"Too Many Asians at this School":
Racialized Perceptions and Identity Formation

An Essay Presented

by

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INTRODUCTION

Background:
My thesis investigates the origins of the perception that there are “too many Asians” in magnet public high schools. I intend to study both the source of this perception and its consequences for Asian students at these magnet public high schools.

This question grew out of my own personal experience. I attended Hunter College High School (HCHS), a magnet high school in New York City. My entering class in 1997 was 30 percent Asian, but the incoming class when I was a senior in 2003 was over 50 percent Asian. During my senior year, the view emerged among both the students and the principal was that there were too many Asian students, to the detriment of the school.1 The school’s 2003 curricular review had a sub-committee devoted to HCHS’s admissions process. The main concern of the admissions sub-committee was to determine the school’s success in educating the brightest young talent in New York City. After comparing the demographic of the primarily white and Asian student body with that of New York City as a whole, the sub-committee deemed that the current admissions process unsatisfactory. Suggestions for improvement focused on ways to increase diversity at HCHS. Proposals included eliminating automatic admissions from Hunter College Elementary School, capping high school admissions per district in New York City, increasing the percentage of low-income students, which was

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1 I met with the principal one-on-one every week, and one of the issues we discussed was the high percentage of Asians at the school. The principal has since changed since I graduated from the school.
then at 10 percent, and increasing outreach to underrepresented neighborhoods. The Chinese Parent Teacher Association reacted negatively to the proposal of capping the number of students by district, as many of the Asian students were from three or four neighborhoods in Queens—Flushing, Forest Hills, Bayside, and Fresh Meadows. They argued that the proposals would directly target the number of Asian students. The curricular review presented its recommendations as I was graduating, but with frequent principal turnover in the past five years, few of the recommendations from the curricular review have been implemented.

In addition from the debates happening at the curricular review and the Chinese Parent Teacher Association, the discussion affected students. Discussions revealed that students from a variety of racial backgrounds felt that the increasing percentage of Asian students at the school threatened the culture of the school. HCHS prided itself on being a school that fostered student leadership through a plethora of student clubs, sports teams, and artistic groups. Students attested that the growing Asian student population had detracted from the creativity and independence that had defined HCHS’s activity scene as the Asian students focused primarily on their academic studies. Those Asian students who were active in extracurricular activities were perceived to be disingenuous. Students felt that Asian students knew how to manipulate the college admissions committees, but lacked passion for the activities they participated in.

These discussions were eye-opening, and paved the way for my thesis. First, I want to understand the issue of HCHS’s lack of diversity, raised in the curricular review. Addressing the question of diversity requires resolving the
disproportionate representation of the four major racial groups in New York City—the under-representation of black and Latino students, and the overrepresentation of white and Asian students. However, the focus of the discussion was on there being too many Asian students. If the discussion had actually been about diversity, the disproportionate representations of the black, Latino, and white students would have been included in the discussion. The exclusion of the white students from the discussion implies that the real issue at hand was that the school felt threatened by the increasing Asian population at the school. Secondly, I want to understand whether or not there is an effect on the school in light of the increasing number of Asian students on the school. Is there a correlation between the increased numbers of Asian students in the student body and the school becoming less vibrant, and if so, is it because the Asian students are choosing to focus on their academics? Why did the Asian students make that choice? Did Asian students lack authenticity with respect to their passion for their extracurricular activities? I suspected that the Asian students at the school felt uncomfortable joining the extracurricular activities because they were dominated by the white students at the school. My primary question was how other Asian students felt about the perception that there were too many of them at HCHS.

Doing further research, I discovered that the racial imbalance was not a problem specific to HCHS—other magnet public high schools face the problem of

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2 I choose to use the term “Latino” instead of “Hispanic” because Latino According to the Oxford English Dictionary, “Latino” refers to “A Latin-American inhabitant of the United States.” Hispanic means “Pertaining to Spain or its people; esp. pertaining to ancient Spain.”

3 I understand that this is a contentious term. I use this term throughout my thesis because that was the term my interview subjects used the most often.
having too many Asian and white students, but not enough black and Latino students. Many of the schools have tried various tactics, with limited success. The New York City Department of Education created Specialized High School Institute (SHSI) is a free preparatory program available to all middle school students with high scores on the city-wide test. While the program is not limited to certain racial groups, the institute’s goal is to increase black and Latino numbers at New York City Board of Education’s top three exam schools—Stuyvesant High School, Bronx High School of Science, and Brooklyn Technical High School. An August New York Times article reported plunging black and Latino numbers at these specialized high schools, as extreme as at Brooklyn Technical High School, where in the span of eleven years, the percentage of black students at the school went from 37.3 percent to 14.9 percent. HCHS reserves 10 percent of its class for low-income students—these are students who get into the school, despite a lower score on the entrance exam. The 10 percent is race blind, although within the 10 percent, the proportion of black and Latino students is higher than within the other 90 percent of the school, a testament to the relationship between race and socioeconomic class. At Lowell High School, a magnet school in San Francisco, efforts to create a more diverse student body resulted first in quotas by race, which was struck down for being unconstitutional. Today, Lowell’s admission has programs targeting students from underrepresented middle schools. At Boston Latin School, a magnet school in Boston, race was used as an admissions criterion, but that was struck down in the early 1990’s, and resulted in plummeting Latino and black numbers at the school.
One common theme among the school is that in the absence of explicit affirmative action policies, black and Latino students are not getting into the magnet public high schools. The increased opportunities available to them intended to boost admissions have mostly been ineffective. Blacks and Latinos are viewed to be the underperforming minorities in America, while whites are the majority, and Asians are the model minority. The aim of my study is not to determine why the racial achievement gap exists, but instead to understand the impact of the existing system on the Asian students at the school. I hypothesize that Asian students are negatively impacted by the perception that they are overrepresented, and that it leads the students to behave in certain ways in the school context. When I refer to the overrepresentation of Asian students in my thesis, I am not referring to the numerical overrepresentation. Their numerical overrepresentation is a fact—Asians make up 4 percent of the United States and close to 50 percent of many of these magnet schools. I am instead referring to the perception that there are “too many Asian students” at the schools, and the commentary that accompanies this perception. I argue that there are prejudices encoded in the commentary.

Methodology

My hypothesis is predicated on the assumption that the perception that there are too many Asians at magnet public schools really exists. I use the accounts from the students at the school to gather information on the assumption and my hypothesis. To supplement the accounts from the interviews, I use social theory to provide frameworks for understanding the implication of the student
accounts. I conducted twenty-seven interviews with Asian and white students who were primarily alumni of the following four schools (Please see the chart on the next page for the break-down of the gender, race, and school-attended of the interview subjects): Boston Latin School in Boston, Lowell High School in San Francisco, and Hunter College High School and Stuyvesant High School, two magnet high schools in New York City. Boston Latin School is governed by the Boston Public Schools Committee. HCHS is a lab school governed by the City University of New York (CUNY), and Stuyvesant is the premier public magnet school governed by the New York City Board of Education.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>School</th>
<th>Asian Interviews</th>
<th>White Interviews</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Boston Latin School</td>
<td>2 (1 boy, 1 girl)</td>
<td>2 (1 boy, 1 girl)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hunter College High School</td>
<td>4 (1 boy, 3 girls)</td>
<td>3 (2 boys, 2 girls)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lowell High School</td>
<td>3 (1 boy, 2 girls)</td>
<td>1 (girl)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Monta Vista High School</td>
<td>1 (boy)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stuyvesant High School</td>
<td>8 (4 boys, 3 girls)</td>
<td>5 (4 boys, 1 girls)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TOTAL</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

I also use personal accounts from my experience talking with students and working with the administration at HCHS. I also interviewed one male student who went to Monta Vista High School, a public school in California infamous for its high Asian population, and one high school administrator at Stuyvesant High School. I decided to interview the Monta Vista High School student because of a recent Wall Street Journal article titled “the second white flight” documenting the exiting of white families from an increasingly Asian community of Cupertino, California. His experiences paralleled the experiences of Asian students at magnet high schools in that Monta Vista High School was a very prestigious school, but was decreasing in desirability because of the increasing number of Asian students.
Both my experience working with the principal at HCHS and the interview with the Stuyvesant administrator shed light on the administration’s perspective of the overrepresentation of Asian students, and the pressures they faced as administrators.

I chose to interview both Asian and white students because they constituted the biggest demographic within the magnet public schools. I am interested in how the two groups experienced high school, and whether there was a difference in the experience. I was also interested in how students from different racial backgrounds perceive the students’ experiences from other racial backgrounds. I chose not to interview black and Latino students from these schools because of their limited presence, which resulted in the few black and Latino students being tokenized. While their experience merits scholarly work, their experience has less impact on the experiences of Asian students than the white students, and it is the impact on the Asian students that I am primarily interested in. In order to determine whether or not there was a perception that there were too many Asians, I interviewed the group that would theoretically have and perpetuate that perception, which in these schools would be the white students. While the Latino, black, and white students all thought there were too many Asians, the white students’ perspective was different from the black and Latino student because the white students were equally represented as the Asian students in these school, which implies that motivation behind the perception of too many Asians was different. For the black and Hispanic students, Asian numbers indeed needed to decrease for black and Hispanic students to be
proportionately represented, which was not the case for white students. The number of Asian students needed to be decreased so that whites could maintain their numerical majority. In early interviews before I interviewed the white students, many of the Asian interview subjects referred to the white crowd versus the Asian crowd in the school, and I pursued this phenomenon in my thesis. I am especially interested in the similarities of perception between the Asian students and the white students. Oftentimes in discussions dealing with racial perceptions, the people from the minority group tend to be more aware of racial dynamics, so I wanted to see whether the white students were aware of how they acted within the school context. The white students at the school had an interesting hegemony over the rest of the student population because while in Lowell High School and Stuyvesant High School they were the numerical minority, the Asian students treated them, and acted as if the white students were the dominant group, or cultural majority.

I accounted for socioeconomic class differences in my interviews by asking my interview subjects their parents’ professions and about their backgrounds prior to coming to the schools. I found within the Asian interview set a wide range of professions, representing a wide range of socioeconomic classes, from factory garment worker to researcher at a Cornell University hospital. I found a similar range in backgrounds for my white interview subjects, as some had gone to private school prior to attending the magnet public high schools, while others came from single parent households. Nevertheless, social class does impact students’ educational experiences. However among my interview subjects,
the race of the student affected their school experience more than their social class.  

My main tool of finding interview subjects was through www.facebook.com, a popular college networking tool. I searched for people who were alums of my four target high schools, who attended Harvard. I chose to interview students who were alums of the schools as opposed to current students because of human subjects’ approval—all college students would be over eighteen. I chose students who were current Harvard students primarily for ease of interviewing. There is a good representation of these from the four magnet public schools because these schools are often feeder schools to the elite Ivy League colleges, which adds to their desirability. After identifying potential interview subjects, the subjects were solicited through email for a thirty minute interview. The email briefly explained the project, and asked if they would be interested in participating. For those who responded, 60-minute interview time slots were allotted to account for lateness and to allow conversations to run their full course. I used the same interview prompt for my Asian and my white interview subjects intentionally because I wanted to let the interview subjects lead the direction of the conversation with their comments. My initial questions addressed the absence of race, which types of extracurricular activities they did in high school, and asking for their descriptions of different social groups within the school. The discussion of race usually emerged earlier in interviews with Asian

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5 For the full transcript of the solicitation email, please see the appendix of the thesis.

6 For the transcript of the original interview prompt, please see the appendix of the thesis.
students versus the white students, but both the Asian and white interview subjects eventually commented on the Asian sub-cultures within the school.

I choose to study behavior at magnet public high schools because the public funding of the school excludes variables that might emerge in other educational institutions. Private educational institutions, both high school and college, are responsible to their alumni and tuition-paying students, which results in admissions policies that are socially engineered, and less likely to yield an incoming class that has a minority group disproportionately represented. I am studying magnet schools specifically because their competitive admissions make them centers of controversy. I chose these particular schools both for their location and their varying percentages of Asian students. Boston, San Francisco, and New York City all have a substantial Asian population in their cities. California, New York, and Massachusetts are among the states with the highest number of Asian residents.\footnote{The Asian Population: 2000, \textit{US Census Bureau} [www.census.gov/prod/2002pubs/c2kbr01-16.pdf]}

Boston Latin School is approximately 25 percent Asian, HCHS and Stuyvesant 50 percent Asian, and Lowell High School 75 percent Asian, which provides insight into the different ratios of Asian students and their potential for impacting the Asian experience at these schools.

The racial dichotomy established in my thesis exists between Asian students and white students. The racial construct of both of these terms encompasses many different ethnicities, all of which have their own unique cultural histories and experiences in America. Because race is a function of self-perception and outside perception, however, the specificities of each ethnicity get
lost, particularly for the Asian population. On the majority of demographic
information collection surveys in the United States, the six most commonly used
categories are non-Hispanic white, black, Hispanic, Asian and Pacific Islander,
Native American, and other. As a result of the Asian and Pacific Islander
category, students of different Asian ethnicities begin to identify themselves as
Asian, and the outside perception becomes the self-perception. In my thesis, when
I refer to Asian, I am specifically referring to people of Chinese and Korean
descent because those make up the biggest Asian populations at the schools. The
biggest Asian ethnic populations in Boston are Vietnamese and Chinese, in San
Francisco Chinese, and in New York City, Korean and Chinese.

I cite my interview subjects and Yen Le Espiritu, a prominent scholar on
Asian American identity, as evidence of the pan-Asian identity that forms among
various Asian ethnicities after their arrival in America. In my interviews, I asked
both my white and Asian interview subjects whether they felt that there was a
separation within the Asian group along specific ethnicities, and the interview
subjects said that for the most part, there was not. When I asked Edward Lee, who
is Korean, whether he felt the Korean kids were separate from the rest of the
Asian kids, he said: “Well, my group was, but the other cliquey Asian groups
were a mix, but there more Chinese people, because there were more Chinese
people at Stuyvesant.” The interview subjects, regardless of whether they were
Korean or Chinese, when referring to the social groups at the school used the
umbrella term of “Asians” and “whites,” demonstrating that in their mind they all
identified as being Asian.
Espiritu establishes that individual Asian ethnicities when coming to America, adopt a Pan-Asian identity as a result from the way race is categorized in America, yet adopting “Asian-ness” is slightly more complicated than that: “This is not to say that panethnicity is solely an imposed identity. Although it originated in the minds outsiders, today that panethnic concept is a political resource for insiders, a basis on which to mobilize diverse peoples and to force others to be more responsive to their grievances and agenda.”

While Asian identity is initially imposed, Espiritu argues that Asians take ownership of this new identity by defining the terms of the identity, allowing them to include those who they deem fit their new construction, and exclude those who do not. Espiritu’s argument resonates with my interview findings. The students felt that everyone else at the schools saw them an Asian, which led them to categorize themselves as such, but it also became useful to be part of the group, especially because it guarantees a form of representation. Taking student government as an example, Asian students would take pride in a fellow Asian student representing them in their student government, and white students felt the need to lobby the Asian vote when campaigning for student government elections.

Structure of Thesis

I divided my thesis into three chapters. The first chapter, “Situating the magnet schools in their geographical locations and historical context,” first examines the relevant historical moments of Asians in San Francisco, Boston, and New York City, and San Francisco. Then the chapter traces the changing

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functions of schooling in America, and then focus on the emergence of magnet schools. I argue that magnet schools were the direct product of desegregation. They were ultimately designed to be white spaces, and the overpopulation of Asian students at the schools is undermines this premise, which explains and validates the perception that Asian students are overrepresented.

The Second Chapter, “Schools as Institutions,” uses the intended function of the magnet schools established in the First Chapter as a lens to examine the ways that schools serve as functional sites of control. Citing Pierre Bourdieu, I demonstrate the integral role that schools play in shaping the social class of its students. Using Foucault’s theory of discipline, I argue that schools serve as functional sites of discipline which shape the behaviors and attitudes of their students, who internalize the power structures, and in turn become their own discipliners in the way they police norms for what it means to be a white student in the school versus an Asian student. I draw upon anecdotes from students in the school to demonstrate how they establish boundaries for themselves.

In Chapter Three, “Racialized Perceptions and Identity Formations,” I examine the effect of the perception of the over-representation on Asian students on the Asian students themselves, and on their perception of Asian identity, especially with respect to Asian students aspiring to be white. I explore the heart of the interview results, and find that Asian students for the most part had internalized the perception that there were too many of them. Many of them in the segregated Asian-white context of the high schools aspired to be white.
Conclusion

My interview results reflect the way that Asian students who are alumni of magnet public high schools, who are current students of Harvard, perceive their racial identity. While this research has implications for the racial identity formation of Asian students as a whole, it cannot speak to the entire Asian experience in America. My more specific question is, “In the context of elite magnet public high schools, what is the impact of the perception that there are “too many Asians” on the Asian students in these schools?”

My hypothesis is that Asian students were negatively impacted by the perception that they were overrepresented and were outsiders within the magnet schools. This discussion of Asian students moves beyond conventional literature about race and education, which includes research on black identity in education and explanations for the academic success of Asian American students. My exploration of Asian American racial identity formation and in both academic and non-academic experiences therefore fills a conspicuous hole in the current body of literature concerning this subject.
CHAPTER ONE: SITUATING THE MAGNET SCHOOLS IN THEIR GEOGRAPHICAL LOCATIONS & HISTORICAL CONTEXT

Introduction:

This chapter will provide a geographical and historical context for the four magnet public schools that I am focusing my thesis on. To understand the effects of the commentary surrounding the overrepresentation of Asian students on the Asian students in the magnet public high schools, I will begin by highlighting relevant history moments involving Asians in San Francisco, Boston, New York. These historical moments will provide a context for the controversies surrounding admissions to the magnet schools in the two decades, and will bring up themes which will be revisited in Chapter Three. The differing city histories have a minimal impact on the nature of the magnet public high school.

Then I examine what the intended purpose of magnet public high schools are. According to the Oxford English Dictionary, a school is “an establishment in which boys or girls, or both, receive instruction." Schools are defined by who the school aims to teach, and what the schools aim to teach. This chapter will focus on the former, and chapter two will focus on the latter. To understand the intended purpose of magnet public high schools, one has to understand the purpose of education in America, and the social context in which the magnet school arose in. I will begin this chapter with the changing functions of schooling in America over time, and then focusing on the rise of magnet schools in the context of school desegregation. I argue that magnet public high schools, which were a product of

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desegregation, were designed to have limited success at integrating blacks and whites, and thus magnet schools are intended to function primarily as an educational space for whites.

**Select History of Asians in San Francisco, Boston, and New York City**

This section will be a selective labor and educational history of Asians in America. The labor history is relevant as the first Asian immigrants came to the United States to as laborers. Each city will feature a chart highlighting the racial make-up of the city, the city’s public education system, and the magnet public high school(s) in the city. The purpose of this history is to inform the reader about the context of magnet schools, and of Asians at the magnet schools.

The Asian population in America underwent a demographic shift after the 1965 Immigrant and Nationality Act, which removed the national origin quotas previously existing in immigration law. Below is a chart comparing the pre-1965 and post-1965 ethnic composition of Asians in the United States: 10

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ethnicity</th>
<th>Japanese</th>
<th>Chinese</th>
<th>Filipino</th>
<th>Korean</th>
<th>Asian Indian</th>
<th>Vietnamese</th>
<th>Laotian</th>
<th>Cambodian</th>
<th>Other</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1960</td>
<td>52%</td>
<td>27%</td>
<td>20%</td>
<td>1%</td>
<td>1%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1985</td>
<td>15%</td>
<td>21%</td>
<td>21%</td>
<td>11%</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>12%</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>3%</td>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Along with changing the ethnic composition of Asian America, the new Asian immigrants also included many immigrants who were entering America’s professional class, thus bifurcating the Asian population into both middle class and the working class elements. While my thesis focuses on the post-1965 Asian population, it is important to understand the backgrounds of the first Asian Americans.

San Francisco

San Francisco was envisioned as the center of American trade with the East. Aaron H. Palmer, an American policymaker, submitted a plan to Congress with the goal that “San Francisco would become the ‘great emporium of our commerce on the Pacific.’” This goal would be achieved by developing steam transportation in the Pacific and building the transatlantic railroad, which would require importing Chinese laborers.¹¹ Today, California, with the highest Asian population of any state in the continental United States, still retains that image of being America’s window to the East.¹²

The Chinese “coolie” laborers were imported because they were seen as an alternative to black slaves. Peter Burnett, the first governor of California, disliked the slave system in the South, and tried to exclude blacks from coming to California. Barnett explained his rationale in his Inaugural address “It could be no favor, and no kindness, to permit that class of population to settle in the State under such humiliating conditions…it would be a most serious injury to us. We have certainly the right to prevent any class of population from settling in our State…”¹³ Burnett’s attitude towards blacks reflected a general attitude among Californians, and left a legacy on the racial composition of San Francisco, where blacks make up a smaller small percentage of the population compared to Asians and Latinos. A comparison was made about the relative quality of the races by a

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¹¹ Takaki, 22.
¹³ Peter Barnett’s Inaugural Address, December 20, 1849 [http://www.californiagovernors.ca.gov/h/documents/inaugural_1.html]
resident of Sonoma: “One white man is worth two Chinamen; that one Chinaman
is worth two Negroes, and that one Negro is worth two tramps.”\(^\text{14}\) This quote
reflects the white-induced inflamed relations between Asians and blacks—Asians
were lauded as the better workers. The wedging of Asians between blacks and
whites is a reoccurring theme in the narrative of American race relations.

Despite the welcome that Chinese people initially experienced, they
experienced discrimination when the California economy took a downwards turn,
in part caused by the lack of jobs following the completion of the first
Transcontinental Railroad in May 1869.\(^\text{15}\) In the late 19\(^\text{th}\) century, one in four
workers in California was Chinese, even though the Chinese only made up a
twelfth of the total population.\(^\text{16}\) With unemployment rates high, other workers in
San Francisco became agitated, and saw the Chinese workers as the reason for
their lack of work. Tensions peaked in the summer of 1877, when riots broke out
and Chinese people were persecuted by the local workers. Dennis Kearney, the
Irish founder of the Workingman’s Party of California, led the crusade for
evicting the Chinese workers from San Francisco.\(^\text{17}\) The discrimination against
the Chinese led to their mass migration to other parts of the country.

Workingman’s Party lobbied for the attention of politicians. On March 10,
1880, the party distributed a pamphlet titled, “Chinatown declared a nuisance!”

This pamphlet urged San Francisco politicians to get rid of the Chinese workers, on the premise that Chinatown was a health hazard to San Francisco:

> These Chinese live in the very heart of the city of San Francisco as a distinct colony, violating all laws of hygiene and defying all fire and policy ordinances. In their quarters all civilization of the white race ceases, and a locality is created where lawlessness, and consequent to it, bribery and corruption, is bred and disseminated through our commonwealth to such an extent that not only the physical condition of our race is endangered, but also the morals of our present and rising generation are corrupted.\(^\text{18}\)

The rationale for evacuating the Chinese workers extended beyond the indignation that they were taking the jobs of other white workers, to the fear that the Chinese would contaminate the space of San Francisco, both literally with the violations of the health code, and metaphorically as a contagion with the potential to infect the rest of San Francisco. The Board of Health reported Chinatown to have numerous physical hazards including everything from overcrowding, to filth, to syphilis. Chinese prostitutes were allegedly responsible for nine out of ten sexual diseases contracted by the men in San Francisco.\(^\text{19}\) This theme of the Asians serving as a polluting force is a reoccurring theme that will be revisited.

The Asian population in San Francisco was on the front lines of Asian activism and civil rights, in part because of the demographics of the Bay Area. Following the Civil Rights Act of 1964, integration of public schools in San Francisco dealt more with integrating the Asian and white population, instead of integrating the black and white population. The landmark case for integration was

\(^{18}\) “Chinatown Declared a Nuisance!,” 11 from *The Virtual Museum of the City of San Francisco* [http://www.sfmuseum.org/hist2/nuisance.html]
\(^{19}\) “Chinatown Declared Nuisance,” 5
Guey Heung Lee v. Johnson (1971), which argued that the decision in Brown vs. Board not only applied to blacks, but to all minorities:

The District Court mentions mostly the Blacks, there are in addition to whites, Chinese, Japanese, Filipinos, and Americans both of African and Spanish ancestry. The schools attended by the class here represented are filled predominantly with children of Chinese ancestry—in one 456 out of 482, in another 230 out of 289, and in a third, 1,074 out of 1,111.20

With the Chinese students being one of the largest minority groups, Title VII of the Civil Rights Act extended to integrated facilities for people whose categorization has always been ambiguous under United States law.

This victory was succeeded by the victory won by the Supreme Court case, Lau v. Nichols in 1973. The suit was brought forward by non-English speaking Chinese students against the San Francisco Unified School District (SFUSD), and the suit required the San Francisco school system to provide English as a second language instruction to the 1,800 students of Chinese ancestry who at the time of the lawsuit did not speak English. This case forced Congress to acknowledge that providing equal education did not mean providing identical education—students who did not speak English for example, needed additional resources.21 Many subsequent lawsuits used Lau v. Nichols as its precedent, including Castañeda v. Pickard (1981) and Executive Order 13166 (2000) "Improving Access to Services for Persons with Limited English Proficiency."22

22 National Clearinghouse for English Language Acquisition and Language Instruction Educational Programs, a History. [http://www.ncela.gwu.edu/policy/1_history.htm]
In the early 1980’s, the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) sued SFUSD on grounds that opportunity for academic achievement was not given equally to black and Latino students, compared to white and Asian students. The subsequent court-ordered desegregation plan in 1982 resulted in race-based admissions criteria for the selective public schools, like Lowell High School, the premiere magnet school in San Francisco. The plan stipulated that any given high school in San Francisco could not have a racial group exceed 40 percent of the student body. In effect, this desegregation plan meant that students of Chinese descent had to score higher than whites, who had to score higher than black and Latinos, in order to gain admission to Lowell High School. With the admissions criteria in place, Lowell High School was 60 percent Asian. In 1994, members of the Chinese American community sued SFUSD in Ho v. San Francisco Unified School District (1994), on the grounds that the admissions criterion was unconstitutional because it was based on race. They won their case, and SFUSD instituted non race-based admissions criterion to reverse the racial imbalance at the school. Today, Lowell High School is 70 percent Asian. This is another demonstration of Asian activism in San Francisco.

The impact of San Francisco’s history can be seen in the following chart, comparing the demographics of San Francisco as a city, the San Francisco public schools, and Lowell High School:

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Asians make up the biggest plurality in San Francisco, in addition to making up the biggest part of the public school system. San Francisco differs from most other big cities in the United States, in that its black population is very small compared to its Latino and Asian populations. Asians are numerically over-represented in Lowell High School, doubling their population in Lowell High School compared to the rest of the city and school system. Whites are overrepresented given their percentage in the San Francisco public school system, but underrepresented compared to their percentage in San Francisco overall. Blacks and Latinos are underrepresented compared to both metrics. According to the Civil Rights project, the four most segregated states are California, New York, Michigan, Illinois, and in California and New York only one black student out of every seven goes to a predominantly white school.27

Lowell High School:

Lowell High School was founded in 1856, and proclaims itself to be the oldest school west of the Mississippi. Their school philosophy is:

Underlying Lowell 's philosophy of education is the resolve that the young people of San Francisco continue to enjoy their traditional option of attending a college preparatory public high school. The emphasis requires an instructional program that promotes sound intellectual and aesthetic values while providing opportunities for self-discipline and individual decision-making. Lowell endeavors to create a just and equitable society where individual responsibilities are clearly defined and personal rights guaranteed. It endorses the concept of an integrated school where cultural and social diversity enrich the lives of all students.28

The philosophy presents Lowell High School as an integral part of the San Francisco. The school’s goal is to create students who are independent thinkers in an environment that celebrates diversity. The school’s philosophy suggests its long history with the use of the word “traditional” to describe to school, and the philosophy also indicates the controversial history of the racial makeup of the school by emphasizing the celebration of diversity.

Today, admittance into Lowell High School is determined both by a student’s performance on the California Test of Basic Skills (CTBS) and their middle school report card grades. The limited enrollment admissions system was created in 1966 because of the school’s “limited capacity.” The CTBS score was added to admissions criteria in 1980. Today, Lowell High School uses a system which privileges middle schools underrepresented at the high school; while these middle schools are often ones with the smallest Asian populations, the system is not an explicit form of racially-based affirmative action.

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28 Lowell High School, About [http://www.sfusd.edu/schwww/sch697/about/]
Boston

Calvin T. Sampson brought the first Chinese immigrants to Massachusetts. Sampson owned a successful shoe factory in North Adams, which was shut down when his workers, who were part of the Secret Order of the Knights of St. Crispin, a powerful labor union, went on strike. After unsuccessful attempts to get workers from nearby cities, Sampson took the advice of *Hide and Leather Interest*, the official magazine of shoe manufacturers, and hired Chinese workers through a San Francisco Chinese labor contractor. Seventy-five Chinese immigrants arrived by railroad in June 1870. The newspapers predicted that the Chinese workers would outperform the white workers, and within three months, the prediction came true. Factory owners all over the Northeast began to import Chinese immigrants to work at their factories, using the intermediary of the San Francisco labor contractors, much to the chagrin of the local white unionized workers.\(^\text{29}\)

These seventy-five Chinese workers moved to Boston after their three-year contract expired, and joined the other Chinese workers there, who had been forced to leave California.\(^\text{30}\) The role of the Chinese worker served as an intermediary between unions and the factory owners, leading to the exploitation of the Chinese workers, and the white workers’ antagonism towards the Chinese immigrants.

The Chinese workers in Boston suffered from similar persecution as their counterparts in San Francisco. On October 11, 1903, there was a raid of the Boston Chinatown, which was prompted by the murder of Wong Yak Chong, a 32-year old laundryman. Chinatown was viewed to be the site of much criminal

\(^\text{29}\) Takaki, 96-99.
activity, and a dangerous place, so Captain Cain, the head of police in Chinatown pushed for the deportation of all unregistered Chinese people living in the area. In the evacuation process, the media perpetuated images of Chinese people as rats fleeing their underground places of residents.\textsuperscript{31} Chinatown as the site of criminal activity and the metaphor of the Chinese people as rats and Chinatown as their underground playground are themes that come up again across time and space.

Unlike San Francisco, which was conceived to be the window to the Pacific and arguably more of a cosmopolitan city, Boston was seen as the historical birthplace of the United States, and thus had a more xenophobic view of immigration. Boston became the home to many new Asian immigrants. After the 1965 Immigrant and Nationality Act, Vietnamese and Chinese immigrants began moving to Boston, coming from a variety of different social classes. Lowell, Massachusetts, a town just outside of Boston, is home to the second largest Cambodian population in the United States, making an estimated 25,000 of the 105,000 people living in Lowell.\textsuperscript{32} In 1985, there were multiple incidents of violence against Asians in the greater Boston area—arson left fourteen Cambodian families homeless in Revere, another Cambodian family was attacked in East Boston, a Vietnamese family was attacked in South Boston, and a recent Chinese immigrant suffered police brutality. Like the Chinese population in San Francisco in the 1970’s, the recent Cambodian and Latino populations in Lowell fought for bilingual education in 1987. Their fight met strong resistance from the

\textsuperscript{31} K. Scott Wong. “‘The Eagle Seeks a Helpless Quarry’: Chinatown, the Policy, and the Press” in \textit{Asian American Studies, a Reader} (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2000), 68-69, 72.
whites in Lowell. The situation escalated to the drowning of thirteen year old Cambodian boy by an eleven year old white boy in 1987, and the passing of a non-binding resolution for English-only education in Lowell schools.\footnote{Bluestone & Stevenson, 47.} Boston’s failure to pass legislation improving English as a second language instruction is the opposite of San Francisco’s success with Lau v Nichols, and is an accurate reflection of the nature of race relations in the two cities.

Below is a chart comparing the racial breakdown for the city of Boston\footnote{US Census Bureau, Census2000: Boston City, MA “Race alone or in combination with one or more other races” [http://censtats.census.gov/data/MA/1602507000.pdf]}, Boston public schools\footnote{Boston Public Schools: Enrollment [http://boston.k12.ma.us/bps/enrollment.asp]}, and Boston Latin School\footnote{Boston Latin School 2004-2005 School Year Report from the Boston Public Schools Website.: [http://boston.k12.ma.us/schools/RC612.pdf], 1}:

Both Asians and whites are overrepresented compared to their percentages in the overall Boston Public School system, and again, blacks and Latinos are underrepresented. Boston underwent violent desegregation efforts in the 1970s, and its legacy is evident in this chart, as whites make up the majority of the total

\footnote{Bluestone & Stevenson, 47.}
\footnote{US Census Bureau, Census2000: Boston City, MA “Race alone or in combination with one or more other races” [http://censtats.census.gov/data/MA/1602507000.pdf]}
\footnote{Boston Public Schools: Enrollment [http://boston.k12.ma.us/bps/enrollment.asp]}
\footnote{Boston Latin School 2004-2005 School Year Report from the Boston Public Schools Website.: [http://boston.k12.ma.us/schools/RC612.pdf], 1}
Boston population, but a minority in the public school system overall. The proportion of whites at Boston Latin School and in the total population of Boston is very similar, suggesting that for education within Boston, one satisfactory option is the Boston Latin School, the other being the suburbs. In 1950, Boston’s white population was 758,700. Following the threat of desegregation Boston’s white population had declined to 524,000 in 1970. By 1990, Boston’s white population was half the size of the 1950 population, to 338,949. Meanwhile, the minority population in Boston continued to increase.\(^{37}\) The situation was exacerbated by the Supreme Court decision in Milliken v. Bradley 1974. To this day, Boston is still one of the most racially segregated cities in the country. According to a report by the Harvard Civil Rights Project, Metropolitan Boston, which encompasses Boston and its thirty surrounding communities, is 82 percent and 91 percent white in the inner and outer suburbs respectively, in stark contrast to the inner city Boston public schools, which are only 14 percent white.\(^{38}\)

**Boston Latin School**

The Boston Latin School, Boston’s premier magnet public school, was founded April 23, 1635, and prides itself as one of the first schools in the country. Boston Latin’s motto is “Sumus Primi,” or “we are the first,”\(^{39}\) a double entendre on the early founding date of the school and the excellence of its academics. Boston Latin was founded by Reverend John Cotton, who wanted to create a school that taught Latin and Greek in the New World, modeling Boston Latin

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\(^{37}\) Bluestone & Stevenson, 26.

\(^{38}\) Chungmei Lee. “Racial Segregation and Educational Outcomes in Metropolitan Boston” The Civil Rights Project: Harvard University (April 2004), 6

\(^{39}\) Boston Latin School [www.bls.org]
after the Free Grammar School of Boston, England. Women were allowed in the school in September 1972. Boston Latin became a magnet public high school in the 1960’s, but had established its reputation as a premier institute of learning from 1925 to 1928, when Boston Latin students obtained the highest average all college preparatory school for college entrance examinations.40

Students can enter Boston Latin in the 7th grade or 9th grades. 50 percent of admission is weighted upon on the Independent School Entrance Examination (ISEE)—the same test is administered for many of the other exam schools in Boston. The other 50 percent is based on the grade point average for students’ English and Math courses only. Before 1997, 35 percent of the class at Boston Latin was reserved for underrepresented minorities. However, the family of one white girl who was not accepted into the school sued on the grounds that using race as an admissions criterion was unconstitutional, and the quota was struck down. Since then, the black and Latino population at Boston Latin has decreased by about half.41 Similar lawsuits over the unconstitutionality of race as an admissions factor occurred in San Francisco and in Boston; in San Francisco, the lawsuit was instigated by an Asian family.

**New York City**

On March 4, 1880, the New York Times reported the first arrival of Asian people in New York, as the weary refugees from the recent violent outbreaks against Chinese workers in San Francisco. The reporter interviewed Wah Ling, a laundryman who had recently moved to New York: “San Francisco…no good
place for Chinamen anymore. Chinaman get pounded by boys stleet [sic]. He hear he can make money in New-Lork [sic], and boys no pound him with stones. Ticket velly [sic] low now, so he buy one piece of paper and come to New-Lork [sic].”

The Chinese workers were greeted by New Yorkers with a mixture of curiosity and enthusiasm. The number of Chinese workers in New York City quickly increased, from 120 in 1870 to 2,559 in 1890, and became the second largest Chinatown outside of San Francisco. The New York City Chinatown was founded in the 1880’s, and replaced many of the Irish and German families. In the latter half of the twentieth century, more Asians chose to immigrate to the New York than San Francisco, shifting the focus of Asians to the East Coast from their traditional base in the West Coast.

With its proximity to Ellis Island, New York City has been the entrance point for many new immigrants, and like San Francisco, has always been the home to foreigners. In 1890, half of New York City’s 1.5 million population consisted of Irish and German immigrants. By 1920, the biggest immigrant groups were Jews and Italians, who made up a little over 25 percent and 14 percent respectively. The different ethnicities settled in their own communities, and as a result, schools were homogenous by ethnic group. A 1905 study showed that the school district located below Houston Street was 94.5 percent Jewish. When the city proposed making the city more diverse, the Jewish parents flooded

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42 “Miscellaneous City News: Chinamen Coming East” New York Times. (Mar 4, 1880), 8
43 Takaki, 250.
44 Ravitch, 175.
the town hall meeting to protest. The homogenization of ethnic groups led to
generalizations drawn about certain immigrant groups. In 1908, fifteen
elementary schools were ranked by measuring the percent of the class that was
“retarded.” It was found that the Germans had the least retardation at 16 percent,
followed by American children at 19 percent, then Russians (who were mostly
Jewish) at 23 percent, the English at 24 percent, the Irish at 29 percent, and the
Italians at 36 percent. The prevalence of schools that reflected the
homogeneousness of ethnic enclaves paved the way for New York City to be the
pioneer in school choice with their creation of specialized high schools. By the
1950s, New York City already implemented a comprehensive school choice
system with specialized high schools and vocational schools, tailoring to students
at all different levels.

By the 1940s, most of the students in the New York City public schools
were second or third generation immigrants. New York City’s population
continued to change with the movement of immigrants in and out of the city. In
the 1950’s, New York City lost 800,000 whites, and gained 700,000 new
immigrants who were mostly black and Latino. Gary Orfield, the director of the
Harvard Civil Rights Center, laments at why New York City, which was the
pioneer in civil right, became the epicenter of segregate public education? As a
result of highly segregated housing and the unequal funds provided to students in

45 Ravitch, 176.
46 Ravitch, 177-8.
47 Graham, 111.
48 Ravitch, 239.
49 Vincent J. Cannato. The Ungovernable City: John Lindsay and his Struggle to Save New York (Basic Books, 2001), 270.
all-minority segregated schools versus students in all-white schools, New York City, like Boston, is one of the most segregated school cities in the country.\textsuperscript{51}

The following table reveals the disparity between the racial demographics of New York City as a whole\textsuperscript{52}, New York City’s public school system\textsuperscript{53}, and Hunter College High School\textsuperscript{54} and Stuyvesant High School\textsuperscript{55}:

\begin{center}
\begin{tabular}{|c|c|c|c|c|}
\hline
\textbf{Race} & \textbf{NYC- The City, the School, Stuyvesant & Hunter} & \\
\hline
\textbf{Total Population in NYC} & White, 35.0% & Black, 24.5% & Hispanic, 27.0% & Asian, 9.8% & Other, 3.7% \\
\hline
\textbf{NYC Public Schools} & White, 14.2% & Black, 31.9% & Hispanic, 39.0% & Asian, 13.5% & Other, 1.4% \\
\hline
\textbf{Stuyvesant} & White, 32.3% & Hispanic, 3.3% & Asian, 61.9% & Other, 0.3% \\
\hline
\textbf{Hunter} & White, 47.4% & Black, 2.2% & Hispanic, 3.5% & Asian, 45.7% & Other, 2.2% \\
\hline
\end{tabular}
\end{center}

This table demonstrates two things: First, the table supports the earlier hypothesis about how white parents feel about the magnet programs. Whites make up the plurality of the population in New York City, yet they make up one of the smallest percentages of the New York City public school system overall, but are adequately represented in terms of percentage, at Stuyvesant High School. Given that the high schools only admit students based on who passes the test, many people are cut out of this process, and therefore at the high school level, many

\textsuperscript{52} As of Nov 17, 2006; On the Stuyvesant website (www.stuy.edu)
\textsuperscript{53} Accurate as of 2003, based on the 2003 Hunter College High School yearbook
\textsuperscript{54} See footnote #7.
white parents do decide to exit the New York City public high school system, and choose instead to enroll them in private high schools, or move to the suburbs. The racial minorities are the ones who are left to deal with the New York City public school system. The table also demonstrates that Asians dominate the magnet schools, with very few blacks and Latinos, who make up the majority of the students in the New York City public school system.

**Stuyvesant High School**

Stuyvesant High School is one of the three specialized high schools in New York City—the other two are Bronx High School of Science and Brooklyn Technical School. Students are admitted to one of the three schools by taking the New York City Specialized Science High Schools Admissions Test (SSHSAT). This test was implemented in the 1930s. There are three cutoffs for admissions—the highest scorers are admitted to all three schools, and can choose among the three. Students who make the second cut-off can choose either to go to Bronx High School of Science or Brooklyn Technical School, and students who make the third cut-off can attend Brooklyn Technical School. Stuyvesant was founded in 1904 as a manual trade school for boys. The school became co-ed in 1969.

To combat the problem of a lack of black and Latino students at their schools, Hunter and Stuyvesant both use affirmative action programs to help racial minorities and people from lower socioeconomic classes to enter their schools despite lower test scores. Hunter reserves 10% of the class for low-income students, and Stuyvesant offers a preparatory class for underserved
minorities to help them pass the school’s admissions test, as well as summer
class to help them prepare for the school’s academic rigor.

**Hunter College High School**

Hunter College High School was founded in 1869 as “The Female Normal
and High School,” a lab school to prepare young women to become teachers. The
school became co-ed in 1974. Today, students are invited to take the Hunter test if
their citywide test scores are above a certain cut-off; this test includes math,
reading and essay components. Students can only enter in the seventh grade. The
school’s location on the upper East Side and its small class sizes—approximately
200 students per graduating class—gives the school much more of a private
school atmosphere, and is thus very attractive to parents.

Despite initial differences in the way in which the schools initially handled
their admissions process, by the end, all four of the high school admissions policy
converged around a similar system, still using a examination-based admissions
process, but banning race as a criterion, and adding other factors that highly
correlate with race, but are different, for example, the middle school with the least
number of students currently at Lowell. At Lowell High School and Boston Latin
School, new admissions policies were the direct result of lawsuits. The New York
City high schools, with their history of specialized education, never used race a
criteria for admissions. The changing admissions process at the schools serves as
a lens for the racial histories of the cities, because at the end all the magnet
schools converge on their admissions policies, the student experience at the
school remains uniform.
Evolving Functions of American Schooling

Early American public education was designed with wider social goals beyond its pedagogical goals. American education emerged as a way to create responsible virtuous citizens. As Benjamin Rush, an American educator in the late eighteenth century said, “I consider it as possible to convert men into republican machines. This must be done if we expect them to perform their parts properly in the great machine of the state.” Educators believed that schools could aid in creating American citizens, and thus ensuring the future of the United States. America was unusual in its vision of education as a form of social control—in Great Britain, members of Parliament were afraid to educate its people for fear that they would revolt. The concept of schooling as a form of social control is utilized to its full potential in the subsequent phases of schooling in America.

The American education system served the purpose of assimilating millions of new immigrants during the Industrial Revolution, with thirty-three million immigrants arriving in America between 1820 and 1920, making up approximately 10 percent of the American population. Americans became anxious about the deluge of foreigners into their cities, and thus education became a mechanism for assimilation—assimilating the foreigner to American society, and the poor to middle-class society. Diane Ravitch, a Research Professor of Education at New York University remarks on the additional responsibility placed

57 Kaestle, 9.
on the public school systems: “But in the early twentieth century the public school was transformed into a vast, underfinanced, bureaucratic social-work agency, expected to take on single-handedly the responsibilities which had formerly been discharged by family, community, and employer.”

Moving into the latter half of the twentieth century, education became an important battleground in the American Civil Rights movement. The landmark Supreme Court case of Brown vs. Board of Education (1954), struck down the old precedent of “separate but equal” facilities for blacks and whites. The impetus was that blacks were receiving a sub-standard education compared to whites, as a result of the segregated facilities. Brown v. Board of Education paved the way for striking down all separate facilities, including restaurants, buses, and trains, demonstrating the importance of education as a battleground. In the years following the Supreme Court ruling, schools and other facilities all over the country underwent court-ordered integration efforts.

However, the implementation of these court-ordered desegregation plans mostly became symbolic. Early efforts worked towards achieving integration, but the Nixon and Reagan administrations reversed the previous efforts. Many school districts were deemed “desegregated” and removed from Federal court-desegregation plans, allowing school districts to reinstate neighborhood zoning

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policies, with neighborhoods that were racially segregated. A 1974 Civil Rights Commission report stated that “present programs often are administered so as to continue rather than reduce racial segregation.”\textsuperscript{61} The passing of the Supreme Court decisions San Antonio Independent School District v. Rodriguez in 1973 and Milliken v. Bradley in 1974 reinforced the constitutionality of policies that allowed white, middle class families to avoid integrated schools. Schools are paid for in part with local property taxes, so wealthier regions with higher property taxes will have better-funded schools. San Antonio v. Rodriquez maintained that it was constitutional for San Antonio to spend 356 dollars per pupil in Edgewood, the poor center of San Antonio with a majority black and Latino population, and 594 dollars per pupil on average in Alamo Heights, the wealthiest part of San Antonio with a majority white population.\textsuperscript{62} Milliken v. Bradley prohibited busing between city district lines. Both case outcomes reinforced the “doughnut” effect we see in many cities today— poor, often minority inner-city communities surrounded by wealthy, often white suburbs. The outcomes of the Supreme Court cases allowed white families who wanted to avoid integrated schools and had the means to leave the city proper, to stay in the city’s vicinity. Because of the income disparity between people within the city lines and outside of the city lines, the enforced desegregation efforts were often imposed on the most marginalized communities within a school district. For example, in Boston, students were bused between Roxbury and South Boston, both predominantly poor, working class neighborhoods, identical except Roxbury was black and South Boston was white.

\textsuperscript{62} Kluger, 764.
By the beginning of the twenty-first century, over 70 percent of black students were attending schools where non-whites constituted the majority. 63 The implementation of the Civil Rights Movement ultimately did not achieve its intended goals of improving education for black students.

These Supreme Court cases prevented the state from acting pro-actively to prevent racial divisions, and continued to deny blacks access to systems of power. Gary Orfield at the Harvard Civil Rights Project using national data from the U.S. Department of Education’s National Center for Education Statistics, notes that in the 2001-2002 school year, 15 percent of the majority white schools have a student population in poverty, measured by over fifty percent of the students on a free and reduced lunch plan, whereas over 86 percent of majority black and Latino schools have a student population in poverty by the same account. 64 This is a testament to the correlation between segregation and poverty—all-minority environments are much more likely to be poor than all-white environments.

The result of the faulty implementation is that desegregation has come to be viewed as something political as opposed to something with educational benefits. Given the way it was carried out, some argue that desegregation had an overall negative income on the educational experiences of both its white and non-white students. Christine Rossell, a professor of political science at Boston University, points out that “school desegregation is a political goal to the exclusion of its being an educational goal.” 65 Rossell’s implies that desegregation

63 Kluger, 772.
64 Brown at 50, 21.
was more about its social justice cause than its stated primary goal of providing a
better education for all students. While these were not the intentions of the Civil
Rights Movement, the implementation of desegregation efforts in America point
to Rossell’s analysis. We will revisit the flawed implementation in the discussion
of the rise of magnet schools later in this section.

The aftermath of the Civil Rights Movement resulted in a shift in rhetoric
with respect to education. Education became the barometer for measuring
inequality in American society. Education is seen as the way to overcome
socioeconomic barriers—anyone who works hard and does well in school, can
succeed in America. In order for education to effectively overcome socio-
economic barriers, everyone in America needs a good baseline education, making
education a basic right. Through this truncated history, we see that the role of
public education has evolved to take on more responsibilities with time, from
creating virtuous citizens, to assimilating foreigners, to ensuring equality in
American society.

*Magnet Public High Schools, a History*

The current American educational system offers its students five types of
schooling options—home schooling, private schools, charter schools, parochial
schools, and public schools. Magnet public schools are a sub-set of public
schools, in that they are funded with tax dollars. What distinguishes magnet
schools from other public schools is that instead of having students assigned to
the school by geographical proximity, their students test into the school if they
exhibit an above-average aptitude at the type of skill that the school specializes in,
like math, technology, humanities, or the performing arts. There are also magnet programs within public high schools, but I am focusing my inquiry on separate schools. As a result of the selective admissions process, magnet schools are often more desirable to attend because the quality of learning for the students is higher, and the exclusivity of the schools often translates into higher rates of admission into successful colleges. A September 2002 *Worth Magazine* article ranked American high schools using the average percentage of a given class attending Harvard, Yale, and Princeton as a measure of success. Among the top ten public schools listed, half were magnet public high schools and the other half were schools located in wealthy suburbs.66

This section discusses the various developments throughout American history than enabled the creation of magnet schools. The first development was the concept of specialization. The underlying principle behind creating an educational system with magnet schools is that specialization is the most efficient way to educate a population—if students are sorted so that they are grouped with other students at the same intellectual level, this will make the job of the teacher easier while simultaneously allowing the student to receive a better educational experience. For example, separating students into different grade levels, and having teachers teach a specific grade, instead of a group of students from mixed levels, was one of the earlier implementations of specialization in schooling.67

Sorting students became a necessity in the years following the Industrial Revolution. The Industrial Revolution created urban centers which attracted

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floods of people to the cities, and also created the need for skilled laborers who could work in factories. The large numbers of students made sorting necessary, and the factories defined the type of specialization students would undergo. A 1946 report published by the New York City Board of Education explained the rationale behind the creation of specialized high schools:

…In the course of the last few decades the American high school attempted to educate much larger segments of the population, when its student body was no longer recruited from the top tenth, it began to face a really serious problem…It is the success or failure of the institution…that should indicate whether or not it is capable of giving…adolescents that type of education which best suits their needs and abilities, as well as the type of education deemed to be in the best interests of the general welfare. 68

The New York City report specifically cites the increased accessibility of education as the reason for the need for specialized schools. The report measures the success of the school based on how well the school tailors to each individual’s educational needs, which the Board of Education ultimately sees as an overall benefit to society. Specialization in mass education was made possible by the industrial revolution because of the techniques it introduced, but mass education was created in response to the need for more white-collar factory workers. Sociologist Martin Trow says, “The growth of the secondary school system after 1870 was in large part a response to the pull of the economy for a mass of white collar employees with more than an elementary school education.”69 Mass education and the Industrial Revolution go hand in hand.

68 “Specialized High Schools in New York City” (Board of Education of the City of New York, 1946), 7.
Tailoring schools to students’ needs was highly correlated with their socioeconomic class. Charles Eliot Norton, the president of Harvard from 1860 to 1909, was very influential in the shaping of higher education in America. He urged elementary schools in a 1908 address to the National Society for the Promotion of Industrial Education “to sort pupils…by their evident and probable destinies.” Specialization in many ways was a euphemism for preparing students for their future line of work. Many of New York City’s “specialized schools” were manual trade programs to prepare the non-college bound poor and recent immigrants for factory work, or to prepare girls for domesticity. In the South, manual trade programs were among the few options available for blacks.

The invention of the IQ test was also another innovation that enabled the existence of magnet schools. The Intelligence Quotient (IQ) test, was developed and introduced to America by Robert Yerkes of Harvard, Lewis Terman of Stanford, and H.H. Goddard of the Vineland Institute, and based on the research of Alfred Binet and Theodore Simon. The IQ test was revolutionary because it made intelligence testing a scientific process, and thus institutions began to rely on IQ tests to screen the intelligence potential of their students. Schools, instead of using social class to differentiate between students who took Latin versus students who learned carpentry, began to sort students by those who were “gifted” and those who were just normal. The U.S. government used IQ testing during World War II to determine what kind of position enlisted men should occupy, and

70 Graham, 37.
71 “Specialized High Schools in New York City,” vii.
72 Graham, 41.
73 Graham, 47-48.
the government encouraged the use of IQ tests during the Cold War era to draw out America’s brightest students so that America could remain competitive against the Soviet Union.\textsuperscript{74} Even though intelligence testing was supposed to be infallible, there were biases in the results, with certain races consistently outperforming other races. This has led many people to contest the scientific validity of IQ testing, on the grounds that the tests are socially constructed and those who are racially and socio-economically privileged in American society are predisposed to performing better on the tests.

Although schools with selective admissions existed prior to the 1950’s, the term “magnet school” emerged as the direct product of the desegregation efforts in the 1960’s and 1970’s. Magnet public schools were conceived of as an alternative to controlled integration and forced busing, the goal being that the schools would be so desirable that the schools would attract students from different backgrounds, hence the use of the word “magnet.” The first magnet public high school with the newly coined term was McCarver Elementary, established in 1968, in Tacoma, Washington. Magnet schools and the ideal of “voluntary integration” that they presented were considered one of the success stories in school desegregation, which garnered the support of the Federal government through increased funding to magnet schools. Well-established specialized high schools like Boston Latin School and Lowell High School re-categorized themselves as magnet schools in order to receive the additional

\textsuperscript{74} Graham, 107.
government support. Today, the Department of Education provides grants to magnet schools through its Magnet Schools Assistant Program. The Department awards grants to school districts who submit proposals detailing the ways in which they will promote diversity with magnet programs.

The success of magnet schools at desegregating school districts is limited. Christine Rossell, conducted a study in 2003 using data collected from over six hundred school districts to determine the effectiveness of magnet schools at desegregating districts using white flight and interracial exposure as the two main methods of evaluation. Rossell’s overall conclusion was that magnet schools were mostly unsuccessful—Voluntary desegregation plans with a higher percentage of magnet schools resulted in greater white flight and less interracial exposure. Even in mandatory desegregation plans, a higher proportion of magnet schools made no difference to white flight or interracial exposure. However, Rossell argues that a potential reason for these results is that magnet schools are not always used strategically. Magnet schools that properly gauged the demand of the community, located themselves in racially mixed neighborhood, and were structured as dedicated magnet schools (magnet school which admit students purely by merit without geographical considerations), are successful at increasing interracial exposure because these schools are desirable to everyone in the community.

Why are magnet schools viewed as the prototype for integration efforts despite their limited success? Magnet schools were championed as the prototype

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77 Rossell, “Magnet Schools and Desegregation,” 719.
precisely because of their limitations. Magnet schools are part of a larger group of initiatives that were implemented following the Civil Rights Movement, which George Lipsitz argues were structured to ensure that being white continues to afford privilege in American society: “Contrary to their stated intentions, civil rights law have actually augmented the possessive investment in whiteness, not because civil rights legislation is by nature unwise or unpractical, but because these particular laws were structured to be ineffective and largely unenforceable.” The earlier discussions of the insufficient implementation of the desegregation are only part of the problem. The biggest consequence of the Civil Rights Movement is that people consider the racial grievances “solved,” which permits a strong white backlash against preferential policies towards minorities. Lipsitz’s claim that whiteness equals privilege manifests itself in Rossell’s analysis of the success of magnet schools—the schools are better and deemed more desirable if there is less white flight, implying that the presence of the white students elevates the quality of the school. Magnet schools were designed like many of the other “solutions” to desegregation, as a way to maintain white privilege, while giving limited opportunities to non-white students. Thus, the demographic magnet schools implicitly intend to serve are the white families, and not the non-white families. The opportunities for non-white students are the remnants of the original provisions of the Civil Rights movement.

How do magnet schools maintain white privilege while giving limited opportunities to non-white students? The primary way is by their admissions

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process. The magnet schools use a combination of school-specific aptitude tests, state-wide tests, and middle school report cards to determine who they admit into their school. Students must perform above-average in order to qualify. Given the amount of segregation that still exists in public school systems, and the corresponding lack of resources and funding available in majority-minority schools, most minority students will not have the means to get into the schools. Discrimination in the New York City public school system helps explain some of disproportionate representation. The New York Association of Community Organizers for Reform Now (ACORN) published a report in 1996 titled “Secret Apartheid,” highlighting the lack of options available for black students when trying to make decisions about elementary schools and middle schools. ACORN sent black and white testers to various public schools around the city, and found that black “testers” were consistently denied information about gifted programs, and treated badly by school administrators.79 The magnet schools are able to guarantee that white students are the privileged recipients of the education, because the current school system continues to segregate blacks and Latinos from white students, and deny them access to educational resources.

Magnet schools also limit access by location. Patricia Graham, the former dean of Harvard Graduate School of Education, posits that magnet schools and magnet programs often appear in places where there is a substantial affluent population or in cities with a large middle class, because those families want

recognition of their children’s intelligence. Graham’s statement implies that magnet schools are located where middle class whites can readily have access. The location of a school can influence a student’s decision schools, as commute time within a city can be upwards of two hours. Location influences the racial make-up of the three magnet schools in Boston, Boston Latin School, Boston Latin Academy, and James O’Bryant School for Math and Science. These schools are listed by their respective selectivity, and incidentally by the percentage of black and Latino students at the schools. Boston Latin School is located next to the Harvard Medical School, whereas O’Bryant and Boston Latin Academy are both located in Roxbury, one of the poorest regions in Boston.

As a result of their restrictions on admissions, magnet schools were a useful political tool because they helped prevent white flight from urban areas during the educational desegregation efforts. Millikin vs. Bradley created a safe space for whites just beyond the city lines. For the whites that remained in the city school district, there was white flight from the public school system to the private schools. For example, in Mississippi, desegregation orders were followed by a 170 percent increase in private school enrollment. For white parents remaining in the city who did not want to send their kids to private schools, magnet schools were a good option. There was a lower probability that minorities would get into the schools, the schools were located in the city, and the schools were often well-respected given their selective admissions process. Magnet schools indeed become a positive alternative to busing, though not in the way they were

80 Graham, 110.
originally intended. The three graphs detailing the racial composition of San Francisco, Boston, and New York City on pages 34, 39, and 41 respectively, highlight the disparities between the percentages of white students at the magnet school compared to the black students, given their overall percentages in the city and in the school system, serves as further evidence.

The recent change in the New York City elementary schools gifted programs is an example of white middle-class parents feeling entitled to spots in magnet schools for their children. New York City standardized its testing system for its elementary school gifted programs, following a complaint filed with the U.S. Education Department’s Office of Civil Rights that the system was racially biased.\(^82\) The New York City Department of Education got record high complaints from white middle to upper-middle class parents, who were used to a system that privileged their children—previous policies allowed elementary magnet school programs to favor siblings of older students, or families who lived near the school.\(^83\) One parent who lives in Boerm, Brooklyn criticized the Board of Education’s decision to change the admissions process: "This is exactly how New York City begins to lose its middle- and upper-class parents who want to stay."\(^84\) This specific controversy is at the elementary school level, but it reflects the controversies that all magnet programs face. Especially at the high school level, when the prospect of college admissions raise the stakes of magnet school


\(^83\) Saulny, Susan. “Lightning Rod for Fury Over Schools’ Gifted Programs” *New York Times* (2006 March 22), Section B; Column 3; Metropolitan Desk; Education Page; Pg. 7

\(^84\) Joyce Purnick. “Schools Strike A Nerve. Parents Yell” *New York Times* (2006 March 16) Section B; Column 1; Metropolitan Desk; Metro Matters; Pg. 1
admissions, parents decide to either leave the school district or enroll their children in private school if they do not gain a spot in the magnet program.

**Conclusion:**

The explicitly stated purpose of magnet schools was to bring together blacks and whites who exhibited above-average aptitude at a particular subject. However, we see that in practice, magnet schools predominantly set out to educate white students and only a limited number of non-white students. The lack of resources available to black and Latino students, who are more likely to come from low-income backgrounds, is evidence of the ineffectiveness of magnet schools in attracting students from all different backgrounds. The correlation of low scores on intelligence testing with black and Latino students and low socioeconomic class serves as another piece of evidence.

The magnet public schools represent the progression of the function of school in the United States, from a tool for assimilation, to the key to achieving social justice. The racial history of the cities influences the history of the magnet schools and lays the foundation for the themes that emerge in the later chapters.
CHAPTER TWO: SCHOOLS AS INSTITUTIONS

Introduction

The previous chapter established the context for the intended function of the magnet public school, and established whom the magnet schools aim to educate. In this chapter, we will compare the intended function of the four magnet schools with their actual function, by examining the histories, the mission statements, and the racial composition of the four magnet schools. Given the intended function and audience of the schools, how do the schools carry out their function, and what do the schools teach the students? I argue that magnet public schools have a tremendous effect on their minority students, the majority of whom are Asian, a point that relates to the main question driving my thesis.

The chapter begins with the writing of Louis Althusser, a Marxist philosopher, who establishes the preeminence of schools in contemporary society as the main tool for controlling individuals. Then the chapter, using the theories of Michel Foucault, will explore the processes by which the power relations of the school manifest themselves among the Asian students, and in the white students’ perceptions of Asian students. The power structures manifest in the thoughts, actions, interactions, and behavior of the Asian students at the school. The chapter will also use French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu to discuss the importance of institutions like schools in replicating social class.

The first observation is that the Asian students are hyper-aware of their race, unlike the white students. The schools as an instrument of the state, intentionally promotes this awareness as a way of reminding the Asian students
that this is not their place. The awareness also leads the Asian and white students at the school to create separate Asian and white spheres within the schools. These are self-imposed, clearly marked boundaries. Finally, the chapter will further deconstruct the notion of “diversity,” which functions at the core of the mission of all magnet public schools, and explain how diversity is used as a tool to create division among the minority students, keeping racial minority populations at a certain level, and thus maintaining white privilege within these magnet schools.

**Schools as Sites of Control**

In his essay “Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses,” Louis Althusser outlines the way the modern capitalist state reproduces the means of production and the productive labor force, which are essential for a capitalist state. The state can perpetuate its productive forces either by repressive State apparatuses or by ideological State apparatuses. The Ideological State Apparatus is the more powerful of the two because it is truly responsible for the reproduction of the productive forces: “…It is the [Ideological State Apparatus] which largely secure[s] the reproduction specifically of the relations of production, behind a ‘shield’ provided by the repressive State apparatus. It is here that the role of the ruling ideology is heavily concentrated, the ideology of the ruling class, which holds State power.\(^{85}\) The ideological State apparatus holds more influence because its ideologies responsible for reproduction. Given this task, schools are the primary institutions hosting the ideological State apparatus’s execution:

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Althusser describes the silent but pervasive influence of the school on its students, explaining how schooling fulfills the purpose of creating the production forces for labor and the continuation of a capitalist society. Althusser’s argument establishes that schools are a tool of the State, and that schools exist to reproduce the production forces that allow the State to exist.

Foucault establishes the ways in which schools exercise control over their students. Foucault asserts that the modern individual is a “docile body.” In order to correctly train these docile bodies, three techniques are used—hierarchical observation, normalizing judgment, and the examination. Hierarchical observations, also referred to as surveillance, and normalizing judgments are the two techniques that appear most frequently in my interviews. Hierarchical observation is defined by Foucault as the use of internalized notions of surveillance as a form of control. Foucault gives an example of a school that exemplifies hierarchical observation with the École Militaire, a school in France, was designed with rooms branching off from long corridors and windows at the end of the hallways: “The perfect disciplinary apparatus would make it possible for a single gaze to see everything constantly.”

The design allowed for an efficient, orderly way to constantly observe the goings-on at the school at all times. The example of the École Militaire demonstrates that locales of

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86 Althusser, 155.
87 Foucault, Discipline and Punish, 173.
surveillance are not limited to prisons. To make the surveillance process in school smoother, teachers began to recruit assistant teachers, or some of their students, to help in the process: “A relation of surveillance, defined and regulated, is inscribed in the heart of the practice of teaching, not as an additional or adjacent part, but as a mechanism that is inherent to it and which increases its efficiency.” The perpetrators of surveillance were limited originally to teachers, but over time included assistant teachers and helpers within the classroom, which allowed students to assess their own peers.

Normalizing judgments are an extension of hierarchical observations. Foucault outlines five techniques of normalizing judgments in disciplinary punishment: each disciplinary system has laws which govern the people within the system; non-conforming is punishable; disciplinary punishment functions to reduce gaps; discipline is part of a gratification-punishment system, trying to avoid punishment at all costs; the distribution within a system both marks students, and punishes and rewards. Foucault summarizes the purpose of these five techniques: “The perpetual penalty that traverses all point and supervises every instant in the disciplinary institutions compares, differentiates, hierarchizes, homogenizes, excludes. In short, it normalizes.” Throughout this chapter, I will highlight examples of Foucault’s normalizing judgments as a mechanism for discipline, drawing from my interviews.

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88 Ibid., 176.
89 Ibid., 175.
90 Ibid., 177 – 181.
91 Ibid., 183.
These are the techniques for executing discipline, but who disciplines who? In his lectures given on January 14, 1976, Foucault expands on the nature of power in the modern era:

It is a mechanism of power which permits time and labour [sic], rather than wealth and commodities, to be extracted from bodies. It is a type of power which is constantly exercised by means of surveillance rather than in a discontinuous manner by means of a system of levies or obligations distributes over time.92

Discipline in the modern era is carried out by individuals; individuals, through disciplinary techniques, have internalized power relations. Foucault says that “individuals are vehicles of power, not its point of application.”93 Thus, power exists beyond the reach of institutions and manifests itself through the individuals themselves. The individuals ultimately are the site for discipline.

Individuals are both the perpetrators and the recipient of disciplinary techniques: “Discipline makes individuals; it is the specific technique of a power that regard individuals both as objects and instruments of its exercise.”94 Mimi Orner uses this aspect of discipline to study how power relations play out within the school context. Through classroom observations and interviews of male and female students, she examines how students normalize definitions of what it means to be female or male (which Foucault mentions as a disciplinary technique). Orner explains the significance of her interviews: “[Stories] about schooling often are told in ways that embody the complex disciplinary technologies deployed in schools. Stories told about schooling can be read as live

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93 Power/Knowledge, 98.
94 Foucault, Discipline and Punish, 170.
testimonies through which the tellers continue to make sense of their own construction within educational contexts, discourses, norms, and practices. Orner’s research examines a similar phenomenon as my thesis, but from the perspective of gender instead of race. In my research, I interviewed white and Asian students to understand what it means to be a white student versus an Asian student in the school. Both gender and race are social constructs with their groundings in physical differences. Orner’s research points out how much of the discipline happens outside of the classroom, and in the interactions between students, extending the task of discipline beyond teacher to student relationship, into student-to-student interactions.

Pierre Bourdieu is another theorist who discusses how schools serve as a site for control. Bourdieu discusses schools as the site of social reproduction. Bourdieu believes that each social class has its own set of cultural capital, which distinguishes it from other classes. He also believes that educational institutions most value the cultural capital of the upper class, which accounts for the correlation between performance in schools and socioeconomic background. Superior academic performance results in superior social standing in society, creating a reinforcing loop. What is even more problematic for Bourdieu is that educational institutions do not acknowledge that achievement is based on class

96 I know Judith Butler would argue that sex differences are also socially constructed, but the belief that sex is based on physical immutable traits is widely accepted.
and instead maintain that achievement is based on meritocracy—the idea that those who are smartest and work the hardest are able to succeed.  

Bourdieu believes that another reason for social inequality has to do with the “habitus” of an individual, and what social class that “habitus” represents. The habitus encompasses the “internalized structures, schemes of perception, conception, and action common to all members of the same group of class.” The habitus can further stifle a member of the lower class because of decreased expectations within the lower class, or a lack of information about what one is supposed to do to “get ahead.” Asians as a group are not inhibited by their “habitus” in terms of achievement because of the heightened expectations of Asian parents and the example provided to Asians by other Asians. However, Asian students cannot escape the function of social class in what are supposed to be meritocracy-based structures, like the public magnet schools. Given their history in the United States, Asians are viewed as part of the labor and immigrant class, and not as part of the white middle class that magnet schools cater to.

**Awareness as Form of Control**

What characterizes the experience of all the Asian students I interviewed at the four high schools was their heightened awareness—or knowledge of their racial identity in a school context—an awareness that the white students I interviewed did not have. The Asian students’ awareness was indicative of the
implicit surveillance occurring at the schools. The awareness motivated Asian students to specific actions—some Asian students reacted with defensiveness over their Asian status, and chose to join Asian cultural groups. Other Asian students channeled their awareness into escaping their identity, by seeking non-Asian friends.

The Asian interview subjects who purposely chose activities and friend groups that were “diverse” did so because they valued diversity, and because they thought the activities dominated by white students were more respected by the school community and by college admissions. They defined “diverse” to mean groups of friends that were majority non-Asian. Having a group of all Asian or mostly Asian friends was stigmatized as acting “too Asian.” Derrick Lee\textsuperscript{100}, a student at Stuyvesant High School, said that the problem with Asian students was that they self-segregated, which limited their options: “I really avoid hanging out with all Asian cultural stereotypes.” He also adamantly stated that there were “too many Asians” at his school. Geehee Choi, a student at Hunter College High School, specified that she picked extracurricular activities at her school based on the lack of Asian students in the activities because she wanted to be more mainstream: “It was kind of [a] weird thing, I actually joined activities because there weren’t too many Asians in them…I wanted to distance myself from the typical stereotype.” Acting Asian at the magnet schools was overall viewed as something negative by Asians, and Asian students sought to distance themselves from the negative perception.

\textsuperscript{100} All names have been changed to protect the privacy of the interview subjects.
The white students showed a similar awareness for this negative impression of the stereotypical Asian student. One white interview subject, Sam Conner talked about Asian students at Stuyvesant High School, and the Asian students who defied that stereotype:

I would say Asian students on the whole were not really much of a presence at Stuyvesant in proportion to the number of Asians there were at the school. They tended to hang out together, go home early after school, and take the easier...math/science classes in favor of the more intellectually challenging classes. There were a few kids who broke the mold, like Grace Cheng, Henry Wu who were very active at school...we all took this ‘great books’ English class together senior year.

Sam demonstrates that the awareness of separate Asian spheres and subcultures was something that the white students picked up on. Sam’s observations coincide with the observations made by some of the other Asian students. At the annual meeting of the National Association for College Admissions Counseling, one of the issues discussed was how to portray Asian applicants in a different light in recommendation letters. One sentence that is appearing more and more is “Rachel, for an Asian, has many friends.”

Dr. Elaine Smith, a now retired guidance counselor at Hunter College High School, said “the counselor who gets the Kim through Lee section of the alphabet has the most difficult time because they are essentially writing the same recommendation over and over again.”

These comments indicate that Asians’ awareness of their race and their racial stereotypes, are born not out of their own paranoia, but of their actual experiences.

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in the school setting. The experiences are perpetuated by authority figures in the schools like guidance counselors, the white peers, and their Asian peers.

Asians experience their Asianness as something negative, subordinate to whiteness. Extrapolated from the descriptions above, Asians are inherently less social, less active in the school community, and are all the same. Foucault’s disciplinary strategy of the gratification-punishment technique “hierarchized the ‘good’ and the ‘bad’ subjects in relation to one another.”¹⁰³ Inherent Asianness becomes “bad” and not acting Asian “good.” Foucault goes on to describe the consequence of this disciplinary strategy: “By assessing acts with precision, discipline judges individuals ‘in truth’; the penalty that it implements is integrated in to the cycle of knowledge of individual.” Asians are constantly rewarded for acting white, and repetition over time leads Asian students to internalize the power relations between Asianness and whiteness.

Josh Rosenberg, a student at Hunter College High School, talked about his diverse group of friends at Hunter and how he really enjoyed learning about different people’s backgrounds while at Hunter, reiterating Geehee’s earlier point about celebrating diversity. Anthropologist Ghassan Hage, in his book White Nation: Fantasies of White Supremacy in a Multicultural Society, posits that the notion of multiculturalism and tolerance contains an implied power structure. The group that is in the position to tolerate, to celebrate diversity, is in the center. This is different from the Asian students actively seeking “diverse” friends, because they were doing so essentially to move socially upwards, while the white students had the power to accept or reject their move.

¹⁰³ Foucault, Discipline and Punish, 181.
The Asian students’ hyper-awareness serves as a form of control over them. Given the demographic charts in the previous chapter, despite non-race based affirmative action policies, Asians are overrepresented at these magnet schools. Magnet schools can only control to a limited extent who gets admitted into their school. Thus, the only way to control the Asian students encroaching upon this white space is to control them once they are at the school. As Althusser establishes, the ruling class defines the ruling ideology, which in turn rules the state. The school is one of primary apparatuses of the state, so consequently, the subject of the state are indoctrinated with the philosophy of the ruling class. The ruling class in this context would be the whites, and Asian students have internalized the power relations at the magnet schools. The perception that there are too many Asians exists because the whites do not believe that Asians should be the majority of students in a magnet school, when admission to the school is supposed to be for the whites.

The reaction on the part of the Asian students’ awareness of their race reflects a different phenomenon. Revisiting Lipsitz’s argument about whites benefiting from identity politics, which I discussed in the context of the creation of magnet schools during desegregation, whites are not the only ones who can invest in whiteness and benefit from white privilege; minorities can be accomplices in this effort. The Asian students who actively distanced themselves from the other Asian students were in effect acting as accomplices to white possessiveness in whiteness.

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104 Lipsitz, 148.
Separate Spheres—the White Groups versus the Asian Groups

The Asian students’ awareness of race eventually leads to the separation of the races, primarily Asian and White, within the school. The separation occurs in a very visually obvious way at Stuyvesant, where everyone knew where the Asian spaces versus the white spaces were in the building. There were specific hallways for the different racial groups or a particular grade level at the school, and while the physical location changed year to year, the presence was always there. The school administration tried to prevent this mapping from happening by assigning lockers instead of letting the students pick their own lockers, but the students would trade politely and impolitely, their lockers so that they were back in the right “racial” spot. Based on my interviews, this “mapping” was specific to Stuyvesant High School, but similar visual cues could be observed to a limited extent at other high schools in the way that groups of friends, usually of the same race, would travel together in packs. Groups of friends were often formed by their geographical proximity to one another, the proximity allowing them to travel to and from school together. Given the high level of residential racial segregation in these cities, the groups of friends mirrored the residential segregation in the cities.

Racial segregation also functioned more subtly through extracurricular activities at school. Upon entering the school, new students quickly realized the racial assignation of each school activity. The distribution of peoples played out in the extracurricular activities that students joined. The new students perpetuated the stereotypes of the activities by joining the activities of their racial group. Those who did not join their assigned racial group activities did so very
consciously, as a way to rebel against the norm. There were activities that were
deeded to be “Asian,” and ones that were deemed “white.” While some clubs
were more racially neutral, one could easily judge the racial affiliation by
scanning the ratio of Asian to white students in the activity. The racial affiliation
of some of the clubs was very explicit; for example, at the Boston Latin School, I
observed the Asian Students in Action, the Wolfpack Volunteers, and the Key
Club. While all of these organizations were involved in volunteer work, the first is
explicitly for Asian students, the second is implicitly known as the “Asian”
service club, and the third as the “white” service club. Of course, these
categorizations were constantly changing, since once a critical mass of Asian
students joined an activity, the more “Asian” that activity began to become, thus
losing its some of its prestige in the eyes of both Asian and white students.

While the extracurricular scene was racially segregated, the leadership in
these “Asian” activities often consisted of white students. One anecdote stands out
from my interviews. There were two school newspapers at Hunter, “the Daily”\(^{105}\)
and “the Witness.” Josh Rosenberg described the relationship between the two
newspapers: “The *Witness* was like the Asian newspaper. I did the *Daily* because
my brother did the *Daily*…but in truth, my closest non-Asian friends all did the
*Daily* with me, and my closest Asian friends did the *Witness.*” When asked about
the quality difference, Rosenberg said: “I thought the *Daily* was better because it
was more savvy [sic], it was older, it was official…I don’t think it was because
better people were on it. It [the quality difference] could also be that it was self-
selecting, so the *Daily* held itself to higher standards because it was perceived

\(^{105}\) All names of the clubs have been changed to protect the identity of the school.
itself to be better. The *Witness* perceived itself as more populist.” Although Rosenberg was biased, his opinions reflected the opinions of the majority of the students in the school. The *Witness* called itself the “independent” school newspaper, acknowledging its unofficial status. The *Witness* was originally founded by two Asian students, which effected the racial categorization of the paper. Examining the *Witness* masthead, the high level of Asian student participation is evident. As a result, or maybe because of its unofficial status, the newspaper was considered less legitimate, compared to the *Daily*.

In 2005, a debate occurred over the two editor-in-chief positions of the *Witness*. There were two Asian females running and one Jewish male; in the deliberation process, one of the newspaper staff writers said, “Well, there can’t be two Asian Editors-in-Chief.” Geehee Choi, one of the girls who ran for the editor-in-chief position, and ultimately ended up getting it, described how she felt during the selection process:

We knew it was going to be one [Asian] or the other, and David was going to be EIC. I don’t know why. It should be based on ability, but it’s not, in a lot of ways. It’s based on how you are perceived, how personable [you] are. Maybe it’s because it’s a leadership position that they look for other qualities, but it wasn’t justified. No one explicitly stated it, but it was implicitly understood.

If the *Witness* was the Asian school newspaper, why could there not be two Asian editors-in-chief? Geehee mentions in the quote that maybe it is because that the newspaper staff was looking for leadership qualities that they did not think could be demonstrated by Asian females. The members of the newspaper staff were the ones to vote in the new editors-in-chief, and even though they comprised mostly
of Asian students, they did not choose both Asians for the position. Asian students are disadvantaged in acquiring leadership status, even in their own “realm.” Race plays a larger role in “meritocracies” than merit. The Jewish male got picked because he was white, and his whiteness compensated for his lack of experience. Geehee’s association of whiteness with someone who is more personable and more of a leader, demonstrates how she has internalized power relations. The Asians on the newspaper staff are what Lipsitz calls accomplices to whiteness.

The extracurricular activities are hierarchically organized, the better the activity, the more white people the activity can attract, following a similar pattern to attractive schools discussed in Chapter One. Within each activity, there is also ranking. According to Foucault, the ranking functions to “marks the gap, hierarchizes qualities, skills, and aptitudes; but it also punishes and awards.”

In the debate over the Witness’s leadership, the qualities that were hierarchized were associated with qualities that whites have, but Asians do not have.

The *Witness* battle over editor-in-chief positions reflects the perception that Asian American student leaders cannot represent or speak for the white members of the school in the same way white student leaders can. The two captains of Stuyvesant’s girls’ handball team, which was predominantly Asian, were also white. The Stuyvesant math team captains, who were mostly white, were not representative of the overall make-up of the rest of the math team, which was mostly Asian. The hierarchical structures in society dictate who can exercise power over others and who cannot. The Asian students who transcended their Asian-ness, were considered to be “white” and “not really Asian,” but as a result

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they became accomplices to the hierarchical structure of the school and perpetrators of that specific power dynamic. This phenomenon will be discussed in more detail in Chapter Three.

Not all white students felt comfortable joining Asian activities. From the interviews with the Whites, the number of Asian students in the club did matter. The Key Club at Stuyvesant, referred colloquially as the “Asian service club,” was also “too Asian” and intimidated one white interview subject, Steve Smith, from joining the service club. “I was interested in public service, and I stepped into the auditorium where the key club open house was during lunch. I’ll be honest, I was a little intimidated by all the Asian students there, and I didn’t feel quite comfortable. Needless to say, I did not go back.” Steve was the only one who explicitly stated why he did not end up joining Key Club. This sentiment was implied by many of the other White interview subjects, who also referred to the club as “very Asian.” By referring to the clubs as “very Asian,” the white interview subjects are implicitly adding, “Thus, not for me.”

The choices made by Asian and white students—Asian students wanting to have non-Asian friends and join white clubs, and white students not wanting to be a part of Asian clubs, except in leadership roles—established a hierarchy in these schools, in which whites’ activities were better than Asians’ activities. The separate spheres reinforced structures of hierarchy within the school in two ways. First, they limited the activities that Asians felt comfortable joining. Asian students were allowed to join the Asian activities, but they ran the risk of knowing that the Asian activities were marginalized within the school. However, if the
Asian students wanted to join white activities, which were perceived to be the more mainstream activities, they first had to cross well-established racial boundary lines. They also ran the risk of signaling to other Asian students that this was an activity conducive to Asian participation, which would then transform the activity into an Asian one and subsequently a marginalized one. Secondly, the separate spheres reinforced the hierarchy because white students did not experience the same limitations, in the sense that they brought social cachet with them no matter what type of club they joined. White students who joined “Asian” clubs had an equal, if not better, chance at acquiring leadership positions. White students who joined “white” clubs were joining what were perceived as the more mainstream, well-respected clubs in the schools.

**The Call for “Diversity” as a Form of Control**

The final way in which schools succeeded at relaying power structures of society to their students was the positive value they attributed to diversity. While the language was that of increasing diversity at the school, the subtext was decreasing the number of Asian students at the school, because they were taking the spaces of both the underprivileged minorities and the whites, who the schools were originally intended for. When asked about the Asian population in the school, Stuyvesant student Steve Smith said, “Well, don’t get me wrong—I have lots of Asian friends, but I just think that it’s unfortunate that Stuyvesant is like, what, two percent black? My neighborhood… schools are almost entirely black, it’s such a contrast.” Steve may have recognized that he might be part of the problem as well, but initially pointed to Asian students as stealers of coveted spots.
at the high school from underprivileged minorities. Asian students with their “model minority” status are often associated as having an excess of privilege compared to other minorities. While some administrators may be truly interested in creating more opportunities for people from black and Latino backgrounds for the sake of equality, I argue that others were interested in creating more opportunities as a way to curb the number of Asian students at the school.

Ghassan Hage discusses the rhetoric used to talk about migrant workers in Australia, and how they are encouraged to come work in Australia precisely because the migrant workers will never actually end up working in Australia: “As such, White multiculturalism activates a dialectic of inclusion and exclusion, similar to the above, in order to position Third World-looking migrants in the permanent spatial in-between where their will is excluded, while their exploitable ‘savage body’/culture is included.”107 Similarly, because for the most part, Black and Latino students do not have the means to get into magnet public schools to the extent that they become the majority of the schools, encouraging the black and Latino students is “safe.” The school’s black and Latino student population will remain small enough to remain under the control of the dominant culture.

The current debates surrounding Asians and admissions have nothing to do specifically with the fact that they are Asian, but more to do with the type of space Asian students are filling. Asians students are filling an elite space in society, holding coveted spots in magnet public schools and in elite colleges. If any of these magnet schools were predominantly Latino instead of Asian, the

same commentary over their overrepresentation would arise as with the current situation, and there would be an outcry for more diversity. The problem is not race-specific, but is instead a product of Asian students occupying a space and social class that was not initially assigned to them.

Jewish students at Harvard experienced similar racial prejudice in the 1930’s because they were taking the space of wealthy, Protestant male students who previously comprised the only ethnic group able to pass the admissions test. At the beginning of the 20th century, Ivy League colleges thus had too many qualified Jewish applicants. With the driving motivation o screen out the Jews at Harvard In response, Harvard changed its admissions system to what it is today, to account for other factors like personality, character, and athletics, Jews were looked down upon for their intense competitive nature and what was seen as their unmanly, generally displeasing appearance. At the time, an anonymous observer at Columbia observed: “Singularly absent is the grace, the swagger, the tall attractive sleekness…One somehow expects them all to be Jews, for it is usually the Jewish members off such a group who lower the communal easy handsomeness.”

In 1922, Jews made up 21.2% of the student body at Harvard, a number that was rapidly approaching the tipping point. President Lowell, Harvard’s president at the time, sensed the urgency and took measures thereafter to decrease the Jewish percentage of the student body. Harvard feared it would become like Columbia or the University of Pennsylvania, examples of good colleges supposedly soiled by an overwhelming Jewish presence. Harvard would

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lose its long-standing attractiveness to members of the upper echelons of Boston and New York society, as Columbia already had. Harvard would lose its status as America’s leading university because the students of elite Manhattan private schools and New England boarding schools would choose to attend Yale or Princeton instead, in so-called “WASP flight.”109 WASP flight then, like white flight today, signified a decline in the schools’ prestige. The desirability of an institution is based on the preservation of a particular social standing.

As we can see in this discussion, the diversity ideal in fact refers to a limited percentage of minorities, with a maintained white majority. Large numbers of all racial minorities are described as unwanted in America, because the space of America is defined to be white and whites prefer to be in the company of other whites. Thomas Schelling, an economist, studies how individual preferences for people like oneself create segregation: “Complete segregation is then a stable equilibrium.”110 If we take for granted that white people prefer white people, and Asian people prefer Asian people, regardless of the motivation for this preference, the only way that everyone can be happy is if their activities are racially segregated; the only alternative is constant tension.

Although different minority groups in large quantities are unwanted in different ways, they are often described as polluting the white atmosphere in some way. Anthropologist Mary Douglas in *Purity and Danger* says: “A polluting person is always wrong. He has developed some wrong condition or simply crossed some line which should not have been crossed and this displacement

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109 Karabel, 87, 89.

unleashes danger for someone.” Blacks are perceived to be the ultimate pollutants; thus schools and neighborhoods that have too many blacks are viewed to be unsafe and become undesirable for whites. Latinos are the most heavily associated with the illegal immigrant phenomenon, and thus are seen as a drain on American resources. Asians are viewed as hardworking, resulting in the oft-used title of “model minority” to describe Asians in America. I will discuss the “model minority” in more depth in Chapter Three. Their model minority status does not mean that Asians are on the same level as the whites; Asians are still considered to be on the periphery of the mainstream culture in America. The phrase “Asian invasion,” which is used to describe a situation in which when a large group of Asians invade a space, exemplifies Asians and their periphery status. Australian politician Pauline Hansen, demonstrated this concept in her 1996 “Maiden Speech:” “I believe we are in danger of being swamped by Asians. Between 1984 and 1995, 40 per cent of all migrants coming into this country were of Asian origin. They have their own culture and religion, form ghettos and do not assimilate.” Inherent in the term “Asian invasion” is the notion that Asians are unwanted, and that they stand out and cannot blend in. This phrase implies that Asians are illegitimately entering the space of the dominant group, without permission. In effect, Asians are polluting the space reserved for the dominant group in America. As with all pollution metaphors, the metaphor of the Asian student as a pollutant has negative consequences for the Asian student.

The “model minority” stereotype serves as a double-edged sword. Asians are not viewed to be dangerous or a drain on resources, but it can still be undesirable for whites to live in an area with a highly concentrated Asian population. A specific example is a recent Wall Street Journal article that talked about the “second white flight” from Cupertino, California. White parents were reluctant to enroll their children at the local Monta Vista High School because the school was viewed to be too competitive. Some white parents chose to send their children to the neighboring Homestead High School, despite its lower test scores. The article quotes the Homestead PTA President Mary Anne Norling saying: “"It does help to have a lower Asian population. I don’t think our parents are as uptight as if my kids went to Monta Vista.” 113 Mr. Rowley, the district superintendent, admitted that "Kids who are white feel themselves a distinct minority against a majority culture." 114 Mr. Rowley chose not send his own son to Monta Vista High School. The Asian students were viewed to be the cause of the heightened pressure and stress at the school. One former student at Monta Vista High School, George Chen, said: “Monta Vista was viewed as being very stressful because of all the Asian students, who fought to be in the AP classes…There was always that perception that the Asian American students were the cause of the stress as well as the reason why the school wasn’t good in something like athletics.” This demonstrates how the model minority myth is a double-edged sword. Even though Asians students at Monta Vista High School were not decreasing the quality of their school by decreasing its academic prestige (in fact,

114 Hwang, “The New White Flight”
the opposite (increasing its academic prestige), the high percentage of Asian students still drove the white families out of Cupertino. This brings us back to Rossett’s earlier point that the percentage of (middle class) white students at the school is the real indicator of how desirable a school is. The Asian students decreased school’s desirability by their mere presence.

A similar phenomenon occurred in the Red Cross of New York City, which had become the “Asian” thing to do. Christine Chang, an alumna of Stuyvesant High School who was very involved in Red Cross, and said that race was a very big issue, and “every year we would address that and figure out ways to increase diversity.” During Christine’s senior year at Stuyvesant, the Red Cross hired a new volunteer coordinator who tried to drastically change the demographic: “We had a new coordinator, and she was Latina American. I think she kind of resented the fact that the board was mostly Asian American, and my very last year there, she placed people there for diversity.” Again, it is not just the outsiders who perpetuate this concept of pollution; Asian students internalize the notion that they are the unwanted, and try to be accommodating to the conception. Christine acknowledged that she agreed with the Red Cross’s actions on some level: “It is the American Red Cross of Greater New York—why are there hundreds of Asians? It probably hurt our [the American Red Cross’s] image.”

Christine is not the only interview subject who expressed this attitude. Jimmy Wong, who was active in the Lowell High School debate team, talked about how the debate team through the years had made a transition from being exclusively white five to ten years ago to becoming too Asian; the team
responded by actively trying to recruit more non-Asian students. When asked why the team felt the need to do this, he said that they felt that they would be more advantageous in winning tournaments and in getting grants from the Parent Teacher Association if they were able to have a more diverse group of people to represent the debate team. “For alumni and parent funding, the parents was mostly white. I don’t know, I guess Asian parents don’t really care [about the school]…If the parents’ kids were involved, they were more willing to get us grants.” The parent teacher association at Lowell High School was predominantly white, and tended to favor their children when dispensing grants. Thus, in order for the debate team to get funding, the team could not become too Asian, otherwise, they would risk losing their funding from the PTA. Jimmy also eluded to the debate team being better for its diversity, and its ability to also win more tournaments. The fact that Jimmy, an Asian student, actively tried to police the debate team from becoming “too Asian,” demonstrates the extent to which students discipline other students, and how societal power relations are internalized by all students. Jimmy maintained a level of awareness about the necessity of maintaining the boundaries the racial boundaries between the students in the school.

**Conclusion:**

I argue that magnet schools in Boston, New York City, and San Francisco superficially presented themselves to educate the best and the brightest, but they were actually created to protect quality education as the privilege of the white middle class. The schools initially tried to protect this privilege through exclusion in their admissions process, but without that capability, the schools then protects
this privilege by transmitting the power dynamics to its students. One of the
characters in David Henry Hwang’s play *M Butterfly*, Song says: “the West
believes the East, deep down, *wants* to be dominated.”¹¹⁵ The West sets up the
power relations so that the East has no choice but to want to be dominated.

The behaviors and actions of the white and Asian students in these schools
mirror the racial hierarchy in society, demonstrating Althusser’s notion that the
ruling class dictates the ideology of the state. The knowledge of one’s own race
and the space it occupies in the schools led to the demarcation of social and
extracurricular spaces for Asian students versus white students, at the same time
privileging the Asians who acted white within the school community. Using
Foucault’s theory of modern discipline, the fact that Asian students who act
“white” are rewarded demonstrates the normalizing of the behavior of Asian
students. The behavior of the white students becomes the norm to conform to.
Finally, the notion of “diversity” dominates both the Asian and white students’
discussion of their ideal social environments, but this notion of diversity is only
an ideal. By “diversity,” Asian students are actually referring to non-Asian
diversity—white students, and white students when they refer to “diversity”
reference a possibility that is out of the realm of possibility.

CHAPTER THREE: RACIALIZED PERCEPTIONS & IDENTITY FORMATIONS

Introduction:

This chapter begins by examining the discourse about Asian racial identity in the United States, drawing references to the historical moments discussed in chapter one. The idea that Asians in America have become a “model minority” features prominently in contemporary discourse about Asian American identity, the role of Asian Americans in magnet public schools, and in the responses from my interview subjects. Then the chapter goes on to examine how interviewed students rebelled against the model minority stereotype, and the final section focuses on the relationship between Asian students and other racial groups, looking specifically at their relationship with black and white students. While Asian students resist the model minority stereotype by aspiring to be white, they indeed fall into the trap that the model minority presents for them.

The chapter builds on the arguments of the previous chapters by focusing specifically how the perception that Asian students are overrepresented in magnet school affects their racial identity. I focus on the word “perception” because I have demonstrated that the overrepresentation is exaggerated, and because of the commentary that accompanies the claim of Asian students being overrepresented, which bring up specific critiques which have little to do with representation. The perception drove behavior, not the actual number of Asians in the school. If the numbers of Asians at the schools drove behavior, then the Asians would have had different experiences at the schools, because each of the schools have varying
percentages of Asian students. I argue that most Asian students are unwilling to identify with being Asian, and instead aspire to be white, carrying out the school and society’s control discussed in the previous chapter.

Asian Racial Identity Formation:

Two factors contribute to a group’s racial identification: how other groups perceive of a particular racial group, and how that racial group perceives itself. The two groups, however, do not have equal amounts of power—there is a dominant group, with more power, and subordinate group(s), with less. The differences among the subordinate groups are important to understand, because the differences inform the placement of Asians within the different racial groups in America. Within the subordinate groups, the anthropologist John U. Ogbu, defines three types—autonomous minorities, immigrant minorities, and involuntary minorities. The distinction between the three rests primarily on how the minority groups were came to the United States, but the distinction also implies a hierarchical structure within the subordinate groups, based on the levels of assimilation into the dominant group. Ogbu uses the Jewish Americans as an example of autonomous minorities, who he claims are minorities only in a numerical sense, and do not experience discrimination from the dominant group, who Ogbu would define was Protestant whites. While Ogbu’s claim is truer today than it was at the turn of the twentieth century, the Anti-Defamation League (ADL), a non-profit devoted to monitoring incidences of and fighting against Anti-Semitism in America, would argue many whites in America still
discriminate against Jews. Immigrant minorities, such as Asians and Cubans, choose to come to the United States, and thus Ogbu argues that they have a different attitude toward America. Finally, involuntary minorities are those who were brought to America against their will, the prime example being Africans brought to the U.S. during the transatlantic slave trade.

The sociologist Herbert Blumer offers a way of framing the relationship between two different groups. In a 1958 article titled “Race Prejudice as a Sense of Group Position,” he posits the group position theory, which uses hierarchical relationships between groups to explain prejudice. Each individual identifies with his or her own group, he conjectures, and conflicts arise when groups have competing interests. Blumer defines the four most common types of racial prejudice that the dominant group has about the subordinate group. The first is a feeling of superiority. The second is a feeling that the subordinate group is different and alien. The third is a proprietary claim to certain areas of privilege and advantage. The fourth is fear and suspicion that the subordinate race “harbors designs on the prerogatives of the dominant race.” The third and fourth reasons Blumer cites support Lipsitz’s claims about white privilege. Whites feel entitled to elite institutions of higher education, and Asian students, penetrating these institutions, appear to intrude on the traditional privilege of the dominant group.

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In the context of the United States, the dominant group is the white population, while the minority groups are Latinos, blacks, Native Americans, and Asians. These categories are not fluid, however. The ethnicities comprising the “white” group has shifted throughout history, for example, at the turn of the twentieth century, Italians, Irish, and Jews were considered minorities—they formed ethnic enclaves and were considered “other” to white Americans who had lived in America for longer periods of time. In their essay “How White People become White,” historians James Barrett and David Roediger address this issue: “The literal inbetween-ness of new immigrants…affirms [that] the state of whiteness was approached gradually and controversially.”119 The European immigrants of the 19th and early 20th century have since entered the realm of whiteness, but the transition was controversial. The narrative of the assimilation of immigrant groups from different European countries into whiteness provides hope for the other subordinate groups that they may eventually assimilate into the majority group, thus erasing the different racial categories. Asians are encouraged to entertain this fantasy because of their label of the “model minority.” Evidence of this aspiration includes trends of Asians wanting to act “white,” and the stereotype of the “model minority,” which I will discuss in subsequent sections of this chapter. The desire to assimilate into the dominant groups serves as one of the foundations of Asian identity formation in America.

Revisiting Althusser’s theory, the ideology of the ruling class holds the State power. Applying Althusser’s theory to the relationship between the

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dominant group and the subordinate group, the dominant group exercises control over all of the subordinate groups, as members of the dominant group permeate the institutions that shape and dictate policy. Whites in America have discursively produced Asian racial identity. The first way is that Asians are perpetual foreigners in America. This stereotype was enforced by immigration laws which forbade Asian male laborers from bringing their families to the United States, a law which made it difficult for Asian immigrants from the 1850s to the 1965 to stay in America. Early immigrants sent money back to their home country, and traveled back and forth between America and their home country, in what was referred to as the “sojourner” mentality. Law professor Frank Wu laments that the first thing every Asian person gets asked is, “Where are you from?” The question-asker is never satisfied with a location within the United States, and usually follows up with, “Where are you really from?” The naive question relates the perception of the Asian person as the eternal foreigner. Today, Asian Americans perpetuate that sojourner status, as many of them make their homes in both their country of origin and in the United States, and frequently travel back and forth to visit family and conduct businesses. For example, the Committee of 100, a non-profit formed by Chinese American leaders in America, aims in part to improve U.S. – China relations. The committee comprises Chinese Americans, who consider it part of their Chinese American identity to moderate the relationship between the United States and China, making use of their connections to their home country and their bicultural identity.

121 “Committee of 100: Issues” [http://www.committee100.org/aboutus/aboutus_issues.htm]
The other way Asian identity is produced is through its relations to the black-white racial binary. In a binary, the two sides are defined in opposition to each other—if one side is good, then the other side by definition is bad. In the United States, whites are the dominant group, and occupy prestigious positions in society. Blacks are the “other” in this binary, and in opposition to whites, blacks are defined to occupy the lowest places in American society. Instead of working to deconstruct this binary, other racial groups, like Asians and Latinos, instead align themselves with a side of the binary. Asians are neither part of the white ruling class nor part of the black lower class, but can fall on either side of the binary depending on what is useful for the dominant whites a given historical moment. On the one hand, in the early twentieth century a Chinese girl petitioned to go to a white school in Mississippi instead of a black school, but was denied entrance in Gong Lum v. Rice (1927) because she was considered to be colored. This example establishes Asians’ affiliation with other minorities, other colored people. On the other hand, Asians are lauded for their educational achievement, as highlighted in a 1971 Newsweek article titled “Outwhiting the Whites.” This article title implies that being “white” is something that can be performed and achieved, and that they Asians are achieving to a place beyond whites, and threatening their place in society. The precarious racial position of Asian Americans leads to specific types of behavior, which provide the context for the experiences and the decisions of my interview subjects.

Mary Douglas’s theory of purity and pollution ties together the notion of Asians as the perpetual foreigners and their ambiguous status in the American

122 Kluger, 120-121
racial binary. Douglas writes that “if a person has no place in the social system and is therefore a marginal being all precaution against dangers must come from others.”123 Something that is foreign and unknown, like the Asian workers, has no place in a social system, and is thus feared. In the United States during the mid-1800s, views of Asians were greatly influenced by the threat Asian workers posed to white workers. Asians were considered foreign, and were always referred to by their country of origin, even as they were living in America—hence the term “Chinaman.” As the episode in the San Francisco Chinatown demonstrates, Chinatowns and Chinamen were also considered to be dirty, unhealthy, and unlawful.

At that time, Americans began to use the term “yellow peril” to refer to unwanted Chinese laborers. They were considered “yellow peril” on three grounds: first a fear of miscegenation between Asian men and white women; second, a fear of the Asian population overtaking the white population; third, the economic competition that the workers represented.124 The “yellow peril” stereotype manifests itself during World War II. America fought against Japan, and placed Japanese Americans in internment camps for fear of their association with Japan. America viewed Japanese Americans to be foreigners though they were American citizens. These fears still exist in contemporary discussions about Asian countries like China and India, as people fear that their American companies will continue to outsource good jobs to those countries because of their enormous labor force and the labor force’s willingness to work for lower

123 Douglas, 98.
standards. Asians as the “yellow peril” thus incorporates the theme of Asians as foreigners, and is largely driven by fear.

The concept of “yellow peril” applies to the commentary surrounding the demographic shifts in magnet public schools, as in the earlier discussion of white flight from Monta Vista High School. “Yellow peril” also manifested itself in more subtle ways—students and administrators charged Asian students with using unfair tactics to get into the magnet schools. Many Asian students attended “cram schools” that had courses specifically designed to prepare students for the magnet schools’ entrance examinations. The belief that Asians were at the schools unfairly, aggravated animosity towards their presence. Oren Cohen, a Stuyvesant High School alumnus, who became a music teacher, and eventually the chair of the music department at his alma mater, witnessed both the administration’s struggles with the diversity of admissions, and had his personal interactions with students, many of whom were Asian. When asked for his explanation for the skewed racial composition of Stuyvesant, Mr. Cohen replied: “It was coaching business, and that seemed to be it, that Asian students were coached…They were mediocre kids, but they got in because of the coaching business.” This statement implies that the Asian students do not deserve to be at the schools, but finessed their way in, and lack innate, raw intelligence. As further evidence, Mr. Cohen described some of the homework assignments he got from the Asian students in his class: “I’ve experienced it when I used to assign music appreciation essays. The writing skills are very poor, with lots of exceptions. You wonder how they did well on the exam.” Mr. Cohen blamed the cram schools for the lack of
diversity at Stuyvesant. The former principal at HCHS, Dr. Eric Jacobs shared
Mr. Cohen’s opinion. In my personal conversations with Dr. Jacobs, he cited cram
schools as an unfair advantage that Asian students had over underserved
minorities. In the HCHS curricular review mentioned in the introduction, one of
the final proposals to improve Hunter’s admissions policy were to create free
cram schools in target neighborhoods, as a way to help prepare underserved
communities for the Hunter examination, equalizing access to test preparation.

The Asian interview subjects from Boston Latin School unveiled another
example of admissions tactics that distinguished Asian students from other
students. These interview subjects all mentioned that a large percentage of Asian
students at Boston Latin really lived in Quincy and Malden, but used addresses
from relatives or family friends in Boston, as their own, to attend the school. The
school administration consistently tried to crack down on people who used illegal
addresses, and according to Jeremy Zhou, “everyone knew that it was really the
Asians they were trying to crack down on. It’s because Asians are sketchy like
that.” When interviewing the Caucasian interview subjects who were also Boston
Latin alumni, I asked what they thought about the illegal address problem. They
all knew other Caucasian students who used illegal addresses, and did not view it
as an Asian problem. The fact that the Asian students had perceived it and
internalized it as an Asian problem, however, is a testament to the power of these
longstanding stereotypes.
Asians as the Model Minority

However during the Cold War, while the United States was at war against Vietnam and Korea, and was implicitly at war with China and the Soviet Union, the concept of “yellow peril” took on a different tone. Cultural historian Christina Klein links Civil Rights Movement in the United States with these wars abroad “integrating the decolonizing nations with the capitalist ‘free world’ order.” Klein argues that “As the social structures organizing Asian people within the United States changed, the meaning of Asianness did as well.”125 The events during the Cold War set in motion the transition of Asians as the “yellow peril” to Asians the “model minority;” although the transition can equally become reversed when Asians begin to infiltrate places in excessive numbers, as seen with the earlier examples of Monta Vista high school and the American worker fear that all jobs will be outsourced to China and India.

To use the term “Yellow Peril” to refer to Asians in the United States is no longer considered politically correct, and “yellow peril” has been replaced by the term “model minority.” The term refers to Asians’ high level of academic achievement in schools, especially in the math and sciences. The Asian model minority myth emblematizes immigrant success and proves that meritocracy exists in America. The terms “yellow peril” and “model minority” are intimately linked. While the two have different connotations—yellow peril has a negative connotation and model minority has a positive connotation—the two terms are refer to a similar phenomenon, and are driven by similar anxieties. Asian Americans who “overachieve” and accomplish more than their minority status

should allow them, become the yellow peril, which leads to the perception that there are too many Asians and they are taking over the United States. Both stereotypes are created by the dominant group as a way reinforcing the place of the subordinate groups. “Yellow peril” primarily represented the threat of the rising Asian immigrant labor force, which competed with blacks, Latinos, and whites for jobs. “Model minority” refers to the threat of the growing elite educated Asian immigrant population, which serves as a model for the other minorities for what they should aspire to be.

The term model minority is problematic in many ways. Law Professor Frank Wu critiques the term by asking who Asians are the model to: “The term begs the question ‘model of what’ and ‘model for whom?’…It could imply that…We are ‘model’ at least for people of color, our performance satisfying a lesser standard. Or it could mean that Asians are exemplary, serving as an ideal of some sort.” The first interpretation is denigrating to Asians and both interpretations are denigrating to other minority groups. Either interpretation leads to detrimental effects on relations between Asians and other minority groups because Asians are compared to other minorities. Lawrence Bobo and Vincent L Hutchings (1996) did a study on beliefs held by people of Asian, Latino, black and non-Latino white descent in Los Angeles. Bobo and Hutchings criticize conventional race theory for focusing on the dominant group and their relationship with subordinate groups. They apply Blumer’s notion of group position theory to beyond just dominant and subordinate groups. In their

126 Takaki, 480–481.
127 Wu, 59.
investigation of Los Angeles residents, they found that blacks, Latinos, and non-Latino whites all felt the greatest threat from Asian-Americans, compared to other races. They were most likely to see relations with Asians as a zero-sum game, without the potential for cooperation. Blacks and Latinos viewed Asians as competitors for jobs, while whites viewed Asians as competitors in social status.\textsuperscript{128}

There are many parallels between the Jewish American experience and the Asian American experience. Novelist and historian Lynn Pan compares the Jews occupying the merchant class in Europe the way the Chinese occupied the merchant class in Asia, and calls the Chinese “the Jews of the East.”\textsuperscript{129} Asians and Jews also had similar educational experiences in the United States. Daniel Golden, a \textit{Wall Street Journal} Reporter covering education, wrote a book in 2006, \textit{The Price of Admission: How America's Ruling Class Buys its Way into Elite Colleges--and Who Gets Left Outside the Gates}, its seventh chapter is titled “The New Jews: Asian American Needs Not Apply.” Both groups traditionally value education highly, and have made remarkable progress within the span of a generation. Asians are victims of the same exclusionary tactics that were used to limit the number of Jewish students entering Ivy League institutions in the early twentieth century, as described in Chapter Two. In the spring of 1987, a neoconservative journal, \textit{Public Interest}, found that Asian students admitted to Harvard scored on average 112 points higher on the SAT than the average

\textsuperscript{129} Pan, 129.
Caucasian admitted student. The discrepancy prompted the U.S. Office of Civil Rights to investigate the Harvard admissions office. Although Harvard denied preferential treatment, following the lawsuit, the percentage of Asian students accepted at Harvard went from 11.3 percent in 1986, to 16.9 percent in 1990, a rate on par with white admission rates at Harvard. The change correlated with external pressure, and suggested that Asian students were, indeed, held to higher academic standards, and purposefully excluded.

The stereotype of the model minority dominated the discussion when I asked both my Asian and Caucasian interview subjects, “How were Asians perceived in your school?” All interview subjects mentioned the model minority in reference to perceptions of Asian students, using it as a theme for what the Asian students at the school were like, especially with respect to what types of extracurricular activities they did, and to their academic performance. The connotations of the stereotype were not positive; students who described Asian students as the model minority described those students in a degrading way. The Asian interview subjects were all careful to qualify their statements with counter-examples of how Asians were not always the “model minority,” and also insisted that they personally did not subscribe to the model minority myth, even though some of their peers would have ascribed them as such. This leads to the conclusion that the model minority, like yellow peril, only exists in the abstract. None of the Asian students I interviewed admitted to being the model minority—they always cited one or more attribute that made them different from the model minority. Grace Cho, a biochemistry concentrator applying to graduate schools in

130 Karabel, 502-503.
chemistry, and the winner of multiple math and science competitions, cited her true passion for the subject of chemistry, and that she was going into graduate school instead of medical school, as evidence of how she was not a “stereotypical Asian.” The white interview subjects distinguished those who were “really Asian,” in other words, those who seemed to embody all the traits of the model minority stereotype, from those who were “normal,” i.e., those who acted more “white.” The distinction draws upon Foucault’s theory of discipline in schools, and the technique of normalizing judgments, described in Chapter Two.

Asian students expressed frustration at their classmates’ heightened expectations as a result of their model minority status. Jack Wu, an alumnus from HCHS, expressed annoyance that people always assumed that he got a good grade on a math test, or that he was prepared for a science test because he was Asian: “When I was cramming for a test,” he recalled, “sometimes the white kids would say, ‘Man, Jack, what are you worried about, you’re Asian!’” Many Asian students echoed Jack’s irritation with white student’s perceptions that Asians have an innate ability in the math and sciences, and that being Asian in it of itself enabled one to do well in school.

The model minority Asian student was viewed by interview subject as excessively success and career-driven. According to the myth, Asian students were calculating, and only care about their grade point average, SAT scores, and resume boosting to get into a good college. They do not care about education for its own merits, nor are they concerned about contributing to their school community. In interviews, white students discussed the behavior of the typical
Asian student versus that of the rest of the school. Tom Michlewitz, who went to Stuyvesant High School, talked about class choices among the Asian students: “Asians tended to opt out of the difficult ‘good’ classes, in favor of the classes that were easier but still looked good on paper.” In terms of participation in extracurricular activities, Michlewitz felt that Asian students were not as involved. “Given that Stuyvesant was sixty percent Asian,” he noted, “the participation of Asian students in school activities was low relative to the larger population.” Josh Rosenberg echoed this sentiment, citing the end of senior year of high school during the senior events when he started to see “all of these random Asian students who I had never seen before came out of the wood work.” Of his graduating class of 200 people, the students that Josh did not recognize on graduation day were mostly Asian. Rosenberg and Michlewitz ascribe negative attributes to the typical Asian student. Their negative perception demonstrates that there is something inherently undesirable in being Asian. In order for Asians to become desirable to their white peers, they must shed their “Asian” attributes. These comments imply that students who do not actively contribute to their school community or utilize the school’s resources to learn the most they can do not really belong at the schools.

The white perception of the model minority stereotypical Asian student was echoed by some of the Asian students. When asked how Asian students participated in their school community, Jack Wu said: “[Asians] tend to do things to make themselves look good, not because they like it… My friends started an environmental club that didn’t really do anything, but they put it on the resume.”
Jack agreed with Michlewitz’s comment that Asian students were very strategic about their high school choices, for the sake of making themselves look good, with the ultimate goal of getting into a good college. Lisa Lin who attended Lowell High School said that often her Asian peers were apathetic about what they did: “They weren’t really passionate about their activities the way white people were, and tended to stick to your very standard extracurricular activities like Scroll and Key, ¹³¹ and Science Olympiad.” These Asian students acknowledged the negative tendencies of other Asian students yet they were also quick to point out examples of when they transcended the negative stereotype, or of other Asian students contributing to the school community. Lin, for example, mentioned her experience on the high school debate team, talking about how passionate she was about debating, and how she did it to the detriment of her schoolwork. George Chen discussed how the Asian students at Monta Vista High School reacted to the phenomenon of white flight from their school. Chen said that, “Unfortunately…the Asian Americans, wrongly I think, saw themselves as the cause of the stress.” Chen thought that the Asian students at his school felt responsible for the high levels of stress at Monta Vista High School. All of my Asian interview subjects pointed fingers at the “typical Asian,” yet no one admitted to being the typical Asian. This tension illuminates my earlier argument that the model minority stereotype exists in the imagination of the students at magnet schools, yet in practice, no one self-identifies as being a model minority.

¹³¹ This is the honor society at Lowell High School
Asians in the White-Black Binary

The post-1965 immigration wave in the United States signaled a change in race relations in America. In the 1960s, 96 percent of racial minorities were black, but today, blacks only constitute 50 percent of the minority population in America. This tradition has changed the landscape of race discussions in America, yet the framework of the discussion is often still portrayed as in black and white. This framework is adopted by Asian students. In an effort to rebel against the model minority status in which they are framed, Asian students rebel either by “acting white,” or “acting black.” Both decisions are respected by the Asian community—the only decision that is not respected is choosing to fulfill the model minority stereotype. The two choices available to Asians reinforce the black-white binary, as mentioned earlier.

Jack Wu described the three types of Asian students at his school: “There were the nerdy Asians, the whitewashed popular Asian, and the higher Asians. The higher Asians don’t like nerdy Asians because they think they badly represent Asians and higher Asians don’t really feel anything towards whitewashed Asians.” The “nerdy Asians” subscribe to the model minority stereotype. The white-washed and popular Asians are those who in their rejection of the model minority stereotype try to “act white.” Their association with popularity correlates with the fact that they have many white friends. The “higher Asians” are the “aZn” thugs who aspire to act black, and are considered the “cool” Asian students at the school. Wu’s categorization is not entirely complete. There are also Asian

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students who refuse to be placed in any of the three categories and succeed—they manage to move between the three groups, and do not buy into the ideology of one group versus another.

The “aZn” thugs Jack Wu mentions in his categorization of Asian students at the school are one of the ways Asians rebel against the imposed model minority myth. Jeremy Zhou acknowledged that Asian students for the most part performed well academically: “Well, seven of the eight valedictorians my year were Asian, so in that sense they were perceived as your standard overachievers, but there are a lot of Asian students getting detention, who eventually dropped out as well.” Zhou points to the Asian students who do badly in school as an example of how not all Asian students can be categorized solely as academic overachievers. This trend appears as a common tactic among the Asian students. The Asian interview subjects from all the magnet schools examined, described the phenomenon of the “aZn pride” students. While the interview subjects described this phenomenon, they would not consider themselves part of that group. The “aZn pride” students were defined by their baggy Jnco jeans, Northface jackets, Timberland boots, and Ecko T-shirts. They were the Asian “thugs” who were involved in youth gangs, carried butterfly knives to school, smoked a pack of cigarettes a day, and frequently cut class. Sometimes they listened to rap, and sometimes to Korean and Chinese pop music, but they never listened to “white music.” Their rebellion took the form of “acting black.” They were considered to be among the cool Asians at the school. Students saw them as militantly pro-Asian, only hanging out with
other Asian students. These Asians rejected the model minority stereotype by purposefully not performing at their full academic potential.

The association between black students and academic underachievement was first established in a groundbreaking study by anthropologist Signithia Fordham and Ogbu in 1986. Fordham and Ogbu’s study establishes that black students resist doing well in school because succeeding academically is perceived as “acting white,” and black students also feel unwelcome to academic achievements as it represents a form of cultural hegemony that whites have over blacks.¹³³ This oppositional culture is firmly rooted in the history of oppression of blacks in America, and in blacks as an involuntary minority. The binary opposite of acting white is acting black, an act which has come to symbolize rebellion. Sociologist Grace Kao studies the effect of racial and ethnic expectations and stereotypes on an individual’s selfhood, and finds that the effect of racial expectations is strong, often creating a self-fulfilling prophecy. Kao analyzes the self in three ways—the hoped-for self, the expected self, and the feared self. Blacks and Latinos experience their feared-self, which Kao argues is a significant factor in their poor academic performance, because negative reinforcement is not as effective as positive reinforcement. Asian students function with their hoped-for self, while whites have the flexibility to be their expected self and were relatively free from feeling the need to conform to a group given their dominant group status.¹³⁴

Asian students usually choose one of two methods for resisting the model minority identity—options which place them, again, on either side of the black-white racial binary. Either they choose to be “cool” by associating with the “AzN pride” movement—often regarded as being cool by “acting black”—or they can be “cool” by “acting white.” One can “act white,” as many of my Asian interview subjects termed it, by consuming and performing mainstream white culture—through choosing typically “white” aesthetics in areas like fashion and music. The most significant factor in “acting white” is displaying social comfort in non-Asian-majority groups. Among blacks, “acting white” is socially stigmatized, but Asian students who “act white” usually occupy the more socially prestigious positions. Because ”acting Asian” is equated with acting foreign or like a nerd, “acting white” among Asian people becomes a source of pride, and is valued as the ability to assimilate into American society. While both performances are frequently practiced, the Asian students who “acted white” are more likely to achieve extracurricular activity status within the school, which often led to admissions into more prestigious colleges.

Asian students’ aversion to being Asian is an interesting contrast to black students’ pride in being black. Facebook groups, a widely, almost universally used form of networking among college and high school students, demonstrates this trend in two contrasting groups, “Twinkies,” with 34 Asian members and “I Should Have Gone to a Blacker College (Harvard Chapter)” with 76 members, all of whom are black. I chose to look at Harvard Facebook groups because I have access to the Harvard network and because that was the college that most of my
interview subjects attended. The description of “I Should Have Gone to a Blacker College” includes anecdotes about how people from other backgrounds cannot relate to or understand black students. “Twinkies” refers to people who are, as a popular saying goes, “yellow on the outside, but white on the inside.” Group members can be appointed “officers” and designated personalized titles. The “Twinkies” Facebook group assigned officer titles detailing why each officer was “white on the inside.” Officer titles include “likes white woman,” and “Ralph Lauren Fall 2005.” From this snapshot of college sub-cultures, Asian students are unlike minority groups like blacks, in that they take pride in being less Asian.

Asians who “act white” are often considered to be trading social capital for academic success. Jimmy Wong, an alumnus of Quincy High School, joked that “in the Asian community… acting white [is] acting stupid.” Acting smart is equated to acting Asian, but acting smart is insufficient to yield respect from the white community. This contrasts with the view among the black community where “acting white” equates to higher academic performance. The appeal of whiteness within the Asian community depends on the particular school environments which place a higher value on “whiteness” (educational achievement) is supported by Asians who subscribe to the environment and aspire to be white. The label of Asians as the model minority and the “new Jews” reinforce these behavior decisions.

Across the high schools, “white washed” Asians were cheerleaders, did student government, and did not participate in activities that were categorized as the “Asian,” as activities that Asian students heavily participated in were viewed
to be marginalized by the white interview subjects. The Asian students with the most social caché were the ones who shed their Asian status. Unlike in the black community, most Asian students did not berate “white-washed” Asians for shedding their Asian characteristics, and instead the “white-washed” Asians usually garnered some sort of respect from both the white and the Asian community. While the “aZn pride” kids would not condone the behavior of the “white-washed” Asians, their support for their fellow Asian would overcome their initial distaste for their behavior. Gina Moy, a former student at Hunter College High School, told me that after she had started hanging out with white friends, one of her white male friends told her, “You’ve transcended.” Tom Michlewitz talked about his junior year experience running for student class president at Stuyvesant with one of his friends:

The newspaper criticized us because we were two white boys who are going to run and try to win Stuyvesant. It was bogus because we still had a lot of friends in diverse groups…if anything we were more diverse than the other candidates running, but like ethnically, the guy that won was an Asian kid from the Upper East Side. In terms of being able to relate to other people, we were probably more able to relate, but people didn’t see that.

Tom was frustrated that his ticket was automatically written off on the basis of race. The Asian student who won, however, behaved just as “white” as Tom and his friend were. He still won the support of the Asian students at Stuyvesant, even though he had very little in common with the majority of the Asian population at the school, as he chose “white” behavior and social communities. Tom’s account of the student government race demonstrates the nature of Asian identity politics at magnet schools. For Tom, the Asian student’s election indicated that race
meant skin color to Asian students more than it meant commonality of experiences. From the election, it showed that Asian students are willing to support someone who is Asian, even though he or she devotes less of his or her resources to becoming friends with the majority of the Asian population. This phenomenon underscores the argument that Asian students do not punish or feel alienated or deserted by their fellow Asians who “act white.”

**Conclusion**

The terms “yellow peril” and “model minority” have both been used over time to describe Asians and Asian Americans. The two terms are inter-related, and the term model minority has inherited much of the rhetoric of the term yellow peril. While the model minority stereotype is meant to be a compliment and is considered to be a privilege, many Asian students feel oppressed by their model minority stereotype. They associate the model minority stereotype to be the quintessential Asian student, which carries with it negative connotations of being competitive, lacking passion, and being calculating.

In an effort to rebel against their model minority stereotype, one that has been constructed by the dominant group in an effort to control the students, most Asians choose to act stereotypically Asian, “aZn” black, or white. Given the aspirations of the students in the magnet public high schools, more Asian students choose to act white than to act black. Ironically, the Asian students in their attempt to escape their model minority status, further affirms it by aspiring towards the dominant group.
CONCLUSION

The initial question I set out to answer is, “What are the effects of these current school systems and perceptions on the Asian students in the school?” The Asian American students at the four magnet public high schools, exhibited in their actions, thoughts, and interactions, the contentious place that Asian Americans occupy in the American education system and American society on the whole.

The first chapter provides the context for the creation of magnet public schools. Policymakers created magnet public schools during the Civil Rights Movement as an alternative to busing. However, magnet schools are part of the failed implementation for desegregating American schools, thus they were designed primarily to be a privilege for affluent, white families. The current overpopulation of Asian Americans at magnet public schools creates a tension with both magnet schools’ stated goal of creating equal opportunities for blacks and whites, and magnet schools’ implicit goal of maintaining white spaces. With respect to the magnet schools’ stated goal, it is actually unsurprising that Asians have overpopulated the school given that Asian laborers were brought over to work on the Transcontinental Railroad, as a way of preventing the recently freed blacks from entering California. Asians are wedged between the black-white binary of race relations in America. With respect to the magnet schools unstated goal, this tension paves the way for the subsequent chapters, which discuss how Asian students’ overrepresentation violates their designated minority status, which has consequences for the Asian students in the school.
Chapter Two begins by establishing that schools are institutions of control using the theories of Althusser, Foucault, and Bourdieu. The unstated goals of magnet schools help explain the motives of the schools in their disciplining of the students. The Asian students had internalized the ruling ideology and considered themselves to be the subordinate group compared to the white students. Using Foucault’s discipline techniques of surveillance and normalization, I discussed how the internalization process happened. I extrapolate three ways in which I interpreted the school environments exercised control over its students. Firstly, the Asian students were preoccupied with their race. Secondly as a result of their preoccupation, decisions with respect to race dictated their behaviors, to the extent that parallel extracurricular activities were formed at the schools, one set for the Asian student, and the other for the white students. Thirdly, the rhetoric of diversity was also used as a way to reinforce to the Asian students that they were unwelcome at the school.

In Chapter Three, I elaborate on my claim in Chapter Two that Asians consider themselves subordinate to the white students. I embellish the argument using racial identity formation theories, like Blumer, Ogbu, and Bobo, and through my interviews. Overall, I found that my interview subjects overwhelmingly were unhappy with being Asian, and reacted by trying to act outside of their prescribed racial stereotypes. This phenomenon made is very difficult to clearly define Asian identity was, especially because the existing identity is the model minority, an imposed stereotype. The discussion demonstrates the preponderance of whiteness and privilege that continues to exist
in American society, and how minority groups like Asians subscribe to the privilege of whiteness.

In addition, there are re-occurring themes throughout the three chapters. One theme is the placement of Asians as a wedge between blacks and whites in American society. Initially Asian laborers were inserted between blacks and whites. Later, in the movement to desegregate schools, Asians again came in between blacks and whites. Perhaps the fact that Asian students are over-represented at magnet schools is the result of their purposeful insertion between blacks and whites in America. Another theme is the Asian as the foreigner, and the question of whether immigrant groups can ever become truly integrated with American society. A theme I only begin to explore in my thesis, the role that whiteness plays and what it means to be white in America.

In my interviews, the Asian subjects for the most part aspired to act “white” instead of to act “black.” I hypothesize that this is a consequence of my interviews being done with Harvard students. There are two implications with this hypothesis: the first is that Asians who act “white” are guaranteed a higher level of success than Asians who act “black, success measured by admission to Harvard. The second is re-emphasizes the point made in the introduction, which is that this study concerns a very specific group of people. Only a limited number of people can gain admissions into the magnet school, and subsequently into Harvard. Potentially there is a type of person who is able to do this, which predisposes them to wanting to act “white.” This work cannot claim to speak for
all Asian students. There is a high possibility that the vast majority of Asian students feel more solidarity with other minorities than they do with whites.

The research has implications for education policy, and the way to successfully integrate schools and other environments with diversity as a goal in mind. If magnet schools truly intend to bring together diverse groups of people together, magnet schools have to do a better job of fostering the experience of the minority children in the schools. The experience of the Asian students is at odds with what one would expect given that they sometimes make up the numerical majority of their school population. The Asian experience at these schools indicates a gap between the mission of diversity, and the way it plays out in student experience.
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APPENDICES

Appendix A: Solicitation for Interview Email

Email Subject Line: Interview for My Thesis

Hi [insert name of interview subject],

I hope you're doing well!

I am writing my senior thesis related to debates surround Asians in admissions, and looking specifically at the perception of there being "too many Asians" in magnet public high schools.

I am interviewing Asian alums of magnet public high schools, and [insert source of referral] said you went to [insert name of high school]. I'd be really interested to hear your input!

I was wondering if you have time in the next week or so, to participate in my thesis-interview. It would take 30 minutes of your time. If you're interested, please email me times you are free, and hopefully we can grab a meal in the dining hall or schedule a time over the phone. Also, if you know of anyone who might be interested in talking about this issue, I'd love to hear from them!

- Jenny
Appendix B: Interview Prompt for my Thesis

Description of my project: I am studying the debate surrounding Asians and admissions in magnet public high schools.

1. What year did you graduate from high school?

2. What high school did you go to?

3. What would you estimate to be the % of Asian students in your high school?

4. Would you say your school is diverse?

5. How were Asians perceived in your high school? Please describe all perceptions that

6. How did Asians participate in the school community? Were there activities that many Asians participated in? If so, what were they? Did this participation come with a connotation?

7. What extracurriculars did you do in high school?

8. What were the interactions like between Asians and other racial groups in high school?

9. How did your parents perceive the Asian population at your school? How did they encourage/discourage the extracurricular that you did?

10. What do your parents do?

Debrief:
I am studying in particular the phenomenon of there being “too many Asians” in magnet public high schools. This is something I personally experienced from my high school experience, and something that has come up again and again in the media.
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