

Our Issue Too

We Asian-Americans occupy an interesting place in the American racial ecosystem. Though a small portion of the population, peoples of East and South Asian descent make up a large portion of America's universities, earn higher salaries than any other demographic group, and boast the lowest rates of crime. These phenomena have led us to be characterized by American society as *model minorities*, often cited by some to claim that America doesn't have a race problem at all. Worse yet, some members of our community have bought into these convenient lies— attitudes expressed when car locks click at intersections, parents dissuade their children from playing certain sports, or ignorant comments are discharged at policies like affirmative action.

An understanding of historical context is a critical portion of any discussion of policy. Though we may now occupy a place of privilege, our background is not far removed from the discrimination that, sadly, we may now be complicit in spreading. The Asian Exclusion Act of 1882 barred us from ever becoming naturalized citizens. It was not repealed until 1945. The first labor organizations, founded as bastions of progressive thought, excluded us from their ranks. For much of the 20th century, the image of an Asian was that of a horde of opium-addicted petty criminals bent on debasing American society. Though many of today's Asian Americans arrived long after the deadliest forms of racism faded from practice, their legacies reverberate to this day. And the same stereotypes that targeted us now target others. The crack pipe might have replaced the opium stick, but the intent behind such characterizations remains. The same political motivations that fuel the myth that Mexicans can somehow be both lazy and job-stealing were applied to us, too. Long before calls for Muslims to be banned were proposed, edicts closed the door for millions of hopeful migrants from our homelands. To understand these continuities is to deconstruct racism itself, to destroy the mask of otherization and see marginalized groups for what they are: human beings. Xenophobes characterized us as savages just seventy years ago, and they were wrong. We need to be able to see that they're wrong again today.

Senator Harris, there can be no denying that we live in troubling times. As a senator from California, you represent America's largest and most diverse state. Your words and actions represent the hopes and dreams of more than ten million people of every race, religion, and background. Your leadership has the opportunity to bring voices long suppressed into the highest chambers of government. Yet such a task will not be easy, and such great power comes with a heavy burden. I hope that you stay in touch with all Californians, holding town halls and relying on political advice from your constituents and not special interests. I hope that you campaign against division, no matter how impossible the odds become. Lastly, I hope that you use your platform to demonstrate that we, no matter our skin color, are more similar than different.