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The Racial Triangulation of Asian Americans

CLAIRE JEAN KIM

1. INTRODUCTION

Recently, the call to go "beyond Black and White" in discussions of race has become something of a mantra in scholarly circles. The conventional trope of "two nations, Black and White"—crafted and reproduced over the past half-century by Gunnar Myrdal, the Kerner Commission, Andrew Hacker, and others—seems increasingly outdated as unprecedented levels of Asian and Latin American immigration continue to diversify the U.S. population. While the multiracial composition of the American populace has always given the lie to a bipolar racial framework, these post-1965 demographic changes have thrown the framework's shortcomings into especially bold relief. But what does it mean to go "beyond Black and White" in thinking about race? As with most ritualistic exhortations, the need to do something is more apparent than how it is to be done.

Scholars have adopted two broad approaches to going "beyond Black and White," both of which, in my view, have certain shortcomings. The first approach, which I call the different trajectories approach, examines racialization (or the creation and characterization of racial categories) as an open-ended, variable process that has played out differently for each subordinated group. Michael Omi and Howard Winant's discussion of distinct and independent group trajectories—"Native Americans faced genocide, blacks were subjected to racial slavery, Mexicans were invaded and colonized, and Asians faced

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exclusion"—exemplifies this approach.[1] As David Theo Goldberg notes about this approach, "the presumption of a single monolithic racism is being displaced by a mapping of the multifarious historical formulations of racism."[2] The second approach, which I call the racial hierarchy approach, emphasizes the ordering of groups into a single scale of status and privilege with Whites on the top, Blacks on the bottom, and all other groups somewhere in between. Gary Okihiro's argument that Asian Americans have been rendered an intermediate group on America's bipolar racial scale and Mari Matsuda's claim that Asian Americans constitute a "racial bourgeoisie" imply such a hierarchy (although both authors are more concerned with the implications of Asian Americans' intermediate status than they are with the overall notion of hierarchy itself). These two broad approaches are not necessarily mutually exclusive: Tomás Almaguer, for instance, addresses both the "differential racialization" of various groups and the single racial hierarchy that these processes produced in a particular time and place.[3]

The shortcomings of both approaches suggest that the mandate to go "beyond Black and White" remains at least in part unfulfilled. The problem with the different trajectories approach is that it imputes mutual autonomy to respective racialization processes that are in fact mutually constitutive of one another. Asian Americans have not been racialized in a vacuum, isolated from other groups; to the contrary, Asian Americans have been racialized relative to and through interaction with Whites and Blacks. As such, the respective racialization trajectories of these groups are profoundly interrelated.[4] The problem with the racial hierarchy approach, on the other hand, is that its notion of a single scale of status and privilege is belied by the fact that Whites appear to have ordered other racial groups along at least two dimensions or axes historically.[5] Angelo Ancheta, for instance, points out that Blacks have been denigrated as inferior while Asian Americans have been denigrated more often as outsiders or aliens.[6] The challenge, it seems, is to find a way to talk about what Neil Gotanda calls the "other non-Whites" in a way that appreciates both how racialization processes are mutually constitutive of one another and how they can unfold along more than one dimension or scale at a time.[7]

My purpose in this paper is twofold. First, I propose that we use the notion of a "field of racial positions" in order to move the conceptualization of racial dynamics "beyond Black and White." Second, I argue that Asian Americans specifically have been "racially triangulated" vis-à-vis Whites and Blacks in this field of racial positions for the past century and a half. Let me discuss these two points in turn.

According to Stephen Jay Gould, our racial thinking, conditioned by European ethnological frameworks of centuries past, is "subject to visual representation, usually in clearly definable geometric terms."[8] My first claim is that public discourse about racial groups and their relative status generates a field of racial positions (or, to borrow Gould's phrase, a particular "racial geometry") in a given time and place. The chief architects of this field are those we might call major

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opinionmakers: White elected officials, journalists, scholars, community leaders, business elites, and so on. Although the most powerful always have the most say in defining it, this field is continuously contested and negotiated within and among racial groups, both at the elite level and at the level of popular culture and everyday life. Since the field of racial positions consists of a plane defined by at least two axes—superior/inferior and insider/foreigner—it emphasizes both that groups become racialized in comparison with one another and that they are differently racialized.[9] As a normative blueprint for who should get what, this field of racial positions profoundly shapes the opportunities, constraints, and possibilities with which subordinate groups must contend, ultimately serving to reinforce White dominance and privilege.[10]

My second argument is that Asian Americans have been racially triangulated vis-à-vis Blacks and Whites, or located in the field of racial positions with reference to these two other points.[11] Racial triangulation occurs by means of two types of simultaneous, linked processes: (1) processes of "relative valorization," whereby dominant group A (Whites) valorizes subordinate group B (Asian Americans) relative to subordinate group C (Blacks) on cultural and/or racial grounds in order to dominate both groups, but especially the latter, and (2) processes of "civic ostracism," whereby dominant group A (Whites) constructs subordinate group B (Asian Americans) as immutably foreign and unassimilable with Whites on cultural and/or racial grounds in order to ostracize them from the body politic and civic membership (see Figure 1).[12] Processes of relative valorization and civic ostracism are linked both analytically and functionally. They are joined analytically by an essentialized reading of Asian American/Asian culture that commits a double elision among Asian American subgroups, on one hand, and between Asian Americans and Asians, on the other. As Paul Gilroy notes in another context, "Culture is conceived . . . not as something intrinsically fluid, changing, unstable, and dynamic, but as a fixed property of social groups."[13] Functionally, the two types of processes work in a complementary fashion to maintain Asian Americans in an triangulated position vis-à-vis Whites and Blacks. As Figure 1 indicates, both processes are required to maintain Asian Americans in this equilibrated position; the abridgment of either would result in an altered group position.

Perhaps the most striking feature of the racial triangulation of Asian Americans is its historical persistence. This paper demonstrates that the racial triangulation of Asian Americans has persisted since its inception in the mid-1800s to the present and that it has undergone only cosmetic changes in the post-1965 era in keeping with contemporary norms of colorblindness. Before the civil rights era, racial triangulation occurred openly, in cultural-racial terms; during the post–civil rights era, racial triangulation has occurred in a coded fashion, in cultural terms decoupled from overtly racial claims. Yet in both periods, racial triangulation (and the field of racial positions, more generally) has functioned as a normative

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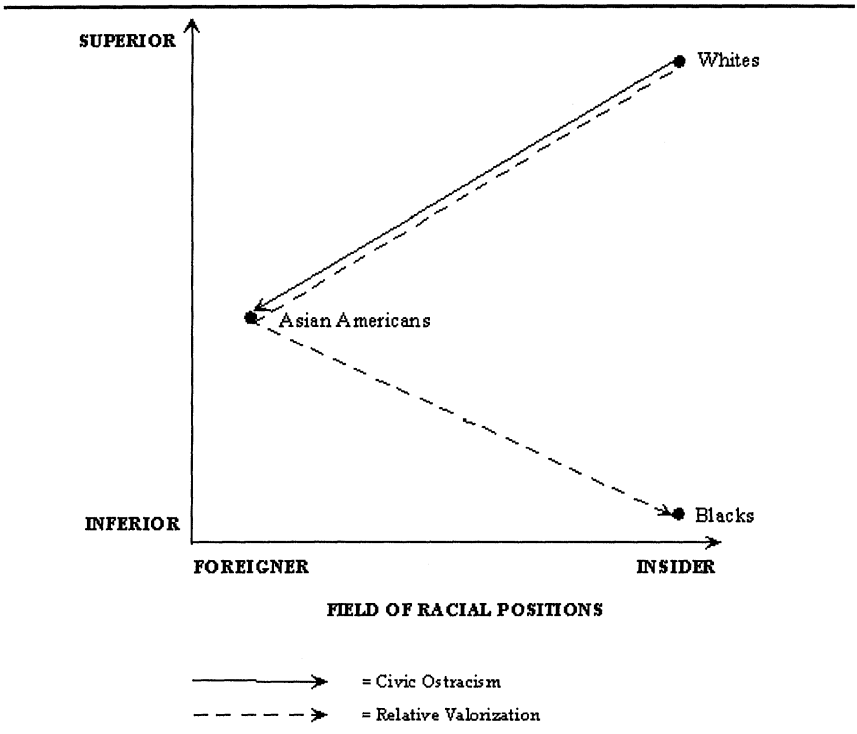

Figure 1. Racial triangulation.

blueprint for which groups should get what, reproducing patterns of White power and privilege. As Omi and Winant note, racial categories and meanings may be social constructions, but they take on a life of their own over time, profoundly shaping the distribution of goods in society.[14] By illuminating the field of racial positions that lies just beneath the contemporary edifice of prima facie racially neutral laws and policies, this paper helps us to understand how White racial power can continue to thrive in a formally colorblind society.

The first part of this paper examines open racial triangulation during the period 1850 to 1950. The second part examines coded racial triangulation from 1965 to the present.[15] The concluding section considers the implications of this paper for future research on race and racialization.

2. OPEN RACIAL TRIANGULATION: 1850-1950

At the midpoint of the nineteenth century, White business and political elites in California faced a dilemma: they had voted to enter the Union as a "free" (non-slave) state just as booming regional economic growth intensified the need for cheap and plentiful labor.[16] Although Chinese immigrant labor promised to solve this dilemma, it raised the specter of a second form of slavery that would create yet

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another permanent class of degraded non-Whites. Racial triangulation reconciled the urgent need for labor with the imperative of continuing White dominance. By positioning Asian immigrants as superior to Blacks yet permanently foreign and unassimilable with Whites, racial triangulation processes fashioned a labor force that would fulfill a temporary economic purpose without making any enduring claims upon the polity. Though Chinese immigrants often chose to be sojourners or "birds of passage" of their own accord, White elites embraced and reinforced this arrangement for their own purposes. Stuart Creighton Miller notes that even East Coast newspaper editors concurred during the mid-1800s "that while the Chinese were not biologically suited for America's melting pot, it would be foolish not to exploit their cheap labor before shipping them back to China."[17] While they suffered the presence of other racial groups because they needed their services, then, the preference of White elites was clear: as one Californian newspaper put it, "We desire only a white population in California."[18] If the racial categories of Black and White were historically constructed, as Barbara Fields argues, to reconcile the institution of slavery with the democratic ideals of freedom and equality, the third category of "Mongolian," "Asiatic," or "Oriental" was constructed to reconcile another labor system with the ideal of a pristine White polity.[19] With biological racism in its heyday, racial triangulation occurred quite openly during this period: elites overtly constructed each racial group as a fixed cultural-biological entity and justified its subordinated status accordingly.

2.1 Relative Valorization: "One Chinaman Is Worth Two Negroes"

Entering the United States at mid-century during escalating national strife over slavery and Black-White relations, Chinese immigrants were a racial wild card of sorts. They simply did not fit into the prevailing bipolar racial framework. Drawing upon preexisting images of the Chinese as well as European ethnological research, White opinionmakers began to triangulate Chinese immigrants vis-à-vis Blacks and Whites. As Stuart Creighton Miller argues, traders, missionaries, and diplomats had woven a largely negative image of China as alien, despotic, and backward for decades before the first Chinese immigrants arrived on U.S. shores.[20] In addition, the leading ethnologists of the time generally agreed on what Gould calls a "conventional racist ranking of Europeans first, Asians and Americans [Indians] in the middle, and Africans at the bottom."[21] Working with this raw material, White opinionmakers constructed a "Mongolian" or "Asiatic" racial category and located it via triangulation (relative valorization and civic ostracism) in the field of racial positions.[22] In this way, they accorded Chinese immigrants qua "Mongolians" a highly conditional acceptance as laborers expected to fulfill a narrow and temporary purpose only.

Some scholars emphasize that Chinese immigrants were "negroized" or treated as "near Black" in racially polarized California.[23] Although White

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Californians rejected slavery and refrained from blocking free Black in-migration to ensure prompt Congressional approval of their admission into the Union, they unequivocally asserted their racial dominance over the few Blacks living in the state. State legislation at mid-century prohibited Blacks from becoming citizens, voting, holding public office, serving on juries, testifying against Whites in court, attending public schools with Whites, and homesteading public land. Whites indeed denigrated Chinese immigrants by associating them with Blacks in various ways.[24] For example, the courts interpreted certain laws curtailing Black civic rights as applying to the Chinese as well (see the discussion of *People v. George Hall* below). The entrenched practice of calling Chinese immigrants "coolies" (despite the fact that they were not involuntary laborers) linked them with Black slaves as part of a degraded, unfree caste that was anathema to "free labor" advocates.[25] White elites and workers alike worried openly that Chinese labor would lead to the resurrection of slavery in another form. Moreover, Chinese immigrants were sometimes seen as lazy, dishonest, irresponsible, docile, and thieving (vices persistently attributed to Blacks); cartoons occasionally depicted the Chinese immigrant with "Black" features; and the "heathen Chinee" character often appeared with the Black "Sambo" character in Wild West minstrelsy shows.[26]

Yet the compelling fact remains that Chinese immigrants were not systematically lumped with Blacks but instead often identified as a distinct racial group and lauded as superior to Blacks on cultural-racial grounds. Relative valorization was neither universal nor constant; it sometimes occurred in quite a backhanded way. Indeed, according to Luther Spoehr, Chinese immigrants were simply demonized less uniformly and less insistently than Blacks.[27] On balance, Whites constructed the Chinese as bearers of a venerable (if now decrepit) culture while denigrating Blacks as infantile, imitative, and cultureless. During the Joint Congressional Committee hearings on Chinese immigration held in 1879 in California, Charles Wolcott Brooks, the former U.S. consul to Japan, testified,

> I think the Chinese are a far superior race to the negro race physiologically and mentally. . . . I think that the Chinese have a great deal more brain power than the original negro. The negro['s] . . . mind is undisciplined and is not systematic as the Chinese mind. For that reason the negro is very easily taught; he assimilates more readily. . . . The Chinese are non-assimilative because their form of civilization has crystallized.[28]

Brooks's testimony, which attributes both Chinese superiority and Chinese permanent foreignness to a supposedly fixed Chinese cultural-racial essence, is a classic statement of racial triangulation. A clergyman writing that same year echoed Brooks's views on the immutability of Chinese culture: "There is nothing in human character, on the face of the whole earth so stable, so fixed, and so sure and changeless, as the character of a Chinaman."[29] Putative unassimilability (and actual disenfranchisement as "aliens ineligible to citizenship") actually made Chinese immigrants more attractive to employers, who presumed that it would make Chinese labor more docile and less demanding than Black labor. For Whites

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openly horrified by the imminent prospect of postbellum Black political enfranchisement, the San Francisco *Daily Alta*'s 1869 description of the Chinese immigrant—"[he] knows and cares nothing more of the laws and language of the people among whom he lives than will suffice to keep him out of trouble and enable him to drive a thrifty trade"—was quite reassuring.[30] These sorts of calculations about labor efficiency and the preservation of White dominance moved one White Californian to expound, "One white man is worth two Chinamen; that one Chinaman is worth two negroes, and that one negro is worth two tramps."[31]

2.2 Reconstruction and the "Apolitical, Noncitizen Coolie"

The mid-century mass media explosion and emergence of the penny press meant that official race talk during this period filtered both outward across regional lines and downward to the level of colloquial discussion. In other words, the field of racial positions within which Chinese immigrants were triangulated relative to Blacks and Whites was increasingly a national phenomenon, although its actual application saw some local and regional variation.[32] For this reason, when Southern political and economic elites sought cheap labor to work their plantations and railroads and facilitate the reassertion of White dominance over Blacks following the Civil War, they naturally turned to the newly triangulated "Mongolian" race. In 1869, leaders of the agricultural and railroad industries from throughout the South attended the Chinese Immigration Convention in Memphis, Tennessee, forming companies and hiring agents to contract Chinese workers from California, Cuba, and China and transport them to Southern locales.[33]

Reputed to be hardworking and intelligent, known to be "aliens ineligible to citizenship" and thus politically powerless, and believed to be sojourners who would pose no long-term burden, Chinese immigrants seemed tailor-made for the needs of Southern elites reeling from the Black political and economic challenge posed by Reconstruction. Southern elites were not shy in discussing the motives behind their ambitious labor experiment. To begin with, in the words of one Georgia planter, Chinese immigrants were "said to be better laborers[,] more intelligent and can be had for $12 or $13 per month and rations."[34] Just as important, though, Chinese immigrants' civic disenfranchisement made them useful pawns in the game of reasserting White dominance over Blacks. One Southern journalist wrote in 1869, "We will state the problem for consideration. It is: To retain in the hands of the whites the control and direction of social and political action, without impairing the content of the labor capacity of the colored race."[35] That the importation of Chinese workers was meant as a retort to Reconstruction is clearly suggested by this journalist: "The tune . . . will not be 'forty acres and a mule,' but . . . 'work nigger or starve.' "[36] Overall, James Loewen notes, "The apolitical noncitizen coolie, it was thought, would be a step back toward the more docile labor conditions of slavery times."[37] The prospect of turning back the clock made some

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White Southerners quite giddy; one planter's wife, for instance, exclaimed, "Give us five million of Chinese laborers in the valley of the Mississippi, and we can furnish the world with cotton and teach the negro his proper place."[38] As it turns out, her optimism was unfounded. The experiment with Chinese immigrant labor proved more costly, difficult, and cumbersome than Southern planters had expected. It died out when the end of Reconstruction in 1877 heralded a return to antebellum racial dynamics.

During the late 1800s, after the last Chinese workers had vacated the plantations, several small Chinese American communities took root and flourished in Southern areas such as the Mississippi Delta. The experiences of these Chinese Americans point up some interesting contrasts with the California story. On one hand, the Chinese Americans living in Mississippi were also triangulated vis-à-vis Black and White. Overwhelmingly concentrated in the grocery trade, they served a "middleman" economic function between Blacks and Whites much as Korean immigrant merchants in central cities do today. On the other hand, however, Chinese Americans in Mississippi moved from a near-Black status in the late 1800s to a near-White status (still triangulated) by the 1920s and 1930s, while those living in California did not experience such a shift in position. As Loewen recounts, incremental White gestures of acceptance prompted Chinese Americans in Mississippi to dissociate from Blacks over time.[39] Many Chinese Americans discouraged intermarriage with Blacks, ostracized group members who interacted with Blacks, gave their children White names, attended White churches, and made donations to White organizations in a deliberate bid to become White.[40] If the Black struggle for advancement has historically rested upon appeals to racial equality, the Asian American struggle has at times rested upon appeals to be considered White (and to be granted the myriad privileges bundled with Whiteness).[41] The relative location of the two groups within the field of racial positions accounts for this important difference. In any case, both the relative sizes of the White, Black, and Chinese American populations in the two regions and the presence of a more rigid and established racial caste system (Jim Crow) in the South may explain why White Southerners felt they had less to lose than White Californians in permitting a slight shift in the racial positioning of the intermediate group.

2.3 Civic Ostracism: "A Viper Is Nonetheless a Viper"

While Chinese immigrants were often valorized relative to the most denigrated laboring class, Blacks, they were also constructed as immutably foreign and ostracized from the body politic on these grounds. Asian immigrants, seen as both unfit for and uninterested in the American way of life, were in fact the only group in American history to be legally rendered "aliens ineligible to citizenship."[42] Again, it was the conjunction of these two types of processes—relative valorization and civic ostracism, both grounded upon essentializing cultural-racial claims—that

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triangulated Asian immigrants in the field of racial positions. When Chinese and other Asian immigrants challenged the bar on naturalization through litigation, lawmakers and jurists at the national and state levels responded by fortifying the border between White and "Mongolian" and rigorously denying the latter the privileges of civic membership. White elites' selective and inconsistent appeals to the authority of ethnological research and their vacillation between classifying Asian immigrants as Black and non-Black clearly demonstrate that they were less concerned with jurisprudential and statutory integrity than they were with keeping Asian immigrants in their place.

Antebellum legal rulings ostracized Chinese immigrants from the body politic by simply lumping them with Blacks, whose thorough exclusion from civic life during this period has already been noted.[43] Although Whites distinguished Chinese immigrants from (and valorized them relative to) Blacks in select contexts, they did not hesitate to render them "Black" for the purposes of political disenfranchisement. Having recently rejected slavery and reluctantly accepted free Black in-migration, the California state legislature in 1850 reasserted White dominance by passing a law stating that "no Black, or Mulatto person, or Indian shall be allowed to give evidence for, or against a White man" in criminal courtroom proceedings. A case addressing the location of Chinese immigrants in this racial schema quickly arose. In *People v. George Hall* (1854), California Supreme Court Chief Justice Murray ruled that Chinese testimony against a White man was inadmissible according to the 1850 law and reversed the murder conviction of George Hall, which had been obtained through reliance upon such testimony.[44] Citing the alleged racial kinship between the Chinese and Indians as well as legislative intent, Murray argued that Black meant not just "negroes" but all non-Whites, including Chinese immigrants. As Murray explicitly noted, the 1850 law protected "the [White] citizen" from "the corrupting influences of the degraded castes" both in the courtroom and beyond:

> The same rule which would admit them [the Chinese] to testify, would admit them to all the equal rights of citizenship and we might soon see them at the polls, in the jury box, upon the bench, and in our legislative halls. This . . . is an actual and present danger. The anomalous spectacle of a distinct people, living in our community, recognizing no laws of this State except through necessity . . . whose mendacity is proverbial; a race of people whom nature has marked as inferior, and who are incapable of progress or intellectual development beyond a certain point . . . between whom and ourselves nature has placed an impassable difference, is now presented . . . [the] privilege of participating with us in administering the affairs of Government.

People v. George Hall turned out to be a landmark case that paved the way for numerous anti-Chinese laws and ordinances in the period leading up to the exclusionary legislation of 1882.

The postbellum naturalization and (formal) enfranchisement of Blacks prompted the generation of new strategies for ostracizing Chinese immigrants. In 1870, Congress amended the Naturalization Law of 1790 (which had granted the

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right to naturalize to "free Whites" only), extending this right for the first time to "aliens of African nativity or persons of African descent." Seeking to bring former slaves into the body politic, if only symbolically, Congress was just as determined that Chinese immigrants remain "aliens ineligible to citizenship." Although Senator Sumner of Massachusetts argued eloquently that Congress should delete the words "free Whites" from the statute so that Chinese immigrants might be permitted to naturalize, Congress refused to take this step. When an amended 1873 naturalization statute inadvertently omitted the words "free Whites," Congress hastened to reinsert them into a revised version. Congress' intent—to render Chinese immigrants "not Black" for the purpose of civic ostracism—was clear, as the courts emphasized in subsequent rulings. The apparent paradox of inviting much-reviled Blacks into the polity while excluding the less-reviled Chinese was not lost on Senator Trumbull of Illinois, who reminded his colleagues that the Chinese immigrant was, after all, "infinitely above the African in intelligence, in manhood, and in every respect."[45] The material consequences of what Stanford Lyman calls the "civic stigmatization" of Chinese immigrants were tangible: laws discriminating against the Chinese (and later Japanese) qua aliens disadvantaged them in mining, agriculture, and other types of work.[46]

Chinese and other Asian immigrants fought the bar on naturalization by arguing that they were in fact White and thus eligible for citizenship. This strategy for group advancement seemed efficient given their triangulated position and the persistent bundling of important privileges with Whiteness. In response, the courts engaged in often tortured arguments to fortify the border between White and "Mongolian." In *In re Ah Yup* (1878), the circuit court in California ruled that Chinese-born Ah Yup could not naturalize because he was a member of the "Mongolian" race and therefore not Caucasian, which was the "well settled meaning [of White] in common popular speech." Citing the authority of Blumenbach, Linnaeus, and Cuvier, the court pointed out that all three leading ethnologists distinguished "Mongolians" or "Asiatics" from Whites (even though they differed as to the actual number of human "races"). In *Takao Ozawa v. United States* (1922), U.S. Supreme Court Justice Sutherland, citing *In re Ah Yup*, ruled that Japanese-born Ozawa was a member of the "yellow" rather than Caucasian race and therefore not White. Playing upon valorizing notions of Asian immigrants relative to Blacks, Ozawa's counsel made the unsuccessful argument that White meant *not* Black, or "a superior class as against a lower class." Just one year later, the same Court ruled in *United States v. Bhagat Singh Thind* (1923) that a Hindu, though considered Caucasian by ethnologists, was not White "in accordance with the understanding of the common man." In other words, the same Court barred Ozawa from citizenship because he was not Caucasian and therefore not White, while it barred Thind, a Caucasian, from citizenship because he was not White by common parlance. These jurisprudential contortions indicate that the courts were determined to use whatever arguments proved useful in maintaining the boundary

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between Whites and Asian immigrants, regardless of how inconsistent or illogical their decisions may have appeared.[47]

Civic ostracism and relative valorization functioned together to triangulate Asian immigrants in the field of racial positions. This triangulated pattern, which secured a cheap and plentiful labor supply while hindering the permanent formation of a second degraded caste seeking inclusion in the polity, left Asian immigrants quite vulnerable to cycles of White aggression. Indeed, the anti-Chinese exclusion movement of the 1870s, the anti-Japanese exclusion movement of the early 1900s, and the internment of Japanese Americans during World War II were less aberrations from than extensions of an ostracizing and denigrating logic already in place. Conventionally, these three events are attributed to major economic or geopolitical shifts—for example, to California's economic depression during the 1870s, Japan's appearance on the world stage following the Russo-Japanese War of 1905, or Japan's aggression during World War II. What has been underemphasized is that the quotidian, ongoing practices of racial triangulation laid an ideological foundation without which neither the exclusion movements nor the wartime internment would have occurred.

The road from racial triangulation (defining the alien) to exclusion (keeping the alien out) and internment (rounding up the alien within) turned out to be remarkably smooth. The same putative unassimilability that once endeared Chinese immigrants to White employers became, in the hands of anti-Chinese organizers, grounds for exclusionary legislation. After all, the "fixed" and "changeless" cultural-racial nature of Chinese immigrants meant not only that they constituted "an indigestible mass in the community" but also that they represented the frontline of a threatened "Asiatic" economic and military takeover.[48] In 1869, *New York Tribune* writer, Henry George, warned, "The 60,000 or 100,000 Mongolians on our Western coast are the thin edge of the wedge which has for its base the 500,000,000 of Eastern Asia."[49] California Senator Aaron Sargent, who chaired the 1879 Joint Congressional Committee hearings on Chinese immigration, sounded the same ominous note in his final report: "The Pacific Coast must in time become either American or Mongolian."[50] This strategy of exaggerating the threat posed by Chinese immigrants by linking them, via cultural essence, to the amassing "Mongolian" hordes was highly effective. Congress' act of 1882 reiterated that Chinese immigrants were "aliens ineligible to citizenship" and banned further Chinese immigration for ten years. Subsequent legislation in 1888, 1892, 1902, and 1904 extended, expanded, and strengthened the original prohibition on Chinese immigration.

Japanese immigrants arriving after the act of 1882 were also classified as "Mongolians" and racially triangulated vis-à-vis Blacks and Whites.[51] This is not to say that Whites could not or did not sometimes distinguish between Japanese and Chinese immigrants. In fact, the "Mongolian" category itself was at different times internally stratified: Japan's emergence as a major power during the early

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1900s led some Whites to valorize Japanese over Chinese immigrants, while China's alliance with the United States during World War II reversed this comparison. Still, both groups were, in turn, racialized as "Mongolian," triangulated vis-à-vis Blacks and Whites, and subjected to exclusionary movements and legislation. The anti-Japanese exclusion movement of the early 1900s modeled itself so closely after the earlier anti-Chinese movement in its personnel, organization, rhetoric, and agenda that Roger Daniels refers to it as "a tail to the anti-Chinese kite."[52]

Unappeased by the passage of the Immigration Act of 1924, which halted Japanese immigration to the United States, Whites continued to view Japanese immigrants and their descendants as the enemy within, harbingers of the "yellow peril" posed by Japan's steady ascendance during the prewar period.[53] Again, Whites' essentialized reading of Asian American/Asian culture rested on a double elision—between Chinese and Japanese immigrants, on one hand, and Asian Americans and Asians, on the other. That many Japanese Americans were native-born citizens by the time of World War II made no difference to those sounding the "yellow peril" alarm: race to them was a matter of blood, not formal citizenship. In his final report on the wartime evacuation and internment of Japanese Americans, General J. L. Dewitt stated, "Racial affinities are not severed by migration. The Japanese race is an enemy race and while many second and third generation Japanese born on United States soil, possessed of United States citizenship, have become 'Americanized,' the racial strains are undiluted."[54] Or, as the *Los Angeles Times* put it, "A viper is nonetheless a viper wherever the egg is hatched—so a Japanese American, born of Japanese parents, grows up to be a Japanese, not an American."[55] Although Whites did view Chinese Americans more favorably than they did Japanese Americans during the war, this eleventh-hour effort at racial differentiation was rather ineffective, despite *Time* magazine's civic-minded gesture of publishing an article entitled, "How to Tell Your Friends from the Japs," in December 1941.[56] There was indeed an "impassable difference" between Whites and Asian Americans during the century of open racial triangulation, but it grew out of the former's exercise of racial power rather than the latter's blood.

3. CODED RACIAL TRIANGULATION: 1965 TO TODAY

Did the civil rights movement of the 1950s and 1960s usher America into a new era of colorblindness, or did it simply generate formal norms of colorblindness that mask ongoing racial domination? Many mainstream scholars contend that the civil rights legislation of the mid-1960s transformed the United States into a substantially colorblind society by removing discriminatory barriers to political participation and economic mobility.[57] Racial formation theorists and critical race scholars, on the other hand, argue that colorblindness is not a social fact but rather a formal ideology or set of norms that obscures continuing patterns of White

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dominance in the post–civil rights era.[58] My argument here—that the field of racial positions that emerged during the pre-1965 period to reinforce White privilege has proven remarkably stable and that it continues to function as a normative blueprint for who should get what in the contemporary era—clearly allies me with the latter perspective.

The field of racial positions has undergone one salient change in response to the post–civil rights context: it is now elaborated in nonracial terms. In the 1800s, White opinionmakers spoke openly about the intrinsic superiority of certain biological "races" over others. Since culture was for them entirely derivative from biological race, their claims about Chinese cultural inferiority were meant and taken as a specification of the broader claim about the intrinsic racial inferiority of this group. It was not until the emergence of the Chicago School of sociology and assimilation theory in the early 1900s that scholars rejected biological determinism, made a clear analytical distinction between culture and biological race, and rendered culture a relatively autonomous essence of its own. As a result of this turn, it became possible to talk about a group's culture while disavowing any claims about its intrinsic racial nature, although overtly racial claims certainly persisted, as the earlier discussion of civic ostracism demonstrated.

Since the norms of colorblindness have expurgated overtly racial claims from the "public transcript" during the post–civil rights era, talk about a group's culture often serves to disguise what are fundamentally racial claims.[59] The field of racial positions has now been rearticulated in cultural terms: rather than asserting the intrinsic racial superiority of certain groups over others, opinionmakers now claim that certain group cultures are more conducive to success than others. Thus, Asian American cultural values are seen as more conducive to success than (read: superior to) Black cultural values. Since talk of cultural differences inevitably activates deeply entrenched views of racial differences, however, this field remains, at bottom, an ordering of racial groups qua racial groups. Culture has become code for the unspeakable in the contemporary era.

It is precisely because it has been revamped in nonracial language that the field of racial positions functions so effectively to reinforce White privilege today. Representing a cultural explanation for group inequalities, the field of racial positions implies that American society is substantially colorblind and that the American Dream is still viable. If this message seems tailor-made for the conservative agenda of racial retrenchment, the persistent triangulation of Asian Americans in particular—now in cultural terms—generates an even more serviceable story.[60] The valorization of Asian Americans as a model minority who have made it on their own cultural steam only to be victimized by the "reverse discrimination" of race-conscious programs allows White opinionmakers to lambast such programs without appearing racist—or to reassert their racial privileges while abiding by the norms of colorblindness.[61] It allows them to displace what is fundamentally a White–non-White conflict over resources (higher education, jobs, businesses,

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contracts) onto a proxy skirmish between non-Whites, thus shifting attention away from the exercise of White racial power. We will see this type of displacement at work with regard to both affirmative action and Black-Korean conflict. At the same time, the continuing civic ostracism of Asian Americans on the grounds that they are culturally foreign maintains the "impassable difference" between Asian Americans and Whites. As before, ostracizing claims entail a double elision among Asian American subgroups, on one hand, and between Asian Americans and Asians, on the other—this notwithstanding the fantastic diversification and growth of the Asian American population following the implementation of the Immigration and Naturalization Act of 1965.[62] Indeed, it is precisely the reality of this diversification that is effectively obscured through persistent patterns of triangulating discourse. In 1850, racial triangulation allowed Whites to exploit Asian immigrants as workers while denying them civic membership; today, it allows them to conscript Asian Americans into the war of racial retrenchment while denying them genuine equality with Whites. Now, as then, racial triangulation enhances White dominance over Asian Americans and Blacks alike.

3.1 Relative Valorization: The Good, the Bad, and the Colorblind

Since the mid-1960s, Asian Americans have been widely valorized relative to Blacks via the model minority myth. Journalists, politicians, and scholars alike have constructed Asian Americans as a model minority whose cultural values of diligence, family solidarity, respect for education, and self-sufficiency have propelled it to notable success. The often explicit suggestion is that Blacks have failed in American society due to their own deficiencies: after all, if Asian Americans can make it, why can't Blacks?[63] Despite appearances, this myth represents a continuation of earlier constructions in a different guise. It is true that earlier constructions steadfastly held Asians to be culturally unassimilable into White society, whatever their other virtues as laborers. Yet the model minority myth does not claim that Asian Americans are culturally assimilated into White society: instead, it posits their material success and attributes this to their ongoing cultural distinctiveness. It also suggests that Asian Americans are too busy getting ahead and making money to worry about politics, thus echoing the old trope of Asian American apoliticalness. Once again, relative valorization is inextricably linked to civic ostracism.

For over three decades, scholars in Asian American studies have generated powerful critiques of the model minority myth, pointing out that it exaggerates Asian American prosperity, homogenizes this extremely diverse population, and obscures discriminatory treatment against it.[64] The myth's teflon quality, its stubborn survival, suggests that its value lies less in truth telling than in erecting a racially coded good minority/bad minority opposition supportive of the conservative imperative to roll back minority gains while appearing nonracist. Indeed, the

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model minority myth's emergence in two waves—the mid-1960s to early 1970s and the early 1980s onwards—correlates with two important periods of racial change. During the first, conservatives embraced formal colorblindness in a strategic effort to delegitimate the emergent Black Power movement and arrest the growth of race-conscious social programs (read: "this far and no more"); during the second, they have attempted to roll back earlier minority gains, challenging affirmative action programs, redistricting plans, and so on. As in the South a century earlier, relative valorization continues to serve the cause of racial reaction against Black political assertion. The model minority myth's suggestion that Asian Americans prosper despite (and in some cases due to) their apoliticalness not only disparages politically active Blacks but also cautions Asian Americans from seeking greater political involvement.[65] The message is clear: Asian Americans have "much to lose if they decide to join other politically active minority groups."[66]

The model minority myth was first articulated in a magazine article in 1966, the very year that Stokely Carmichael popularized the phrase "Black Power" and nonviolent integrationism gave way to its more radical successor. The article, William Petersen's "Success Story, Japanese-American Style," published in *The New York Times Magazine*, explicitly valorizes Asian Americans relative to Blacks on cultural (or racially coded) grounds.[67] According to Petersen, Japanese Americans have succeeded relative to problem minorities such as Blacks because they hold "Tokugawa" values (diligence, frugality, and achievement orientation) that link them with the "alien" culture of Japan and serve the same motivating purpose as the Protestant ethic. Petersen indeed argues that Japanese Americans' self-generated success casts doubt on the effort to help Blacks through social programs. The clear implication is that Blacks would do well to dispense with political agitation and demandmaking and follow the example of the model minority. Though ostensibly laudatory, Petersen's essentializing description of Japanese American culture clearly suggests the immutable foreignness of this group. Why does Petersen assume that Japanese Americans are bearers of Japanese, as opposed to American, culture when the Japanese American population in 1966 consisted almost entirely of native-born U.S. citizens, Japanese immigration to the United States having been barred between 1924 and 1965? While Petersen avoids explicit mention of race, his implicit suggestion is that culture is a matter of blood or biological race—that those of Japanese descent are unalterably and essentially Japanese. Via the model minority myth, both Blacks and Asian Americans are kept in their place in the field of racial positions without a single overtly racial claim having been uttered.

Subsequent magazine articles from this first period (mid-1960s to early 1970s) echo Petersen's construction of Asian Americans as a model minority. One *U.S. News & World Report* article, entitled, "Success Story of One Minority Group in America," praises Chinese Americans for their cultural values—their embrace of

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education, diligence, family solidarity, discipline, self-sufficiency, respect for authority, thriftiness, and morality.[68] Again, the author suggests that Chinese Americans' ability to move ahead on their own steam undermines the claims of other minorities to government aid. A few years later, *Newsweek* published an article—"Success Story: Outwhiting the Whites"—that attributes Japanese American success to the resilience of "traditional" Japanese values such as duty, restraint, and perseverance.[69] Again, the notion that Japanese Americans are culturally Japanese rather than American is so taken for granted that it is asserted without substantiation. The author, who actually suggests that Japanese American youth seeking a sense of cultural heritage find solace in watching Toshiro Mifune movies, also contends that the internment experience motivated Japanese Americans to become better Americans. In other words, no amount of externally imposed hardship can keep a good minority down. The article closes with a quote from a Japanese American man who admits that he would prefer not to have Black neighbors because they do not take care of their things and drive property values down, and who suggests that Blacks have to work hard like the *Nisei* (second-generation Japanese Americans) if they want to get ahead. By using Asian Americans as proxy Whites or spokesmen for White views, the author can indirectly convey a denigrating image of Blacks—that they are lazy, that they want something for nothing, that they bring chaos and crime with them wherever they go—while avoiding charges of racism.

The renaissance of the model minority myth in the early 1980s coincided with the start of a vigorous conservative campaign to turn the clock back on civil rights, affirmative action, redistricting, and social welfare programs. The Reagan administration pursued this racial retrenchment agenda—abandoning desegregation appeals, weakening affirmative action requirements in federal contracting, halting record-keeping procedures vital to civil rights and fair housing enforcement, and more—under the legitimating guise of promoting a colorblind society.[70] Once again, the model minority myth has conscripted Asian Americans into the conservative war to protect (or, in this case, retrieve) White privileges from Black encroachment. This time around, rather than focusing on Chinese Americans or Japanese Americans only, purveyors of the myth have lumped all Asian Americans together, producing a double elision—of distinctions among Asian American subgroups as well as between Asian Americans and Asians. As Keith Osajima points out, however, opinionmakers have learned to pay lip service to intra-Asian diversity and anti-Asian discrimination even as they reiterate the same essentialized good minority/bad minority trope.[71]

Newsweek's "Asian-Americans: A 'Model Minority,' " for example, opens by juxtaposing images of Connie Chung, a successful Chinese American news anchorwoman for CBS, and an unemployed Cambodian refugee who has just lost his welfare benefits.[72] Yet the article closes by concluding that Asian culture—in particular, Asian "gung-ho"—accounts for the group's astonishing achievements.

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Table 1
The Model Minority Versus the Underclass

The Model Minority	The Underclass
Diligence	Laziness
Discipline	Lack of discipline
Strong family values	Weak family values
Respect for authority	Criminal inclinations
Thriftiness	Inability to defer gratification
Morality	Deviance
Self-sufficiency	Dependency
Respect for education	Tendency to drop out

The author's scrupulous observation of intra-Asian diversity thus gives way, in the end, to a homogenized and essentialized view of Asian culture. In his book, *Who Prospers? How Cultural Values Shape Economic and Political Success*, Lawrence Harrison also reproduces the double elision mentioned above, arguing that "Confucian-Americans" (Chinese Americans, Japanese Americans, and Korean Americans) "have imparted pro-work, pro-education, pro-merit values to the melting pot at a time when those values are much in need of revival."[73] That Harrison also opposes affirmative action and Black nationalism while championing integrationist ideals should come as no surprise.

The model minority myth has always worked in tandem with explicit constructions of Blacks as culturally deficient. From the publication of Daniel Patrick Moynihan's *The Negro Family* in 1965 to the explosion of works on the Black "underclass" in the 1980s, White (and sometimes Black) opinionmakers have argued that Black cultural pathology explains Black "failure" in American society.[74] And while the term "underclass" is conspicuously nonracial or colorblind on the surface, it is the quintessential example of racial code, conjuring up images of Blacks as reliably as do the terms "ghetto" and "urban poverty". That the model minority myth and underclass myth are in fact precise mirror images highlights that they are constructions serving to affix the two groups in their respective places within the field of racial positions (see Table 1). By emphasizing internal sources of success or failure, both myths decisively shift attention away from structural determinants of group outcomes, including institutionalized White dominance.[75] Racial inequalities have nothing to do with politics or power, we are told, but only with differences in group values. Asian Americans are thus wise to ignore politics in their pursuit of prosperity, and Blacks would do well to follow their example. Thus, conservative author Thomas Sowell writes, "[T]hose minorities that have pinned their greatest hopes on political action have made some of the slower economic advances. This is in sharp contrast to the Japanese American, whose political powerlessness may have been a blessing in disguise, by preventing the expenditure of much energy in that direction."[76] "Apolitical, noncitizen coolies" are being toasted once again as an alternative to politically assertive Blacks.

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Some conservatives have actually courted Asian American political participation on the assumption that Asian Americans would make a suitable model for other minorities in the political realm. In a *New Republic* article titled, "The Triumph of Asian Americans," David Bell notes approvingly that Asian Americans, unlike other minorities, do not pursue an Asian American agenda per se. William McGurn, in a *National Review* article titled, "The Silent Minority: Asian Americans' Affinity with Republican Party Principles," echoes Bell, arguing that Asian Americans would be political paragons because they would quietly follow the Republican Party agenda, rather than complaining and pressing for special advantages as Blacks do.[77] In other words, Asian Americans could define a new mode of minority politics, one that involved not acting like a minority. McGurn's depiction of Asian Americans as docile and compliant is explicitly gendered. Thus, he chooses to cite Nancy Kwan—who played the title character in *The World of Suzie Wong*, a film notorious for its portrayal of Asian women as exotic, submissive sexual objects—as a spokesperson for Asian Americans.[78] The implication is that Asian Americans would be the Suzie Wongs of American politics—sweet, docile, and eager to follow White directives. Even as it purports to usher Asian Americans into civic life, McGurn's article also ostracizes them. He asserts that the United States is the adoptive land of Asian Americans and celebrates Nancy Kwan's discussion of Asian Americans as "we" versus "them" (White Americans) in a way that powerfully reinscribes Asian American "otherness." As always, relative valorization implies civic ostracism. After a century of classifying Asian Americans as "aliens ineligible to citizenship," Whites have invited them into the polity on the condition that they "honor" (Kwan's word) White prerogatives.

3.2 Affirmative Action: "Asian Victims and Black Villains"

Valorizing Asian Americans relative to Blacks via the model minority myth permits conservatives to pursue racial retrenchment without appearing racist. Yet when the two groups are juxtaposed not only in abstract comparisons but in real-life conflicts, the ideological payoff is even greater. Opinionmakers invariably interpret such conflicts as the bad minority victimizing the good minority, thus rendering each group's image more extreme: Blacks become evil, Asian Americans saintly. When Whites then side with Asian Americans in an effort to push back Black political demands, they can come across as antiracist champions of the underdog rather than as acutely self-interested actors.[79] This payoff is so rich that conservatives have actually manufactured conflicts between Blacks and Asian Americans in order to achieve it. Conservative discourse about affirmative action, the single most important target of racial retrenchment efforts, illustrates how the false construction of interminority conflict serves to protect White prerogatives from minority encroachment.

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The first step in this construction process consists of redrawing the political lines of conflict about affirmative action. Most Asian American advocacy groups concur that Asian Americans, like Blacks, have benefited from and continue to benefit from affirmative action programs in higher education, professional employment, public employment, contracting, and so on.[80] Affirmative action has helped, in other words, to level the playing field between the unfairly advantaged (Whites) and the unfairly disadvantaged (non-Whites). Yet conservatives persistently argue that Asian Americans, the model minority, have "made it" by meritocratic standards and that they do not need "preferential treatment." Ronald Reagan's speech on February 23, 1984, congratulating Asian Americans for revitalizing the American Dream, conveyed this message. Indeed, Nathan Glazer expresses disbelief that "Oriental Americans" are included in affirmative action programs at all: "Having done passably well under discrimination, and much better since discrimination was radically reduced, it is not clear why the government came rushing in to include them."[81] In this way, conservatives represent Asian Americans as "near Whites" or honorary or proxy Whites, recasting the opposition between Whites and non-Whites over affirmative action into an opposition between Whites and Asian Americans, on one hand, and Blacks, on the other.[82] While Whites and Asian Americans excel by meritocratic standards, we are told, Blacks demand special treatment. This redrawing of group boundaries denies the ongoing discrimination suffered by both Asian Americans and Blacks and weakens the overall justification for affirmative action.

Once conservatives set up Asian Americans and Blacks on opposite sides of the fence, it is easy for them to paint Asian Americans as the hapless victims of "reverse discrimination" engendered by affirmative action. This is precisely what occurred during the Asian American admissions controversy of the 1980s. When Asian American student and community groups noticed that increasing Asian American application rates at several prestigious universities (Brown, Harvard, Princeton, Stanford, Yale, UCLA, UC Berkeley) during the 1970s and 1980s failed to yield a comparable increase in admissions rates, they raised the possibility that these schools employed tacit racial quotas to keep Asian American admission rates low and preserve the Whiteness of their student bodies.[83] As Dana Takagi argues, conservatives bent on eliminating affirmative action saw their chance and took it.[84] Deliberately and systematically, they shifted public debate from the real issue at hand—whether or not several leading universities imposed racial quotas on Asian American students to preserve the Whiteness of their student bodies—to the false issue of whether affirmative action programs designed to benefit Blacks and Latinos unfairly discriminated against Asian Americans. In doing so, they ignored the fact that affirmative action programs could not have depressed Asian American admission rates since they applied to only a tiny percentage of the slots in question.

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With the use of smoke and mirrors, conservatives transformed an issue of White discrimination against Asian Americans into one of Black "reverse discrimination" against the same. Under Reagan's instructions, the Office of Civil Rights of the Department of Education vigorously pursued Title VI antibias compliance investigations on behalf of Asian American applicants. Administration spokespersons such as Assistant Attorney General William Bradford Reynolds repeatedly conflated anti-Asian racial quotas with affirmative action programs designed to increase diversity, denouncing both as racist and unfair. Columnist George Will wrote of the controversy, "Affirmative action discriminated against Asian Americans by restricting the social rewards to competition on the basis of merit. . . . [I]t is lunacy to punish Asian Americans—the nation's model minority—for their passion to excel."[85] Finally, Representative Dana Rohrabacher introduced a bill that sought to undermine affirmative action under the guise of condemning anti-Asian racial quotas. To further their war on affirmative action, therefore, conservatives literally manufactured this conflict between "Asian victims and black villains."[86] Although numerous Asian American advocacy groups and community organizations resisted conscription into this manufactured war, the mass media ignored their efforts, perhaps because they contradicted the reassuring myth of Asian American apoliticalness. The UC Regents' decision of July 1995, the passage of Proposition 209 in California in 1996, and the proliferation of anti-affirmative action initiatives nationwide suggest that the conservative strategy of championing Asian Americans as proxy Whites is having its desired effect.

3.3 Black-Korean Conflict: "Hardworking Immigrants" Versus "Black Racial Agitators"

Since the late 1970s, conflicts between Korean immigrant merchants and the Black communities within which they own and operate stores have become commonplace in many major U.S. cities. White racial power decisively shapes the backdrop to such conflict by slotting Korean immigrants and Blacks into their respective places in the urban political economy through such practices as language and accent discrimination, redlining, residential segregation, and racial violence. Yet the mass media consistently interprets Black-Korean conflict as a morality play—or as the bad minority's persecution of the good minority. By focusing on each group's putative characteristics and deflecting attention away from the architectonic exercise of White racial power, this interpretive move works to depoliticize the conflict and delegitimate Black grievances about discrimination and racial inequality. Blacks come across as bullies picking on the little guy rather than as bona fide political actors challenging White dominance; Whites once again come across as antiracist champions of the underdog even as they protect their own institutionalized privileges. If valorizing Asian Americans relative to Blacks is primarily the work of conservatives regarding the affirmative

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action issue, it is a nearly universal practice when it comes to Black-Korean conflict. With this issue, opinionmakers are quite unified in their "discursive reproduction of the ideological framework that legitimates the ethnic and racial dominance of the White group."[87]

The mass media's interpretation of the Flatbush boycott of 1990—a purposive, highly organized, year-long retail boycott and picketing campaign led by Black and Haitian activists against two Korean-owned grocery stores in central Brooklyn—was particularly revealing.[88] Precipitated by an altercation between a Korean-born store manager and a Haitian-born woman customer, the Flatbush boycott developed into a full-fledged social movement. More precisely, it became a movement within a movement, or part of a broader resurgence of Black Power activism that took place in New York City during the 1980s. It was a revolutionary nationalist group born of this Black Power resurgence, the December 12th Movement, that assumed leadership of the Flatbush boycott. Framing the merchant's alleged assault on the customer as symptomatic of anti-Black racism in American society, the December 12th Movement exhorted Blacks to mobilize in pursuit of community control, self-determination, and racial liberation. While this group had led other boycotts against Korean-owned stores during the 1980s, the Flatbush boycott achieved a singular magnitude because of its intersection with mayoral politics. David Dinkins, who had just been elected the first Black mayor of New York City with the aid of many Black Power activists, had campaigned on a promise to protect the city's "gorgeous mosaic" of racial, ethnic, and religious groups. By treating the boycott as a test of Mayor Dinkins's campaign promise—would he be fair to Korean Americans or would he pander to his main constituency?—the mass media transformed the Flatbush boycott into a political crisis of historic proportions.

Yet even as the media politicized the boycott's connection to Mayor Dinkins, it depoliticized the event itself by casting it as a morality play between the bad minority and the good minority. The entire mainstream media—from *The New York Times* to the tabloids to television news programs—interpreted the boycott as greedy, demagogic Blacks scapegoating the innocent, apolitical model minority.[89] Many journalists suggested that the boycotters were opportunists trying to advance their own interests or even that they had staged the merchant-customer altercation as part of an extortion scam. That such scapegoating constituted "reverse racism" was hardly in doubt: one *New York Post* editorial, titled "Anti-Asian Bigotry," condemned the boycott as racist and suggested that Blacks, who were the most dependent on welfare programs, would have the most to lose if tax-paying Korean merchants stopped subsidizing the city.[90] In its zealous effort to depoliticize the boycott, the media ignored the fact that the December 12th Movement sought to pose a fundamental, long-term challenge to White dominance rather than to extort short-term material concessions; the group indeed rejected

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the Brooklyn borough president's offer of a new small business loan program as a palliative that did nothing to address systemic racial inequities.

By valorizing Korean immigrants and defending them against Black "agitators," the media once again used Asian Americans and the norms of colorblindness to protect White privilege from a Black Power challenge. One journalist made the connection with the 1960s explicit, comparing the Flatbush boycott unfavorably with the integrationist boycotts of the civil rights movement.[91] Eventually, the media's misportrayal of this normative conflict about racial justice culminated in its comparisons of the boycotters with Nazis and Ku Klux Klan members. Having successfully manufactured public outrage over Black "reverse racism," Sthe media finally compelled Mayor Dinkins to intervene in the conflict. The image of the city's first Black mayor crossing a Black picket line to shop in the two Korean-owned stores at the insistence of the White-owned media says a great deal about racial politics in the post–civil rights era.

3.4 Civic Ostracism: "Here a Nip, There a Nip, Everywhere a Nip, Nip"

The racial triangulation of Asian Americans continues to protect White privileges from both Black and Asian American encroachment today—just as it did a century ago. Valorizing Asian Americans helps to deflect Black demands for racial reform while civic ostracism ensures that Asian Americans will not actually "outwhite" Whites. Indeed, relative valorization not only implies civic ostracism—through its essentialized reading of Asian/Asian American culture—but creates a functional necessity for it. Although the bar on naturalization was lifted in 1952, White opinionmakers continue to police the boundary between Whites and Asian Americans by imputing permanent foreignness to the latter. They do not overtly deny civic membership to Asian Americans; yet their skepticism about the legitimacy of Asian American participation in public life and their readiness to see Asian American public figures as agents of a foreign power powerfully constrain what civic privileges Asian Americans do enjoy. Racially motivated violence against Asian Americans, which escalated during the 1980s, is only the most dramatic manifestation of persistent practices of civic ostracism. The model minority may prosper in American society because it has been culturally programmed to do so, but, in the eyes of most Whites, it will never be truly American.

Civic ostracism need not be hateful or vicious to be effective. Media commentary on Japanese American Kristi Yamaguchi's 1992 Olympic figure skating contest with Japanese Midori Ito, for instance, often suggested that fourth-generation, native-born Yamaguchi was as much Japanese as she was American and hinted at the irony of her representing the United States in this international contest. In his *Newsweek* cover story on the subject, Frank Deford writes that Yamaguchi's and Ito's "bloodlines both stretch back, pure and simple, to the same soft, cherry-blossom days on the one bold little island of Honshu. . . . Certainly,

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deep within her, she [Yamaguchi] is still Japanese—some of her must be—and if she should win it's because, while others have the triple axel, only she has the best of both worlds."[92] The author's mention of bloodlines in this context is eerily reminiscent of General Dewitt's wartime commentary about Japanese Americans' "undiluted racial strains." Although the article appears to praise Yamaguchi's endowments, its ostracizing thrust is unmistakable: Kristi Yamaguchi is no Dorothy Hamill.[93]

Asian Americans who have achieved positions of authority or leadership routinely confront accusations that their foreignness makes them unfit for their jobs. Simply put, they are seen as outsiders without standing. When Senator Daniel Inouye chaired the Iran-Contra hearings in 1987, this decorated war hero who volunteered for the famous 442nd Regimental Combat Team in the midst of internment and lost an arm fighting in Italy received hundreds of letters saying that he had no right to question an American hero (Oliver North) and that he should "go back to Japan."[94] When UC Berkeley professor Elaine Kim wrote a *Newsweek* essay about how the media obscures the roots of Black-Korean conflict, she received hundreds of letters with such statements as, "If you are so disenchanted, Korea is still there. Why did you ever leave it? Sayonara"; "I should suggest that she move to Korea"; "She can get the hell out and return to her beloved Korea—her tribal afinity [sic] where her true loyalty and consciousness lies [sic]"; and "If you cannot accept the fact that you are American, maybe you should be living your life in Korea."[95] More recently, public commentary on the O. J. Simpson criminal trial has demonstrated that the practice of ostracizing Asian Americans goes beyond hate letters and in fact permeates discourse at every level. Radio host Howard Stern sang a ditty about the trial to the tune of "Old McDonald" on the air in October 1994; one line, referring to Judge Lance Ito, was "here a Nip, there a Nip, everywhere a Nip, Nip." Senator Alfonse D'Amato mimicked Judge Ito by speaking in a thick accent on a radio show in April 1995 (Ito, a native-born Japanese American, speaks without an accent). A book entitled *O. J.'s Legal Pad* contains various sketches depicting Judge Ito as a smiling, slant-eyed samurai/kamikaze warrior. One sketch is accompanied by a poem that reads in part: "HIROSHIMA, NUKE JUDGE ITO/BANZAI, BANZAI, NAGASAKI/USE HIS HEAD FOR BACKYARD HOCKEY!" Another sketch shows him with a mushroom cloud over his head; the caption is "HIRO-ITO!"[96] A viper is nonetheless a viper. . . .

Tacit suspicions about Asian American participation in American politics broke out into the open during the campaign finance scandal surrounding Clinton's 1996 presidential campaign. Here the abiding assumption of Asian American foreignness segued rapidly into the accusation that Asian Americans were secret agents working for Communist China. Once again, the resonance with the treatment of Japanese Americans during World War II is striking. During the scandal, opinionmakers painted Democratic National Committee (DNC)

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fundraisers John Huang and Charlie Yah-lin Trie not just as shady businessmen engaged in allegedly illegal practices but specifically as "untrustworthy and unscrupulous aliens eager to buy influence into the Clinton administration and to subvert American democracy and national security."[97] Journalists fanned the flames of public anxiety with headlines such as "Bamboo Connection" and "American Guanxi." Aroused by the scent of a Communist plot, Senator Fred Thompson, chair of the Senate Governmental Affairs Committee, organized and led four months of hearings (July to October 1997) to investigate whether Huang and Trie had solicited donations from illegal Asian sources for Clinton's 1996 presidential campaign. Under pressure to act, the DNC initiated its own investigation in which it telephoned Asian American donors (identified by their Asian-sounding last names) and interrogated them as to their citizenship status, income level, credit history, and so on. The DNC also announced that it would accept donations from "citizens only" in the future. The point here is not that Huang and Trie are innocent scapegoats or that the influence of transnational capital is unworthy of examination, but rather that the readiness of opinionmakers to view all Asian Americans as subversive foreign agents reflects and reinforces century-old practices of civic ostracism.

When White Americans closed ranks against the Japanese "threat" during the U.S.-Japan trade tensions of the 1980s and early 1990s, they once again identified Asian Americans with the foreign foe. Japan's emergence as a global economic power during this period prompted the revival of the "yellow peril" alarm: opinion makers warned that Japan was continuing World War II by other means, that it was carrying out an "economic Pearl Harbor," and that it planned to invade and take over the American economy.[98] From every mountaintop, the "yellow peril" alarm rang out. Academics and other writers produced an explosion of cautionary books about Japan's nefarious agenda,[99] and corporate elites, politicians, and populist groups alike encouraged participation in a "Buy American" consumer campaign.[100] The marking of the fiftieth anniversary of the bombing of Pearl Harbor in 1991 intensified these jingoistic appeals.

Asian Americans were symbolically rounded up and expelled from the body politic during this dramatic "call to [racial] arms."[101] At the time of the Pearl Harbor anniversary, the Japanese American Citizens League received a phone message saying, "I'll show you a year of remembrance, you dirty Japs. What we remember is Pearl Harbor. . . . We'll get you, you dirty pigs."[102] It also received mail that read, "Dear Jap Cocksuckers: All sneaky Yellow Beggars out of America. You Gook punks stink in the sight of honest people. Go back where you belong. You are not wanted." This note was signed, "Patriot."[103] Since civic ostracism has always entailed a double elision among Asian American subgroups as well as between Asian Americans and Asians, the anti-Japanese furor has in fact produced a climate of fear for all Asian Americans. The Vincent Chin case—in which two White autoworkers beat Chinese American Vincent Chin to death in

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Detroit in 1982 while calling him a "Jap"—is notorious but not atypical. Monitoring groups such as the National Asian Pacific American Legal Consortium, the Japanese American Citizens League, and the Los Angeles County Human Relations Commission report that racially motivated violence against all Asian Americans has increased dramatically during the past decade, due in part to the intensification of anti-Japanese sentiment.[104] Triangulated between Black and White, Asian Americans have been granted provisional acceptance for specific purposes, but they have never been embraced as true Americans.

4. CONCLUSION

To go "beyond Black and White" in a rigorous sense, we need to do more than trace separate racial trajectories or elaborate a single hierarchy defined by the Black-White opposition. The notion of a field of racial positions helps us to grasp that group racialization processes are mutually constitutive and that they generate rankings along more than one dimension. Within this field, as we have seen, Asian Americans have been triangulated vis-à-vis Blacks and Whites through simultaneous valorization and ostracism since their first arrival in the United States. This triangulation pattern has proven remarkably robust over time, undergoing only cosmetic changes in the post–civil rights era. The field of racial positions generally—and the location of Asian Americans specifically—continues to reinforce White racial power, insulating it from minority encroachment or challenge.

This has been an admittedly one-sided story about the exercise of White racial power. My omission of Asian American and Black agency has been a matter of economy rather than of principle, however, since I agree with Omi and Winant (1994) that subordinated groups continuously contest imposed racial meanings through political struggle.[105] Racialization is clearly a reflexive as well as externally imposed process. In defense of the partial narrative offered here, I would like to suggest that this study of racial triangulation can serve as an important prelude to and backdrop for future research on racial resistance by both Asian Americans and Blacks. White racial power may not tell the whole story, but it does generate a distinct structure of opportunities, constraints, and possibilities—parameters of resistance—with which groups of color must contend. Too often, scholars overlook these parameters and treat minority politics as though it occurred in a discursive and ideological vacuum and were entirely self-determining.

Contextualizing minority politics within the field of racial positions raises a bevy of interesting research questions. Rather than simply polling Asian Americans about affirmative action, we might explore whether relative valorization shapes their perspectives on the issue by encouraging them to publicly disidentify with Blacks. Must Asian Americans still attempt to be White in order to get ahead?[106] Similarly, we might examine the degree to which Korean American responses to Black grievances buy into relative valorization practices or Black grievances against Korean merchants buy into ostracizing practices. In general,

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we can become more sensitive to the impact of each group's empowerment strategies upon the relative positions of other subordinated groups and gain new insight into both the difficulty and promise of multiracial coalitions.[107] We can also be in a position to speculate about what unified resistance to the field of racial positions might look like. Recognizing that this field constrains minority resistance does not mean surrendering to it, but rather exposing it once and for all to meaningful and effective challenge.

NOTES

1. Michael Omi and Howard Winant, *Racial Formation in the United States: From the 1960s to the 1980s*, 2nd ed. (New York: Routledge Kegan Paul, 1994), 1. Note that while I capitalize Black and White throughout, I preserve outside quotes (which often use lowercase black and white) in their original form. Also, while I discuss Asian Americans generally and touch upon the experiences of Chinese Americans, Japanese Americans, and Korean Americans in particular, my arguments may be more or less applicable to the experiences of different Asian American subgroups.

2. David Theo Goldberg, *Anatomy of Racism* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1990), xiii.

3. Gary Okihiro, *Margins and Mainstreams: Asians in American History and Culture* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1994); Mari Matsuda, "We Will Not Be Used," *UCLA Asian American Pacific Islands Law Journal* 1 (1993): 79-84; Tomás Almaguer, *Racial Fault Lines: The Historical Origins of White Supremacy in California* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994).

4. There are excellent studies of how Whites and Blacks or Whites and Asian Americans have been racialized relative to one another. See, for example, David Roediger, *The Wages of Whiteness* (London: Verso, 1991) and Alexander Saxton, *The Indispensable Enemy: Labor and the Anti-Chinese Movement in California* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995). However, I am aware of few works that go significantly beyond dyadic analysis.

5. In a single-scale hierarchy consisting of groups A, B, and C (from top to bottom), group B possesses all of the privileges that group C possesses and more; Asians living under South African apartheid were a classic group B. Racial ordering in the United States has been more complex: Asian Americans have been more privileged than Blacks in certain ways and less privileged in others.

6. Angelo Ancheta, *Race, Rights and the Asian American Experience* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1998).

7. Neil Gotanda, " 'Other Non-Whites' in American Legal History: A Review of *Justice at War*," *Columbia Law Review* 85 (June 1985): 1186-92.

8. Stephen Jay Gould, *The Mismeasure of Man*, revised and expanded edition (New York: W. W. Norton, 1996), 403.

9. I discuss only two axes of racial domination, but I am open to the argument that there are in fact more. This is a matter to be investigated empirically rather than determined a priori. The reader will notice that I do not discuss Native Americans or Chicanos/Latinos in this paper, although both groups figured prominently in the history of the West generally and California in particular. This is primarily a decision of economy that is defensible insofar as Asian Americans were usually compared with Blacks and Whites rather than with these other two groups, who were less integrated into the expanding capitalist labor market. Still, a study of Native Americans and Chicanos/Latinos and their respective places in the

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field of racial positions would complement this paper nicely. My preliminary impression is that Latinos have been triangulated vis-à-vis Blacks and Whites in much the same way that Asian Americans have, and that this triangulation has varied somewhat across time (upper-class Mexicanos were considered "near White" during the late 1800s, while current Mexican immigrants are considered "near Black") and national origin subgroup (Cuban Americans are seen as a model minority, while Puerto Ricans are seen as part of the underclass).

10. I argue throughout that the field of racial positions (and racial triangulation specifically) reinforces White dominance in various ways and that White opinionmakers sometimes deploy it quite strategically in defense of their own group interests. However, I am not making the claim that the field of racial positions is entirely instrumental or functional or that it arose for the sole purpose of abetting White racial power. It makes more sense to me to trace the emergence and development of this field empirically than to make this kind of an a priori theoretical claim about it.

11. According to the *Merriam-Webster's Collegiate Dictionary* (tenth edition, 1996), "triangulation" means a way of "finding a position or location by means of bearings from two fixed points a known distance apart."

12. Figure 1 highlights only relative valorization and civic ostracism and omits numerous other practices (or arrows) by which Whites assert dominance and Asian Americans and Blacks respond to it.

13. Paul Gilroy, "One Nation under a Groove: The Cultural Politics of 'Race' and Racism in Britain," in David Theo Goldberg, ed., *Anatomy of Racism* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1990), 262-82, 266.

14. Omi and Winant, *Racial Formation*.

15. I do not discuss the civil rights movement era (1955 to 1965), during which Blacks challenged White dominance in the South through collective action and the elaboration of an ideology of colorblindness. In the next section, however, I do focus on how this ideology has been appropriated by conservatives during the post–civil rights era.

16. During the 1850s, the Black population in California was quite small—between one thousand and a few thousand; see Dan Caldwell, "The Negroization of the Chinese Stereotype in California," *Southern California Quarterly* 53 (June 1971): 123-31, 127. The Chinese immigrant population in California grew rapidly during this time, from approximately 3,000 in 1851 to over 20,000 in 1852 to just under 50,000 in 1870; Almaguer, *Racial Fault Lines*, 156.

17. Stuart Creighton Miller, *The Unwelcome Immigrant: The American Image of the Chinese, 1785-1882* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1969), 159.

18. Almaguer, *Racial Fault Lines*, 17.

19. Barbara Jeanne Fields, "Slavery, Race, and Ideology in the United States of America," *New Left Review* 181 (May/June 1990): 95-118. Although Filipinos were classified as "Malays" rather than as "Mongolians," they too were located between Blacks and Whites and outside of the body politic. According to European ethnology, both "Malays" and "Mongolians" occupied an intermediate status between Blacks and Whites.

20. Miller, *The Unwelcome Immigrant*.

21. Gould, *The Mismeasure of Man*, 405. The three most prominent ethnological frameworks of the time actually differed as to the precise number of human "races": Johann Friedrich Blumenbach's system included Caucasians, Mongolians, Ethiopians or Negroes, Reds, and Malays or Browns; Carolus Linnaeus's system included European/Whitish, American/Coppery, Asiatic/Tawny, and African/Black; and Baron Georges Cuvier's system included simply Caucasians, Mongolians, and Ethiopians. See Stanford Lyman, "The Chinese before the Courts: Ethnoracial Construction and Marginalization," *International*

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Journal of Politics, Culture, and Society 6, no. 3 (1993): 443-62. Nevertheless, most ethnologists located "Mongolians" or "Asiatics" somewhere between Blacks and Whites in their rankings.

22. Congressional debates about the bar on naturalization and the exclusion of Chinese immigrants, as well as public hearings on the latter, are rich examples of racializing discourse from this period.

23. The first phrase is from Caldwell, "The Negroization of the Chinese Stereotype"; the second is from Okihiro, *Margins and Mainstreams*.

24. The racialization of Asian immigrants as "Mongolians" unfit for various privileges and that of various European immigrants as Whites entitled to those privileges were mutually constitutive processes. The presence of Chinese immigrant miners was "indispensable" to the construction of a White racial identity among Irish, German, English, Scotch, and Welsh immigrant miners in California. See Saxton, *The Indispensable Enemy*.

25. See Almaguer, *Racial Fault Lines*, for a discussion of free labor ideology.

26. Caldwell, "The Negroization of the Chinese Stereotype."

27. Luther Spoehr, "Sambo and the Heathen Chinee: Californians' Racial Stereotypes in the Late 1870s," *Pacific Historical Review* 43 (May 1973): 185-204.

28. Ibid., 198-99.

29. Lewis Carlson and George Colburn, *In Their Place: White America Defines Her Minorities, 1850-1950* (New York: John Wiley, 1972), 177.

30. Charles McClain, Jr., "The Chinese Struggle for Civil Rights in Nineteenth Century America: The First Phase, 1850-1870," *California Law Review* 72 (1984): 529-68, 533. McClain argues that Chinese immigrants were in fact remarkably politically adept. He examines their successful lobbying efforts against discriminatory taxation in 1870 and analyzes their contribution to the development of the equal protection doctrine in the courts.

31. Arnold Shankman, "Black on Yellow: Afro-Americans View Chinese-Americans, 1850-1935," *Phylon* 39, no. 1 (Spring 1978): 1-17, 5.

32. During the 1870s, a few employers in Massachusetts and New Jersey imported Chinese immigrant workers as strikebreakers. These labor experiments received extensive press coverage and helped to nationalize awareness of the "Chinese problem."

33. Okihiro, *Margins and Mainstreams*, 47.

34. Ibid., 44.

35. James Loewen, *The Mississippi Chinese: Between Black and White* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1971), 22.

36. Eric Foner, *Reconstruction: America's Unfinished Revolution, 1863-1877* (New York: Harper & Row, 1988), 419.

37. Loewen, *The Mississippi Chinese*, 23.

38. Foner, *Reconstruction*, 420.

39. Loewen, *The Mississippi Chinese*.

40. Jeannie Rhee, "In Black and White: Chinese in the Mississippi Delta," *Journal of Supreme Court History* (1994): 117-32, 120.

41. Some Blacks derided Asian Americans who were trying to be White as Uncle Toms. See Shankman, "Black on Yellow." Indeed, some Black leaders bought into the ostracization of Asian Americans: Booker T. Washington, for instance, remarked publicly upon the foreignness and unassimilability of Chinese immigrants. On the other hand, many Black public figures spoke out on behalf of Chinese immigrants as fellow victims of White racism: Frederick Douglass denounced the Reconstruction experiment with Chinese labor as an effort to subjugate both Black and Chinese workers and advocated Chinese naturalization rights during the 1870 debates, and Senator Blanche Bruce from Mississippi spoke out against (and voted against) the exclusionary act of 1882.

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42. Aside from some exceptions made during World War II, Asian Americans remained "aliens ineligible to citizenship" until the McCarran-Walter Act of 1952 lifted the bar on naturalization.

43. Although Blacks have been excluded from meaningful civic participation for most of American history via a shifting combination of law, informal practice, and terror, they have not been ostracized in precisely same way that Asian Americans have. For one thing, Blacks were granted formal citizenship in 1870, while Chinese immigrants remained "aliens ineligible to citizenship." In addition, Blacks have historically been deprived of civic privileges (formally or informally) on the grounds that they are racially inferior and unfit for participation—not on the grounds that they are foreign. Today, many Whites continue to see Black immigrants as simply "Black" even as they see native-born Asian Americans as foreign.

44. *People v. George Hall*, 4 Cal. 399 (1854).

45. Miller, *The Unwelcome Immigrant*, 160.

46. Lyman, "The Chinese before the Courts."

47. *In re Ah Yup*, 1 Fed. Cas. 223 (1878); *Takao Ozawa v. United States*, 260 U.S. 178 (1922); *United States v. Bhagat Singh Thind*, 261 U.S. 204 (1923). Chinese Americans, who were lumped with Blacks in *People v. George Hall* (1854) and distinguished from Blacks in the 1870 Naturalization Act, were once again lumped with Blacks in *Gong Lum et al. v. Rice et al.*, 275 U.S. 78 (1927). In this famous case, Chinese American Gong Lum challenged Mississippi's practice of placing Chinese American students in Black schools (Mississippi law mandated the segregation of "colored" students from White students). Although Lum's attorney argued that Chinese American students were not "colored"—" 'Colored' describes only one race, and that is the negro"—and that they should be allowed to attend White schools in order to escape the degrading influence of Black students, the U.S. Supreme Court ruled that Chinese American students such as native-born Martha Lum, as members of the "yellow race," were indeed "colored" and therefore properly placed in Black schools. This is yet another example of the courts' willingness to sacrifice jurisprudential consistency in the name of protecting White privilege.

48. Spoehr, "Sambo and the Heathen Chinee," 191.

49. Roger Daniels, *Asian America: Chinese and Japanese in the United States Since 1850* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1988), 40.

50. Ibid., 53.

51. Between 1885 and 1924, approximately 180,000 Japanese immigrants entered the continental United States; see Ronald Takaki, *Strangers from a Different Shore* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1989), 45. That the 1930 census showed fewer than 140,000 Japanese immigrants living in the United States (and less than 100,000 in California) suggests significant rates of sojourning; see Roger Daniels, *The Politics of Prejudice* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1977), 1.

52. Daniels, *The Politics of Prejudice*, 21.

53. "Yellow peril" was a highly flexible term, used by White opinionmakers to refer to the different kinds of threat (military, economic, demographic, social, or cultural) posed by China and/or Japan. See Richard Thompson, *The Yellow Peril, 1890-1924* (New York: Arno Press, 1978).

54. Susan Lee, "Racial Construction through Citizenship in the U.S.," *Asian American Policy Review* 4 (1996): 89-116, 96.

55. Takaki, *Strangers from a Different Shore*, 388.

56. The article presents four pictures—two of Japanese men and two of Chinese men—for purposes of differentiation, once again eliding the distinction between Japanese and Japanese Americans, on one hand, and Chinese and Chinese Americans, on the other.

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The Chinese men have placid, pleasant expressions; their faces are illuminated by generous lighting. The Japanese men are frowning and serious; their pictures are darker and filled with shadows. Conceding that there is no "infallible way" of telling the two groups apart since they share certain "racial strains," the author nevertheless offers ten "rules of thumb" for differentiation regarding height, weight, hip width, hirsuteness, eyewear preferences, width of space between the eyes, facial expression, facial structure, gait, and social skill. During the war, some Chinese Americans actively disidentified with Japanese Americans, featuring "I am not a Jap" signs on their businesses, homes, and, sometimes, even on their persons. Racialization, like other forms of politics, creates strange bedfellows.

57. See, for example, Thomas Sowell, *Ethnic America* (New York: Basic Books, 1981); William Julius Wilson, *The Truly Disadvantaged* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987); and Nathan Glazer, *Affirmative Discrimination: Ethnic Inequality and Public Policy* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1987).

58. See, for example, Omi and Winant, *Racial Formation*; Derrick Bell, *Faces at the Bottom of the Well: The Permanence of Racism* (New York: Basic Books, 1992); and Neil Gotanda, "A Critique of 'Our Constitution Is Color-Blind,' " *Stanford Law Review* 44, no. 1 (1991): 1-68.

59. For the concept of a "public transcript," see James C. Scott, *Domination and the Arts of Resistance: Hidden Transcripts* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1990).

60. Blanket statements about White opinionmakers are less tenable now than they were a century ago. When discussing contemporary events, therefore, I often distinguish certain White opinionmakers from others (e.g., conservatives from progressives regarding affirmative action). Not that such distinctions are always necessary: for example, White opinionmakers of all political persuasions talk about Black-Korean conflict in a similar way. Also, I use the "mass media" and "White opinionmakers" as synonyms in places because the former continues to reproduce White racial power, regardless of the fact that there are more journalists of color in the newsroom.

61. See David Wellman, "The New Political Linguistics of Race," *Socialist Review* 16 (1986): 43-62 and Frank Wu, "Neither Black nor White: Asian Americans and Affirmative Action," *Boston College Third World Law Journal* 15, no. 2 (Summer 1995): 225-84.

62. Although they constitute less than 4 percent of the U.S. population, Asian Americans are the fastest growing minority group. Their total numbers went from 3.8 million in 1980 to over 7 million in 1990 and are projected to reach 20 million by 2020. The Asian American population, which is two-thirds foreign born, has diversified by national origin (and other measures) quite dramatically since 1965. Before 1965, Chinese Americans and Japanese Americans made up the majority of Asian Americans; since 1965, other East Asian groups, Southeast Asian groups, and Pacific Islanders have come in ever-increasing numbers. Today, the largest five subgroups are, in descending order, Chinese Americans, Filipino Americans, Japanese Americans, Indian Americans, and Korean Americans. For discussion of the post-1965 diversification of the Asian American population by national origin, class, and other dimensions, see Paul Ong, Edna Bonacich, and Lucie Cheng, eds., *The New Asian Immigration in Los Angeles and Global Restructuring* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1994).

63. See Keith Osajima, "Asian Americans as the Model Minority: An Analysis of the Popular Press Image in the 1960s and 1980s," in Gary Okihiro, Shirley Hune, Arthur Hansen, and John Liu, eds., *Reflections on Shattered Windows: Promises and Prospects for Asian American Studies* (Pullman: Washington State University Press, 1988), 165-74; Okihiro, *Margins and Mainstreams*; and Ki-Taek Chun, "The Myth of Asian American Success and Its Educational Ramifications," in Don Nakanishi and Tina Yamano Nishida, eds.,

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The Asian American Educational Experience (New York: Routledge Kegan Paul, 1995), 95-112.

64. See Chun, "The Myth of Asian American Success"; Bob Suzuki, "Asian Americans as the 'Model Minority': Outdoing Whites? Or Media Hype?" *Change* (November/December 1989): 13-19; and Won Moo Hurh and Kwang-chung Kim, "The 'Success' Image of Asian Americans: Its Validity, and Its Practical and Theoretical Implications," *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 12, no. 4 (October 1989): 512-33.

65. Opinionmakers (including mainstream scholars) reinforce the myth of Asian American apoliticalness by consistently ignoring or downplaying evidence of Asian American political involvement. As a result, most people have no idea that there was an Asian American movement in the late 1960s—let alone that it contained a revolutionary wing or that it left a vital legacy in the form of Asian American Studies programs nationwide.

66. Moon Jo, "The Putative Political Complacency of Asian Americans," *Political Psychology* 5, no. 4 (1984): 583-605, 594-95.

67. William Petersen, "Success Story, Japanese-American Style," *The New York Times Magazine*, 6 January 1966, 20ff.

68. "Success Story of One Minority Group in U.S.," *U.S. News & World Report*, 26 December 1966, 73ff.

69. "Success Story: Outwhiting the Whites," *Newsweek*, 21 June 1971, 24-25.

70. Omi and Winant, *Racial Formation*.

71. Osajima, "Asian Americans as the Model Minority."

72. Martin Kasindorf, "Asian-Americans: A 'Model Minority,' " *Newsweek*, 6 December 1982, 39ff.

73. Lawrence Harrison, *Who Prospers: How Cultural Values Shape Political and Economic Success* (New York: Basic Books, 1992).

74. For a critique of the underclass myth, see Adolph Reed, Jr., "The Underclass as Myth and Symbol: The Poverty of Discourse About Poverty," *Radical America* 24 (January 1992): 21-40. Certain Asian American subgroups (especially Southeast Asian Americans) have been classified as part of the underclass when their behavior controverts the model minority myth. Consider the case of the four Vietnamese and Chinese Vietnamese youths who held up a Good Guys electronics store and seized hostages in Sacramento in April 1991. (Their demands included passage out of the country to fight Communists in Southeast Asia.) The media and the police promptly characterized these youths as gang members even though they had no evidence to substantiate this charge. See Michael Peter Smith and Bernadette Tarallo, "Who Are the 'Good Guys'? The Social Construction of the Vietnamese 'Other,' " in Michael Peter Smith and Joe Feagin, eds., *The Bubbling Cauldron: Race, Ethnicity, and the Urban Crisis* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1995), 50-76.

75. Although William Julius Wilson in *The Truly Disadvantaged* does attribute the formation of the Black underclass at least in part to large-scale economic processes, he minimizes the continuing impact of institutionalized racism. Moreover, others have interpreted his underclass argument as a culture-of-poverty argument so relentlessly that he has called for the expurgation of the term "underclass" from discourse about poverty.

76. Thomas Sowell, *Race and Economics* (New York: D. McKay Co., 1975), 128.

77. David Bell, "The Triumph of Asian Americans," *The New Republic* (July 1985): 24-31; William McGurn, "The Silent Minority: Asian-Americans' Affinity with Republican Party Principles," *The National Review* 43, no. 11 (June 1991): 19ff.

78. In the film, Suzie is a hooker with a heart of gold who accepts her White boyfriend's violence against her as a sign of his love. Nancy Kwan has built her career on White

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fantasies about and distorted constructions of Asians and Asian Americans. During the 1980s, she appeared in paid television commercials for "Oriental Pearl Creme," insisting that this product was the secret to "Oriental" women's youthful appearances.

79. Do Whites feel that affirmative action threatens their privileges? Consider the following *U.S. News & World Report* cover story from February 13, 1995: "Does Affirmative Action Mean . . . NO WHITE MEN NEED APPLY?"

80. See the Japanese American Citizens League, *Why Asian Americans Should Oppose Proposition 209* (San Francisco); Chinese for Affirmative Action, *Asians and Affirmative Action* (San Francisco); and Leadership Education for Asian Pacifics, *Perspectives on Affirmative Action* and *In Support of Civil Rights* (Los Angeles: LEAP Asian Pacific American Public Policy Institute, 1996). Although the leading Asian American advocacy groups support affirmative action, Asian Americans as a whole have shown marked ambivalence toward the issue, perhaps in part because they have been misled by conservative efforts at relative valorization. After all, there is no reason to think that Asian Americans are any less confused about affirmative action than Whites. An April 1995 survey by Louis Harris and The Feminist Majority found that 81 percent of Californians claimed to support Proposition 209; however, this number dropped to 29 percent when they were told that Proposition 209 would eliminate all affirmative action programs in the public sector. See Janine Jackson, "White Man's Burden: How the Press Frames Affirmative Action," *Extra!* (September/October 1995): 7-9, 7.

81. Glazer, *Affirmative Discrimination*, 74. During the late 1990s, Glazer publicly reversed his position on affirmative action, declaring his qualified support for it.

82. The phrase "near White" is from Okihiro, *Margins and Mainstreams*.

83. Brown and Stanford admitted to irregularities of their own accord. Internal and external reviews of the other universities produced mixed results. The Office of Civil Rights cleared Harvard of wrongdoing but ordered UCLA's math department to admit certain graduate school applicants that it had rejected. Both the State Auditor General and the California Senate Subcommittee on Higher Education investigated UC Berkeley; in 1989, UC Berkeley's Chancellor Ira Michael Heyman publicly apologized for "disadvantaging Asians" in the school's admissions process. See Dana Takagi, *The Retreat from Race: Asian American Admissions and Racial Politics* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1992).

84. Ibid.

85. Don Nakanishi, "A Quota on Excellence? The Asian American Admissions Debate," in Don Nakanishi and Tina Yamano Nishida, eds., *The Asian American Educational Experience* (New York: Routledge Kegan Paul, 1995), 273-84, 275.

86. Takagi, *The Retreat from Race*, 109.

87. Teun van Dijk, *Racism and the Press* (London: Routledge Kegan Paul, 1991), 10.

88. This section on Black-Korean conflict is based upon my forthcoming book from Yale University Press.

89. On the whole, the Black-oriented media (newspapers, television programs, radio shows) offered more balanced coverage of the Flatbush boycott, seriously addressing the Black activists' political activity without attacking the Korean merchants and their advocates.

90. "Anti-Asian Bigotry," editorial in *The New York Post*, 24 May 1990.

91. Sheryl McCarthy, "When Boycotts Were for Just Causes," *New York Newsday*, 4 February 1991.

92. *Newsweek*, 10 February 1992, cited in Asian American Journalists Association, *Project Zinger: A Critical Look at News Media Coverage of Asian Pacific Americans* (Washington, DC: Center for Integration and Improvement of Journalism, 1992), 7-8.

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93. In the next issue of *Newsweek*, a reader wrote in with the observation that no one ever implied that Dorothy Hamill felt some "deep allegiance" to the land of her forefathers. See ibid., 7-8.

94. Moon Jo and Daniel Mast, "Changing Images of Asian Americans," *International Journal of Politics, Culture, and Society* 6, no. 3 (1993): 417-41.

95. Elaine Kim, "Home Is Where the Han Is: A Korean-American Perspective on the Los Angeles Upheavals," in Robert Gooding-Williams, ed., *Reading Rodney King/Reading Urban Uprising* (New York: Routledge Kegan Paul, 1993): 215-35, 223.

96. Cynthia Kwei Yung Lee, "Beyond Black and White: Racializing Asian Americans in a Society Obsessed with O.J.," *Hastings Women's Law Journal* 6, no. 2 (Summer 1995): 165-207. Thanks to Katheryn Russell for bringing this article to my attention.

97. L. Ling-chi Wang, "Race, Class, Citizenship, and Extraterritoriality: Asian Americans and the 1996 Campaign Finance Scandal," *Amerasia Journal* 24, no. 1 (1998): 1-21, 9-10.

98. In 1991, a Fairfax, Virginia, organization called "Americans for Fair Play" sent out solicitation letters that read in part:

> LET'S STOP JAPAN'S UNFAIR ECONOMIC WAR AGAINST AMERICA! . . . The Japanese are attempting to do economically what they could not do militarily—conquer America! . . . [I]t took an atomic bomb to knock some sense into the Japanese. . . . [Its leaders] conceived an incredibly bold plan to (1) take over the banking and financial systems of the West (2) buy huge amounts of American real estate (3) purchase entertainment and educational institutions to change Western public opinion to more favorable Japanese views (4) "buy" significant political power in the US Senate and House and (5) loot United States oil and gas industries, agriculture, and manufacturing through buyouts, acquisitions, and "third party" takeovers. In short, they prepared their detailed "war plan."

See Japanese American Citizens League, *The Impact of Japan-Bashing and the "Buy American" Movement on Japanese Americans: An Educational Workbook* (San Francisco, 1992).

99. Robert Reich has identified at least thirty-five such books written during the late 1980s and early 1990s, including Pat Choate's *Agents of Influence* (1990), Clyde Prestowitz, Jr.'s *Trading Places* (1988), Karel Van Wolferen's *The Enigma of Japanese Power* (1989), William Dietrich's *In the Shadow of the Rising Sun* (1991), Robert Zielinski and Nigel Holloway's *Unequal Inequities* (1991), Daniel Burstein's *Yen! Japan's New Financial Empire and Its Threat to America* (1988), and William Holstein's *Japanese Power Game* (1990). See Robert Reich, "Is Japan Really Out to Get Us?" *The New York Times Book Review*, 9 February 1992, 1ff.

100. The "Buy American" movement ignored the glaring if inconvenient fact that American cars are increasingly difficult to distinguish from Japanese cars. Many American name brand cars are made in Japan, and many Japanese name brand cars are made in the United States. Moreover, Detroit's Big Three automakers all own stock in Japanese auto companies: General Motors owns 38 percent of Isuzu, Ford owns 25 percent of Mazda, and Chrysler owns 6 percent of Mitsubishi. See Japanese American Citizens League, *The Impact of Japan-Bashing*, 4.

101. In "Is Japan Really Out to Get Us?" Robert Reich suggests that the anti-Japanese furor of the late 1980s and early 1990s was a national "call to arms"—a call for Americans to come together against what they perceived as a common threat in order to strengthen their sense of identity in the post Cold War world. What Reich fails to note is the degree to which this was in fact a "call to [racial] arms," an exhortation to an imagined community that has always been exclusively White.

102. Masako Iino, "Asian Americans under the Influence of 'Japan Bashing,' " *American Studies International* 32, no. 1 (April 1994): 17-30, 23.

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103. Japanese American Citizens League, *The Impact of Japan Bashing*, 9.

104. Hate crime statistics are notoriously unreliable since most state and local law enforcement agencies do not collect and record the relevant data. Indeed, police departments are often reluctant to classify hate crimes as such because they want to avoid unwanted publicity (and/or because one of their own members is the perpetrator). The Hate Crimes Statistics Act of 1990 mandates the collection of data at the federal level, but it still relies on the data collection efforts of lower level agencies.

105. Omi and Winant, *Racial Formation*.

106. My thanks to Helen Ingram and Rogers Smith for posing this question to me. I have referred to conservatives' "conscription" of Asian Americans into the racial retrenchment war, yet not all Asian Americans have resisted the draft. In this context, Mari Matsuda urges all Asian Americans to proclaim, "We Will Not Be Used" (1993).

107. My argument about racial triangulation raises difficult questions, for instance, about the Civil Liberties Act of 1988, the legislation that provided reparations to Japanese Americans subjected to wartime internment. Was the Civil Liberties Act a historic victory for Japanese Americans specifically and Asian Americans generally? Or was it yet another instance of relative valorization? Can both of these characterizations be true? Consider the history, rhetoric, and possible meaning of this law. Japanese American activists deliberately framed the proposed law in terms of equal opportunity and freedom from state intrusion—rather than in terms of civil rights or racial justice—in order to win Republican votes. Moreover, the law seemed to reward Japanese American political efforts while slighting Black leaders and organizations who had demanded reparations for slavery for decades. As one Black legal scholar observes, "Granting reparations to Japanese Americans without granting similar compensation to African Americans sends the latter yet another message declaring that they are on the bottom of society's ladder"; see Vincene Verdun, "If the Shoe Fits, Wear It: An Analysis of Reparations to African Americans," *Tulane Law Review* 67, no. 3 (February 1993): 597-668, 659. Importantly, President George Bush's apology letter to former internees does not acknowledge the role that racism played in the internment effort. Mindful of the Japanese American community's valiant struggle to pass this law, we still need to ask if the Civil Liberties Act actually reinscribed White dominance under the guise of renouncing it. For an exploration of some of these issues, see Eric Yamamoto, "Friend, or Foe or Something Else: Social Meanings of Redress and Reparations," *Denver Journal of International Law and Policy* 20, no. 2 (Winter 1992): 223-42. For general information about the Civil Liberties Act, see Leslie Hatamiya, *Righting a Wrong: Japanese Americans and the Passage of the Civil Liberties Act of 1988* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1993).

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