

Many of these problems have been widely discussed in Mexico for at least 15 years. In some respects the discussion has gone far beyond Dussel's book as well as in the standard English literature. Issues about the characteristics of the new deficits, particularly private deficits that generate trade and public sector deficits, require proper consideration. Also the discussion of the emergence of alternative trade strategies for the survival of rural Mexico would be of considerable importance. By bringing together some of the relevant issues Dussel has presented a fruitful provocation.

Etelberto Ortiz

*Universidad Autonoma Metropolitana-Xochimilco  
Calzada Del 1100, Col Villa Quietud, C.P. 04960, Mexico  
Tel.: +52-5-645-3397; fax: +52-5-594-7392.  
E-mail address: orcei301@cueyatl.uam.mx*

PII: S0486-6134(02)00185-7

### **Glass Ceilings and Asian Americans: The New Face of Workplace Barriers**

Deborah Woo (Ed.); Walnut Creek, CA: Alta Mira Press, 2000, 241 pp., \$24.95 pb

Deborah Woo has produced a valuable book that will reach beyond those narrowly interested in the question of employment discrimination against Asian Americans. The successes of Asian Americans, and the economic obstacles they face, are much misunderstood, subject both to the whims of stereotype and to the faulty assumptions of scholars and politicians. Woo's project is to clear up the common misunderstandings as well as advance her original research on glass ceilings among professional Asian Americans. This complex effort produces some mixed results, as in some ways she has attempted to cover the ground of two books.

The introduction and first four chapters cover the necessary background, and this is the part of the book that will have the broadest appeal. Here, Woo establishes and critiques the myth of the model Asian minority.

Throughout this material, Woo distinguishes between Asians of national origins that bring vastly different histories to the U.S. economy. Woo's point is that in all economic classes Asians have been subjected to different forms of glass ceilings. The preponderance of professionals with high levels of education among some Asian ethnic groups is what has given the impression that Asian Americans have overcome, or not been subjected to, racial economic discrimination. But this is misleading. Careful attention to the relationship between national origin and class position is required, as Woo aptly demonstrates regarding the use of aggregate statistics for Asians. Measuring the average Asian American against the total U.S. population overstates the success and relative well-being of most Asian groups. In aggregate statistics, the higher incomes and occupational status of the professionals obscure those in the working class, while the high incomes of the professionals masks the glass ceilings that block their mobility relative to Whites of similar skills and education.

Because of the relatively small size of the Asian population in the United States, and because of the assumptions regarding their cohesiveness, most researchers use aggregate statistics

to generalize about their well-being. However, Asian Americans are a collection of diverse groups. Their overall income distribution is bimodal, Woo reports, with the average not representing anyone very well.

My own analysis of 1990 census micro-data (from a sample that includes all non-self-employed workers earning between \$1 and \$250 per hour in metropolitan areas) is consistent with this assertion. Asian workers were more likely than non-Latino Whites to earn \$5 per hour or less (31 percent versus 27 percent), and more likely to earn more than \$25 per hour (9 percent versus 8 percent). And while Asian and White workers have the same mean hourly wage in this sample (\$14), the White median is higher (\$11.54 versus \$11.15), so the Asian mean is more distorted by a few high earners. (Details of this analysis are available upon request.)

Further, the concentration of Asians in areas of the country that have high incomes and high cost of living distorts national statistics, when comparing Asians to other groups. Thus, while Asian income outpaces White income in national statistics, in the four metropolitan areas that are home to many Asians, their average incomes are lower than non-Latino Whites'. And because of the higher number of earners per household among Asians, family and household statistics also are often misleading.

These statistical complications coincide with the ideological function that the model minority mythology serves, promoting the special role that culture and education are supposed to play in the presumed Asian success. The myth bolsters the American ideal that individual education will overcome inequality, and it serves "as a sign of the ongoing vitality of the American Dream" (36) that is used to blame Blacks and Latinos for their relative economic failure.

The rags-to-riches model minority story focuses on the entrepreneurs (many of whom ironically may have entered self-employment because of obstacles to their mobility in White-owned firms). Nevertheless, the mythology belies the class background of many of these immigrants, and the support they received from, among other sources, the federal government. In general, the successes achieved are actually smaller than would be predicted based on the background and resources the new immigrants brought to bear in their new lives.

Asian America has been transformed by the waves of immigrants that followed the 1965 reform of U.S. immigration law, which eventually brought hundreds of thousands of Asian scientists, accountants, and technical professionals. Thus, Woo shows that 23 percent of all doctorates are awarded to foreign-born Asians. Yet at the same time as some visible ethnic groups were getting established in professional—if not managerial—niches, several other groups of Asian immigrants flowed right into the bottom of the labor market. Woo cites evidence from California, for example, showing that more than a third of Cambodian, Laotian, and Vietnamese workers were employed in manufacturing industries in 1990, more than twice the rate in the labor force as a whole. While 30 percent of Whites worked in professional occupations, Asians ran the gamut from the 45 percent of Taiwanese who were professionals to only 7 percent among Laotians. The "Asian" average in such a distribution is relatively meaningless.

Nevertheless, although Asian ethnic groups differ greatly and should be examined separately when possible, most (Chinese, Japanese, Indian, Korean, Thai, Filipino, even Vietnamese and Cambodians) have college attendance rates higher than the national average. And even the 2.7 percent of doctorates awarded to U.S.-born Asians is more than two times their proportion in the population. So the story is complicated. First, the mythology has many harmful effects, and not just for Asians. Second, some Asian groups are overrepresented among those with higher

education, especially doctorates in engineering and physical and life sciences. Third, and this is the focus of the second half of the book, those professional Asians—concentrated much more in industry than in academia—face a unique set of glass ceiling conditions limiting their mobility given their skills and education, even while they experience above-average economic success overall.

The strength of the second half of the book is in Woo's detailed case study of a large aerospace organization that has a history of grappling with glass ceiling issues, especially among its Asian employees. Woo makes a good argument for the necessity of case studies in the context of weak national statistics. Her study of "XYZ Aerospace" offers much to illuminate the many ways Asian professionals are excluded from management positions through mechanisms with varying degrees of legitimacy, including presumed or real English language difficulties, cultural styles, and attitudes toward entering management. She draws out the complexities of racial-ethnic glass ceilings in a post-civil rights legal environment that is also in some ways post-affirmative action, with its emphasis on "diversity management" and the problem of making diversity work for profitability.

The second half of the book will be of greater interest to specialists in employment discrimination issues, who will find much useful material here. Most readers—and these should include students of racial-ethnic inequality—will find Woo's treatment of the myths and realities of Asian and Asian American experience in the U.S. economy a balanced and informative one.

Philip N. Cohen

*Department of Sociology*

*University of California*

*Irvine, CA 92697, USA*

Tel.: +1-949-824-5041; fax: +1-949-824-4717

*E-mail address: cohenp@uci.edu*

PII: S0486-6134(02)00184-5

### **The State in Modern Society**

Martin Oppenheimer (Ed.); New York: Humanity Books, 2000, 217 pp. + index, \$45.00 hb

Few subjects seem to provide as much opportunity for the proliferation of impenetrable jargonese than the state. This is not to detract from the efforts of many Marxian scholars who, especially during the 1970s, grappled with the theoretical problems posed by the clear, empirical disintegration of the post-1945 welfare state in the West. The parallel stagnation of the Soviet bloc begged its own questions concerning the role of the communist state. Then there were historical questions concerning the nature of fascism and its relation to capitalism, the ongoing problems of neo-colonialism and underdevelopment, and the apparently anomalous position (with respect to conventional theories) of the apartheid state in South Africa. It is no wonder that there was plenty to think and write about. One of the key theorists of this time, Nicos Poulantzas, was, of course, concerned that theory should inform practice. It is a little ironic, perhaps, that some of the most dense prose committed to paper on the subject of the