

# Breaking the Model Minority Myth

**Lessons from the 1971 Japanese American Drug  
Overdose Epidemic in Los Angeles**

Warren Yamashita MD MPH  
Family Medicine & Addiction Medicine  
Stanford Addiction Medicine Fellowship Adjunct Faculty



**No conflicts of interest**

# Learning Objectives

- 1) Review discrepancy in historical accounts of 1971 Japanese American Los Angeles Drug Overdose Epidemic.
- 2) Introduce concept of the Model Minority Myth and its impact on our clinical understanding of substance use among Asian American and Pacific Islander.
- 3) Contemplate approaches to improving veracity of data as well as clinical care and advocacy for AAPI patients with substance use disorders.



# Breaking Free from the Model Minority Myth: Lessons from the 1970s Japanese American Drug Epidemic

10/02/2021

By WARREN YAMASHITA, MD MPH

[Breaking Free from the Model Minority Myth: Lessons from the 1970s Japanese American Drug Epidemic - Rafu Shimpo](#)





# MISSION & HISTORY

Of AADAP, Inc.

“Over fifty years ago, during one hot summer, 31 Asian American youth died of drug overdoses. As much as elder members of the community wanted to believe their kids “did not do drugs” this epidemic in 1971 jolted the community into a shocking reality. This was their kids, and something needed to be done.

The community organized, held meetings, talked to youth who were working with youth, trying to figure out what was really going on. What they realized was people in the Asian American community, both young and old, had nowhere to go when it came to drug abuse. These youth needed a place to belong and someone to talk to, someone who understood their culture and family and could relate to what they were going through.

A proposal was written and submitted to the Federal Government asking for funding for the first ever drug abuse program targeting Asian Americans. The proposal was funded, and in 1972, the Asian American Drug Abuse Program was born. Today, 50 years later, AADAP remains one of a few select programs in the nation with a mission to target and design services for Asian and Pacific Islanders with drug abuse problems.”



[AADAP - The Asian American Drug Abuse Program \(aadapinc.org\)](http://aadapinc.org)



1971-72, 1972-73

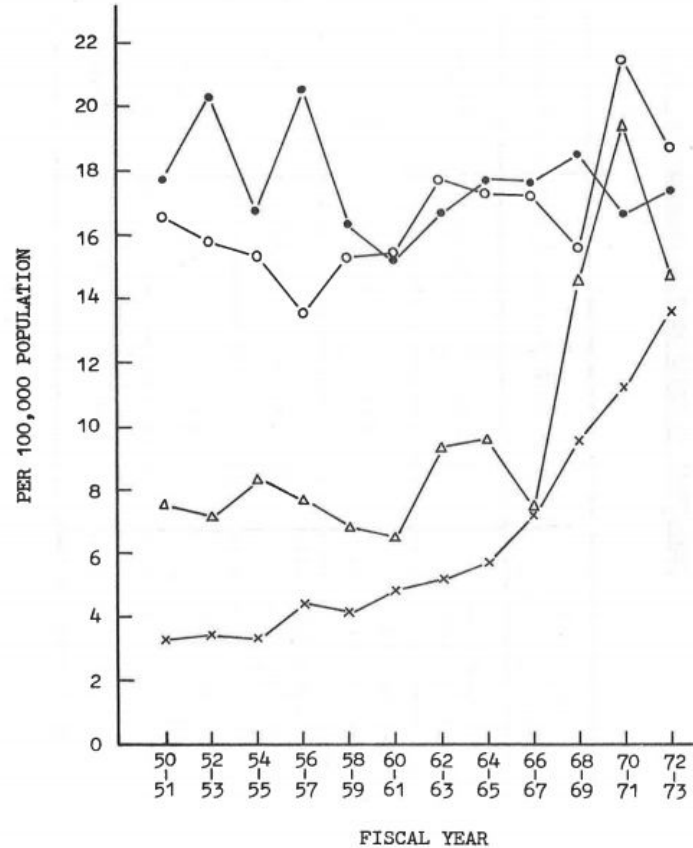
**BIENNIAL REPORT**  
of the  
**CHIEF MEDICAL EXAMINER-CORONER**



THOMAS T. NOGUCHI, M.D.  
*Chief Medical Examiner-Coroner*  
*County of Los Angeles*

CHIEF MEDICAL EXAMINER-CORONER  
COUNTY OF LOS ANGELES  
23-YEAR RATES OF SOME SPECIFIC DEATHS  
(per 100,000 population)

x — x HOMICIDE      Δ — Δ OVERDOSE  
o — o SUICIDE      • — • VEHICULAR ACC.



DEATHS DUE TO OVERDOSE OF DRUGS - BY MODE OF DEATH AND TYPE OF DRUG

Year mode Type of Drugs	July 1, 1971 - June 30, 1972					July 1, 1972 - June 30, 1973				
	ACCIDENT	SUICIDE	UNDE- TERMINED	HOMICIDE	TOTAL	ACCIDENT	SUICIDE	UNDE- TERMINED	HOMICIDE	TOTAL
Barbi- turates	102	471	80	1	654	112	358	71		541
Narcotics	194	8	7		209	231	9	14	2	256
Barbs. & Narcos.	34	5	3		42	30	9	7		46
Hypnotics excluding Barbs.	6	67	13		86	17	54	7		78
Analgesics	13	46	9		68	5	31	8		44
Stimulants	6	23	4		33	3	15	5		23
Others	17	24	2		43	20	16	4		40
Unknown	3	13	1		17	6	9	2		17
Total	375	657	119	1	1152	424	501	118	2	1045



DEATHS DUE TO OVERDOSE OF DRUGS - MODE OF DEATH, AGE GROUP, ETHNIC GROUP, SEX  
JULY 1, 1971 - JUNE 30, 1972

mode of death ethnic group age group sex		A C C I D E N T							Total
		White excluding Spanish Surname	Negro	Spanish Surname	Chinese	Japanese	American Indian	Others & Unknown	
≤ 9	M	1	3	1					5
	F	4							4
10 ≤ 19	M	9	2	3		1			15
	F	3	6	3					12
20 ≤ 29	M	81	25	37				1	144
	F	15	22	5					42
30 ≤ 39	M	20	16	17				1	54
	F	9	8	8					25
40 ≤ 49	M	17	10	6					33
	F	9	5						14
50 ≤ 59	M	12		1					13
	F	5							5
60 ≤ 69	M	2	2						4
	F	3							3
70 ≤	M								
	F	2							2
Unknown	M								
	F								
Subtotal	M	142	58	65		1		2	268
	F	50	41	16					107
Total		192	99	81		1		2	375

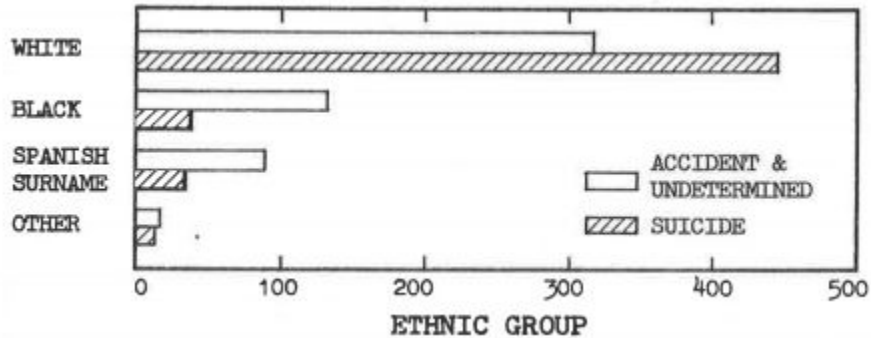
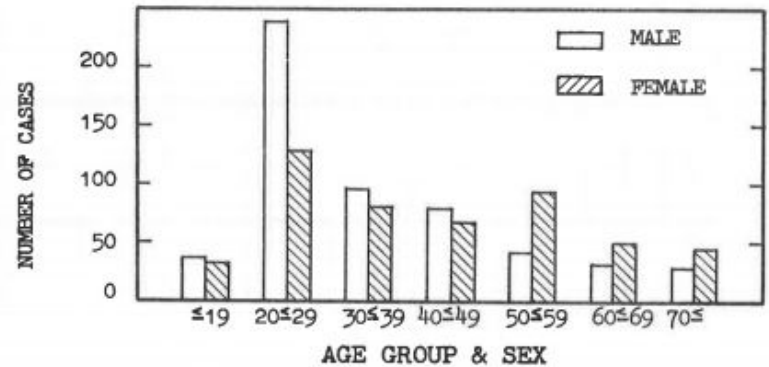
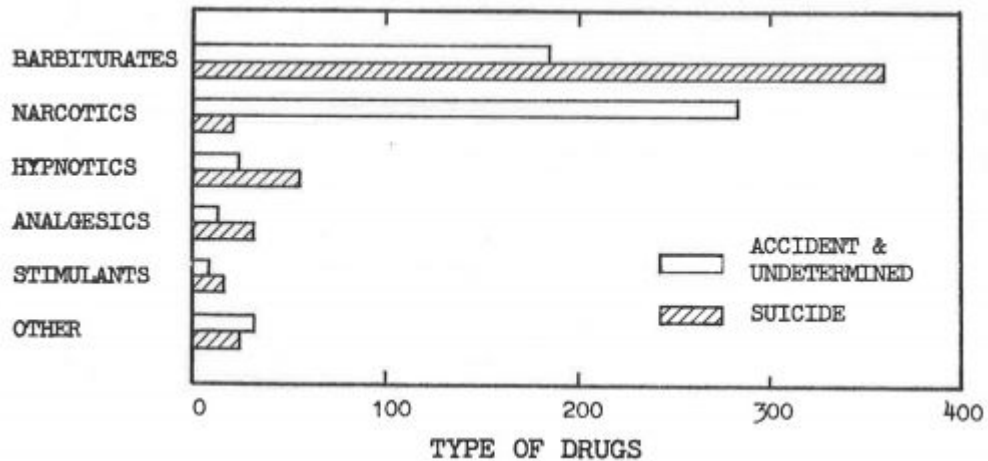
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mode of death ethnic group age group sex		S U I C I D E							Total
		White excluding Spanish Surname	Negro	Spanish Surname	Chinese	Japanese	American Indian	Others & Unknown	
≤ 9	M								
	F								
10 ≤ 19	M	13							13
	F	12	6	4		1	1		24
20 ≤ 29	M	63	3	10		2			78
	F	53	18	11			1		83
30 ≤ 39	M	34	6						40
	F	42	6	5	1	1			55
40 ≤ 49	M	32	5	2	1	1			41
	F	71	2	10					83
50 ≤ 59	M	35							35
	F	68	1	3					72
60 ≤ 69	M	22		3					25
	F	43	1	1					45
70 ≤	M	17							17
	F	45							45
Unknown	M								
	F	1							1
Subtotal	M	216	14	15	1	3			249
	F	335	34	34	1	2	1	1	408
Total		551	48	49	2	5	1	1	657

DEATHS DUE TO OVERDOSE OF DRUGS

JULY 1972 - JUNE 1973



DEATHS FROM NATURAL CAUSES - IN MAJOR GROUPS

(INTERNATIONAL WORLD HEALTH CODE)

JULY 1, 1971 - JUNE 30, 1972

disease	no. of cases			cases autopsied	% of disease- specific autopsies	% of grand total
	cases	male	female			
Infective & Parasitic diseases	17	17	34	31	91.18	0.47
Neoplasm, cancer, tumors	93	70	163	60	36.81	2.24
Endocrine, Nutritional & Metabolic Diseases	23	19	42	12	28.57	0.58
Diseases of the Blood & Blood-forming Organs	5	4	9	9	100.00	0.12
Mental & Psychoneurotic Disorders	5	3	8	6	75.00	0.11
Diseases of the Nervous System & Sense Organs	34	28	62	41	66.13	0.85
Diseases of the Circulatory System	3818	2054	5872	1168	19.89	80.71
Diseases of the Respiratory System	212	161	373	342	91.69	5.13
Diseases of the Digestive System	392	166	558	191	34.23	7.67
<b>Total</b>	<b>4688</b>	<b>2587</b>	<b>7275</b>	<b>1990</b>	<b>27.35</b>	<b>100.00</b>

# Model Minority Myth

TIME

IDEAS • RACE

Asian Americans Are Still Caught in the Trap of the 'Model Minority' Stereotype. And It Creates Inequality for All

The New York Times

How 'Crazy Rich' Asians Have Led to the Largest Income Gap in the U.S.

By ADEEL HASSAN and AUDREY CARLSEN AUG. 17, 2018

'Model Minority' Myth Again Used As A Racial Wedge Between Asians And Blacks

npr

OKPCC

April 19, 2017 - 8:32 AM ET

The Washington Post

Democracy Dies in Darkness

Try four weeks free

Economic Policy

The real reasons the U.S. became less racist toward Asian Americans

# Model Minority Myth

"Asked which of the country's ethnic minorities has been subjected to the most discrimination and the worst injustices, very few persons would even think of answering: 'The Japanese Americans,' ... Yet, if the question refers to persons alive today, that may well be the correct reply. Like the Negroes, the Japanese have been the object of color prejudice .... When new opportunities, even equal opportunities, are opened up, the minority's reaction to them is likely to be negative — either self-defeating apathy or a hatred so all-consuming as to be self-destructive. For the well-meaning programs and countless scholarly studies now focused on the Negro, we barely know how to repair the damage that the slave traders started. The history of Japanese Americans, however, challenges every such generalization about ethnic minorities."

*Success Story, Japanese-American Style; Success Story, Japanese-American Style*

**The New York Times**

By William Pettersen

Jan. 9, 1966

# Model Minority Myth

“The “Model Minority Myth,” which says that Asians comprise the racial minority group that has “made it” in America through hard work and education, and therefore serve as a model for other racial minorities to follow.” - Wing 2007

"The model minority myth (i.e., that Asian Americans are academically and economically well-off) assumes that Asian Americans experience protective factors associated with genetics or culture that contribute to high achievement and low incidence of mental health problems in comparison with Whites and other ethnic and racial groups." - Iwamoto 2011

# Racial Narratives

- ❖ Symbolically imbedded racial bias
  - persists in popular culture and
  - affects all institutions, including medicine

Published in final edited form as:

*Cult Med Psychiatry*. 2016 December ; 40(4): 664–686. doi:10.1007/s11013-016-9496-5.

## **The War on Drugs That Wasn't: Wasted Whiteness, “Dirty Doctors,” and Race in Media Coverage of Prescription Opioid Misuse**

**Julie Netherland, PhD [Deputy State Director]** and  
New York Office of the Drug Policy Alliance

**Helena B. Hansen, MD PhD [Assistant Professor of Psychiatry and Anthropology]**  
New York University, 25 Waverly Place, Room 608, New York, NY 10003

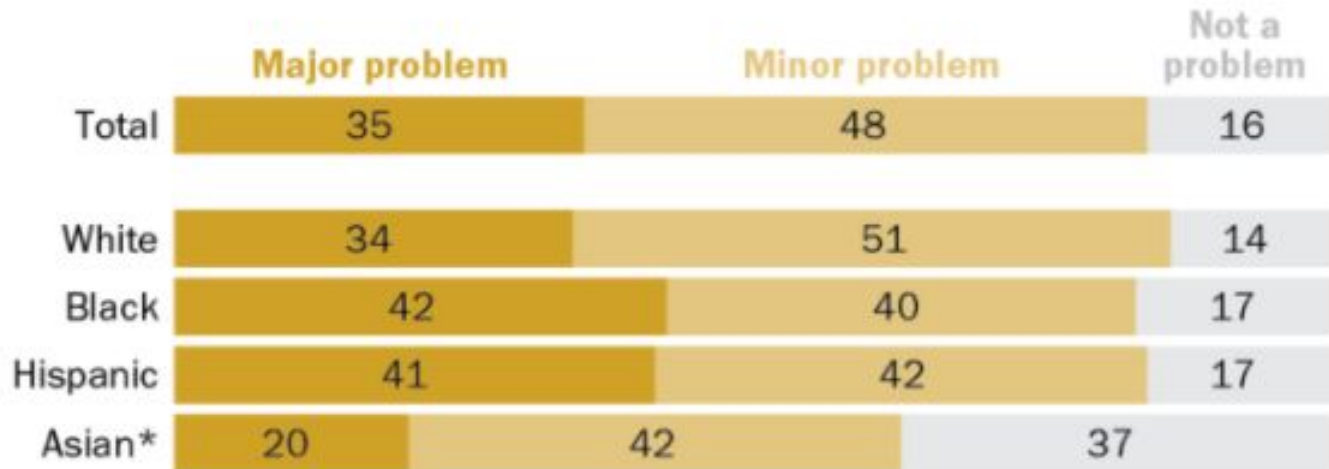




**TABLE 1. Annual number and age-adjusted rate of drug overdose deaths\* involving all opioids<sup>†</sup> and prescription opioids,<sup>§,¶</sup> by sex, age, race/ethnicity,\*\* urbanization level,<sup>††</sup> U.S. Census region,<sup>§§</sup> and selected states<sup>¶¶</sup> — National Vital Statistics System, United States, 2017 and 2018**

Decedent characteristic	All opioids				Prescription opioids			
	2017	2018	Rate change from 2017 to 2018***		2017	2018	Rate change from 2017 to 2018***	
	No. (rate)	No. (rate)	Absolute change	Relative change	No. (rate)	No. (rate)	Absolute change	Relative change
<b>Race/Ethnicity**</b>								
White, non-Hispanic	37,113 (19.4)	35,363 (18.6)	-0.8***	-4.1***	13,900 (6.9)	12,085 (6.0)	-0.9***	-13.0***
Black, non-Hispanic	5,513 (12.9)	6,088 (14.0)	1.1***	8.5***	1,508 (3.5)	1,444 (3.3)	-0.2	-5.7
Hispanic	3,932 (6.8)	4,370 (7.5)	0.7***	10.3***	1,211 (2.2)	1,122 (2.0)	-0.2***	-9.1***
American Indian/Alaska Native, non-Hispanic	408 (15.7)	373 (14.2)	-1.5	-9.6	187 (7.2)	125 (4.7)	-2.5***	-34.7***
Asian/Pacific Islander, non-Hispanic	348 (1.6)	345 (1.5)	-0.1	-6.3	130 (0.6)	115 (0.5)	-0.1	-16.7

*% of U.S. adults who say drug addiction is a \_\_\_\_\_ in their local community*



\*Asian adults were interviewed in English only.

Source: Survey of U.S. adults conducted Oct. 18-24, 2021.

The New York Times

# How 'Crazy Rich' Asians Have Led to the Largest Income Gap in the U.S.

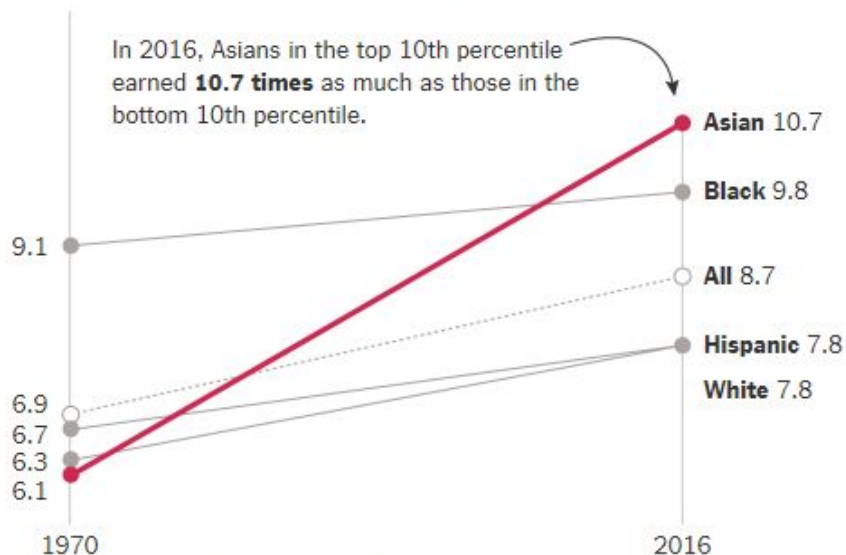
By ADEEL HASSAN and AUDREY CARLSEN AUG. 17, 2018



# How 'Crazy Rich' Asians Have Led to the Largest Income Gap in the U.S.

By ADEEL HASSAN and AUDREY CARLSEN AUG. 17, 2018

## Income inequality



Income inequality is measured as the ratio of income in the top 10th percentile to income in the bottom 10th percentile for each race or ethnic group.

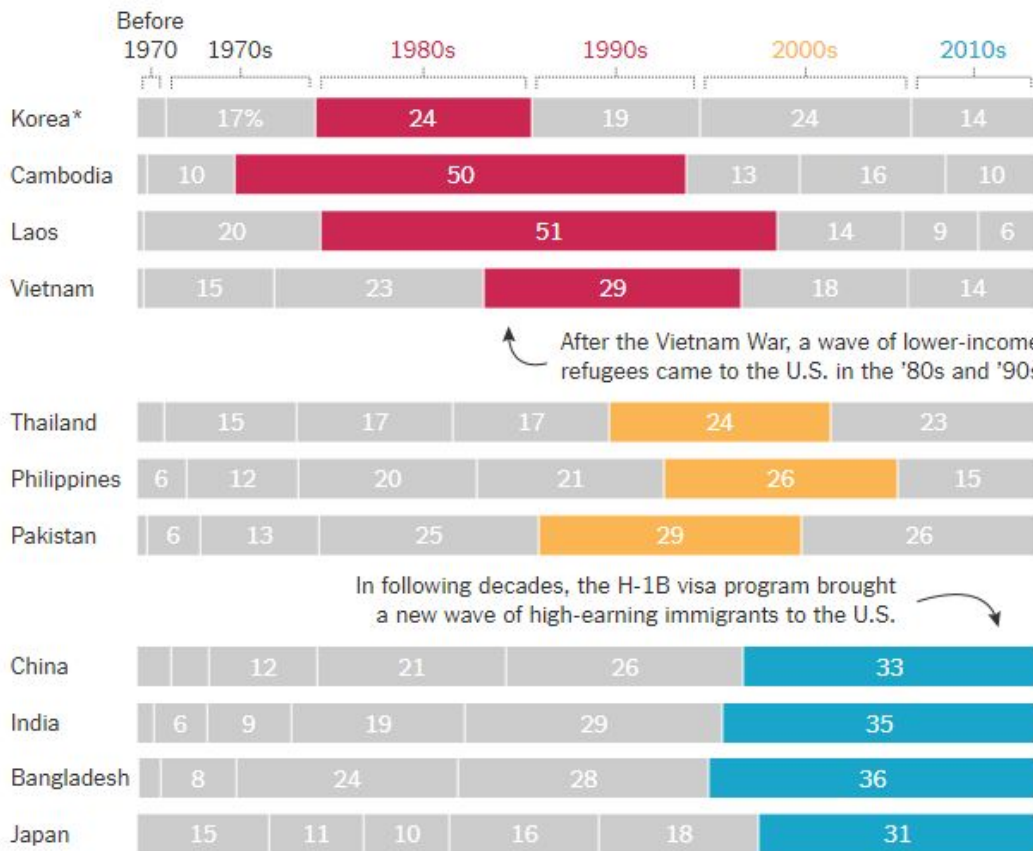
Source: Pew Research Center analysis of U.S. Census and American Community Survey data.

## Education and income of Asian-Americans



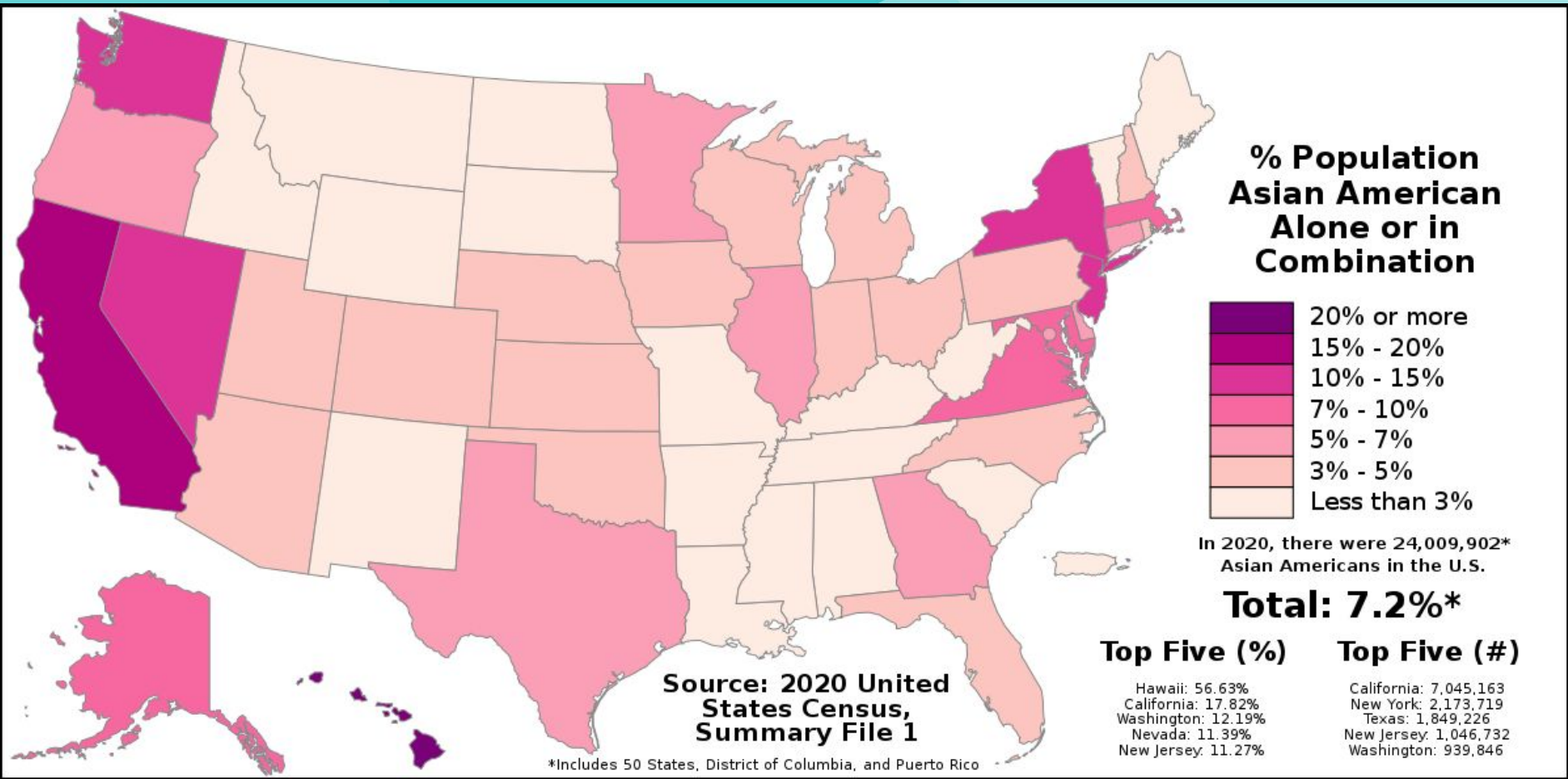
Source: Pew Research Center analysis of U.S. Census and American Community Survey data.

## When Asian immigrants arrived

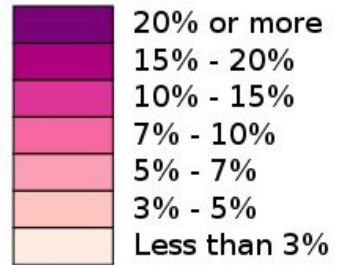


\*Includes North and South Korea.

Source: American Community Survey (2016), IPUMS



## % Population Asian American Alone or in Combination



In 2020, there were 24,009,902\* Asian Americans in the U.S.

**Total: 7.2%\***

**Source: 2020 United States Census, Summary File 1**

\*Includes 50 States, District of Columbia, and Puerto Rico

### Top Five (%)

- Hawaii: 56.63%
- California: 17.82%
- Washington: 12.19%
- Nevada: 11.39%
- New Jersey: 11.27%

### Top Five (#)

- California: 7,045,163
- New York: 2,173,719
- Texas: 1,849,226
- New Jersey: 1,046,732
- Washington: 939,846

# Model Minority Myth

- ❑ **Understudied**
- ❑ Heterogenous
- ❑ Rising Rates of Drug Use & Overdoses
- ❑ Geographic differences
- ❑ Unique Risk Factors
  - ❑ Acculturation
  - ❑ Shame
  - ❑ Low Utilization
- ❑ Protective Factors
  - ❑ Prosocial coping skills a/w asian cultures

“Due to a pervasive bias toward Asian Americans, such as tendency to view Asian Americans as **model minorities**, drug use behaviors among them are often ignored by health professionals, researchers, and community members, including Asian community members.” (Nemoto et al., 1999)

- NIDAAA's National Epidemiologic Survey on Alcohol and Related Conditions-III (NESARC-III) undersampled Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders. (Haeny et al., 2021)

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    - ❑ Prosocial coping skills a/w asian cultures
- ✔ Filipino substance use was more similar with Whites than among other Asian subgroups. (Watkins & Ford, 2011).
  - ✔ Higher drug use among US born, higher English proficiency, males, depression, and younger age. (Bersamira et al., 2017)
  - ✔ Korean American drinking influenced by Korea drinking culture. (Oh & Yamada, 2021)
  - ✔ Diverse reasons for drug use across AAPI that varied by ethnicity, gender, immigration status, age. (Nemoto et al., 1999)

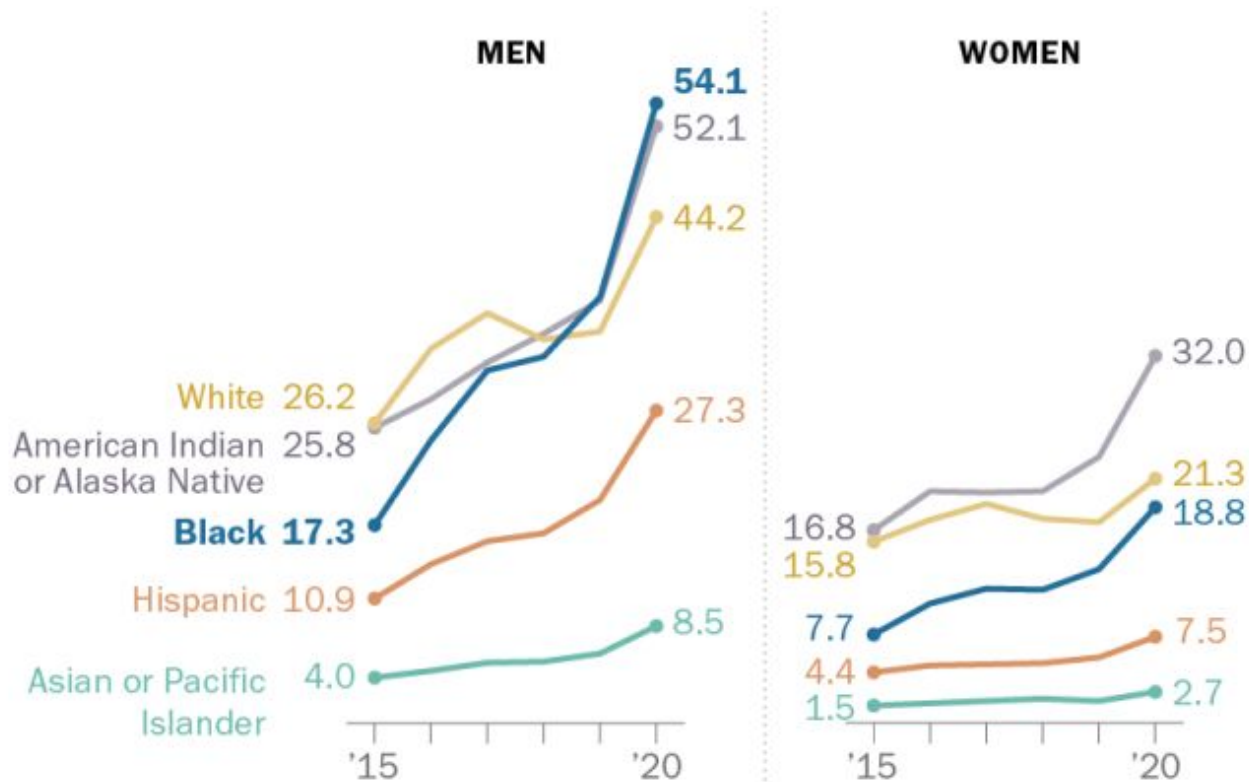


# Model Minority Myth

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- **Narrowing Gap:** AAPI admissions for drug treatment nationally rising at a greater rate than non-AAPI admissions from 2000-2012
  - ▽ Greatest in Midwest and Southern States with low AAPI populations
  - ▽ Increases among:
    - △ Bimodal 12-14 yo, >55 yo
    - △ Low Income
    - △ Higher Education Level
  - ▽ Increased Opioid admissions by 415%

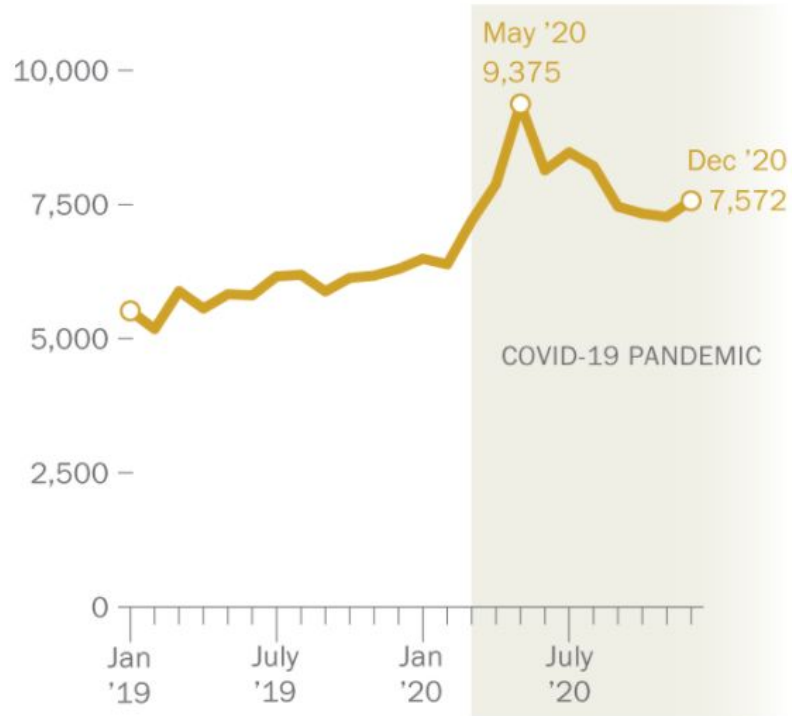
(Sahker et al., 2017)

*U.S. drug overdose death rate per 100,000 people, by race and ethnicity (age-adjusted)*



## Monthly drug overdose deaths have trended higher during the pandemic

*Monthly drug overdose deaths in the U.S.*



Source: Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

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    - ❑ Acculturation
    - ❑ Shame
    - ❑ Low Utilization
  - ❑ Protective Factors
    - ❑ Prosocial coping skills a/w asian cultures
- ✔ New York City with greater rates of AAPI Substance abuse than nationally.
    - ▽ 3% greater
    - ▽ Korean Americans with highest rate

(Yu, 2009)

# Model Minority Myth

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    - ❑ **Acculturation**
    - ❑ Shame
    - ❑ Low Utilization
  - ❑ Protective Factors
    - ❑ Prosocial coping skills a/w asian cultures
- ✔ Acculturation increased risk of drug use
    - ▽ Influenced by English language fluency & Born in the US.

(Watkins & Ford, 2011)

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    - ❑ **Shame**
    - ❑ Low Utilization
  - ❑ Protective Factors
    - ❑ Prosocial coping skills a/w asian cultures
- ✔ NESARC-III found Asians were more likely among all groups to report being afraid of what their boss, friends, family or others would think about their substance use.

(Haeny et al., 2021)

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    - ❑ **Low Utilization**
  - ❑ Protective Factors
    - ❑ Prosocial coping skills a/w asian cultures
- ✔ Lower perceived need
    - ▽ Among AAPI in treatment for methamphetamine use, they reported a lower need for treatment than non-AAPI patients. (Evans et al., 2012)
  - ✔ Lower utilization
    - ▽ 10% of individuals with positive SUD screening declined brief or full treatment. (Yu, 2009)
    - ▽ Less likely to talk about substance use with their doctor in primary care settings compared with White and AI/AN patients. (Haeny et al., 2021)

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  - ❑ Shame
  - ❑ Low Utilization
- ❑ Protective Factors
  - ❑ **Prosocial coping skills a/w asian cultures**
- ✔ Asian values (Iwamoto, 2011)
  - ▽ negatively a/w avoidant behaviors
  - ▽ Positively a/w active coping
- ✔ Best practices for substance use treatment is to include culturally competent care that includes cultural and family strengths. (Evans et al., 2012; Haeny et al., 2021)



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10/02/2021

By WARREN YAMASHITA, MD MPH



AADAP distinguishes itself by embodying the Hawaiian concept of “Ohana,” meaning “family.” Each individual who joins AADAP joins a Family bound together by its values of compassion, responsibility, and respect.

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SPONSORS & ADS

## Structural Competency

- See Jonathan Metzl & Helena Hansen.
- Need continued support for AAPI drug treatment programs.

## Community Partnerships

- Partnering with community stakeholders: churches, nonprofits, community orgs.

## A New Narrative

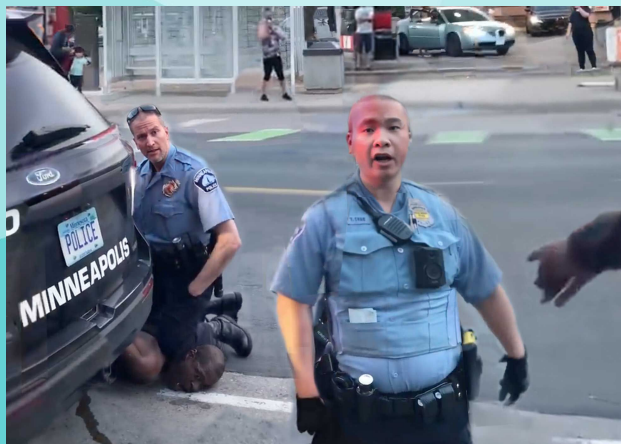
- Moving past hero narratives.
- Learning to tell stories of addiction & recovery.
- Fuller, Richer, Honest Story-Telling



IDEAS • RACE

# Asian Americans Are Still Caught in the Trap of the 'Model Minority' Stereotype. And It Creates Inequality for All

BY VIET THANH NGUYEN



“

The endless race of “out whitening the white man.”

”

—Nick Nagatani  
The Yellow Brotherhood

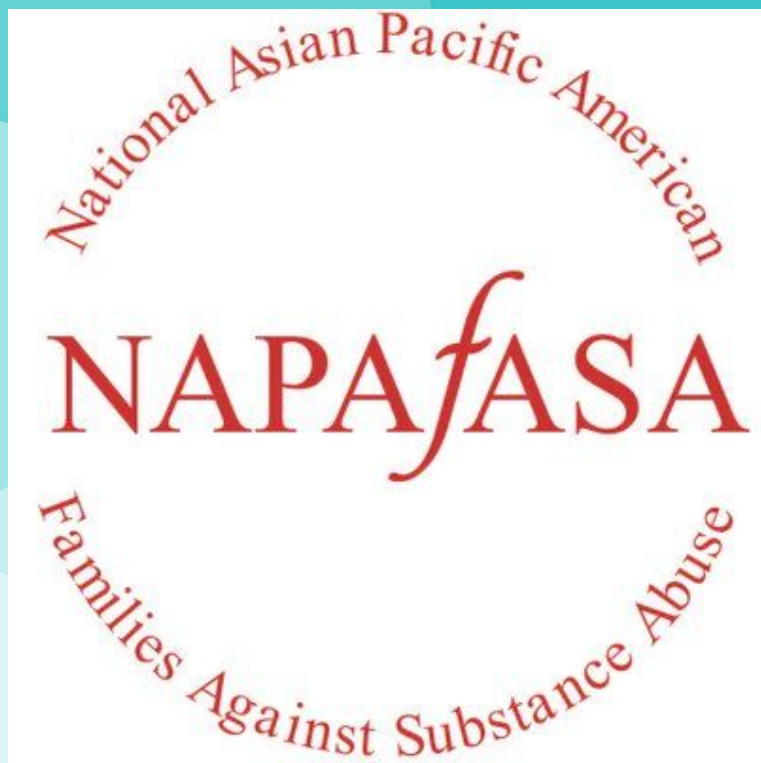
# International Conflict

Malaysian citizen, Nagaenthran, is on death row in Singapore for smuggling heroin across the border.

Does the Model Minority Myth prohibit the US from commenting or caring about Nagaenthran's case?

Does the US generated MMM contribute to the MMM in Singapore and their harsh treatment of drug users?





Left to right: Alissa Schneider, Cynthia Cabot, Ford Kuramoto, Cheryl Kameoka, and Michelle Park at the NAPAFASA NN/LM Project training session in Honolulu

## **The Model Minority Myth Choice:**

Will you remain Complicit (benefiting from it where we can) or will you become a Change Agent?

# Resources

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10. [How the Model Minority Myth of Asian Americans Hurts Us All | Time](#)
11. [How 'Crazy Rich' Asians Have Led to the Largest Income Gap in the U.S. - The New York Times \(nytimes.com\)](#)
12. [Success Story. Japanese-American Style: Success Story. Japanese-American Style - The New York Times \(nytimes.com\)](#)
13. [The real reasons the U.S. became less racist toward Asian Americans - The Washington Post](#)
14. [“‘Model Minority’ Myth Again Used as a Racial Wedge Between Asians and Blacks.” NPR](#)
15. [Mission & History - AADAP - People Need People \(aadapinc.org\)](#)
16. [Breaking Free from the Model Minority Myth: Lessons from the 1970s Japanese American Drug Epidemic - Rafu Shimpo](#)
17. [Nagaenthran case puts Singapore's death penalty in spotlight | Death Penalty News | Al Jazeera](#)

# Thank you!

Warren Yamashita MD MPH  
wyamashi@gmail.com