

To the Asian American and Pacific Islander Community and Community Members:

We the Asian Pacific Student Association (APSA) at the University of California, Irvine support the spirit and intent of the California Senate Constitutional Amendment 5 (SCA5) as it stood in early 2014. We are a student organization dedicated to advocating in the framework of social justice in a multicultural society on behalf of Asian American and Pacific Islanders not only on the UC Irvine campus but in communities beyond. We believe that SCA5 aligns with the values and interests of the communities that we serve.

SCA5 has been referred back to the California Senate and awaits the results of the official bipartisan taskforce that will inquire on the accessibility and diversity of California's public higher education system. Though this development allows stakeholders, such as APSA, to more comprehensively educate the community, we must address several issues. Primarily, the gravely misleading campaign of ahistorical information disseminated in the weeks leading to SCA5's withdrawal; and, its shameful distortion of Asian America's diverse constituencies.

The most blatant lie about SCA5 is that it would allow the introduction of so called "racial quotas" or negative action that would exclude Asian Americans due to perceived overrepresentation. We firstly point to the federal Supreme Court's 1978 decision in *University of California v. Bakke*, which outlawed the use of racial quotas in all public university admissions policies. *Bakke* set legal precedent that SCA5 does not seek to disturb. This means that the passage of SCA5 would still disallow the use of racial quotas.

Furthermore, we stress that not all of "Asian America" is "overrepresented" in California's public higher education system (the University of California system, the California State University system, and California Community Colleges). Many Asian Americans, especially those with working class, refugee, or colonization- and imperialism-related immigration backgrounds, have significantly lower rates of higher education attainment and accessibility. Moreover, Southeast Asians, Pacific Islanders, and Native Hawaiians, among other disadvantaged Asian American subgroups such as working class East Asians, are not overrepresented and could be beneficiaries of affirmative action or race-conscious admissions policies.

Another claim made against SCA5 reflects the racial prejudices and discriminatory practices within our own Asian American communities. Many arguments, exemplified by signatories of the Change.org petition and outspoken Asian American politicians and special interests, contain widespread implied assumptions that African Americans, Latinos, and American Indians are inherently and "culturally" less hardworking, diligent, motivated, than Asian Americans. This is simply and objectively not true. For example, research¹ has shown that when class and other structural conditions are controlled for, African American and Latino families spend just as much time supporting their children's educational development as Asian American

¹ <http://digitalcommons.usu.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=2513&context=etd>

families. Similarly, African Americans and Asian Americans of comparable class backgrounds are documented to be comparable in educational achievement. This is not to say that a class-conscious affirmative action is a better solution than race-conscious affirmative action. Rather, race, ethnicity, and class are closely intertwined and must all be addressed as a few of many factors in the college admissions process.

The rhetoric of “lazy Blacks taking my hardworking Asian child’s spot” reflects deeper anti-Black and anti-Latino sentiments held by many in the Asian American community, especially in the more privileged quarters. Acclaimed writer Toni Morrison once wrote of a phenomenon affecting all immigrants: “A hostile posture towards resident Blacks must be struck at the Americanizing door before it will open”. As Asian Americans invested in constructing a socially just world not only for our own communities but for all oppressed people’s, we must interrogate the racist roots of this assumption that Black, Latino, and Native Americans who could benefit from race-conscious admissions are any less qualified or capable than Asian Americans. The rhetoric is ironic when considering it was the African American led Civil Rights Movement that produced the 1965 Immigration and Nationality Act that brought down the racist and exclusionary ban on immigration from most of Asia. The primary beneficiaries of this Act were highly educated and skilled East Asians who received *preferential treatment* to immigrate to the US; and now they are people most vocal and influential in preventing SCA5’s potential of expanding access to higher education for the communities who made these East Asian Americans’ success in the US possible in the first place.

We the Asian Pacific Student Association at UC Irvine demand and assert the following:

- Student voices must heard, acknowledged, and considered in this conversation and decision making process, because we are closest to the issue of higher education and the ones who are living the struggles of higher education attainment and accessibility.
- The inclusion of student voices must specifically occur in the bipartisan taskforce being put together by the California Legislature
- We condemn the use of lies, misrepresentations, and blatant racism to manipulate our Asian American communities’ understanding of SCA5 and affirmative action
- The lack of representation of many groups such as African Americans, Southeast Asians, Latinos, American Indians, West Asians, and others negatively impacts our campus climate and the learning experience of all students
- Race-conscious admissions policies that would have been made possible by SCA5 could have benefitted many still-disadvantaged Asian American students
- Asian Americans must stand with affirmative action’s goals of justice and equity for all people of color because it is the ethical response to a history of oppression

In closing, we as the Asian Pacific Student Association at UC Irvine maintain our support for a vision of social and racial justice through proactive, affirmative policies to right both the wrongs of the past and those continuing in the present.

Signed,

Asian Pacific Student Association at the University of California, Irvine

“Finally, APAs must be mindful of their own blindspot: We possess a “simultaneity” in which we can be both victim and perpetrator of racial oppression. We must reject a self-congratulatory embrace of the model minority myth and reject policies justified only by the narrowest self-concern. Most importantly, we must denounce the prejudice within our own communities, which allow us to care less about social justice and more about individual self-interest.

The affirmative action debate affords APAs a unique opportunity to re-envision a multiracial democracy. In an era of global corporate restructuring and downsizing, APAs should do more than scramble for a piece of a constantly shrinking pie. We should do more than aspire to be “model minority” managers of increasingly scarce resources. In coalition with all those genuinely committed to social justice, we can together pursue a transformative program of social and economic expansion informed by the sort of deep democratic inclusion that places those least privileged at the forefront.”

- Beyond Self-Interest: Asian Pacific Americans toward a Community of Justice, 1996