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Updates from Cornell Asian American Studies alumni, 1994 - 2012
Dear Friends and Colleagues,

We recently completed another busy academic year in the Asian American Studies Program. In May, we saw our 20th class of Program minors graduate. At our commencement ceremony co-hosted with the Asian and Asian American Center (A3C), we celebrated the accomplishments of nine seniors: Doretha Dawkins, Cindy Huynh, Catherine Jung, Nick Lycette, Jaya Nambiar, Lila Nojima, Stephannie Ratcliff, Casey Sweeney, and Allen Wang. Drawn from a variety of colleges and departments across the University, the Class of 2013 received their honor stoles in front of family, friends, faculty, and distinguished guests, including Associate Vice Provost for Academic Diversity Initiatives, Dean of Students Kent Hubbell, and Cornell Asian Alumni Association representative Dr. Winston Tom (class of 1978).

Our commencement celebration capped a full year. Our faculty was characteristically active. I recently signed on as an advisor for the Museum of the Chinese in America’s Digital MOCA project. I also spent a lovely afternoon with Cornell alums at the second annual Cornell Asian Alumni Association Reunion. It was a pleasure to meet enthusiastic alums who attended Cornell before the Program had been established as well as those like, Scarlet Fu (class of 1994) of Bloomberg News, who appreciate what the Program was able to do for them. Meanwhile, Professors Shelley Wong and Viranjini Munasinghe traveled to Seattle to present their scholarship at the annual meeting of the Association for Asian American Studies, and Professor Minh-Ha Pham, despite being on leave during the Spring 2013 semester, managed to contribute to a forum on the state of Asian American Studies in the field’s flagship publication. Professor Pham also participated on a MOCA panel on Chinese Americans in fashion.

Professor Pham will continue to be on leave in the fall of 2013, but we were granted funds to hire a temporary replacement. Dr. Chrissy Lau will be joining us as a visiting assistant professor for the semester. She recently earned her Ph.D. in history at the University of California at Santa Barbara and spent last spring as a Goldman Sachs MultiCultural Junior Fellow and Intern at the National Museum of American History at the Smithsonian Institution in Washington, D.C. Dr. Lau’s scholarship focuses on Japanese Americans, cultural history, women’s and gender history, and class and racial formation. She will be teaching the Introduction to Asian American History and Asian American Women’s History. We are thrilled that she will be joining us, even if only for a short time.

The Program also continued to sponsor and co-sponsor a number of events on campus. Coordinated largely by our ever diligent and always enthusiastic staff of Vladimir Micic (manager) and Sada Gurbanova (assistant), we hosted regular Spam and Eggs community breakfasts and information sessions about the AASP and the AAS minor. We also co-sponsored two events at Cornell Cinema. In October, we welcomed filmmaker Teju Prasad (class of 2001) back to Ithaca with a screening and discussion of his documentary, “Not a Feather but a Dot.” In March, in conjunction with the A3C, we screened two films for the “Yuri & Grace Film Fest.” The first film featured a conversation between Angela Davis and Yuri Kochiyama; the second film was an interview of Detroit-based
activist Grace Lee Boggs by Bill Moyers. At intermission, Assistant Dean of Students and A3C Director Patricia Nguyen moderated a fascinating panel discussion with Asian American women graduate students, highlighting practices of and perspectives on activism.

The theme of activism seems particularly pertinent. Indeed, last summer Ithaca was chosen as one of 30 locales to host a viewing party of a national “Google Hangout” and panel discussion to memorialize the thirtieth anniversary of Vincent Chin’s murder in Detroit. Vladimir and the AASP worked with Ithaca’s Multicultural Resource Center to put on the event. And in the fall, we followed it up by co-sponsoring, with the Ithaca Asian American Association and the A3C, a community screening of and conversation about Curtis Chin’s “Vincent Who?” This follow up event took on even greater importance in the wake of a number of anti-Asian hate crimes in Ithaca. Program faculty also hosted a campus-based discussion and forum on anti-Asian violence.

The persistence of anti-Asian sentiment and acts underscores the importance of our scholarly and pedagogical mission in the AASP. We will continue our commitment as scholars and educators as students, faculty, administrators, staff, and community members struggle to make sense of, contextualize, and seek justice for these acts, and as we all work toward creating a more just and equal world.

Sincerely,

Derek Chang
Director, Asian American Studies Program
### COURSES OF STUDY

#### ASIAN AMERICAN STUDIES FALL 2012 - SPRING 2013

### FALL 2012

- **AAS 2130 Intro. to Asian American History**  
  D. Chang, 4 credits, MWF 01:25 - 02:40 pm

- **AAS 3030 Asians in the Americas**  
  V. Munasinghe, 4 credits, TR 01:25 - 02:40 pm

- **AAS 4170 Asian American Popular Culture**  
  M. Pham, 4 credits, Tu 02:30 - 04:25 pm

- **AAS 4530 20th Century Women Writers of Color**  
  S. Wong, 4 credits, Tu 12:20 - 02:15 pm

- **AAS 4790 Ethnicity and Identity Politics**  
  V. Munasinghe, 4 credits, F 10:10 - 12:05 pm

- **AAS 4950 Independent Study**  
  Staff, 4 credits, permission required

### SPRING 2013

- **AAS 1100 Intro. to Asian American Studies**  
  D. Chang, 3 credits, TR 01:25 - 02:40 pm

- **AAS 2100 South Asian Diaspora**  
  V. Munasinghe, 4 credits, TR 02:55 - 04:10 pm

- **AAS 2620 Intro. to Asian American Literature**  
  S. Wong, 4 credits, TR 10:10 - 11:25 am

- **AAS 4550 Race and the University**  
  S. Wong & D. Chang, 4 credits, W 12:20 - 02:15 pm

- **AAS 4950 Independent Study**  
  Staff, 4 credits, permission required

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"In many ways, the Asian American Studies Program at Cornell is my home. It is the foundation of an important part of my identity, and is an essential academic extension of the Asian American community here at Cornell. I remember the first class I took in the program with pride. The students were actively involved, pushed their stances, and eagerly checked to see if they were on point. It is my belief that unless a class makes your heart pound or your blood boil, you have not experienced what it feels like to be truly engaged in learning. The AASP provides just that. It is for this reason that I am proud to be an AASP minor. The Asian American Studies Program provided me with the tools and language necessary to have a real impact in the community as a student leader. The staff and faculty are first rate; their passion for Asian American studies provides inspiration for their students."

- Aminta Liu, the AASP class of 2014
ANTI-ASIAN VIOLENCE DISCUSSION
On September 26, in response to recent anti-Asian incidents in Ithaca, the AASP faculty and staff hosted a session with students in the Asian and Asian American Center at 626 Thurston Avenue.

CALL TO ACTION: RESPONDING TO ANTI-ASIAN VIOLENCE FILM SCREENING & COMMUNITY DIALOGUE
On November 4 the AASP co-sponsored a community-based screening and discussion of Curtis Chin’s “Vincent Who?” Initially conceived as a follow up to the June event, the screening and discussion also served as a catalyst for a community discussion of a recent local anti-Asian incidents.

NATIONAL PANEL DISCUSSION COMMENORATING 30th ANNIVERSARY OF VINCENT CHIN’S MURDER
On June 23, the AASP co-sponsored a viewing party and the “Google Hangout” with numerous Cornell and community partners. The event was nationally broadcast panel discussion to memorize the 30th anniversary of Vincent Chin’s murder in Detroit.
“NOT A FEATHER BUT A DOT”
On October 15, the AASP hosted a screening of Teju Prasad’s ('01) documentary about the history, perceptions, and evolution of the South Asian community in the United States. Prasad took questions from the audience members after the screening.

YURI & GRACE FILM FEST
On March 25, the AASP co-hosted, with the A3C, two films about Asian American women activists. The first film featured a conversation between Angela Davis and Yuri Kochiyama. The second film was an interview of Grace Lee Boggs by Bill Moyers. Part of the “2013: Invisible HERstories” project, the event also featured a panel discussion, organized by the Society for Asian American Graduate Affairs with women graduate students discussing their perspectives on activism.

ASIAN AMERICAN STUDIES MINOR INFO SESSION AND RECEPTION
On April 10, the AASP hosted an information session and the reception to introduce students to the Asian American Studies minor. Professors Viranjini Munasinghe and Derek Chang facilitated a wide-ranging discussion on the structure of the minor, various AASP courses, and the state of the field.
On Tuesday, November 6th, 2012, Barack Obama became the first African American to be reelected president of the United States of America. While this day was historical for the presidency, it was also a historic day for Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders (AAPI). Twelve AAPI congressmen and congresswomen, a record number, were elected to serve in the United States Congress. In addition, a record 73% of Asian/Asian American voters turned out for Democratic President Barack Obama. This number was significant because the polling results from the past 20 years show that the proportion of AAPIs who voted Democratic has shifted quite dramatically, a trend that has surprised many in the mainstream American media. Combine that trend with the fact that AAPIs are the fastest growing minority group in the United States, and the amount of political influence that AAPIs hold has increased significantly and show little signs of slowing down.

In the 113th United States Congress, one new AAPI candidate began serving in the United States Senate and five new AAPI candidates began serving in the House of Representatives. Many of these new AAPI congress members also set historical firsts. Representative Mazie Hirono (D-Hawaii) became the first Asian American women, first Asian immigrant, and first Buddhist to be elected into the U.S. Senate. Tammy Duckworth (D-Illinois) became the first Asian American to serve in the U.S. Congress. Grace Meng (D-New York) became the first Asian American to serve in the U.S Congress. Mark Takano (D-California) became the first openly gay man of color to serve in the U.S. Congress. Tulsi Gabbard (D-Hawaii) became the first Pacific Islander woman and Hindu American to serve in the U.S. Congress. Finally, Ami Bera (D-California) became third Indian-American to serve in the U.S. Congress, after Dalip Singh Saundh in 1950 and Bobby Jindal in 2005. These six candidates joined six other AAPI members who were currently in the U.S Congress: Daniel Inouye (D-Hawaii), Robert C. Scott (D-Virginia), Mika Honda (D-California), Doris Matsui (D-California), Judy Chu (D-California), and Colleen Hanabusa (D-Hawaii).

The proportion of AAPIs who voted Democratic during the 2012 election also surprised the mainstream American media. 73% of AAPIs voted for Democratic President Barack Obama, eight percentage points higher than the 63% of AAPIs who voted for President Obama in 2008. Contrast that with 1992, when only 31% of AAPIs voted for Democratic President Bill Clinton. How did the proportion of AAPIs who voted Democratic shift so dramatically in the past 20 years? Scholars Taeku Lee and Karthick Ramakrishnan suggest in a *LA Times* article entitled “Asian Americans turned Democratic” that the shift may have to do with the policies enacted by the three presidents in the past 20 years. Democratic President Bill Clinton improved the economy while naturalizing thousands of AAPIs and appointing the first ever Asian American to the Cabinet. Republican President George W. Bush, on the other hand, was against immigration, a stance, which polls indicated, was not favorable with AAPIs. In addition, President Bush was not interested in ending the wars in the Middle East or willing to provide support for universal health care, stances which were also unfavorable with Asian Americans. Democratic President Barack Obama, on the other hand, appointed a record number of Asian Americans to the Cabinet and enacted polices favorable towards AAPIs in healthcare reform as well as in education and with foreign policy. President Obama also reestablished the White House Initiative on Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders in 2009 reaffirming his commitment in supporting the AAPI community. Of course, these are just general trends, but they do suggest why the AAPI vote has shifted significantly towards the Democrats in the past twenty years.
The impact of this shift can be quite profound given the fact that AAPIs are the fastest growing minority group in the United States. According to the 2000 United States Census, 11.9 million Americans, or about 4.2% of the total population, identified as Asian Americans or part Asian. According to the 2010 United States Census, over 17 million Americans, or about 5.6% of the United States population, identified as Asian Americans or part Asian, a 46% increase. Just by the sheer increase in population, there will undoubtedly be AAPIs voters. With an increase in the number of voters, AAPIs will have greater political influence. Prior to the 2012 elections, the term “Asian American” was seldom used in news stories or television programs that covered politics and the election. Scot Nakagawa, a blogger on ChangeLab, wrote an article entitled “The Obama Asian American Landslide,” stating that before the elections “Asian Americans were simply not part of the discussion… but then, the election results came in and suddenly, there we were, relevant because we did something surprising enough to get folks attentions.” AAPIs are no longer a racial group that can be ignored in the political arena.

The record number of AAPIs elected to Congress and dramatic changes in how AAPIs voted made 2012 a historic year for AAPIs. While AAPIs still have a long way to go before they are fully represented in politics, there's no doubt that they have made some impact going forward. President Obama said at the 2012 Asian Pacific American Institute Annual Gala that, “[w]e will arrive at that destination where every child born in America regardless of race, creed, color, is going to have a chance… because in this country we look out for each other…. That’s the story of America. And that’s the story of this [AAPI] community.” Mike Honda, the former chair of the Congressional Asian Pacific American Caucus (CAPAC), said, “[t]he next Congress will see more Asian American and Pacific Islander members of Congress than ever before… Congress is slowly, but surely, starting to better represent America.” The American political system is one that will ultimately better represent its racial and ethnic minorities.
Why are Alumni connections so important to any college in the world? Aside from the financial contributions, connections, and involvement in the college, alumni connections also provide a model and inspiration to future students. There is no denying that younger students look up to their upper classmen for advice, vision and an example of what they can aspire to become. The chance to see someone who is like yourself whether in race, color, gender, ethnicity, and identity triumph through the same experiences, adds a sense of belongingness and motivation. But not every community on campus is fortunate enough to observe that important link to the past. Thus it is essential to highlight the involvements of early alumni in hopes of telling future students their struggles are not uncommon.

The stories of the earliest Cornell Asian Alumni demonstrate their active involvement in student affairs during a period when they were pioneers in many respects. Asian students began studying in Cornell as far back as 1870 when a Japanese student name Nagasawa Kanaye arrived to study Natural History. Cornell maintains archived files of all their alumni in the 19th and 20th century.

Sao-Ke Alfred Sze was the first Chinese student ever to enter Cornell. Sze graduated in 1901 with a B.A. degree and a M.A. degree in 1902 and went on to become Chinese ambassador to the United States. While on campus, he was the editor of the Cornellian and a member of the Savage club, an organisation that grew from the Cornell Glee club. Sze was also a member of the Phi Beta Kappa and Phi Kappa Phi honor societies. Sze was able to reach his full potential at Cornell and make his impression on the university.

Helen Huie Kwei also overcame challenges. She was born on 1899 in New York, NY. She was the daughter of Reverend Huie Kin Kwong and Louise Van Arnam. She was one of the first Asian American students to ever study in Cornell and graduated in 1920 with a B.A. While on campus, she was very active in athletics and student affairs such as the Mortar Board, Crew, the Baseball Team, the Basketball Team, the Tennis Team, the Y.W.C.A, and the Chinese Students Club. Kwei held leadership roles as the president of the Y.W.C.A and the captain of the basketball team. During a time when it was rare for women of color to be enrolled in Ivy League universities. The case of Kwei is a moving story of courage and determination.

The stories of Cornell Alumni can be encouraging to future students that may feel their paths are not clear yet. At Cornell, help is always present for students that seek it. Individuals are empowered when they look for guidance from upperclassmen with experience or read about the alumni.
If one were to take a moment and consider where society stands in terms of racism, some would strongly advocate that we are finally part of a post-racial society. Such a concept may be true if the only factor taken into account is the decrease in overall acceptance for overt racism by the general public. However, this is not to say overt racism is completely nonexistent. In August 2012, Americans witnessed a “domestic terrorist-type incident” within a Wisconsin Sikh temple. This tragic event involved a white supremacist shooting and killing six people and wounding four others. (CNN Wire Staff) The resulting repercussions of this bias incident prove our laws to be better and more equitable than those from 30 years ago. However, such laws still fail at internalizing the unpredictability of human behavior and curbing the ongoing force racism is using to bury itself deeper into society.

So is it enough to say that less acceptance of outright violent racist acts translates to less racism? Based on current sociological studies and everyday interactions it could be said that we are nowhere near a post-racial society; on the contrary, we have simply altered the way racism is practiced or expressed. Considered by writer J.B. McConahay as “modern racism”, racial microaggressions are “commonplace daily verbal, behavioral, or environmental indignities, whether intentional or unintentional, that communicate hostile, derogatory, or negative racial slights and insults toward people of color.” (Sue, 2007) For Asian/Asian Americans, microaggressions can range from unconscious insults such as “you’re so lucky that you’re naturally good at math” to unintentional invalidations such as “I know you were born in California but where are you actually from?” Statements such as these may not be said with malicious intent, but they do demonstrate a certain degree of ingrained racism or insensitivity to the experiences of ethnic minorities in a predominantly white nation. Thus, challenging racial microaggressions wherever they emerge in public will educate violators of the harmful impacts of their words/actions and help pinpoint where such automatic racism is coming from. As collateral damage to such ingrained racism, citizens of society will greatly benefit by acknowledging the influence they hold in combating this issue of racial discrimination, despite the false security provided by the so called accountability of policymakers to their constituents.

Now this contemporary form of racism may seem like a step in the right direction since often times the perpetrators commit microaggressions unintentionally. However, no matter the motive behind our actions there are always consequences. It is my belief that we need to bring the issues of racial microaggressions on the level of a larger public discussion, otherwise the racial division within American society will either remain the same or deepen as more and more goes unsaid.

Despite the tranquil bubble that many of us claim to be enclosed in during our time here at Cornell, the Ithaca and Cornell community is not untouched by bias incidences, or verbal and physical attacks towards those generally associated with minority groups. It would seem as if Ithaca is a place where overt and “modern racism” are both very much present and where a regression from microaggressions to hate crimes might have already occurred. Just last year, our community here witnessed the racial attack at Sigma Pi Fraternity in which an individual unaffiliated with Cornell threw beer cans and hurled racist comments at Black students passing by the fraternity house and the verbal and physical attack towards LGBTQ and ethnic minority couples in Collegetown. Clearly, Ithaca is a place that can no longer afford to ignore the implications behind microaggressions.

According to a 2004 Cornell University report, the most prominent bias incidents at Cornell involved women of Asian descent being targeted for verbal, physical, and sexual attacks. (Hall, 2004) Such prevalence of anti-Asian violence seems to be show a link between being called a “chink” and being physically attacked and/or mentally tormented. If holding anti-Asian sentiments can influence one’s mental and verbal responses, then seeing such sentiments transform into action is not that farfetched of an idea. According to federal legisla-
tion, a hate crime is a “criminal offense against a person or property motivated in whole or in part by an offender’s bias against a race, religion, disability, ethnic origin or sexual orientation. Hate itself is not a crime—and the FBI is mindful of protecting freedom of speech and other civil liberties.” (Hate Crime—Overview) It is important to note that a hate crime is not only an action of oppression against targeted groups but it is also an action based on illegitimate categorization of an individual or a group. Such illegitimate categorizations can range from racial to sexist ways of thinking. When people begin to undervalue a person’s life because of racist or sexist ways of thinking, the illegitimate manner of categorizing that person becomes dangerous to all discrete group members. (Hernandez, 1990)

So is the societal hesitation towards categorizing bias-incidents as hate crimes a sign of progress towards a post-racial society or does it serve as another microaggression that succeeds in invalidating the racism experienced by the victims? According to the Yale Law Journal, “unconscious racism, ingrained in North American culture, makes it difficult for prosecutors to concede that racially-motivated violence is indeed a crime.” Such a sentiment hit too close to home in June 2011, when a student of Asian descent was subject to racial epithets by four subjects in a vehicle and was later physically assaulted by one of the four subjects as the others watched. (Camuti) In the end, despite the outraged protests of the community and public support of Assemblywoman Grace Meng, the perpetrator was only charged with a misdemeanor assault in the third degree and not a hate crime. (Niczky)

We have worked so hard to encourage multiculturalism and diversity but have only partially succeeded. For many, multiculturalism is synonymous with colorblindness, which cannot be true if what we are striving for is full acceptance and interracial harmony of all races and people. To clarify, multiculturalism stresses recognizing and celebrating group differences, whereas color blindness stresses ignoring or minimizing group differences. (Plaut, 2009) Both terms advocate for equality but the actual consequences for minorities can differ greatly. As for the influence on perpetuators, exposure to a colorblind perspective generated greater automatic racial bias and multiculturalism yields more positives outcomes for intergroup relations than color blindness. (Richeson, 2003) So the simple task of encouraging multicultural views and discouraging microaggressions can truly go a long way in creating a move inclusive and comfortable living space for all of us.

Works Cited:
Affirmative action has once again moved to the front of the conversation about American education. It was only in 2003 that the Supreme Court upheld affirmative action, with Justice Sandra Day O’Connor predicting that it would no longer be necessary in 25 years. Now, only nine years later, affirmative action’s predicted lifespan may be cut short, with it once again being tested against the Supreme Court. It is important now more than ever that we critically evaluate both the positive and negative social effects of affirmative action in higher education.

The cause that affirmative action was originally intended to champion is by no means outdated. The racial gaps in our society have not yet been closed. As recently as 2008, the US Department of Education reported that 33% of white adults had at least a bachelor’s degree, compared to just 20% of black adults and 13% of Hispanic adults. Compared to 44% of college-aged whites, only 32% and 26% of college-aged blacks and Hispanics were enrolled in colleges and universities, respectively.¹ The inequalities do not stop at higher education: A study performed by MIT and the University of Chicago in 2003 revealed that job applicants with white-sounding names had a 50% greater chance of being asked back for an interview than applicants with black-sounding names, even when qualifications were identical.² Clearly, we are not a post-racial society yet, and affirmative action was supposed to be one of the tools to help us become one.

The question, then, is not whether affirmative action’s cause is still relevant, but rather whether affirmative action has been effective in addressing the problems it was tasked to address. And there is at least some reason to believe that it has.

The main idea behind affirmative action in higher education is that people who have had to face racial barriers would be given opportunities to succeed by being granted educations—and, ultimately, degrees—that they might otherwise not have had access to. These people would then go on to have successful careers, have higher standards of living, and would hopefully be able to pass on their success to the next generation. Repeat this process over several generations, and maybe eventually the racial gaps in education and employment would be closed.

At first glance, this general strategy seems to have been effective. Affirmative action programs have a significant positive effect on minority enrollment, most evidently shown by the effects of the removal of those programs. In the years after Proposition 209 in California prohibited public universities from considering race and ethnicity as a part of their admissions process, annual enrollment rates across the California public universities dropped by 15% for blacks and 10.3% for Hispanics, and the drop for the more selective UC system was even larger.³ The year after a similar proposal was passed in Michigan, admission rates for underrepresented minorities at the University of Michigan dropped from 76% to 43%.⁴ Furthermore, being granted admission to a selective school has been shown to correlate well with future career success. A 2011 study by economists Stacy Dale and Alan Krueger revealed that particularly for black students, Hispanic students, low-income students, and students whose parents did not graduate from college—the same groups that affirmative action policies target—attending a more selective university increased future earnings significantly.⁵ Proponents of affirmative action, then, argue that the prohibition of affirmative action policies would be very detrimental to both the educational and socioeconomic statuses of disadvantaged groups in the future. Minority enrollment at selective universities would plummet, fewer minorities would
receive degrees, and their career choices would be limited, thus leaving the next generation in no better shape than the current one. Not to mention the detrimental effects of having less diverse student bodies across the nation.

The proponents of affirmative action, however, are making one crucial assumption: that simply granting admission to more selective universities is enough to put minorities on a path to success. Unfortunately, this is not always the case. By granting admission to students to more selective universities than they would have been able to attend based on merit alone, affirmative action is placing these students in a much more academically rigorous environment than they are prepared for. Recent studies have shown that this sudden increase in academic intensity can have serious consequences.6

One prime example is the case of UCLA. Despite the staggering drops in the enrollment of blacks and Hispanics at UCLA post-Prop 209—drops of 50% and 25%, respectively—the total number of bachelor’s degrees earned by these two groups for the five years after Prop 209, compared to the five years before, remained constant. 7 Blacks and Hispanics, despite being far fewer in number, earned bachelor’s degrees at a much higher rate than they ever had before the ban on affirmative action went into effect. In fact, the four-year graduation rate for blacks after Prop 209 was twice that of the years before Prop 209. 8 The blacks and Hispanics admitted post-Prop 209 were simply much more prepared for the academic environment of UCLA than those who had been given large admissions preferences pre-Prop 209, and therefore, were much more likely to graduate in four years.

Not only can affirmative action have the unintended consequence of lowering minority graduation rates, it can also affect the kinds of degrees that graduates eventually receive. Dartmouth psychologist Rogers Elliott found that although black and Hispanic high school seniors are actually more likely than whites to aspire to careers in science, technology, math, and engineering (STEM), they seem to be driven away from these career paths once they enter college.9 In fact, whites are seven times more likely than blacks to receive PhDs in STEM fields.10 Studies performed in 2003 by sociologists Stephen Cole and Elinor Barber, in which they examine why so few minority students become professors, elucidate the probable cause: When students are under-prepared for a new academic environment, they are more likely to struggle academically, leading to lower intellectual self-esteem. They found that blacks who were academically under-prepared for college were much more likely to abandon their original academic ambitions, while those who were adequately prepared were much more likely to retain them.11 Not only does affirmative action negatively impact those minorities who drop out due to struggling academically, but even those minorities who are able to get a degree are also averted from their preferred career path.

In addition to negative academic consequences, affirmative action can have negative social consequences as well. A study performed at Duke University in 2011 showed that students were most likely to befriend other students who they saw as at the same academic level as themselves. While students who had not received racial preferences in admission tended to integrate themselves into the social scene on campus much more readily, students who had received racial admissions preferences were much more likely to self-segregate and become socially isolated. The study concluded that reducing the use of racial preferences in admissions would actually increase the amount of cross-racial interaction, despite the lower numbers of minority students that would be admitted.12

Thus it appears that each benefit of affirmative action comes with a significant caveat. Affirmative action may lead to higher minority enrollment, but it might also lead to lower minority graduation rates and diversion from preferred career paths. Affirmative action might increase the overall minority presence on campuses, but not necessarily the amount of cross-racial interaction. Affirmative action, although it could possibly have a net positive effect on future minority socioeconomic and educational status, is not the flawless machine at churning out minority graduates that some may have thought it to be.

This does not mean that the racial gaps in education and employment are destined to remain open. Viable alternatives to affirmative action exist. At the level of higher education, universities can implement programs that help disadvantaged students overcome the increased academic rigor, both by helping struggling students with their academics and by better integrating them into the social scene on campus. The Prefreshman Summer Program here at Cornell, designed to prepare economically and educationally disadvantaged entering students for their freshman year, is a good example of such a program.
However, there is arguably more that can be done during the earlier stages of education. The racial gaps in higher education and employment are rooted in racial inequalities that carry over from earlier periods in life. Therefore, if we place more emphasis on improving the education of disadvantaged groups well before they enter college, then we should be able to see improvements in minority enrollment in colleges, minority employment, and campus diversity in the future—all the benefits of affirmative action, without the caveats.

How early should we be focusing on minority education? As it turns out, as early as possible. A 2002 report by the Economic Policy Institute found that inequality in academic achievement exists even before children enter school. Among children entering kindergarten, average math achievement for blacks and Hispanics is 21% and 19% lower than whites, respectively. The reasons for this vary and may include socioeconomic status and family structure, but the finding is clear: Children do not enter school as perfectly equal, blank slates. Furthermore, once children fall behind, it is difficult for them to catch up. A 2007 study showed that math and reading skills at the point of school entry are extremely powerful predictors of academic performance in later grades. Additionally, studies performed in 1998 showed that over 50% of the black-white test score gap in 12th grade could be accounted for by the academic inequalities that existed before first grade, with the other 50% coming from divergence in academic ability after first grade. Closing the pre-kindergarten racial achievement gap would go a long way towards closing the achievement gap in higher education.

In the past, early academic intervention has been shown to be extremely effective. In 1972, 111 infants were chosen from low-income families to participate in an early intervention program named the Carolina Abecedarian Project. Half of the infants were assigned to receive academic intervention, consisting of a variety of educational activities incorporated throughout each infant’s day, from infancy to age five, while the other half were assigned to a control group with no academic intervention. Follow-up assessments years later consistently showed significant academic improvement in the treated group. At age 21, treated individuals were over twice as likely to be attending a four-year college than non-treated individuals; at age 30, treated individuals were over four times as likely to have graduated from college. Treated individuals were also more likely to hold a skilled job, less likely to have exhibited criminal behavior, and less likely to have used public assistance.

The results of this project are reproducible. Similar programs—most notably the HighScope Perry Preschool program started in 1962 and the Chicago Child-Parent Centers program started in 1983—have consistently shown the benefits of early educational intervention. Furthermore, none of these programs are a financial burden; in fact, they are just the opposite. The National Institute for Early Education Research has estimated the benefit-to-cost ratio of each of these programs, taking into account the savings of each program in welfare spending, criminal justice costs, unemployment benefits, etc., and the results are encouraging. The benefit-to-cost ratio of the Carolina Abecedarian program is 2.5:1; the Chicago Child-Parent Centers program, 10:1; and the HighScope Perry Preschool program, a staggering 16:1. For each dollar that society invests in these preschool programs, it more than gets its money back.

Investing more money into preschool programs has been shown to be an effective and financially feasible alternative to affirmative action, but it does not get the attention that it deserves. It may be that the existence of affirmative action eases people’s minds about the education of minorities, and convinces people that enough is already being done to assist them. However, nothing could be further from the truth. If it takes the Supreme Court striking down affirmative action to bring more attention to these programs, then that is a decision that I would wholeheartedly support.

Notes and sources:
3. Peter Arcidiacono, Esteban Aucejo, Patrick Coate, and V. Joseph Hotz, “The Effects of Proposition 209 on College Enrollment and Gradu-


6*. Note that there will be substantial use of black and Hispanic statistics in the following paragraphs. There is no presumption here that all blacks and Hispanics have received admissions preferences and are academically under-prepared. However, since studies have shown that, at selective schools, over 80% of blacks and two-thirds of Hispanics were the recipients of at least moderately large preferences in admissions due to race, blacks and Hispanics are the groups most representative of academically under-prepared students for which data is also readily available.


8. Ibid.


10. Ibid.

11. Ibid.


Greetings from the Asian & Asian American Center! We started the school year with about 2,600 undergraduate Asian Americans and 670 Graduate/Professional Asian Americans, comprising almost a quarter of the student body. This community brings a vibrant diversity of students that speak over 44 languages, coming from over 20 countries in East, Southeast, South Asia and the Pacific Islands. Their diversity manifests in student life, comprising 75+ Asian-interested based student organizations holding over 100+ social, professional, cultural, and sociopolitical events that help us reflect, think, and act in ways to contribute to an ever-growing global society.

This is the first time, when all four undergraduate classes at Cornell have experienced the A3C as “something that has always been there”. Since the A3C has arrived:

• Three years in a row, the Cornell Asian Pacific Student Union has won the Student Organization award for Outstanding Campus Event that Celebrates Diversity for Asia Night.

• Our community gave rise to the activist of the year in 2012, Karin Zhu ‘12, armed with a scholarly ammo from classes taken with Asian American Studies Program and a compassionate heart developed in her work in Asian-affiliated student organizations who now has taken her work globally in a program called Teach for China.

• We have seen a record number of students enrolling and graduating with a minor in Asian American Studies.

• We have welcomed new student organizations such as the Sri Lankan Student Association, the Burmese Student Association, and the South Asian Council.

The AC3 strives to uphold the four pillars of identity, community, education, and advocacy, but simply put, the AC3 is a place that cares. Whatever identity you bring to this campus, the Asian & American Center is a place that celebrates, advocates, and promotes for your success here at Cornell. So don’t be shy. Stop by at 626 Thurston Avenue and tell us a little about you, and who knows, you might end up learning something about yourself as well!
**ALUMNI SPOTLIGHT**

News and happenings from Asian American Studies alumni

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**Allen Fung ’07/Arts and Sciences**

After graduating in 2007, Allen Fung went on to work in the non-profit sector in New York City for several years. Allen first served with AmeriCorps as a City Year corps member where he was part of a team that mentored inner-city students. He then went on to join the Asian American Legal Defense and Education Fund where he worked in the organization's Youth Rights & Educational Equity Division. Allen went on to attend Teachers College, Columbia University, and in 2012, earned his MA in Social Studies Education. Currently, Allen is a social studies teacher at his old high school back in the suburbs of NJ. In the future, he would like to obtain a PhD/EdD and become a Department Head/Supervisor of Social Studies. Allen misses all aspects of the AASP (including the comfy couch) and would like to thank the AASP faculty and staff for playing such positive and influential roles during his time at Cornell.

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**Alison Chen ’08/Architecture, Art, and Planning**

Since graduating from AAP in 2008, Alison has continued to pursue her career as an artist. In 2010 she married Johnson Chen (Cornell Engineering ’08), and dropped the ‘g’ in her last name. In 2012, she graduated from Parsons the New School for Design's MFA Program in Photography and Related Media. During the program, she participated in a residency at the Atelier de visu in Marseille, France, where she studied with Magnum Photography is Antoine D'Agata. She has also traveled to China twice to participate in the Pingyao International Photography Festival. Currently, Alison lives in New York City with her husband, Johnson, and their chow-mix, Lilou. Alison has been awarded a residency at Arteles Creative Center in Finland for the month of April. Her work can be found at www.alisonchen.com.

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**Samantha Wu ’08/Architecture, Art, and Planning**

After graduating from Cornell in 2008 with degrees in Urban & Regional Planning (AAP) and Asian Studies (A&S), with concentrations in Asian American Studies, Law & Society, and Southeast Asian Studies, Samantha pursued her love of science by getting a M.S. in Biology with a concentration in Physiology. During graduate school, she was very involved in Hep B Free San Francisco, volunteered at Stanford Hospital, and taught Anatomy & Physiology labs to undergraduates as a T.A. Samantha is currently in medical school at Michigan State University, College of Human Medicine and plans to work as a physician for the underserved. At MSU, she remains very involved in Hepatitis B awareness in the local Asian American community and is Midwest Regional Director of the Asian Pacific American Medical Student Association (APAMSA) as well as President at her chapter at MSU.

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**Lucy Chen ’09 /Arts and Sciences**

Upon graduation from Cornell in 2009 with a major in History and a minor in Asian American Studies, Lucy returned home to New York City. For nearly three years, she served as service coordinator at a local nonprofit agency, where she worked with Chinese/Chinese-American individuals with developmental variations and their families. After a brief summer traveling abroad, this past fall, she returned to school full-time to begin a dual Master's degree program in Early Childhood Special and General Education and Social Work with Bank Street College of Education and Columbia University School of Social Work. Currently, she is enjoying and learning a great deal in her second semester at Bank Street. In the fall, she will begin the social work portion of her program at Columbia, hoping to complete degree requirements for both schools by 2015.

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*Photos courtesy of Allen Fung, Samantha Wu, Alison Chen, and Lucy Chen.*
CONTRIBUTIONS

Cornell’s Asian American Studies Program welcomes financial contributions to support our educational mission and advance our goals of increasing awareness of Asian American issues. Your donation will allow the Program to supplement our Resource Center media and print collection, develop student scholarship opportunities, and sponsor special performances and programming in order to provide an enriching environment for the Cornell community.

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