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Reading Response 5: An Analysis of UCSD's Racial Climate

Twenty-plus hours a week spent at a pool and this moment occurs during one of them. The team is readying for its mid-season championship meet and has done so by bleaching each man's hair gold, with those fortunate enough to have been born blonde exempt from the process (along with those who were not willing to ruin their scalp at the cost of camaraderie). Each man knows he will need to rely on his brothers to survive the challenges of the upcoming weekend, the successes and disappointments, the chemical air, the endless tension filled hours between grueling races, but for now the atmosphere is jovial. Matching practice suits, skin singed brown by the San Diego sun, and upon every head a shock of platinum hair, and a sense of beautiful unity is apparent among the men. No color, no race, no age, no status, (relatively) no clothing. These real world trappings of varying necessity are suspended as the sun shines down on a group of connected individuals, as close as those from separate wombs can be. Black and Asian teammates laugh with their European kin, although it is difficult to tell who is whom in this scene. A few days earlier a man with a tan as fake as his hair was elected to lead our country, a fact that had caused some of the men joy and some of the men sadness, but nobody remembered that now. This pool deck was a place of joyful shoving, joking, and yelling. In a few hours we would all say goodbye and contend with the issues of the real world but, again, nobody remembered that now. As of that moment, the only goal was to have as much fun as possible before getting in for the day's workout.

Altogether, the reading did less to change my view of UCSD's racial climate as it did further illuminate my pre-existing suspicions. Any individual who has spent more than a week living on campus knows of the pervasive nature of Asian stereotypes across the school. Anybody who has walked around and listened can hear the annoyance of white students at their minority position, expressed in ways as varying as complaints about a lack of English skills in the student body to frustration at their own ability to meet girls who are pretty in a conventional Anglo-saxon sense. Similarly, the Asian position as the "model minority" in society is equally as apparent. However, it did help me to realize some aspects of Asian racism on campus that I had my suspicions were existent but did not know for sure. One major part of this is the Asian involvement in UCSD's previous racial struggles. I had assumed that Asians would have participated in the

events following the Compton Cookout, but to what degree I did not know. I also did not know the depth and detail of their struggle. Kong's writings did much to show me that part of their struggle. I also was unaware of the lack of Asian cultural resources on campus, a fact that is simply astounding. The idea of a predominantly Asian campus having neither an Asian cultural center nor an Asian American studies major is frankly hard to believe. The former fact became apparent to me as I was fulfilling my diversity tour requirements for the school's athletic programs, and the latter was not made clear until reading Kong's writings.

My experience of UCSD's racial climate has been a bit of a skewed one, largely due to my involvement in the school's athletics program. My team features individuals from walks of life from foreign transfers attempting to make a better future for themselves and their families to privileged Republican children from wealthy beach towns. Despite these differences, we are united by a common bond: hard work and a team to fight for. These pursuits matter much more to us than the race of our teammates. But once the safe space of the pool is behind us and the rest of campus awaits, a different climate is to be seen. In my eyes, UCSD is undoubtedly a place of tolerance, albeit with flaws. The graffiti recently sprayed on the Chicano center, past incidents involving race, and many of the innocent yet problematic stereotypes about Asians the swirl among students here serve as proof to UCSD's lack of perfection in areas of tolerance. A distinct portion of the student body comes from wealthy beach cities that more often than not possess less than progressive racial ideals. Unlike other top universities such as Berkeley and NYU, which often are chosen as models for tolerance, UCSD does attract a certain conservative element. Yet, these individuals represent a small, but vocal, minority. Simply because their noise is loud that does not mean these people possess great numbers. Tolerance is still the overwhelming atmosphere on campus, and anybody awake after Donald Trump's election can attest to UCSD students' willingness to stand up against racial inequality. Despite a few who might attempt to hold UCSD back, this university is still a forward looking progressive institution, and will continue to be in the future.