthorized immigrants who arrived in the US before the age of sixteen and have no serious criminal convictions to go to school or get a work permit and receive protection from deportation for a two-year period. Not all who are eligible have come forward, some perhaps wary about reporting themselves to the federal authorities, but it is estimated that 78 percent of those eligible have applied to the program.[73] Once an individual is approved for the program, the benefits can be renewed after the first two-year period expires. Gonzales interviewed his study respondents before DACA was initiated—today the program offers a potential lifeline to young people like Margarita:

> I graduated from high school and have taken some college credits. Neither of my parents made it past fourth grade, and they don't speak any English. But I'm right where they are. I mean, I work with my mom. I have the same job. I can't find anything else. It's kinda ridiculous, you know. Why did I even go to school? It should mean something. I mean, that should count, right? You would think. I thought. Well, here I am, cleaning houses.[74]



Will that lifeline be taken away from DACA beneficiaries by the new president? At this writing, we don't know.

It is easy to feel sympathy for the young people caught in this undocumented dilemma and to lament the potential loss of human capital for a nation in need of talent. Yet what is the role of racism in this narrative? Some readers may say, "This is not about race or racism; it is about illegal activity—crossing the border without permission has consequences for adults and, unfortunately, their children." Historian Natalia Molina has another perspective on that question that is worth considering. She writes:

> What we are seeing is the reanimation of longstanding stereotypes—what I call racial scripts . . . that present Mexicans as unassimilable, criminal, even diseased. . . . The history of who gets to be "legal" in our country is complex. European immigrants who came to the US in the 19th and early 20th centuries faced few restrictions. And even when immigrants broke the rules, short statutes of limitation meant they were rarely deported. When laws changed in 1924, the federal government took steps to make European immigrants "legal" and pave the way for their eventual assimilation. Deportations were suspended, and immigrants could pay a small fee to register when they arrived in the United States. Mexican immigrants enjoyed no such opportunities. Instead, they faced increasing regulation through the Border Patrol, established in 1924. . . . In the 1920s, like now, employers opposed immigration quotas because they limited the availability of low-wage labor. But even this supposed openness to Mexicans nonetheless cast them as alien workers, not as immigrants arriving to the American melting pot. And during the Great Depression, when Mexican labor was no longer needed, the U.S. sent an

estimated 1 million Mexicans back to Mexico, including some U.S. citizens of Mexican descent.[75]

Drawing the contrast between the way European immigrants were viewed and the way Mexican immigrants were regarded during the same historical periods, Molina revisits the history of Mexican segregation (akin to the Jim Crow treatment that Blacks experienced in the South—Mexican immigrants were barred from swimming pools and restaurants, separated in neighborhoods, movie theaters, and cemeteries). What becomes clear is that the "you don't belong here" message was undoubtedly part of the Latinx past, even for those who were US citizens, and for now it continues to be a part of their present.

## What Do We Mean When We Say "Native"?

It is impossible to know just how many millions of indigenous people there were in North America prior to 1492. What is certain is that contact with the Europeans was disastrous for them. The explorers brought with them the diseases of Europe, such as smallpox, to which the Native Americans had no immunity. It is estimated that more than 90 percent of the native population was wiped out by virulent epidemics. By the time European settlers began to arrive in large numbers, the indigenous population had already been reduced significantly. Military conflict, forced relocations, and other traumas added to the depopulation. By the early twentieth century, census figures reported the American Indian population above the Rio Grande to be just 490,000.[76]

Now, as of 2015, the number of people who self-identify as American Indians or Alaska Natives is 6.6 million, including those who choose more than one racial group on the census form. They represent 567 different cultural communities federally recognized as sovereign entities with which the United States has a government-to-government relationship.[77]

Each of these cultural communities has its own language, customs, religion, economy, historical circumstances, and environment. They range from the very traditional, whose members speak their indigenous



language at home, to the mostly acculturated, who speak English as their first language. Most Native people identify with their particular ancestral community first and as American Indians second.[78]

The Native population grew slowly in the first half of the twentieth century but has grown rapidly in the second half due to a high birth rate and reduced infant mortality. Another source of the population increase, however, has been the fact that since 1970 a significant number of people have changed their census identification to American Indian from some other racial category on the census forms.[79] This shift in self-identification raises the questions, who is Native and how is that category defined?

The answers depend on whom you ask. Each Indian nation sets its own criteria for membership. Some specify a particular percentage of ancestry (varying from one-half to one-sixty-fourth), others do not. Some nations specify Native language fluency as a prerequisite for service in their government, others do not. The US government requires one-quarter blood quantum (as indicated on a federal "certificate of Indian blood") in order to qualify for Bureau of Indian Affairs college scholarships. Other federal agencies, such as the Census Bureau, rely on self-identification. Declining social discrimination, growing ethnic pride, a resurgence in Native activism, and the pursuit of sovereign rights may account for the growing numbers of racially mixed US citizens who are now choosing to identify themselves as American Indian.[80]

Despite the stereotypes to the contrary, there is great diversity among this population. K. Tsianina Lomawaima, a professor of American Indian studies, makes this point very clearly when she writes:

> A fluent member of a Cherokee Baptist congregation living in Tahlequah, Oklahoma, is different from an English-speaking, pow-wow-dancing Lakota born and raised in Oakland, California, who is different from a Hopi fluent in Hopi, English, Navajo, and Spanish who lives on the reservation and supports her family by selling "traditional" pottery in New York, Santa Fe, and Scottsdale galleries. The idea of being generically "Indian" really was a figment of Columbus's imagination.[81]

However, there are general demographic statements that can be made about the Native population. The majority live in one of ten states: California, Oklahoma, Arizona, New Mexico, Texas, North Carolina, Washington, Alaska, New York, or South Dakota. Over the last forty years, significant numbers have moved from rural areas to major cities. In 1970, 45 percent lived in a metropolitan area; by 2010, that number had grown to 70 percent.[82] The cities with the greatest number of indigenous people are New York, Los Angeles, Phoenix, Oklahoma City, and Anchorage, Alaska. Only 22 percent of all American Indians (including Alaska Natives) live on reservations and trust lands, with the remaining percentage living in nearby rural communities.[83] According to 2015 census data, the median income of single-race American Indian and Alaska Natives households was $38,530; the national median was $55,775. More Native people live in poverty than any other racial group. Approximately 27 percent of Native families are at or below the official poverty level, compared to a national poverty rate of approximately 15 percent. Among single-race American Indians and Alaska Native adults (twenty-five or older), 14.1 percent had earned a bachelor's, graduate, or professional degree. Overall, Natives have the lowest educational attainment rates of all ethnic and racial groups in the United States and face some of the lowest high school graduation rates nationwide.[84]

Beyond these demographic patterns, there are shared cultural values that are considered characteristic of American Indian families. For example, as with Latinxs (who often have indigenous ancestry), extended family and kinship obligations are considered very important. Consequently, group needs are more important than individual needs. Communal sharing with those less fortunate is expected. Traditional Indian culture sees an interdependent relationship among all living things. Just as one seeks harmony with one's human family, so should a person try to be in harmony with nature, rather than be dominant over it.[85]

## Surviving the Losses

From the beginning of their encounters with Europeans, these and other Indian values were at odds with the individualistic and capitalistic



orientation of the White settlers. US government leaders were convinced that changing Indian cultural values were the key to "civilizing" Indians and acquiring Indian-controlled lands.[86]

Following the establishment of reservations, one of the major strategies used to facilitate this cultural conversion was the establishment of off-reservation boarding schools for Indian children. The first such school was the Carlisle Indian School in Carlisle, Pennsylvania, established in 1879. Over the fifty years that followed, thousands of Indian children as young as five were forcibly removed from their families and placed in boarding schools, too far away for their poverty-stricken families to visit. Parental nurturing was replaced with forced assimilation, hard physical labor, harsh discipline, and emotional, physical, and often sexual abuse. Though the US government's practice of removing children from their home environments was reversed in the 1930s, by then several generations of Indian children had lost their traditional cultural values and ways, and yet remained alienated from the dominant American culture.[87]

Further cultural disruptions occurred in the 1940s and 1950s when federal Indian policy shifted again, this time with the goal of terminating the official relationship between the Indian nations and the US government. Many Indians were taken from their homes and relocated in urban areas, in a manner reminiscent of the earlier forced removal to reservations.[88] The upheaval brought on by the relocation process was devastating. Alcoholism, suicide, and homicide increased to epidemic proportions and continue to be among the leading causes of death among American Indians.[89]

The intergenerational impact of these disruptions can be seen in this Native woman's narrative:

> For 500 years, my people have been told in so many ways, "You're no good. You are a savage. Change your ways. You are not civilized. Your ways are heathen and witchery. Your ways are not Christian!" My grandfather gave up his tribal religion and customs. He adopted Christianity. He, my grandmother, and the other people on the reservation did their best to give up the old ways, become farmers, quit

hunting, go to church and be "good Indians, civilized Indians." They wept when the federal agents rounded up their children to take them away to boarding school. Some of the children never came home. Some came home to be buried. My grandparents and the people wept again because their children grew up learning alien ways, forgetting their language and customs in schools too far away to visit.

My parents married soon after they came home from the boarding school. They came from different tribes. They left my father's reservation encouraged by the U.S. government and the boarding school system to find jobs in the "real world." . . . The promised jobs never materialized and, stuck between two worlds, the big city and the reservation, the Indian world and the White, my father drank and beat my mother. My mother worked at menial jobs to support us. My life was built on this foundation. I was never parented because my parents, raised in government boarding schools, had nothing to give me. They had lost their languages and retained only traces of their cultures. They had never been parented themselves. Boarding school nurturing was having their mouths washed out with soap for talking Indian and receiving beatings for failing to follow directions.

So this is my legacy and the legacy of many Indians, both reservation and urban. . . . We are survivors of multigenerational loss and only through acknowledging our losses will we ever be able to heal.[90]

The legacy of loss is accompanied by a legacy of resistance. As they had in the past, Native peoples resisted the termination policy, and the policy ended in the 1960s following the election of John F. Kennedy. The civil rights era included Native demands for greater self-determination and the development of a pan-Indian movement based on the assumption that indigenous peoples shared a common set of values and interests. In response to American Indian activism, the federal government condemned its own destructive policies of the past and increased support for Indian self-determination, passing legislation in the 1980s and 1990s designed to promote Indian-controlled schools, protect American Indian religious freedom, and preserve traditional Indian languages.[91] During the civil rights era, tribal colleges were established to improve



postsecondary educational opportunities for Native communities on or near reservations. As of 2017, there are thirty-two fully accredited Tribal Colleges and Universities (TCUs) in the United States. Diné College, established in 1968 by the Navajo Nation, was the first and is the largest of these tribally controlled institutions, awarding "associate degrees and certificates in areas important to the economic and social development of the Navajo Nation."[92]

Given the poverty that has resulted from the long history of relocation, isolation, and cultural disruption, economic development is critical for Native communities. A significant development in the economic history of Native peoples in the United States was the passage of the Indian Gaming Regulatory Act (IGRA) in 1988, in which Congress "recognized the exclusive right of tribes to regulate gaming on their lands and sought to promote tribal economic development, self-sufficiency and strong self-government."[93] Specifically, Congress mandated that gaming revenues cannot be used for individual private gain but must be used primarily for public purposes, such as funding tribal government operations or programs, providing for the general welfare of the Indian tribe and its members, promoting tribal economic development, donating to charitable organizations, and funding operations of local government agencies. In addition, revenues can be paid on a per capita basis to individual tribal members with the approval of the secretary of the interior.[94]

The impact of this legislation has been quite dramatic. Revenues have grown from $225 million in 1987 (generated from tribal bingo operations) to $9.8 billion in casino gaming revenue in 1998 and $26.5 billion in 2009. Native American casinos now represent 40 percent of the gaming industry in the US. While not all American Indian nations have chosen to participate or are located near population centers that would make gaming success possible, by 2009 approximately 237 tribes were operating 442 gaming facilities in the US.[95] Two of the largest—Foxwoods, operated by the Mashantucket Pequots, and Mohegan Sun, operated by the Mohegans, both in Connecticut—have been generating billions of dollars annually, dramatically improving the economic well-being of the two nation's members. The gains for members of other

tribal groups have been quite modest. American Indians on gaming reservations experience a 7.4 percent increase in per capita income and reductions in both family and child poverty rates as compared to those on non-gaming reservations.[96]

Those who have experienced gaming success have also experienced backlash from non-Native communities. "Local reactions to tribal sovereignty, often elicited in response to a tribe's decision to pursue gaming, may belie historically anti-tribal and anti-Native attitudes, that while pre-dating Indian gaming, find new vitality in a decade of increasingly plausible Native viability."[97] The stereotype of "rich Indians" who are not paying "their fair share" has been part of the political discourse in California, in particular, home to more people of Native American heritage than any other state in the nation.[98]

> Although we should recognize tribes' limited economic alternatives to gaming, we should be ready to acknowledge as well the role of gaming in politicizing Native identity. Indian gaming has added "rich Indians" and "real Indians" to the vocabulary of policymakers and their constituents. It has served as fodder for caricatures on television and in newspapers, such as a *Family Circus* comic strip depicting a cowboy-dressed child playing a modern "cowboys and Indians" opposite a tuxedo-clad casino operator. At first blush, the *Family Circus* image may seem harmless, but it works, which is to say it is "funny" because it points up the incongruity of cultural perceptions. The subtext of such an image is that the tuxedo-wearing "Indian" is not really authentic, or is at a minimum less authentic than other representations of "Indian-ness."[99]

## "Have You Ever Seen a Real Indian?"

In 2001, the American Indian College Fund (AICF) launched an advertising campaign featuring accomplished Native professionals and tribal college students in an attempt to portray a contemporary and accurate image of Native American people, shown with the caption, "Have you ever seen a real Indian?" Richard Williams, then the executive director of



AICF, said the organization's goal was "to challenge the American public's notions about who Indian people are and what they can become."[100] That 2001 challenge is still part of the Native American reality in 2017, due to both widespread invisibility in terms of contemporary images and continued and pervasive use of stereotypes rooted in the past.

Invisibility in classrooms is a common experience for Native students. In her article "Is There an 'Indian' in Your Classroom?," Lee Little Soldier makes the point that teachers might find it hard to determine whether there even are Native American students in their classrooms.[101] Natives often have European names, and because of the high proportion of mixed-heritage individuals, there are wide variations in physical appearance. While some are easily recognized as people of color, others have light skin, light eyes, and brown or blond hair and may be identified by others as White. Those who are products of Black-Native unions may simply be assumed to be African American. Particularly in those parts of the United States with small indigenous populations, many people may be surprised to discover that Natives still exist at all. For example, American Indian studies professor Donald Andrew Grinde Jr. described his own history professor's response when he expressed an interest in studying American Indian history: "My advisor told me I needed to focus on an area such as American economic history to secure employment. When I told him I was an American Indian and thus still wanted to do research in this area, he smiled and murmured, 'I thought that we had killed all of them.'"[102] This perception is not surprising given the missing information about Native peoples in most US history curricula.

Viena, a Native American teen living on a reservation in northwest Washington, recalls her experience in a predominantly White elementary school off the reservation.

> There was a time, I was in third grade, there was a film about Native Americans, something in the movie I knew wasn't right and I came home really sad about the Paiute. The movie said the so-called pioneers came westward. They were in some fort and their fort was encircled by the Paiute and burnt to the ground. The whole class got

> to watch that film. The class was saying how horrible the Paiute were. My mom went in and talked to the teacher; she said to the teacher, "Did you know Viena is Paiute?" She could not deal with it. She could not deal with the fact—the European Americans did bring diseased blankets, how many people died. You cannot just say one side. . . . Our people did not just attack people for no reason. It is true that Indians did burn down forts, but it is the way in which the story has been told [that bothers me]. Why did they have to defend themselves in this way?[103]

Historical omissions and distortions don't just affect Native students, they also contribute to the miseducation of everyone else. The same can be said of the stereotypical images popularized by the use of American Indians as mascots. One consequence of the relative invisibility of Native peoples is that the knowledge most Americans have about them is "formed and fostered by *indirectly* acquired information (e.g., media representations of American Indians.)"[104]

The most highly visible example has been, and at this writing continues to be, the NFL football team in the nation's capital, the Washington Redskins. The term *redskin* was widely used in the nineteenth century to describe the scalped head of a Native American for which state governments paid bounties. The ugliness of its history continues in the present, as it is now used as a derogatory racial slur.[105] There is growing pressure on the Washington football team to change its name, and there are media outlets that now refuse to use it, referring to the NFL team as simply "the Washington football team." The NFL owner asserts that the name will "never change." As disturbing as that is, what is more problematic than the name of this national team is the use of similarly derogatory mascots in public K–12 schools.[106]

In 2001 the US Commission on Civil Rights issued a statement on the issue: "The stereotyping of any racial, ethnic, religious or other groups when promoted by our public educational institutions, teach all students that stereotyping of minority groups is acceptable, a dangerous lesson in a diverse society. Schools have a responsibility to educate their students; they should not use their influence to perpetuate misrepresentations of any culture or people."[107]



Since then, the American Psychological Association, the American Sociological Association, the American Counselors Association, and the National Collegiate Athletics Association have all called for the elimination of such usage of American Indian and Alaska Native names, mascots, symbols, and logos. Several state boards of education have taken action to ban the use of these mascots and symbols in the schools within their states. But not all have.[108]

Leaving these symbols in place can create a hostile learning environment for students. Consider this example shared by Dahkotah Kicking Bear Brown, Miwok student and football player at a California high school:

> One of our school's biggest rivals is the Calaveras Redskins. Calaveras has always had an obscene amount of school pride, but little do they know how damaging their game-time routines are. With so many around me, I feel ganged up on, but at the same time, all of these screaming fans don't know how offensive they are, or that they are even in the presence of a Native. Most of the time, they don't even know that Natives are still around. Worst of all, the most offensive stuff doesn't even come from the Redskins. It comes from their rival schools, mine included. I have heard my own friends yelling around me, "Kill the Redskins!" or "Send them on the Trail of Tears!"[109]

Some have argued that some of the mascot representations, such as a "chief," are positive, honoring American Indian heritage. However, Native students say they do not feel honored. Cierra Fields, a Cherokee member of the National Congress of American Indians Youth Cabinet, articulated this viewpoint:

> When I see people wearing headdresses and face paint or doing the tomahawk chop, it makes me feel demeaned. The current society does not bother to learn that our ways, customs, dress, symbols, and

> images are sacred. They claim it's for honor but I don't see honor in non-Natives wearing face paint or headdresses as they are not warriors who have earned the right. My heritage and culture is not a joke. My heritage and culture is not a fashion statement. For me it ultimately boils down to respect. Respect our heritage by not using a caricature of a proud people but by learning our history.[110]

The research of social psychologist Stephanie Fryberg and others has demonstrated that whether the stereotypical image is "negative" or "positive" in its content, the impact on Native American youth is harmful in terms of lowering self-esteem, feelings of community worth, and achievement-related possible selves. In the absence of a broader range of societal images of American Indians, the stereotypes have a disproportionate impact.

> The current American Indian mascot representations function as inordinately powerful communicators, to Natives and non-Natives alike, of how American Indians should look and behave. American Indian mascots thus remind American Indians of the limited ways in which others see them. Moreover, because identity construction is not solely an individual process (i.e., you cannot be a self by yourself), the views of American Indians held by others can also limit the ways in which American Indians see themselves.[111]

The antidote to these limited images is to "either eliminate them or to create, distribute, and institutionalize a broader array of social representations of American Indians."[112] Parents, educators, and students themselves can work to eliminate the stereotypical representations from schools. Sonia Nieto and Patty Bode share a case study in their book, *Affirming Diversity,* of a group of eighth-grade students who did just that, with the support of their teacher.[113]

Paul Ongtooguk, an Alaskan Native educator, has made it his mission to develop curricula that assumes Alaska Natives such as the Inupiaq are not just people with a past but also people with a future. As he said in a speech to fellow educators in Alaska,



> We have a suicide rate for Alaska Native males that is about eight times the national average in the age category from 15 through 24. What does that say? Some people would look at that statistic and say, well, that's not about education—it's not an educational statistic. But I look at that, and I look at the lives of the people who are trapped in it. We are talking about young people who are going through life so ill-prepared for the future, whose opportunities are so narrow, whose sense of the future is so bleak, and whose circumstances are so overwhelming that death is preferable to the life that lies before them. Isn't that an educational issue? Something for us to consider.[114]

Throughout his career, Ongtooguk has pushed to create curricular materials that would inspire Native students to see themselves in the future. He worked to reconstruct the "Inupiaq Heritage Curriculum," which at the time he began consisted primarily of Native arts and crafts projects. While the traditional arts and crafts were worthy of study, the curriculum embodied a "museum" perspective whereby the traditional life of Alaska Natives was studied as "an interesting curiosity commemorating the past." Ongtooguk explained, "The most disturbing picture of Inupiaq culture, then, was of its static nature—something that had happened 'back then' rather than something that was happening now. Did this mean that the people living in the region now were like a cast of actors who had run out of lines?"

He set out to reconstruct the curriculum to reflect not only traditional life but also transitional life and the modern period. "If, as their teachers commonly implied, being Inupiaq only meant being traditional (or Ipani), then both assimilation and all of modern schooling were essentially cultural genocide in that they moved the students away from things traditional. . . . [Students] needed to know both what was and what is crucial for survival and for leading productive lives within the Inupiaq community."[115]

The inclusion of contemporary life as part of this revised Inupiaq studies curriculum was essential if Inupiaq students were to see themselves reflected in the schools and see the Inupiaq identity as having a future, not only a past. They needed a coherent picture of the continuity,

conflict, and cultural transformation that had shaped and continued to shape the Inupiaq community. Ongtooguk's reconstructed curriculum was eventually adopted by the Northwest Arctic School District and became a model for Yup'ik studies in several school districts in southwest Alaska.[116]

Such curricular interventions stand in stark contrast to the deculturalization that has been the legacy of American Indian education, reminding us that education does not have to mean alienation. More such interventions are needed if faculty and students, both Native and White, are to realize that the Native community is not a relic of the past but a growing community with a future.

Another growing population, which, unlike American Indians, is usually assumed to have a very bright future, is the Asian and Pacific Islander (API) community. The collective image of Asians as the "model minority" in the United States is a pervasive one. Yet, as we will again see, even a "positive" stereotype can have negative consequences, and like the Latinx and Native communities, the API community is not a monolith.

## What Do We Mean When We Say "Asian"?

The terms *Asian* and *Asian American* encompass people of many different national origins, histories, cultures, languages, and religions. The federal government, for the purpose of the census, defines "Asian" as "a person having origins in any of the original peoples of the Far East, Southeast Asia, or the Indian subcontinent, including for example, Cambodia, China, India, Japan, Korea, Malaysia, Pakistan, the Philippine Islands, Thailand and Vietnam."[117]

Cultural traditions and religious beliefs vary greatly across this vast geographic region and include Buddhism, Islam, Christianity (both Protestant and Catholic), Hinduism, Shintoism, Confucianism, ancestor worship, and animism.[118]

Given the wide range of countries of origin and the cultural diversity represented, it is reasonable to ask whether the umbrella category of "Asian" is a useful one. Scholars Min Zhou and Jennifer Lee say it is, primarily because of the way race operates in American society.



> In the United States, race often overrides many major socioeconomic and cultural factors—including education, occupation, language, and religion—to affect the everyday lives of all Americans. . . . Asian-origin Americans . . . adopt the pan-ethnic label because of convenience and because other Americans cannot and often do not even try to make ethnic distinctions, despite vast differences in national origin, religion, language, and culture.[119]

Collectively, Asian Americans have the highest median family incomes, highest levels of education, highest rates of intermarriage, and the lowest rates of residential segregation in the country.[120] They are also the fastest-growing racial group in the United States.[121] The Asian population in the US grew by 43 percent, from 10.2 million to 14.7 million, between 2000 and 2010, while the US population overall grew 9.7 percent.[122] In 2014, the estimated number of people of Asian descent was 20.3 million, approximately 6 percent of the total US population. At 4.5 million, the Chinese are the largest Asian group, followed by Asian Indians (3.8 million), Filipinos (3.8 million), Vietnamese (2.0 million), Koreans (1.8 million), and Japanese (1.4 million).[123] Together these top six groups account for approximately 85 percent of the total Asian population. Asians in the US are concentrated on the West Coast (47 percent), with 20 percent living in the Northeast, 21 percent in the South, and just 11 percent in the Midwest.[124]

In 1960, most Asian Americans were descendants of early Chinese and Japanese immigrants. Changes in immigration policy in 1965 dramatically increased Asian immigration, significantly altering the demographic makeup of the Asian American community. By 2010, 59 percent of Asians in the US were foreign-born, compared to 13 percent of the total US population. Among Asian adults over the age of twenty-five, the percentage of foreign-born is even higher—74 percent. As is the case among Latinxs, each national group has its own unique immigration history that has shaped its experience in the United States. While it is not possible to review the immigration history of all these groups, the immigration experience of the most populous groups will be briefly summarized here.[125]

The Chinese were the first Asians to immigrate to the United States in large numbers, arriving in California in 1850 as part of the rush for gold. These first arrivals were single men who paid their own way to the California gold fields, hoping to get rich and then return to China. As the gold rush waned, many Chinese did not have enough money to go home. Hired at wages one-third below what Whites would have been paid, Chinese men found employment as laborers working on the transcontinental railroad and on California farms.[126] When the US economy took a sharp downturn in the mid-1870s, White labor union leaders blamed Chinese workers for the depressed wage levels and the Chinese became a frequent target of racial bigotry and violence. In fact, in 1871 the largest mass lynching in US history took place in Los Angeles when a mob of White men attacked and lynched more than twenty Chinese men.[127]

The anti-Chinese sentiment culminated in the passage of the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882.[128] Immigration was severely restricted by the Chinese Exclusion Act and completely forbidden by the 1924 Immigration Act. Like Blacks and Indians, the Chinese, referred to as the "yellow peril," were reviled and viewed as a threat to White racial purity. Laws prohibiting marriage between a White person and a "negro, mulatto, or Mongolian" were passed.[129] These laws, combined with immigration restrictions, special taxes directed against the Chinese, and discrimination in housing and employment, limited the growth of the Chinese population. Most of the men did not start families in the United States, and many returned to China.[130]

A second wave of Chinese immigration occurred after World War II. In an effort to promote an alliance with China against Japan, the US government repealed the Exclusion Act to allow a few thousand Chinese to enter the country. Chinese scientists and professionals and their families escaping communism were part of this second wave.[131]

A third wave of Chinese immigration occurred after the 1965 Immigration Act (and its 1990 extension). Because racial quotas on immigration were eliminated by this legislation, Chinese immigration dramatically increased, with entire families immigrating at once. The Chinese population grew from 237,000 in 1960 to over 4 million in



2010.[132] In the last fifty years, Chinese immigrants have come not only from China but also from Hong Kong, Taiwan, Vietnam, Laos, and Cambodia, as well as other parts of Asia, some arriving with little education and few resources while others have college and graduate degrees, family savings, and in-demand job skills. The latter group of new Chinese immigrants is not drawn to ethnic enclaves like the Chinatowns found in major cities; instead, they have the financial ability to settle in affluent suburbs or in "new suburban ethnic enclaves known as 'ethnoburbs.'"[133]

In contrast to the Chinese and other Asian immigrants, more than three-quarters of the people with Japanese ancestry in the United States are American-born, descendants of those who came to the US mainland or Hawaii before 1924. These early immigrants were attracted by higher US wages, and because the Japanese government encouraged women to emigrate as well, often as "picture brides" in arranged marriages, Japanese families quickly established themselves. While Japanese workers were welcomed on the plantations of Hawaii, there was considerable anti-Japanese feeling on the West Coast.[134] In 1906 the San Francisco Board of Education established a separate school for Chinese, Japanese, and Korean children, and the California Alien Land Law of 1913 prohibited Japanese immigrants and other foreign-born residents from purchasing agricultural land because they were ineligible for citizenship. (The Naturalization Act, passed in 1790, only allowed Whites to become naturalized citizens, so while children born in the United States automatically became citizens, until this law was repealed, their immigrant parents could never be eligible.) As with the Chinese, immigration of Japanese came to a halt with the Immigration Act of 1924.[135]

The Japanese bombing of Pearl Harbor in 1941 certainly intensified anti-Japanese sentiment. In March 1942, Executive Order 9102 established the War Relocation Authority, making it possible to remove 120,000 Japanese Americans from their West Coast homes without a trial or hearing and confine them in internment camps in places as far away as Idaho, Colorado, and Utah.[136] One response to this internment experience was for Japanese American families to encourage their children to become as "American" as possible in an effort to prevent

further discrimination. For this reason, as well as their longevity in the United States, Japanese Americans as a group are the most acculturated of the Asian American communities, and the only Asian ethnic group not currently growing in population size. Japanese have high rates of intermarriage—more than half of Japanese American newlyweds in 2010 married a non-Asian—and 35 percent of Japanese Americans identified themselves as multiracial in the 2010 census.[137]

Like the Chinese, Koreans arrived in the US in distinct waves of immigration, beginning with seven thousand farmers who came to Hawaii to escape poverty and work on plantations there in the early 1900s, followed there by Korean "picture brides." Koreans were subject to the same antimiscegenation laws that affected the Chinese. Another small group of immigrants came to the United States after World War II and the Korean War. This group included Korean adoptees and Korean women who were married to US soldiers. As with the Chinese, the 1965 Immigration Act dramatically increased Korean immigration of entire families, with thirty thousand Koreans arriving annually between 1970 and 1990. Most Korean Americans currently living in the United States were part of this post-1965 immigration. Typically these families consist of immigrant parents and American-born or American-raised children, families in which differing rates of acculturation may contribute to generational conflicts.[138] Koreans in the US come from a wide range of socioeconomic and educational levels, but more than half (53 percent) of Korean adults over the age of twenty-five have a college degree, earned either in Korea or in the United States.[139]

Filipino Americans also experienced a pattern of male immigration to Hawaii, and then the mainland United States, in the early 1900s. Because these men could not establish families, there are few descendants from this wave of immigration. This pattern ended in 1930 when Congress set a Filipino immigration quota of fifty per year. As with Chinese and Koreans, tens of thousands of Filipinos have immigrated annually since 1965. As of the 2010 census, 69 percent of Filipinos were foreign-born. Forty-seven percent of Filipino adults have a college degree, and the poverty rate is only 6 percent, the lowest of all Asian groups in the US.[140] Reflecting the colonial history of the Philippines,



Filipinos have a multicultural heritage of Chinese, Spanish, Malayan, Indonesian, South Asian, American, and Muslim cultural influences and are similar to Pacific Islanders in many ways.[141]

Southeast Asian refugees are quite different from other Asian immigrant groups in their reasons for coming to the United States and their experiences in their homelands. After the end of the Vietnam War in 1975, a large number of mostly educated Vietnamese arrived. After 1978, a second group of immigrants, many of them uneducated rural farmers traumatized by the war and its aftermath, came to the United States to escape persecution. This group includes Vietnamese, Chinese Vietnamese, Cambodians, Lao, Hmong, and Mien.[142]

Among Vietnamese, another wave of immigration occurred after 1980 as the result of an agreement negotiated between Vietnam and the US. A subsequent wave of Vietnamese immigration in the 1990s was the result of the process of family unification, as new immigrants came to join family members that had already established a presence in the United States. Vietnamese now represent 10 percent of the adult Asian American population, 84 percent of whom are foreign-born. Less well educated than other Asians, 26 percent of Vietnamese adults have college degrees and 15 percent live in poverty, compared to 12 percent of Asians overall.[143]

Asian Indians have also experienced a dramatic population growth in the United States since 1965. The number of Asian Indians in the United States increased from eight hundred thousand in 1990 to almost four million in 2014. The first wave of immigrants from India—about six thousand—came to work as farmhands, arriving in the first decade of the twentieth century. Initially, Indians were classified in court cases of 1910 and 1913 as "Caucasians" and consequently were allowed to intermarry with US-born Whites.[144] Because previous Supreme Court rulings had established that being Caucasian was synonymous with being White, a group of Asian Indians, on the basis of their Caucasian classification, pursued their right to become citizens but were denied because of their brown skin. In 1923 the case went to the Supreme Court—*United States v. Bhagat Singh Thind.* The judges ruled that while Asian Indians were Caucasians (descended from the Caucasoid region

of Eurasia), they could not be considered White and consequently were not eligible for US citizenship. This ruling made explicit the concept of skin color as a bar to becoming a citizen. As the court ruling stated, "It may be true that the blond Scandinavian and the brown Hindu have a common ancestor in the dim reaches of antiquity, but the average man knows perfectly well that there are unmistakable and profound differences between them today," adding that "the intention of the Founding Fathers was to 'confer the privilege of citizenship upon the class of persons they knew as white.'"[145] This racial barrier to citizenship was not removed until 1952 when the passage of the McCarran-Walter Act revoked the Naturalization Act of 1790.

The real turning point in Asian immigration occurred in 1965 during the civil rights movement when US leaders decided to abandon previous racist desires to maintain a primarily all-White republic. The Immigration Act of 1965 provided for annual admission of 170,000 immigrants from the Eastern Hemisphere and 120,000 from the Western, with 20,000 immigrants per country allowed from the Eastern Hemisphere.[146]

As we have seen, the legislative action of 1965 dramatically changed the flow of immigration from Asian countries. In the case of India, it allowed for an influx of well-educated, English-speaking adults to come to the US for skilled employment. As of 2010, 87 percent of Asian Indians in the US were foreign-born, and 70 percent of all Asian Indian adults over the age of twenty-five had earned at least a bachelor's degree, making them more highly educated as a group than other Asians and more than the US population as a whole. Because of their high level of education, median family incomes are also higher—in 2010, the median annual income for Indians was $88,000, much higher than for all Asians ($66,000) and all US households ($49,800). While the majority of Indians in India are Hindus, as of 2012 only about half (51 percent) of Indian immigrants to the US are Hindus; 18 percent identified as Christians and 10 percent are Muslim.[147] Pakistanis are also considered part of the Asian American population, linguistically and culturally similar to Indians, and there are also high levels of education among



Pakistani immigrants in the US. Because most Pakistanis are Muslim, they are sometimes mistakenly thought to be from the Middle East.[148]

Another population group often discussed in the context of Asian Americans is the Native Hawaiian and Pacific Islanders (NHPI). In the 1990s they were included in the census data with Asians but advocated for their own separate census category, which was granted in 2000. The NHPI population is much smaller than that of other Asian groups—approximately 1.5 million in 2014—and has a very different history relative to the United States. Theirs is not a story of migration but rather one of colonial conquest, particularly in Hawaii. Plantation economies and US military installations in the Pacific have played an important role in the NHPI experience. A highly diverse group, Native Hawaiians make up 41 percent of the NHPI population, followed by Samoans (13 percent), Guamanians or Chamorros (10 percent), Tongans (5 percent), Fijians (3 percent), and Marshallese (2 percent), and 26 percent are from other, much smaller Pacific island origins.[149] Relative to the Asian American population, NHPIs have lower levels of educational attainment (20.9 percent have a college degree) and a higher poverty rate (18.4 percent).[150]

The linguistic, religious, and other cultural diversity of these disparate groups, some of whom have long histories of conflict with one another in Asia—for example, Japan and Korea, Japan and China, China and Vietnam—gives validity to the question posed by Valerie Lee, director of the 1992 Asian American Renaissance Conference: "What do we have in common except for racism and rice?"[151] Social scientists Kenyon Chan and Shirley Hune argue that racism is quite enough. Because the treatment of early Asian immigrant communities was so similar and distinctions between them ignored by the dominant culture, the foundation of a group identity was laid.

> Racial ideologies defined Pacific immigrants as aliens ineligible for citizenship, unfair economic competitors, and socially unassimilable groups. For the first one hundred years of "Asian America"—the 1840s to the 1940s—the images of each community were racialized

and predominantly negative. The Chinese were called "Mongolians" and depicted in the popular press as heathens, gamblers, and opium addicts. The Japanese and Koreans were viewed as the "yellow peril." Filipinos were derogatorily referred to as "little brown monkeys," and Asian Indians, most of them Sikhs, were called "ragheads."[152]

In the late 1960s, as part of the social transformation of the civil rights era, the concept of a panethnic Asian American identity emerged among second- and third-generation Japanese, Chinese, and Filipino American college students. Chan and Hune write: "Racial identity and ethnic consciousness were fundamentally transformed along with the racial order. The polarization of civil rights protests required Asians in America to consider their identity, their self-definition, and their place in racialized America. They discovered that racial quotas and legal inequalities applied to them just as they did to other minorities. 'Colored' was clearly defined as anyone nonwhite."[153]

Consequently, the terms *Asian American* and *Asian Pacific American* emerged as a unifying political construct encompassing all US residents of Asian and Pacific Island ancestry, encouraging individuals to work across ethnic lines for increased economic, political, and social rights. Asian American groups have lobbied for bilingual education, curricular reform, Asian American studies, improved working conditions for garment and restaurant workers, and support for community-based development. They have also opposed media misrepresentations and sought more opportunities for Asian Pacific Americans in theater, film, and television. Racial politics have continued to foster this unifying panethnic identity, though the large influx of new immigrants has changed the character of the Asian American community from the stable third- and fourth-generation community of the 1960s to one now composed largely of newcomers.[154]

## Unpacking the Myth of the Model Minority

"What do you know about Asians?" a young Chinese American woman asks Mark, a young White man of Italian descent. His response: "I'm



going to be honest with you. I completely believed the stereotype. Asian people are hard workers, they're really quiet, they get good grades because they have tons of pressure from their families to get good grades. . . . Asians are quiet so people can't have a problem with them."[155]

This exchange captures the essence of the current stereotypes about Asian Americans. The "model minority" characterization is a pervasive one. The first public presentation of this idea is generally credited to a 1966 article by William Petersen entitled "Success Story, Japanese-American Style." It reviewed the success of Japanese Americans despite the history of discrimination they had endured. A similar article describing the success of Chinese Americans appeared in *U.S. News and World Report* the same year.[156] Both articles used statistics on rising educational attainment and income levels, along with statistics on low rates of reported crime and mental illness, to demonstrate how Asian cultural values had allowed these groups to succeed against the odds.[157] Now, more than fifty years later, Asian American youth are routinely depicted in the media as star students (especially in math and science) supported by industrious, entrepreneurial, and upwardly mobile parents.

In their book *The Asian American Achievement Paradox*, sociologists Min Zhou and Jennifer Lee reflect on how, despite decades of institutional discrimination and racial prejudice, the stereotypes of Asian Americans changed from "undesirables" to "models of success."[158] The answer, they say, lies in the dramatic shift in the immigrant population itself. Unlike the low-skilled laborers who came to California in the nineteenth century, the Chinese immigrants who arrived after 1965 are a "hyperselected" group. They define *hyperselectivity* as a relative concept that uses two reference groups against which to compare a group of immigrants—the first comparison group being the peers they are leaving behind in their country of origin and the second being the native-born citizens of the host country. When the immigrants have above-average education as compared to their peers at home, they are a "highly selected" group, but when they have above-average education relative to the host country peers as well, they can be described as "hyperselected." By these criteria, there is no doubt that Chinese immigrants are a hyperselected group. While only 4 percent of adults in China have at least an

undergraduate degree, half of Chinese adult immigrants to the US do, and nearly half of the college-educated Chinese immigrants have earned a master's or doctoral degree as well, mostly from US universities. Not only are they twelve times more likely than Chinese at home to have a college degree, with a college graduation rate of 50 percent, their education rate is far above the college-going rate among the general US population (28 percent). Because of their higher level of education, they are able to earn above-average incomes in the US.[159]

By contrast, Vietnamese immigrants are not hyperselected, because their educational attainment does not exceed the general US population's, but they are highly selected, because 23 percent of Vietnamese immigrant adults have at least a bachelor's degree, compared to only 5 percent of their peers in Vietnam. While not all Vietnamese are well educated—in fact, a significant portion did not finish high school—the positive perception of Asians as highly educated is cast over them as well.[160] "Although Vietnamese immigrants are not hyper-selected as are Chinese immigrants, they benefit from the hyper-selectivity of the Chinese because they are racialized as Asian American; the hyper-selectivity of Chinese immigrants (the largest Asian immigrant population in the United States) drives the general American perception that all Chinese immigrants and all Asian immigrants more generally are highly educated."[161]

Compare this perception to the situation of Mexican immigrants. As a group, they are "hyposelected" because on average their educational attainment is lower than their peers' back in Mexico, and it is also lower than the general population's in the United States. Though the overall education level of Mexicans in Mexico is relatively high, Americans tend to perceive all Mexicans as poorly educated because of the low selectivity of Mexican immigration. Conversely, Asian Indians are another hyperselected group, creating the perception that Indians as a whole are highly educated, but most Indians in India do not have formal schooling.[162] In general, Asian immigrants are likely to be more economically successful upon arrival in the US than Mexican immigrants, for example, because they are coming with more social capital in the form of their advanced education.



Zhou and Lee argue that the hyperselectivity of Asian immigration sets the foundation for Asian immigrant parents and their second-generation children "to create and adopt a specific cultural frame about achievement and success that is supported by public and ethnic resources, reinforced in institutional contexts and buttressed by social psychological processes. Together, these factors explain the Asian American achievement paradox, or the so-called exceptional academic outcomes of Asian Americans."[163] Because so many Asian immigrants have high levels of education, they have the resources to re-create institutions (e.g., businesses, cultural institutions, ethnic organizations) that help them and their fellow Asian immigrants adapt to their new country and help their children succeed in school. Those institutions, once created, benefit not only the hyperselected but also the less-educated of their ethnic community, who may find employment opportunities and supplemental educational resources for their children within the same ethnic community. "Chinese ethnic communities and ethnic newspapers are dotted with signs for Chinese language schools, after-school tutoring, academic enrichment programs, and cultural enrichment programs (such as music, dance, and sports) that arm Chinese immigrants with supplemental skills that help them excel academically."[164] They also bring with them a very specific definition of achievement and success, a "success frame" that includes earning straight As (an A- is described as an "Asian F"), graduating at the top of one's class, earning a degree at an elite university, and working in one of four high-status professions (medicine, law, engineering, or science).[165]

This "success frame" is rewarded by teachers and guidance counselors who assume that Asian children are smart, hardworking, and destined to be high-achievers and consequently are more likely to provide them access to the best resources in public schools (gifted and talented programs and honors or Advanced Placement courses) than non-Asian students.[166] Unlike the stereotype threat that tends to depress the performance of Black students, Asian students are likely to benefit from "stereotype promise," the performance-enhancing benefit of being expected to succeed. For example, a second-generation Chinese student offered this example from her junior high school: "Like in math, they

[my teachers] would be like, 'Oh, Nancy, this should be easy for you.' Just like passing tests out, they would make little comments like, 'Oh, I expected you to do better.' Math isn't my thing, you know. Just because I'm Asian doesn't mean I'm smart in math."[167]

In Nancy's case, not wanting to disappoint her teacher or her parents, she put in extra effort, with the help of the tutors her parents provided, and eventually was placed in an AP math class in high school. Stereotype promise can become a self-fulfilling prophecy.

Zhou and Lee found that even Asian students who exhibited mediocre or below-average academic performance were given the benefit of the doubt by teachers and encouraged to improve, and sometimes placed in honors or AP courses without the academic profile usually required for such placement. By contrast, Mexican participants in their study were rarely placed in the honors or AP classes. Asian students in Zhou and Lee's study sample noticed that the expectations others held for them were not extended to other groups of color. Lily, a 1.5-generation Chinese woman, explained, "Like it's expected that every Asian goes to college, gets a college degree or more. It's just, like, they expect you to do well in school. I don't think it's expected much, like, say for Mexicans."[168]

The "ethnic capital" of the hyperselected Asian community also benefits working-class Chinese and Vietnamese children whose parents have just a grade-school education, because they are able to learn from more highly educated immigrant peers about the importance of being in honors and AP classes for college admissions and how to navigate the school system to get placed at that level. Children of Mexican immigrants noticed that they were not in the same classes as their Asian peers, but because of the lower educational attainment in their ethnic community, they did not have access to the same kind of shared knowledge about maximizing the school resources within their social networks.[169]

Zhou and Lee identify another factor important to the successful educational outcomes of Asian children: mind-set. "Asian immigrants have been raised in countries where the prevalent belief is that effort, rather than ability, is the most critical ingredient for achievement. . . . By contrast, native-born American parents believe that their children's outcomes are more heavily influenced by innate ability."[170] As was discussed in Chapter 4, if you have an "effort" mind-set, you are more likely to persist in the face of academic challenges. Families with an effort mind-set emphasize the value of practice and are more likely to invest in supplemental resources (like tutors) to achieve the desired outcomes.



The downside of high expectations and a belief in the power of effective effort is that those who do not achieve the high standard of success set by their families and teachers describe feelings of failure and see themselves as "ethnoracial outliers" who have to distance themselves from their Asian peers and their ethnic community. One such young man was Adam, the son of highly educated Vietnamese immigrants, who was not able to maintain the high level of academic success that his family expected in high school or in college. By comparison, his brother achieved all aspects of the success frame. Because Adam does not feel successful according to Vietnamese standards, he has distanced himself from his ethnic group, avoiding contact with other Vietnamese. Adam said, "I'm not sure how people see me. If they ask what I am, I say Vietnamese, but I don't consider myself Vietnamese enough." His brother, he says, is more truly Vietnamese.[171] Similarly, Zhou and Lee report that many 1.5- and second-generation Koreans who have not achieved the key elements of the success frame—graduation from an elite university and a high-status career—are embarrassed by their "failure" and feel a need to disassociate themselves from the Korean American community because they do not feel "authentically Korean or Korean American."[172]

Though many children of Asian immigrants have internalized the cultural expectations and the stereotype of stellar academic achievement, only a small percentage attain the culturally specific hallmarks of success, and many deviate widely from them.

> Even based on the Immigration and Intergenerational Mobility in Metropolitan Los Angeles (IIMMLA) data, we find that nearly two-fifths of 1.5 and second generation Chinese do not graduate from college, and half of Vietnamese do not obtain a bachelor's degree. Yet Asians and non-Asians alike tend to overlook those Asian Americans

> who do not graduate from college, do not attain the success frame, and do not fit the model minority stereotype. These Asian Americans either go unnoticed or are dismissed as exceptions. The cultural lag keeps the association between ethnoracial status and achievement in place, despite the bevy of disconfirming evidence.[173]

Whether positive or negative in content, stereotypes are hard to erase once they have been etched in our collective memories.

Another dimension of the Zhou and Lee study using data from the IIMMLA survey was the comparison they were able to make between the outcomes of Chinese and Vietnamese immigrants and their 1.5- and second-generation children and the outcomes of Mexicans and their 1.5- and second-generation children. Perhaps not surprisingly, they found that the Chinese children of immigrants exhibited the highest levels of education—as with native-born families, the strongest predictor of a child's level of education is the parent's level of education. But they found that Mexican children of immigrants had made the greatest educational advances relative to their parents.

> Though more than 55 percent of Mexican immigrant parents did not graduate from high school, this figure dropped to 14 percent within one generation. In essence, the 1.5 and second generation nearly doubled the high school graduation rates of their parents. Moreover the college graduation rate of 1.5 and second-generation Mexicans (18 percent) is far lower than the rate for the Chinese (63 percent), but it is more than double that of their Mexican immigrant fathers (7 percent) and triple that of their immigrant mothers (5 percent). Thus, when we measure attainment intergenerationally rather than cross-sectionally, the children of Mexican immigrants exhibit the greatest educational gains of the three second-generation groups. In this respect, the children of Mexican immigrants are successfully assimilating and doing so rapidly.[174]

In terms of intergroup relations, the myth of the model minority has served to pit Asian Americans against other groups targeted by racism.



The accusing message of the dominant society to Blacks, Latinxs, and Native Americans is, "They overcame discrimination—why can't you?" Of course, as the research of Zhou and Lee makes clear, any group comparisons that don't take into account differential starting points are inherently flawed.

In addition, uncritical acceptance of the stereotype has concealed the needs and problems of those Asian ethnic groups in America that have not experienced uniformly high levels of success. While the Asian high school dropout rate is very low overall (2 percent), there are some Asian subgroups that have much higher dropout rates: Bhutanese (37 percent), Burmese (21 percent), Nepalese (11 percent), and Cambodian (6 percent). In general, the high school dropout rate among Southeast Asians (5 percent) is more than double that of the total Asian rate.[175] Among eighteen- to twenty-four-year-olds, college-going rates also vary across Asian ethnic groups, ranging from 20 percent for Bhutanese young adults to 84 percent for other Southeast Asian (e.g., Indonesian and Malaysian) young adults. In 2013, the total college enrollment rate for Asian eighteen- to twenty-four-year-olds was 67 percent.[176]

Do teachers sometimes overlook the learning needs of Asian students because they assume they don't need help? For individual students, the stereotype of success may have negative consequences for the quality of instruction they receive. For example, educator Lisa Delpit reports her observation of a five-year-old Asian American girl in a Montessori kindergarten class dutifully engaged in the task the teacher had assigned, placing a number of objects next to the various numerals printed on a cloth. The child worked quietly without any help from the teacher, and when the time was up, she put her work away. Delpit writes, "The only problem was that at the end of the session no numeral had the correct number of objects next to it. The teacher later told me that Cathy, like Asian-American students she had taught previously, was one of the best students in the class." In this case, the stereotype of good Asian students meant Cathy had not received the instruction she needed.[177]

Vinh, a Vietnamese student, noted the feedback he gets from his teachers is not always as helpful as he would like, perhaps because it is too positive.

> Sometimes, the English teachers, they don't understand about us. Because something we not do good . . . like my English is not good. And she say, "Oh, your English is great!" But that's the way American culture is. But my culture is not like that. If my English is not good, [the teacher] has to say, "Your English is not good. So you have to go home and study." And she tell me what to study and how to study to get better. But some Americans, you know, they don't understand about myself. So they just say, "Oh! You're doing a good job! You're doing great! Everything is great!" Teachers talk like that, but my culture is different. They say, "You have to do better." So, sometimes when I do something not good, and my teachers say, "Oh, you did great!" I don't like it. I want the truth better.[178]

Asian students in America know that their teachers expect them to excel in math and science, and they may be encouraged to pursue those fields at the expense of other academic interests. Educators Pang, Kiang, and Pak report that Asian Pacific American students often suffer from communication anxiety, feeling inadequate about their writing and speaking ability. This anxiety may contribute to a student's choice to pursue subject areas, such as math, that require less verbal fluency. In this case, the model-minority stereotype actually serves to restrict their academic options.[179]

## Finding a Voice

Another dimension of the model-minority stereotype is the notion that Asian Pacific Americans are quiet and content with the status quo. Mitsuye Yamada challenges that stereotype in her classic essay, "Invisibility Is an Unnatural Disaster: Reflections of an Asian American Woman."[180] She recounts her experiences teaching the Asian segment of an ethnic American literature course and discovering that her White students were offended by the angry tone of the Asian American writers. Yamada was puzzled by this response, since her students had not been offended by the Black, Chicanx, or Native American writings. When she pressed them for an explanation, they said they understood the anger of Blacks and Chicanxs and empathized with the frustrations and sorrows of the American Indians. But the anger of the Asian Americans took them by surprise. As one student said, "It made me angry. Their anger made me angry, because I didn't even know the Asian Americans felt oppressed. I didn't expect their anger."[181]



The myth of the model minority obscures the reality of racism in the lives of Asian Pacific Americans and encourages their silence about it. One of my Korean American students wrote about this silence: "When racial comments were said around me I would somehow ignore it and pretend that nothing was said. By ignoring comments such as these, I was protecting myself. It became sort of a defense mechanism." While denial is a common coping strategy for dealing with racism, when the experiences are too numerous or too painful to be ignored, the silence is broken. Unfortunately, the voices of Asian Pacific American students often fall on deaf ears.

In his essay "We Could Shape It: Organizing for Asian Pacific American Student Empowerment," Peter Nien-chu Kiang cites examples from urban and suburban schools in Massachusetts in which Asian Pacific American students were frequent victims of racial harassment.[182] For example, Thuy, a Vietnamese immigrant, recalled, "When we pass by them they give you some kind of like a dirty look. . . . They say, 'Look at that Chinese girl,' and they call like, 'Chinks, go back where you belong.'"[183]

Yet in each case cited by Kiang, school administrators seemed unresponsive. Responding to this indifference, one young Asian American woman said: "It made me realize even more that . . . no one listens to [Asians]. Like if the African Americans came out and said something, probably the people in the school would have done something, but when the Asians come out, no one really does anything."[184]

Out of this context grew a regional youth conference organized by an ad hoc group of adults and teens who initially gathered to discuss how community resources could support Asian Pacific American students confronting racial harassment at school. The result was the Conference for Asian Pacific American Youth, attended by seven hundred students from fifty area high schools. The conference brought together many Asian Pacific American students who had been isolated in their own schools

and created a place for them to see themselves reflected in each other and to explore their identities as Asian Pacific Americans. The power of this process is reflected in Amy's comments. She recalls her first meeting:

> When I first walked in, I swear, I just wanted to turn around and walk right out, I was so intimidated. I've never really been in a room with so many Asian students in my age group. I was like, what am I doing here? And then I started coming to the meetings, and I got more involved in it, and I was like, oh my god, you know this is really cool! Asians are cool! [laughs][185]

Planning for the conference sessions and workshops introduced the student organizers to older generations of Asian Pacific American activists. The topics they discussed ranged from gangs and media stereotypes to interracial dating, civil rights strategies, and curriculum reform. The opportunity to work with Asian adults was very meaningful because there were no Asian Pacific American teachers in most of the schools they represented. For Amy and others, the conference planning process was a transformative experience not unlike Paul Ongtooguk's discovery of his Inupiaq history. Said Amy, "I've become really proud of who I am and where I come from, and I know that I've become stronger. I'm no longer that silent anymore. . . . I have really found myself."[186]

The process of finding oneself in the face of invisibility, silence, and stereotypes is not an easy one. In her analysis of thirty-nine autobiographical narratives written by Asian American adults, Lucy Tse uncovered their struggle to face and name their oppression, then to affirm a positive sense of their identity as Asian Americans.[187] Documentary filmmaker Eunice Lau has captured that struggle in a forthcoming (2017) film about Asian American gang members in Atlanta called *A-Town Boyz*. Lau describes confusion about identity as the common thread in the stories of the young people she encountered in the process of making the documentary.

> There's the big question of this myth of the model minority: we all go to school, we get our straight A's, and we take a certain path and end up as law-abiding Ivy League college graduates who get white collar jobs. . . . But the truth is that the majority of our community did not take that path. What happened to those guys who didn't take the 'prescribed' route to success?[188]



Hoping that her film will broaden the conversation about Asian American identity, Lau is joined in the project by her producer Grace Jung. Jung recalls her own growing-up experience,

> Being of a lower middle-class household, both of my parents worked full-time during the week and on Saturdays. . . . I was often lonely, and in my social circles, I never once felt completely accepted for who I was. I thought I was the only one but as it turns out, feelings of instability and insecurity are typical for many Asian-American kids growing up in the U.S., and the subjects of this film illustrate it for us, along with the choices they've made in reaction to that pain.[189]

## Racial Formation and Racial Identity

Asian Pacific Americans, Latinxs, and Native Americans are disparate groups, but they all share with people of African descent the struggle for identity where European heritage—or Whiteness—is defined as the American norm. As social scientists Chan and Hune remind us, the racialization of America has never been simply Black and White. Early European settlers used race-based policies toward Native Americans long before Africans were introduced to this continent. The US government applied race-based discriminatory and exclusionary policies to Mexican residents and Chinese settlers in the Western territories immediately upon contact. The social categories we now use are the legacy of those racial formations.[190] Cultural identities are not solely determined in response to racial ideologies, but racism increases the need for a positive self-defined identity in order to survive psychologically.

To find one's racial or ethnic identity, one must deal with negative stereotypes, resist internalizing negative self-perceptions, and affirm the

meaning of ethnicity for oneself.[191] If educators and parents wish to foster these positive psychological outcomes for the children in our care, we must hear their voices and affirm their identities at school and at home. And we must interrupt the racism that places them at risk.

## Middle Eastern and North Africans (MENAs)

Coming to terms with the social meaning of one's racial-ethnic-cultural identity in the face of negative stereotyping is a challenging task for all members of marginalized groups, but it may be particularly complex for those who do not fit neatly into standard racial categories. The group of people whose families originate from the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) are among those who are not neatly categorized. In 2016, the federal government announced a proposal to add a new ethnic category to the US Census form specifically for people of MENA ancestry. Though the proposal must be approved by Congress and would not be in use until the 2020 census, the working MENA classification includes people with origins in Algeria, Bahrain, Egypt, Iraq, Iran, Israel, Jordan, Kuwait, Lebanon, Libya, Morocco, Oman, Palestine, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Syria, Tunisia, the United Arab Emirates, or Yemen, as well as those who identify as Amazigh, Berber, Arab, Assyrian, Bedouin, Chaldean, Copt, Druze, Kurdish, or Syriac. Groups that could be added in the future include Turks, Sudanese, Somalis, Afghans, Armenians, Azerbaijanis, Cypriots, Djiboutians, Georgians, Mauritanians, South Sudanese, and Turkish Cypriots.[192]

As this long list suggests, those whose country of origin is in the MENA region are a very heterogeneous group that is multicultural, multiracial, and multiethnic. Some have historically been identified as "White" in the US, an important designation during the era when US citizenship was for Whites only. Other darker-skinned peoples might have been classified as "Black" or self-identified as "Other."[193] As with the Asian Pacific Americans, there is a tendency to lump those from the MENA region under one umbrella category—Arabs or Muslims—but neither term can be applied across the region with accuracy. Some are Arabs and some are not. Some are Muslims and some are not. Although



"Arab" and "Muslim" are often linked together in the popular culture, many Arabs are Christian, and many Muslims are not Arabs.

In fact, the first wave of MENA immigrants came to the United States between 1890 and 1940 from regions now known as Syria and Lebanon. Ninety percent were Christian, with limited education, seeking economic opportunity. These early immigrants seem to have assimilated in their new country with relative ease, recognized by others as White based on their physical appearance.[194]

The second wave of MENA immigrants began after World War II, following the 1948 Arab-Israeli War and revolutions in Egypt and Iraq in the 1950s. Dominated by Palestinians and Muslims with an "Arab identity" from Egypt, Iraq, and Syria, this group consisted of highly educated elites.[195] Following the Immigration and Nationality Act of 1965, the third wave of immigrants came to the US seeking family reunification, education, and employment opportunities and an escape from the war and violence in the MENA region. Many of this cohort of immigrants are Muslim. The growth of the MENA immigrant population has been steady, going from 223,000 in 1980 to slightly more than one million in 2013.[196] Approximately 70 percent of the MENA population is from the Middle East and 30 percent from North Africa, and it is concentrated in California, Michigan, and New York.[197] It is important to note that while the MENA population is only about one million people (not all of whom are Muslim), the Muslim population in the US is approximately 3.3 million, the majority of whom are US-born. Only a quarter of American Muslims are of Arab descent. Approximately one-third of the Muslim community is African American, one-third is of South Asian descent, and the rest are from all over the world, including a growing Latinx Muslim population.[198]

The MENA population, whether Arab or not, Muslim or not, has been increasingly impacted by anti-Arab sentiments and "terrorist" stereotyping in the US. For MENA youth, the terrorist attack of September 11, 2001, forever known as "9/11," marked a turning point in how others looked at them and how they looked at themselves in the United States. In his introduction to *Growing Up Muslim: Muslim College Students in America Tell Their Life Stories* (edited by Andrew

Garrod and Robert Kilkenny), Eboo Patel writes: "On the evening of September 10, 2001, these were sensitive, intelligent young people experiencing adolescent identity issues typical of the children of immigrants who practice a minority faith tradition. Twenty-four hours later, an important part of their identity had been marked as the source of absolute evil."[199]

The 9/11 attacks brought a heightened salience to the Muslim aspect of their identities that has been hard for young people to carry. For Zahra, who describes herself as a "black Muslim Somali girl," 9/11 brought her Muslim identity to the foreground. She was a sophomore in high school then. "We had never realized how vulnerable we were as minorities until 9/11. I always viewed myself as a racial minority, as my being black seemed most significant to others in American society. After the attacks, however, my being Muslim was the characteristic that was most openly challenged and discriminated against."[200]

Aly, a Muslim student of Pakistani descent, described his college experience before and after 9/11.

> I never felt particularly marginalized as a Muslim student. I had always been vocal on a range of political issues and prided myself on being a political liberal. . . . After 9/11, however, the comfort zone started to contract. Having an openly Muslim identity in an increasingly hostile public arena is a daunting experience. I have read virulent columns by tenured professors at elite universities attacking Islam as intrinsically violent and hateful. I have sat through lectures at Dartmouth at which my religion has been derided as a dangerous ideology. . . . I find myself being more and more on the defensive, having to explain why I can be both a part of North American society and a Muslim. It is draining to constantly feel that you have to be on the defensive and to justify who you are, which I am beginning to increasingly resent. These challenges seem relentless, and not always separate or impersonal.[201]

To avoid the relentless challenges, for some there is the temptation to "pass" by altering one's appearance—for women, choosing not to wear the hijab (traditional Muslim head scarf), or for men, remaining clean-shaven rather than wearing a beard, or changing one's name to something less ethnically identifiable. Commonly, people of Middle Eastern descent have dark hair, large facial features, and skin tones of varying shades of tan. In a study of Middle Eastern Americans, researchers Amir Marvasti and Karyn McKinney found that some Middle Eastern Americans "try to pass by trading their own ethnic identity with a less controversial one." Moving to an ethnically diverse region allows a chameleon-like experience of blending in with others around them. Some of their respondents found that by living in South Florida they avoided some of the negative encounters with Islamophobic or anti-Arab bigotry because they were assumed to be Hispanic.[202] Denying a core part of one's own identity comes with a psychological cost, increasing the risk of internalizing the negative attitudes one is seeking to avoid.



Claiming one's identity with pride, even in the face of hostility, is for some a much preferred stance, the outcome of a quest for identity of the kind Jean Phinney has described. This process is visible in the narrative of Amani Al-Khatahtbeh, author of *Muslim Girl: A Coming of Age*. She was in the fourth grade in 2001. She writes:

> I'm not really sure I understood what was going on when 9/11 happened, but I was old enough to feel the world shift on its axis that day and change everything forever. . . . That day has become crystallized in my memory not just for how harrowingly scary it was—how we didn't know what would come after that—but also because I deeply believe that my generation of millennial Muslims has, whether we like it or not, come to be defined by it.[203]

The child of Palestinian and Jordanian immigrant parents, she was bullied at school, and her parents were harassed at their workplace. Their New Jersey home was defaced with rotten eggs and water balloons. She was in the sixth grade when she first decided to deny her religion.

> It happened one sunny afternoon on our yellow school bus, heading home from another exhausting day of middle school in which I

> constantly tried to blend away my differences and fit in, only to inevitably capture the attention of bullies in my classes, and even ones I didn't know in the halls. I would get taunted for being a "monster" as I walked to class between periods, and all I ever wanted to do was disappear.[204]

A schoolmate on the bus asked her what religion she was. Not wearing a head scarf, she was not immediately identifiable as a Muslim. The question prompted a wave of panic, and after a long hesitation, she replied, "Oh, I don't know. Something Mediterranean, I forget." Rather than the relief she longed for, instead she experienced a deep sense of shame for denying something so much a part of her sense of identity. She writes, "I didn't realize it at the time, but that decision would become a pivotal moment in my journey."[205]

Amani captures the confusion she felt at that early adolescent period in her life. "I was so fractured by my Muslim identity and Western society that I was completely lost in this weird enigma of awkward girl puberty and unbearable racism that emerged as a total disconnect."[206] What she needed was the opportunity to immerse herself in an active exploration of identity in the company of supportive peers. That opportunity came when her father decided to take his family back to Jordan. Though the time spent in Jordan was relatively short, just nine months, it was transformational for Amani. "The culmination of my experience in Jordan, where I heard Muslim and Arab people's narratives and diverse stories in their own voices, reignited my pride in my heritage and religion and prompted my desire to finally reclaim my identity."[207]

With new and deeper knowledge of her family's heritage, she began to redefine her identity as a Muslim as not a source of harassment but instead a source of pride.

> I decided [then] that I wanted to wear a headscarf, as a public marker that I belonged to this people. I wanted it to be so that before people even knew my name, the first thing they would know about me is that I am a Muslim. I told myself that upon my return to the States, I would wear the headscarf with pride as my outward rebellion against the Islamophobia that had seized me and suffocated me most of my life. With that decision, I inherited the entire history to which the hijab has been tied, and carried it on my head like an issue for public debate.[208]



Amani's assertion of her identity through the claiming of her head scarf, despite her earlier rejection of it, is reminiscent of the example of the Latina who reclaimed her Spanish and its importance to her identity in college after her childhood rejection of the language that had set her apart from the mainstream, again illustrating the similarity of the process of identity exploration among marginalized groups in the face of that marginalization.

When Amani's family returned to New Jersey, she stuck to her decision to wear the hijab, though other women in her family, including her mother, did not. It was not easy. "On my first day back to junior high school in New Jersey, I had a panic attack." Afraid of how her classmates would respond to her head scarf, she was awash in anxiety. Her father assured her that she could take it off but said, "Just know that if you are able to commit to this, then there's nothing else in your life that you wouldn't be strong enough to commit to." With that, she went forward with her hijab still on. For her, the wearing of the head scarf is a physical symbol of the intersection of both her gender identity and Muslim identity. "The headscarf is not only intertwined with our respective cultures, but it has also become the strongest emblem of our distinct identities as Muslim women. And how could it not? It is hypervisible and unmistakable."[209]

Back in New Jersey, she yearned to be part of a community of young women like herself, and in 2009, still a teenager, she created a virtual "cafeteria table" for herself and other young Muslim women by launching the website MuslimGirl.[210] Reflecting on that time, Al-Khatahtbeh writes:

> I acutely identified that I was leading a unique and trying experience as a millennial Muslim, the daughter of an immigrant and a refugee, born and raised in the United States—ostracized through bullying,

heightened Islamophobia, and the difficult task of growing up as a young girl in a misogynistic and hypersexualized society. My life, and the lives of others like me, reflected a deeply entrenched double jeopardy to which Frances Beal first introduced us: the intersectional concept of being subjected to racism, and then further being subjected to sexism within that racist framework. While it refers to the unique and incomparable oppression of black women in the United States, Beal's concept of double jeopardy can unfortunately be applied in varying degrees to the exacerbation of many Muslim women's struggles in a post-9/11 era. Not only do we have to battle today's modern assault on our religion, but we also have to defy its sexist application to us both inside and outside of our own communities, all on top of the preexisting anti-black racism that black Muslim women suffer from Muslims and non-Muslims alike.

I knew that there *had* to be other girls who were going through these experiences, who also wanted to have conversations that were directly relevant to our Muslim lifestyles in today's society. I wanted to find them.[211]

Realizing that the opportunity for connection was missing, that there was a void, Amani realized she could do something about that. "I thought, *Why not?* I would make a new community entirely." MuslimGirl evolved from a teenager's refuge to a cultural phenomenon, garnering attention from mainstream media outlets and giving its founder a platform and eventually national visibility as a media commentator.

The empowerment that comes from connecting with others who have shared experiences and concerns is critical for those whose identities are challenged by stereotyping and the bigotry of others. Like Amani, Zahra, the Somali Muslim quoted earlier, found that the opportunity to connect deeply with Muslim friends in college reduced her sense of isolation. She said, "I had friends from all sorts of backgrounds, but my closest friends—the ones I spoke to about serious and personal topics . . . whom I related to as if they were family—were three Muslims."[212] They understood why she didn't want to go to alcohol-heavy campus parties and why she chose to wear her hijab. Her family



members had feared that in college she would lose herself, feeling forced to conform in negative ways. Zahra found the opposite was true. "On the contrary, I believe that the more I discovered who I am and what my relationship is with the world around me, the stronger I became academically and professionally. I could be me—African, American, Muslim, a woman . . . it took all the life experiences I have had thus far to bring me to this point, where I am feeling most content."[213]

It is also critical for allies—those who are not the targets of anti-Arab racism and Islamophobia—to raise their voices in support of those who are. Though most mass shootings in the US have been committed by US-born White men, it is rare (if ever) that those shooters are identified by their religious affiliations. They are viewed and talked about as individuals, not as representatives of a racial, ethnic, or religious group. When an attack is carried out by someone who is a Muslim, the acts of the individual or extremist group are projected onto a global population of 1.6 billion Muslims (3.3 million in the US), the vast majority of whom live peacefully in their communities, just as most White men do. The repeated representation of Muslims as a dangerous presence in American society has served to legitimize anti-Muslim feelings and has fueled the rise in anti-Muslim hate crimes. According to the FBI, in 2015 there were 257 reports of assaults, attacks on mosques, and other hate crimes against Muslims, a sharp increase of about 67 percent over 2014. Not since 2001, when in the aftermath of the 9/11 attacks more than 480 attacks occurred, have there been so many anti-Muslim hate crimes.[214]

Muslim women are particularly vulnerable because of their identifiable religious attire. Sadly, male members of the Sikh religion, who are typically from India and also wear religious attire—turbans—have also become hate-crime targets, mistakenly identified as Muslims.[215] The anti-Muslim rhetoric that fuels such violence escalated during the presidential campaign of 2016 as Donald Trump proposed a ban on Muslim immigrants. In the first weeks of his presidency, Trump issued an executive order halting immigration from seven majority-Muslim countries, stranding travelers, young and old, with visas in hand, suddenly unable to enter the US.[216] At this writing, it is unclear whether this is just

the beginning of presidential actions impacting the American Muslim community. As difficult as this situation is for the Muslim community, Al-Khatahtbeh has seen signs of goodwill.

> Amid all the chaos, I witnessed one interesting development for the first time in my entire life since 9/11. When Trump's words rang around the country, many Americans were roused to rise to the defense of their Muslim neighbors. Social and broadcast media highlighted heartwarming stories of extended hands between Muslims and non-Muslims, images popped up on my feed of non-Muslim Americans going the extra distance to make Muslims feel safe here in their own hometowns, and my Muslim friends from across the country recorded moments of increased acts of warmth and kindness towards them—seemingly as though our fellow countrymen were making an effort to remind us that this was our country, too. It was as if, through Trump's outrageously hateful rhetoric, America had awoken to the reality that now was time to defend and protect a minority community that needed it. Even though Trump represented the racist underbelly of a nation, light rose to the surface, even through the most negligible of cracks, to resist it.[217]

## Spreading the Light

What can concerned educators do to support Middle Eastern, North African, and/or Muslim students, recognizing that sometimes these identities intersect and sometimes they don't?

*Acknowledge their presence institutionally.* During the years I served as president of Spelman College, I made an effort to recognize the presence of Muslim students on our campus. The school was founded by two Christian missionaries in 1881, and its motto, "Our Whole School for Christ," is directly linked to that history. Yet my goal as president was to ensure that all of our students, regardless of religious affiliation, felt welcome and included in our campus community. One tangible way to do so was to host an *iftar* (a special meal commemorating the end of Ramadan, the month of fasting) at the president's residence on campus for Muslim students, faculty, and staff and their invited guests.



Another important act of affirmation of our Muslim students was to invite a Muslim student to participate in the baccalaureate service on commencement weekend. Just as we had a student read from the Hebrew scriptures (Old Testament) and a student read from the New Testament, we also asked a Muslim student to read a text from the Quran as an integral part of the service. When we had Baha'i students, a reading from that faith tradition was included as well. In these ways, we signaled to those who might otherwise feel excluded in the midst of a majority-Christian environment that they too were an important part of our community. Everyone wants to feel included. Though I have described here relatively small acts, the impact was meaningful for community members who too often were accustomed to being treated as either invisible or dangerous in the wider society.

*Educate yourself.* Though I identify as a Christian, I had the wonderful opportunity to learn something about Islam when I was a student at Hartford Seminary, an academic community that is committed to fostering interfaith dialogue. Not everyone will take a course on Islam, as I did at Hartford Seminary, but all of us can learn more about Islam and the MENA region from reliable sources like the American-Arab Anti-Discrimination Committee and Teaching Tolerance, both of which offer educational resources for teachers. Get beyond the stereotypes. Seek out ways to include the voices of MENA and Muslim students, but don't ask members of these marginalized communities to speak for their whole community.

*Speak up against Islamophobia.* Anyone can interrupt an offensive joke, challenge stereotypes, or offer assistance to someone who is being harassed or is fearful that they might be. If you don't know how best to be helpful, ask and then *listen*. Use your own privilege to question policies that are discriminatory. Be public in your support for those who are targeted, so they will know where to find help when it is needed. In a time of darkness, we all have to generate more light.