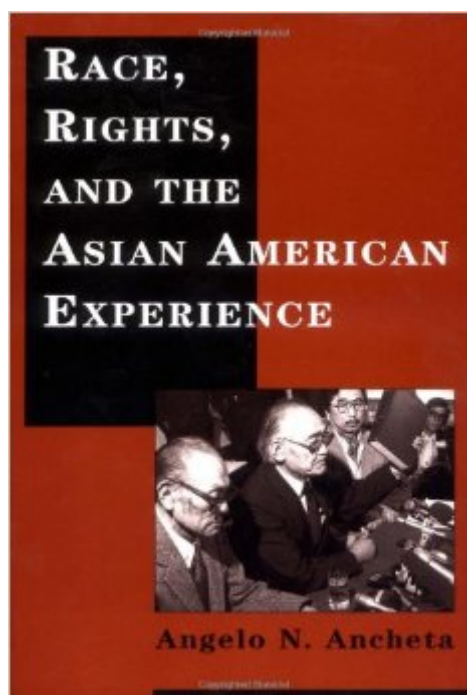


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# Race, Rights, And The Asian American Experience



## Synopsis

In *Race, Rights, and the Asian American Experience*, Angelo N. Ancheta demonstrates how United States civil rights laws have been framed by a black-white model of race that typically ignores the experiences of other groups, including Asian Americans. When racial discourse is limited to antagonisms between black and white, Asian Americans often find themselves in a racial limbo, marginalized or unrecognized as full participants. Ancheta examines legal and social theories of racial discrimination, ethnic differences in the Asian American population, nativism, citizenship, language, school desegregation, and affirmative action. In the second edition of this influential book, Ancheta also covers post-9/11 anti-Asian sentiment and racial profiling. He analyzes recent legal cases involving political empowerment, language rights, human trafficking, immigrant rights, and affirmative action in higher education—many of which move the country farther away from the ideals of racial justice. On a more positive note, he reports on the progress Asian Americans have made in the corporate sector, politics, the military, entertainment, and academia. A skillful mixture of legal theories, court cases, historical events, and personal insights, this second edition brings fresh insights to U.S. civil rights from an Asian American perspective.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

Why America Should See More than Black & White By Samuel R. Cacas  
*Race, Rights & The Asian American Experience* By Angelo N. Ancheta, Rutgers University Press: 1998, 224 pp, Hardcover.

While taking a civil rights class in law school during the late 1970s, I felt cheated by what I felt was a

significant gap in the course and text material which almost exclusively focused on the achievements for and by African Americans. As a very politically conscious Asian American in college, I knew that while immigrant groups like Asians were a very minuscule minority population-wise in this country, they had still made a significant contribution to the eradication of "Jim Crow" policies and other racial segregation laws. And I would often expound on such contributions during class. For instance, the *Yick Wo v. Hopkins* case - in which a Chinese American laundry owner in San Francisco successfully sued to overturn a racially discriminatory city ordinance - has been cited in countless legal briefs and court cases involving the Fourteenth Amendment's Equal Protection clause. Or *U.S. v. Wong Kim Ark* which has long been the major legal precedent establishing birthright citizenship under the Fourteenth Amendment. While my civil rights teacher and fellow classmates were warm and respectful to my tendencies, I still felt the contributions of non-Black minority groups deserved to be covered more thoroughly in print. So reading civil rights lawyer Angelo Ancheta's "Race, Rights & The Asian American Experience" was a refreshing affirmation of my daily, righteous meanderings in that civil rights class. Ancheta pulls no punches in citing his motivation for writing this ground-breaking text on civil rights and race relations. In the book's preface, he relates his racial experiences growing up in San Francisco during the 1960s: racist landlords that limited the sections of the city where his family could live, discriminatory employment practices which prevented his parents from the career they desired, and the endless anti-Asian racial taunts he endured throughout elementary and high school. And even when such experiences receded as he grew older, Ancheta was still exposed to significant, though subtle, forms of racism such as law school classmates who marveled that Ancheta - a second generation, American-born Filipino American - could not understand Chinese or Japanese. The book's bifurcated focus - how Asian Americans are affected by civil rights laws and how civil rights laws are affected by Asian Americans - forms the basis for why all Americans should read this book even if they are not of Asian descent. If anything, they will come away with a more encompassing mind-set on civil rights that accommodates the racial experiences of the fastest-growing minority group in this country. A major polemic addressed throughout the book is the problem that civil rights protections available to Asian Americans are most often contingent upon the rights granted to African Americans. In effect, says Ancheta, Asian Americans "have been treated primarily as constructive blacks," forced to make "unseemly, curious choices" when they sue for their civil rights, such as asserting that they are white in order to attend the best public schools. But Ancheta emphasizes that periods where Asian Americans were treated by courts as "honorary whites" were "short-lived and more unusual." And not always beneficial. The recent exclusion of Asian Americans from affirmative

action programs due to their repeatedly being lumped with whites is an example of the latter, according to Ancheta, even where "Asian American still face racial discrimination and remain underrepresented." Such exclusions are built into all civil rights protections and policies which are premised largely premised on the color discrimination premised on the treatment of African Americans. While such bias may apply to Asian Americans, Ancheta contends, the stigma! of being labeled foreign-born - even if one is American-born - has been one of the primary bases for Asians in this country being the target of hate violence, media-based stereotypes, as well as benefit-entitlement laws like California's Proposition 187 premised on citizenship, among others. Ancheta's solutions for such racial inequities which feed on the anti-Asian tendencies in the law and among most Americans is very concrete: develop new laws or amend old ones that rely on theories that comprehend the complexity of race relations beyond the black-white racial paradigm. Essentially this means including immigration status in hate crime laws. As well as recognizing that discrimination can be based on ethnicity and being labeled and treated as foreign-born, not just race. In asserting such remedies where the interracial friction involves African Americans as victimizers, such as the current conflicts occurring between Asian Americans and African Americans in San Francisco's housing projects, Ancheta encourages transracial, innovative solutions such as the Asian Law Caucus suing the city housing authority instead of racially targeting individual tenants. After all, he posits, "expanding the civil rights agenda to include Asian Americans cannot come at the expense of African Americans." While presented in tightly written, sometimes analytical prose, this book could probably be well understood to the average lay person not well-versed in the law. Many of the principles Ancheta expounds on are based on real-life stories that Ancheta and other Asian Americans have lived. Stories, along with perspectives, often missing in the media's coverage of important issues such as immigration, affirmative action, and hate violence. Their absence in headlines as well as history books are complemented by the law's insensitivity to immigrant groups such as Asian Americans. And Ancheta addresses that insensitivity very eloquently.

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