

Let Lin be Lin

By [Jane Messah](#)

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Last

weekend, [ESPN fired an editor](#) who posted

[a racially offensive](#)

[headline](#) about NBA player Jeremy Lin; the

network also suspended an anchor who used the same term. And taking the Lin

coverage as a starting point, [SNL produced a parody](#) mocking a media double

standard: stereotypes about Asian

Americans are acceptable, but stereotypes about African Americans are

offensive.

The

Lin media storm exposes the myth of a colorblind society. As much as we want to

believe in meritocracy, equality and individuality, we rely on racial

assumptions to make sense of the world and those around us. In many cases, the

assumptions carry real consequences.

Some

have questioned whether Lin's journey to overnight sensation is the consequence

of prejudice. In a [USA Today article](#), U.S.

education secretary (and former professional basketball player) Arne Duncan

argues that Lin "has been very good for a long time and just never quite had

the opportunity" because of stereotypes that "underappreciated and

unrecognized" his talent as an Asian-American player.

In

the same article, recruiting expert Jerry Meyer admits the following:

You just don't see that many good Asian-American players.

That doesn't mean they're not out there.... People don't expect Asian Americans

to be that good at basketball. We just have to be honest about that.... That's

crass, and that's stereotypical. Obviously, he's breaking that.

Undoubtedly

there are numerous reasons why Lin's abilities went unrecognized. (There are many talented, hard-working players who go unsigned.) But race continues to be a major factor in perceptions of Lin, from the offensive public comments to the media emphasis on stereotypes as part of his underdog narrative.

At

the same time, it would be myopic to reduce Lin's success story to his Asian-American identity, as [Gabe Zaldivar observes](#):

We continue to bury it as an Asian story or about an Asian-American that is making good on hard work. Even that pigeonholes this remarkable man and his rise to prominence.... He went to Palo Alto high school, where he dominated. After hard work, he went to Harvard, where he struggled to get a consistent look. His struggles continued and were magnified at the next level, but he never quit and kept pushing to see his dream through. Look just past the color to the meat of the story.

Lin's

narrative has numerous unique and resonant aspects--race alone does not shape his experience. And while many Asian Americans can relate to elements of his story, his experience does not represent all members of his race.

Lin's

a 23-year-old, a son of Chinese immigrants, a California native, a Harvard alumnus, a person of faith, an undrafted NBA player and a New York Knick. Even as a high-profile figure, Lin should be given space to define himself on his own terms, as more than an "Asian sensation" or a "Taiwanese Tebow." Why not just let Lin be Lin?