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Dear Colleague:

In the trans-continental guide of 1884, called The Pacific Tourist, you will find the following gem on the Chinese of San Francisco: "They are great imitators, and so far as known, do they not furnish a striking illustration of the truth of the theory of natural selection? Do not their caudal appendages and power of imitation show their relation to the monkey, and the link they form in the development of the race?"

Well, I feel like saying to America, half in sorrow and half in pride, "Baby, you have come a long way!"

The Chinese Exclusion Act was passed in 1882. Imagine the shock a white American of that time, however liberal, would feel if he were able to foresee the following immigration statistics: "From 1930 to 1960 about 80% of US immigrants came from European countries or Canada. From 1977 to 1979, only 16% did, while Asia and Latin America accounted for about 40% each. By 1979 the nine leading source countries for legal immigration were Third World nations; namely, Mexico, the Philippines, Korea, China and Taiwan, Vietnam, India, Jamaica, the Dominican Republic, and Cuba" (Norwine & Gonzalez, ed., The Third World, p. 255).

Japan is a very successful country. But it can never be a model for the rest of the world because Japanese society is exceptionally homogeneous. Perhaps for this reason the Japanese will always feel a bit out of the mainstream of social innovation: while they enjoy their VCRs in the midst of their own kind the great multi-ethnic experiments of the world will pass them by. Heterogeneity and an imperial system are fully compatible; indeed one of the few redeeming features of an empire is its tangy salad of human types. Homogeneity and a democratic system have often coexisted, viz., Periclean Athens, New England towns, Upper Midwestern states, Sweden, France, etc. But can heterogeneity and a truly democratic liberal system coexist and even flourish? We will see. If the experiment in multiracial living succeeds in the great American cities, we shall have reason for hoping that success is also possible in the world at large. Americans can once more consider themselves pioneers; they are on the path to another high adventure with all its attendant risks. Should they fail, their expensive trips to outer space will seem pure escapism.

Best wishes,

