

Critical Thoughts on Asian American Assimilation in the Whitening Literature

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In recent years the idea that Asian Americans, as well as Latinos, are becoming white or are aligning with whites in a new black/non-black divide has become almost a priori among sociologists. This study problematizes such a "racial assimilation" thesis by assessing extant empirical data on socioeconomic status, intermarriage patterns, and racial/ethnic attitudes. Based on these data, the author argues that Asian groups have been racially subordinated along lines of citizenship even if many of them have not been subjugated in the same manner as blacks along color and socioeconomic lines. By way of a historical and global framework, the author notes that U.S. dominance over Asian countries and ongoing U.S. conflicts with some has reproduced the citizenship-based subordination of Asian Americans. The author concludes by underscoring the need to consider such subordination, manifest in the historical exclusion laws to today's anti-Asian violence, in future social scientific studies.

In recent years the idea that Asian Americans, as well as Latinos, are becoming white or aligning with whites has become almost *a priori* among sociologists. This idea has been popularized by the forecast of a new black/non-black divide (Bean and Stevens 2003; Gans 1999; Lee and Bean 2004; Yancey 2003). While the overall literature draws on the historical model of European immigrant "whitening" and on demographic data to support the racial assimilation thesis on Asian Americans, these works also rest on different core ideas. Warren and Twine (1997), for example, emphasize that today's "white" category seems to be expanding in ways akin to Euro-American history, while Lee and Bean (2004) rely on intermarriage and multiracial identification patterns to proffer an emerging black/non-black divide. Yancey (2003) draws especially on racial attitudes toward and among Asian Americans and Latinos to evince his thesis of blacks' alienation from non-black groups. Gans (1999) and Bonilla-Silva (2002) point to an emerging tri-racial hierarchy based on relational "race,"¹ color and class phenomena.

While the above literature insightfully portends the future and forces all race scholars to think seriously about these issues, this critical essay problematizes the forecast that Asian Americans are "whitening" (Warren and Twine 1997), experiencing "honorary whitening" (Bonilla-Silva 2002), joining a "residual" group (Gans 1999), and/or aligning with whites and Latinos as non-blacks (Bean and Stevens 2003; Gans 1999; Lee and Bean 2004; Yancey 2003; see also Waters 1999). The central argument of this essay is that Asian groups have been racially subordinated along lines of citizenship even if many of them have not been subordinated in the same way as blacks along color and socioeconomic lines. In other words, the racialization of Asian ethnics as "not-Americans" across historical periods irrespective of light skin, wealth and fifth-generation status underscores the need to problematize the racial assimilation theses. The questions pursued here are, how can a group racialized as foreigners bask in the full privilege of whiteness if a central privilege of being white is to be an authentic American – *the American* (Lipsitz 1998)? This conundrum begs for a scholarly focus on racialization processes specific to Asian Americans and Latinos as well as those of whites and blacks. Rather than do so, however, much of the sociology of race and immigration has imposed on Asian Americans concepts derived from the traditional white-black color line (see Ancheta 1998; Chan 1990; Kim 1999; Lee 2000; Okihiro 1994; Takaki 1998). Not only does this imposition on a neither-white-nor-black group inadvertently uphold binary classifications (e.g., white-black) – those upon which societal inequalities depend (see Collins 2000; Glenn 2002) – but it underappreciates the foundations of anti-Asian subjugation: USA-Asia relations and citizenship (as linked to immigration). Apt here, then, is Cherrie Moraga's (1981:29) oft-quoted phrase referring to men of color's 1970s' activist focus on race/nation at the expense of gender (Moya 1996): "[t]he danger lies in failing to acknowledge the specificity of the oppression." Through a critical reevaluation of the sociological literature, this essay introduces the *specificity* of the oppression of Asian Americans and its implications for understanding the larger hegemonic project of white racial dominance over *all* non-whites. That is, while *some* Asian American groups might be assimilating socioeconomically, Asian Americans at large are not whitening *per se* because such a move would hinge on racially assimilating into a

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status as *authentic Americans*. In other words, Asian Americans would need to be granted the full privilege of social citizenship to change from one race (Asian) to the dominant alternative (white).

Conceptualized thus, Asian Americans' racial positioning as forever foreigners, i.e., inauthentic Americans (Tuan 1998), belies the core assumptions on which many of the racial assimilation theories rest. All of these theories use a U.S.-bound framework to understand a population with a past and present harnessed to global inequalities. Additionally, I question the core assumption that South-East European and Irish immigrants' path from "not-quite-white to white" is a harbinger of Asian Americans' futures. This prediction overlooks the fact that, contrary to wide acceptance among sociologists and to popular wisdom, European immigrants' expansion of the "white" category remains a debated question among historians of whiteness themselves (e.g., Arnesen 2001; Frank 1998; Guglielmo 2003; Kolchin 2002; Roediger 2006).

I also question the methodologies that racial assimilation theses employ to forecast the racial future of the United States. To be sure, scholars such as Gans (1999:372-3) readily concede that the weakness of a predictive analysis "...is its empirical reliance on the extrapolation of too many current trends and the assumed persistence of too many current phenomena." But even beyond that, most predictive studies do not empirically interview or systematically observe Asian Americans (or Latinos) in the United States to capture if and how "race" might matter; nor do they draw on the many qualitative/historical studies that have already done so (e.g., Espiritu 1992, 2003; Kibria 2002; C. Kim 1999; N. Kim 2003; Lowe 1996; Palumbo-Liu 1999; Park 2005; Purkayastha 2005; Pyke and Dang 2003; Rudrappa 2004; Tuan 1998, 1999). Additionally, predictive studies do not draw on data from representative surveys which tap Asian Americans' experiences with racial bias and discrimination, especially pertaining to global inequalities, immigration and social citizenship.

Citizenship: Racially Not American

U.S. history reveals that citizenship was initially the province of white men of property (Glenn 2002). Later, white women were granted the right to naturalize and all blacks received it by way of the 14th Amendment to the Constitution in 1868. Of course, the United States had rooted its nation building and ideology of the national family in the relegation of black and Native Americans to second-class citizenship, both before and after the 14th Amendment (Collins 2001). Southern blacks in particular would be disenfranchised through the 1960s and, among the more coded parallels in the present day, black males constitute a disproportionate number of convicted felons who thus cannot vote while the Motor Voter laws harken back to voter suppression under Jim Crow.² Yet, precisely because of the white-over-black racial model of the United States that has pivoted on the color line and its ideologies of racial superiority-inferiority, Asian Americans have been subordinated in a different manner as not second-class Americans but as the *not-Americans*. Multiple versions of this *conflation of Asia and Asian America*, the former often looming as "the enemy," persist in the present day. No group has been excluded from the country because of their "race" to the extent that Asian Americans have been. Starting in 1875, Congress passed the Page Law to forbid the entry of Chinese and other "Mongolian" prostitutes, felons and contract laborers – a law which effectively reduced the entry of all Chinese women. Because all were suspected of prostitution, the growth of the Chinese-American population was profoundly stunted (Espiritu 1997). Thereafter, federal laws excluded the immigration of Chinese male laborers (and their wives) in 1882 as well as those from India in 1917, from Korea and Japan in 1924, and from the Philippines in 1934. In brief, most Asians could not pass through the "golden door" because of their race.

Even those who lived in the United States could not be legal citizens, no matter how culturally and loyally American they were. Citizenship, then, has not only been the Achilles heel of Asian Americans, but the shackle on the heel. In a landmark case Takao Ozawa was told by the Supreme Court in 1922 that Japanese people like him could not be citizens because they were not white. Learning from the Ozawa case, Bhagat Singh Thind petitioned the same court for citizenship a year later on the premise that ethnologists of the time classified Asian Indians as Caucasians. While the Supreme Court justices conceded his Caucasian status, they dismissed their previous logic by denying Thind citizenship on the grounds that the "common man" did not see him as white. By the time the last laws barring Asian American naturalization were lifted in the 1950s, many Asian Americans had been cumulatively disadvantaged by the many years without legal citizenship. Had it not been for the exclusion and anti-naturalization laws, Asian Americans would likely be a much larger and dominant force in U.S. politics, corporations and national culture today. But even with legal citizenship in hand, Asian Americans have been denied the more crucial promise of civilized existence and membership in the nation, that is, *social* citizenship (Marshall 1973; see Lowe 1996).³

At the heart of the exclusion acts and citizenship hierarchies is “nativistic racism.” (Ancheta 1998:11) Historically, as Ancheta (1998) has written, nativistic racism has relied on several ideologies and stereotypes: economic competitor, organized criminal, “illegal alien,” and unwelcome immigrant; to that I would add military enemy (“yellow peril”). For example, white Americans’ resentment of alleged economic competition from the “yellow hordes” secured the exclusion acts. And the alarmist “yellow peril” stereotype, often couched as “American patriotism,” emerged from World War II and was entrenched by the conflict with Koreans and Chinese in the Korean Conflict, in Viet Nam with the Vietnamese (“gooks”), and with most of these nations during the Cold War. Arguably, the United States’ most pernicious form of anti-Asian racism on U.S. soil was the World War II mass incarceration of Japanese Americans (Ancheta 1998:11), a group composed predominantly of U.S. citizens and law-abiding ones, at that. Since Franklin D. Roosevelt’s Executive Order to mass incarcerate Japanese Americans, Japanese ethnics and anyone confused for Japanese, continue to suffer intimidation, violence and other hate crimes on December 7th, the anniversary of Japan’s bombing of Pearl Harbor (Ancheta 1998:11-12). More contemporary examples include the baseball bat murder of Vincent Chin in 1982 by two white males who scapegoated him for the U.S. auto industry meltdown; to date, the two men have never spent a night in jail. The forever foreigner is evident in the many racial foreigner epithets hurled at Judge Lance Ito during the O.J. Simpson trial, despite his iconic symbol as a model minority. Then New York Sen. Alfonse D’Amato mocked Ito’s alleged accent (undetected to everyone else) on the Don Imus show, Howard Stern branded him a “nip,” and a book entitled *O.J.’s Legal Pad* had sketches of a slant-eyed “samurai/kamikaze” warrior next to a caption that read: “Hiroshima, Nuke Judge Ito/Banzai, Banzai, Nagasaki/Use his head for backyard hockey!” (C. Kim 1999:127) Owing to the 1996 Clinton campaign finance scandal involving John Huang and Charlie Yah-lin Trie, the Democratic National Committee telephoned all donors with Asian-sounding names to interrogate their citizenship status. It would be hard to imagine the same kind of treatment of white Americans if Bill Clinton had potentially taken money from someone in Europe. The examples are endless, but not only has anti-Asian violence remained high (an unrecognized social problem), but at the end of 2006 Rosie O’Donnell mocked the Chinese language and showed little remorse until Asian-American organizations protested and lobbied for an apology. In 2007, the mass media, politicians and pundits “foreignized” the Virginia Tech school shooter Seung-Hui Cho as a “South Korean” or “South Korean national” when in fact he is an American (he had lived in the United States since he was 8 years old); they usually reported his name in the South Korean fashion as well: family name first.

In response to these issues, sociologists, political scientists, legal scholars and Ethnic/American Studies scholars have examined the ways in which Asian Americans (and Latinos) are subordinated along the citizenship line. Scholars have called this line the “insider-foreigner” axis, one rooted in a macro process of civic ostracism (Kim 1999), and/or have broadly focused on its legal (Ancheta 1998), national (Lee 2005), and political dimensions (Lie 2004). Most of these scholars agree that while some (or all) Asian American groups are valorized above blacks along class and color hierarchies, they are not “Americans” in the same manner that blacks are. In large part because of America’s white-black legacy, black Americans are not constantly conflated with Ghana, Guinea or Niger.

The Racialization of Asian Americans across Borders

Racial assimilation theories focus only on what happens to immigrants within U.S. society and its institutions, excising global inequalities such as U.S. foreign relations with the countries from whence the immigrants came. These accounts thereby underappreciate the importance of U.S. rule over immigrants’ home countries. Yet such dominance has institutionalized racial subordination over Asians abroad and has carried over to treatment of Asian Americans on “the home front.” As Chan and Hune (1995:213) aptly write, such transnational dominance matters:

“[T]hroughout U.S. history each Asian American community continued to have its image and well-being defined not by its activities in the United States but by a racial order that was both domestic and international. No other American immigrant community has had its domestic relations with the U.S. government so determined by the nation’s foreign policies with homeland states.”

In other words, Asian Americans’ racial marginalization, in Yen Le Espiritu’s (2003:210) words, has been “shaped not only by the social location of their group within the United States but also by the position of their home country within the global racial order.”

Yet racial assimilation theories have not integrated the transnational racialization of Asian immigrants into their analyses. This is despite the fact that Asian Studies, Asian American Studies and global racism scholarship have long documented such phenomena or have pointed in that direction. Pioneering Asian American Studies scholar Lisa Lowe (1996:17) asserts, for example, that U.S. intervention in Asia during and after World War II was part of a larger project to assume global hegemony, especially over Japan. Not just in the name of staving off Communism, the United States, she writes, also sought to use Asia as a "brutal theater" on which to "perform its technological modernity and military force in relation to the Asiatic world."

On the level of "race," the United States justified its globalization projects in Asia by deploying Orientalist ideologies of Asians as foreign, other or feminine (see Said 1979). Certainly, the U.S. role in Asia has engendered contradictions (see Ong 1999) insofar as U.S. capital investment helped create the "Asian Tiger" economies we know today (Lie 1998). Yet Asian capitalism has also served to *reinforce* racial subordination, as Asian nations and peoples morph into the "yellow peril" when they become too good at what they do (Ong 1999:174-80). That is, the specter of the inferior and child-like Filipino "little brown brother" (Espiritu 2003), of the evil enemy "gook" of Viet Nam and North Korea, and of the feminized dependents in South Korea, all haunt Asian Americans in the United States today (see Lowe 1996). No matter their light skin, wealth or cultural literacy, they must contend with being forever not-American.

Re-examining Demographic Data on Asian Americans

Beyond the lack of a global lens on Asian America, racial assimilation theories have harnessed too much explanatory power to certain demographic data, namely data on socioeconomic attainment, intermarriage and racial attitudes. Data on all of these areas are themselves more contextually- and historically-contingent and complex than forecasts of Asian American racial assimilation allow. In discussing these three areas I will embed other key critiques, first, that most of these predictions, excepting Bonilla-Silva (2002) and Gans (1999), homogenize diverse Asian ethnics (as well as Latino ethnics). Second, they do not acknowledge the circular relationship between the model minority and the foreigner ideologies (Okimoto 1994). Finally, they presume European immigrants' "whitening" despite historians' debates about whether the white category ever in fact "expanded" (see Arnesen 2001; Frank 1998; Guglielmo 2003; Kolchin 2002).

Reexamining the Socioeconomic Picture

In this section I contend that social class mobility for Asian Americans is not a ticket out of racial subordination. That is, so long as Asian Americans continue to be conflated with (enemy) Asian nations and presumed to be not-American, they do not escape racial bias just because they have Yale degrees and expensive homes. To be sure, most East/South Asian Americans have been valorized for their socioeconomic successes as compared to black Americans who are often monolithically derogated the "underclass." In this way, Asian Americans can and do benefit from their "model minority" status, especially in light of whites' greater willingness to live beside (and marry) Asian Americans than blacks (see Yancey 2003). Yet, the fact that model minority acclaim has not been enough to grant Asian groups "authentic American" status is reminiscent of black Americans' experiences of class. In the same way that a high class profile has not spared black Americans from institutionalized and everyday racism (e.g., Collins 1997; Cose 1993; Feagin and Sikes 1994), class status has not spared, and actually *has exacerbated*, nativistic racism against Asian Americans. A similar class parallel has been drawn between Asian Americans and Jewish people (see Karabel 2005) for sharing a liminal position as honorary whites. While these two groups can be compared for suffering discrimination on account of their being successful, especially in the realm of higher education, they do not share a European background or phenotype. Anti-Semitism is thus racialized and ethnic-religious discrimination, whereas anti-Asianism is more squarely in the "race" camp. The fact that Asian Americans are often described in biological/essentialist ways, whether the stereotype is positive and negative, illustrates the point.

High class status as a catalyst for nativistic racism sharpens into relief the circularity between the "model minority" and the "foreigner" ideologies. As Gary Okimoto (1994:142) aptly states, the model minority and the yellow peril are not poles, but "form a circular relationship that moves in either direction." That is, while Asian Americans' success can incite "yellow peril" discrimination (Ancheta 1998; Newman 1993), the feminized model minority image can assuage fears of Asian Americans as the masculinized yellow peril. This dialectic allows both representations to exist side-by-side (Okimoto 1994; see Espiritu 1997).

Although high social class status has not spared Asian Americans from racial marginalization, I believe that the socioeconomic data on the group (which usually refers to East and South Asians) require further analysis. To be

sure, in censuses from 1970 to 2000, it would appear that one could proclaim Asian Americans' socioeconomic glory. In 2000, Asian Americans had the highest education levels, household and median family incomes, and the most expensive homes. Since 1980, they have even surpassed white Americans along all of these dimensions.⁴ Yet, these data need to be understood in context. While some pundits claim that Asians are inherently more intelligent in mathematics and science than other groups, such a biological, essentialist conclusion ignores the social phenomenon of U.S. policies favoring highly-educated, professional Asian immigrants. That is, the U.S. government's immigration policy since 1965 has mostly granted entrance to Asian immigrants with advanced education, advanced technical backgrounds and/or other professional skills, as if to engineer a model minority (Park and Park 2005).

Socioeconomic data on Asian Americans need also be *disaggregated*. Asian Americans – consisting of Bangladeshi, Cambodian, Chinese, Filipino, Indian, Japanese, Korean, Laotian, Pakistani, Vietnamese, Pacific Islander ethnics, and so on – are among the most diverse of the racialized groups and are internally stratified in profound ways. Yet, social scientists tend to lump all of these groups together, not differentiating between ethnic/national groups that are highly dissimilar. One must consider the social class disparities *within* the Asian American group. In so doing, we find that many Asian-American groups are, in fact, not middle class. As Bonilla-Silva (2002) and Gans (1999) point out, Asian ethnics such as Vietnamese, Cambodian and Laotian Americans (as well as Pacific Islander groups) tend to live in poverty, are unemployed, and are less-educated than the average American (see Xie and Goyette 1994). In fact, Xie and Goyette's (1994) analysis of 2000 census estimates found the Asian-American poverty rate to be 10 to 13 percent, a rate considerably higher than that for white Americans. They found that not only is the poverty rate high among Southeast Asian groups like the Vietnamese, but it is high among certain East Asian groups as well, such as Chinese and Korean Americans. Indeed, Asian Americans could be considered one of the most stratified populations in the United States (see Nishioka 2003).

In addition, Asian Americans' *individual* incomes lag more than 10 percent behind the individual incomes of white Americans; those of Pacific Islanders lag roughly 40 percent behind (Nishioka 2003). The difference between Asian Americans' *household* incomes (higher than that of whites) and their *individual* incomes (lower than that of whites) is partly explained by the larger number of earners in Asian immigrant households (Nishioka 2003; Takaki 1998). This extended family or multiple immigrant household differs markedly from most white-American household structures. In addition, Asian Americans' higher household values can be largely explained by the propensity of Asian Americans to live in immigrant-receiving states with high costs of living, namely Hawaii, California and New York (Nishioka 2003).

And despite being glorified as a model minority group "becoming white," Asian Americans' heads have certainly been bruised by the infamous glass ceiling. The clearest indicator that socioeconomic discrimination exists is the discrepancy between the earnings of Japanese Americans and their levels of education (Feagin and Feagin 1993:354). Furthermore, despite Asian Americans' overall higher educational attainment than white Americans they are underrepresented in two major high-status occupations: (1. lawyers and judges (2.7 percent) as well as (2. administrators and public officers (2.4 percent) (Xie and Goyette 2004). Xie and Goyette also find that Asian Americans are greatly underrepresented as managers in several occupational sectors: government, private employment and both public and private institutions of higher learning. In addition, although Asian American women currently earn more than white women on average, studies have found that at universities across the country Asian American women faculty disproportionately suffer from harassment in a hostile environment (Hune 1998).

In the civil service sector Asian Americans have filed many formal complaints about being passed over for managerial positions by those with far less training, education and years of experience. Indeed, 75 percent expressed interest in managerial positions as opposed to technical work in the electronics industry (Asian Americans for Community Involvement 1993), while many others lodged glass ceiling complaints. The same study also found that the exclusion of Asian Americans from managerial positions could not be attributed to their poor English proficiency, time of arrival, cultural differences, work experience, formal training or greater job concentration in low-status sectors of the economy. In brief, the fact that some Asian American groups are assimilating along social class lines is *part* of the story, but not the story itself.

Reexamining Asian Americans' Intermarriage Trends

While all of the studies invoke high rates of intermarriage to support their predictions of racial assimilation, none of them discusses the global inequalities that first spawned these marriages. As noted earlier, U.S. relationships with Asian countries have had profound effects on Asians in the United States, including whom they marry. U.S.

imperialist rule in Asian countries points to why, historically, the rate of Asian female-white male marriages has been so much higher than that of Asian males-white females. America's colonization of the Philippines 1898-1944 and its continued military presence up to 1991 explains why the Philippines has sent more immigrants as wives of U.S. servicemen than any other Asian nation (Min 2006:46). Min reports that an estimated 343,000 brides of "U.S. citizens" came from 1950 through 2003; most of these were the wives of servicemen. When the United States occupied Japan from the end of World War II until 1952, a sizeable portion of the armed forces remained behind in Japan, thus spurring a large number of Japanese emigrant brides in the 1950s and early 60s (between 1950 and 1979 alone, about 71,000 wives immigrated) (Min 2006:46).. In South Korea where an even greater number of U.S. troops have been stationed since 1945, approximately 96,000 Korean women have married U.S. soldiers and immigrated to the United States from 1950 through 1989. Asian-white intermarriages therefore cannot be understood apart from the larger context of U.S. (neo)colonial and imperial rule.

Additionally, most forecasts of Asian racial assimilation do not cite the studies that reveal a noticeable decrease in Asian-white pairings since 1980. For example, Lee and Bean (2004:228) draw on Asian Americans' and Latinos' high rates of marriage with whites to affirm a growing black/non-black divide yet they cite mostly statistics for native-born and young Asian Americans rather than for the population at large. Asian Americans are a predominantly foreign-born populace (Lai and Arguelles 2003) and are also a group in which the first generation serves as leaders and elders.⁵ I believe that the marital patterns of the entire group are important. Xie and Goyette's (2004) aggregate analysis reveals that most Asian Americans are married to members of their own ethnic group. To illustrate, their comparison of recent censuses revealed that Filipino and Vietnamese Americans have dramatically shifted to co-ethnic marriage. And contrary to popular wisdom, the second largest proportion of marriages is not Asian-white couplings but *interethnic* marriages, that is, marriages *between* different Asian ethnic groups (Xie and Goyette 2004). According to the U.S. Census Bureau's 5 percent PUMS data, Asian-white marriage declined from 18 percent in 1980 to 15.3 percent in 1990 to 12.7 percent in 2000 (Min 2006). Not only has the proportion of Asian-white marriages dropped, rates of interethnic marriage *have risen* dramatically (Lee and Fernandez 1998; Min 2006; Qian and Lichter 2007; Shinagawa and Pang 1996). From 1980 through 1990 Asian interethnic marriages doubled from 11 to 21 percent and eclipsed marriages between Asian and white Americans; broken down by gender, 18.9 percent of Asian-American men and 16.3 percent of women were interethnically married (Lee and Fernandez 1998).

In states with high concentrations of Asian Americans, such as California, the rate of interethnic marriage is even higher. While in 1990, 21.1 percent of Asian-American men in California were interethnically married, by 2000, 64 percent were so married (Lee and Fernandez 1998). A gender breakdown reveals that, in 1980, 10.8 percent of Asian-American women were married to Asian-descent men, while in 1990, 45.5 percent of women were so married (Shinagawa and Pang 1996). Given most Asian-American women's consistently higher rates of marriage to whites than their male counterparts, a figure of 45.5 percent constitutes a dramatic increase. These jumps indicate that interethnic marriages will likely remain a trend for some time, having increased 400 to 500 percent between 1980 and 1990 alone.

What are the reasons for Asian Americans' growing preference for intra- and inter-ethnic marriage over marriage with whites? Many speculate that the growing size of the Asian American population has largely contributed to the shift toward intra-Asian marriage. When the Asian-American population was smaller, and many brides of U.S. soldiers were immigrating, their rates of marriage with whites were rather high (this trend was also true of Native Americans). As the Asian population has grown, the larger group size itself has depressed outmarriage rates (Qian and Lichter 2007). Qian and Lichter add that such growth has consequently promoted in-group interaction and solidarity, hence, endogamy. Overall, they find that increased immigration has slowed native-born Asian Americans' and Latinos' marital assimilation, results that stand in stark contrast to the marital assimilation patterns of various European immigrants in the early 20th century. As Asian Americans constitute one of the fastest growing groups in the United States, endogamous marriage does not look as if it will abate in the foreseeable future.

Several studies contend that Asian Americans' choice of other Asian mates reveals a growing racial (panethnic) consciousness, especially among the second generation-plus (Kibria 1997; Lee and Fernandez 1998; Shinagawa and Pang 1996). For one, Asian Americans are keenly aware that they are treated as a monolith, thereby fostering their racial affinity and solidarity (Shinagawa and Pang 1996; see Lee and Fernandez 1998). Such a move beyond solely an ethnic consciousness is especially acute in areas with large Asian-American populations, such as California. And within states like California, the importance of Asian-American populations on college campuses cannot be overstated. Because college is the site of the most interethnic contact, it is also the place where many Asian Americans forge and develop a panethnic consciousness. Interestingly, this trend further affirms

the unpredictable outcomes of Asian Americans' ascent into the middle class insofar as middle-class status has fostered pan-Asian identification rather than identification with whiteness. To be sure, class is not the only determinant of intra- or inter-ethnic marriages. Other influential factors could be the shared experiences of being American-born Asians (see Kibria 2002). Finally, recent marital trends may be pointing to a broader "people of color" consciousness. As an example, Asian Americans' marriages to Latinos have risen from 3 percent in 1980 to 11 percent in 1990. Some attribute this change to the shared immigrant experience of many members of these groups as well as their common residence in states like California (Lee and Fernandez 1998).

Racial Attitudes and Ideology

Some of the scholarly predictions stress that Asian Americans' (and Latinos') anti-black attitudes parallel South-East Europeans' and the Irish's prejudicial dissociation from blacks in the early 20th century (e.g., Bonilla-Silva 2002; Ignatiev 1995; Warren and Twine 1997; Yancey 2003). Although no group, including those of color, can escape the pull of racial prejudice, I believe that knowledge of the global and cultural context of Asian Americans' racial attitudes is necessary. That is, globally, the United States introduced its anti-Asian and anti-black racial ideologies to Asia as part of its imperialist expansion (Kim forthcoming; see Feagin 2000). On a related cultural level, those Asians who have come to the United States have not been conditioned by norms of social desirability on issues of race that long-time Americans have been. Yet, survey analyses of Asian Americans – a predominantly non-U.S.-born population – do not consider how the first generation's lack of exposure to norms of social desirability may shape their overall response patterns. Schuman et al.'s (1997) classic study, however, found that social desirability was palpable among white Americans, many of whom supported the *abstract principle* of racial equality, but were less enamored by the literal *implementation* of it. Although it is true that both Asian and European immigrants faced virulent and violent nativism, Asian Americans have not, to my knowledge, waged the kinds of mass organized riots that European immigrants exacted upon blacks in a bid for whiteness/non-blackness. This distancing and discrimination, however, was one of the key processes that enabled European immigrants to shore up the various dimensions of their whiteness. To be sure, most Asian Americans arrived in the mid-1900s, after the era in which these kinds of acts were more common, but there were certainly Asian Americans on both coasts at the same time European immigrants were proliferating in the East. These kinds of differences need to be considered and made clear whenever the historical records of Asian Americans and of South-East European and Irish Americans are made analogous.

A more fundamental problem is the racial assimilation account's reliance on the claim that European immigrants were once not white but later *became* white. Such a claim has not been conclusively supported by historians themselves. While historians have generally agreed that the United States always categorized South-East European and Irish immigrants as "white," they disagree on whether these immigrants were white on the ground (Arnesen 2001; Frank 1998; Guglielmo 2003; Kolchin 2002; Roediger 2006). Thomas Guglielmo's (2003) most comprehensive primary source research on Italian Americans, however, found that this group was always categorized as white along the color line and were thus granted citizenship and all the other rights that attended such a privilege. He found that what was more ambiguous was the categorization of Italians as a race: Southern Italian, Northern Italian, etc. Irrespective of where one stands in the historical debate, however, the larger take-home point is that social scientists cannot claim unequivocally that Asian Americans will expand the white category *again*, as it is not clear that the category has ever expanded before.

If we assume, however, that whiteness *did* expand to include "non-white" European immigrants, one of the necessary components was immigrants' eventual desire for a white identity. There is strong evidence, however, that Asian Americans across generations do not desire to blend in with whiteness or unhyphenated Americanness (e.g., Espiritu 2003; Kibria 2002; Kim 2003; Ong and Azores 1994; Rudrappa 2004). In further contrast to the South-East European and Irish immigrants at the turn of the century, contemporary Asian groups' retention of their ethnonational identity is further encouraged by America's multiculturalist era in which they live, an era that recognizes and hegemonically celebrates difference (see Rudrappa 2004). While Asian immigrants might welcome the privileges and resources that attend whiteness, they do not desire a white identity, a variant thereof, or any kind of blending with other groups that would dilute their ethnonational difference. In this light, some of the key forces that secured European immigrant whitening – assuming that they were not white at the outset – are not paralleled in the Asian-American (and Latino) experience of the latter 20th century. In fact, some scholars believe that the stress on ethnicity/nationality among post-1965 immigrants and their progeny (Kibria 2002) signals a move towards ethnicity's increasing importance in race-centered America (Ong and Azores 1994).

Another key point: as U.S. exclusion laws against Asians, denial of citizenship to the group, and wartime incarceration bear out, Americanness has been, and continues to be, synonymous with whiteness (Lipsitz 1998). Whiteness, therefore, has several key dimensions beyond social class and racial attitudes. It is also anchored in nationality, a status-claim that Asian Americans were denied legally and continue to be denied socially. Therefore, it seems optimistic at best and contradictory at worst to dub Asians as whitening or racially assimilating if they are denied one of the most crucial tenets of being white: authentic Americanness. Such concerns about social citizenship seem to get lost when the *specificity* of Asian American racialization is peripheral to the inquiry at hand.

Racial Stories Surveys Tell

Although the racial subordination of Asian Americans is obscured by the model minority stereotype, national public opinion often tells a different story. Two national surveys of Americans' racial attitudes by the National Conference for Community and Justice titled "Taking America's Pulse" found that whites reported many negative stereotypes of Asian Americans, particularly ones which constellate around the "forever foreigner" ideology (phrase from Tuan 1998).⁶ A 2001 national survey study led by a professional Chinese American organization called the Committee of 100⁷ found that, of the most prejudiced Americans, 18 percent reported that they would be uncomfortable with an Asian American supervisor. Yet, only 9 percent of these Americans were uncomfortable with a black supervisor, 5 percent with one who was female, and 7 percent with one who was Jewish. And consistent with foreigner stereotypes and Asian Americans' lack of political power, 23 percent of the nation stated that they were "uncomfortable" voting for an Asian-American U.S. presidential candidate. They were substantially less uncomfortable voting for an African-American candidate (15 percent), a female candidate (14 percent), and a Jewish candidate (11 percent), most of whom, not surprisingly, are more prominent in politics than Asian Americans. To be sure, numbers also define this equation. Owing to the legacy of a white-over-black national history, black Americans constitute 13.1 percent of the U.S. population while Asian Americans constitute 5 percent. At the same time, precisely because the hegemonic racial binary renders Asian Americans invisible, which suppresses the group's entrance into elected public service, and precisely because of the anti-Asian foreigner racialization, they are nowhere near 5 percent of elected officials in the United States. In striking terms, the Committee of 100 survey evidences the power of the not-American/foreigner racialization. Interested particularly in the American public's perceptions of *Chinese* Americans, the Committee was disturbed to find that anywhere between 68 to 73 percent of the nation believed that Chinese Americans were "taking away too many jobs from Americans," insinuating that Chinese Americans were themselves not American. Moreover, 68 to 73 percent of the public also believed that Chinese Americans had "too much power in the business world," invoking the stereotype of Asian Americans as foreign economic competitors. Another dimension of the foreigner racial ideology is to collapse Asians in the United States and Asians in Asia, as evidenced by the World War II mass incarceration of Japanese Americans. In fact, 46 percent of the country reported that "Chinese Americans passing on information to the Chinese government [was] a problem."

As further evidence that model minority stereotypes exist alongside foreigner ones, a large portion of the public also noted that Chinese Americans "have strong family values" and "place a higher value on education than do most other groups in America." Yet, studies like the 2000 "Taking America's Pulse" national survey found that it is precisely the success of some Asian Americans that has sparked negative foreigner stereotypes. Indeed, the positive stereotypes of Chinese Americans as valuing family and education were common even among those reporting the *most negative* attitudes toward Chinese Americans. A 1993 *Los Angeles Times*⁸ survey of Southern Californians found that Asian Americans were thought to be too successful and too enamored with material success. Specifically, this survey asked whether any group "is getting more economic power than is good for Southern California" and whether any group "is working harder than the others to succeed in Southern California." Asian Americans were considered to be endangering the state with their growing economic prowess. In addition, survey analyses revealed a statistical linkage between the view of Asian Americans as too economically powerful and as the most prejudiced group in California. Counter to classic assimilation theory, then, Asian Americans' economic mobility often engenders less social acceptance and intensifies racism towards them (Lee 2000; see also Newman 1993). This link between model minority and foreigner stereotypes suggests that, irrespective of whether stereotypes are positive or negative, stereotypes are stereotypes nonetheless. Judging and homogenizing a group as having particular traits, traits that are often seen as inherent, effectively dehumanizes a group.

Paradoxically, Asian Americans are the only group that attributes the racial discrimination it faces to *success* in the United States. Moreover, Asian Americans are the only ones who consistently recognize that their lack

of political power – their invisibility and unmet needs – is a major obstacle for them. It is thus not surprising that among all groups, Asian Americans have most strongly opposed a moratorium on immigration and the deportation of Chinese who seek U.S. asylum. They also most ardently support the reparations for Japanese-American internees and a University of California admissions policy that is meritocratic (Lee 2000:135).

Beyond the good stereotype-bad stereotype paradox, multiple survey studies have revealed another paradox. It shows that while Asian Americans report experiencing discrimination at levels close to those of black Americans, most Americans see Asian groups as experiencing little discrimination to none at all.⁹ In two national polls of the four largest racial/ethnic groups in the United States – a 1995 *Washington Post*/Kaiser Foundation/Harvard University poll and a 1993 *Los Angeles Times* poll – Asian Americans were just behind African Americans in reporting experiences of discrimination. Polling only Asian American groups, the *Los Angeles Times* yielded similar results: 57 percent of those of Chinese descent, 46 percent of Filipino and Korean descent, and 41 percent of Vietnamese Americans reported discrimination. Even a 1998 University of Massachusetts poll which restricted Asian Americans' reports of discrimination to experiences *within the last three months of the survey* still found that fully 25 percent of Asian Americans reported bouts with discrimination. Still, only 10 to 15 percent of the American public considered racism to be an obstacle for Asian Americans, while the above *Washington Post* and *Los Angeles Times* polls revealed that 40 to 60 percent of Asian Americans reported thus. When the nation does indeed acknowledge racism against Asian Americans, they often use "blame the victim" reasoning, pointing to the group's supposed cultural distinctiveness, clannishness and language problems (stereotypes linked to the foreigner ideology) (Lee 2000).

Why do Asian Americans report so much racial discrimination while non-Asians believe that they experience very little to none at all? One reason for the discrepancy may stem from the fact that Asian Americans who report discrimination tend to be those who are more successful and upwardly mobile. As Bobo and Suh (2000) found, Asian Americans face much of their racial discrimination in institutional contexts. The larger American public, however, would likely not think of professional Asian Americans as facing any racial barriers. Again, "model minority" success also breeds "majority" resistance.

A second reason may be that survey items on race tend to be centered on the black American experience (Lee 2000). Despite the conspicuous diversification of the United States since 1965, surveys have been slow to modify and add questions to address the experiences of Asian Americans, Native Americans, Latinos, Arab Americans and other groups. As such, the unique form of discrimination that Asian Americans experience – specifically along lines of citizenship – is not captured by survey questions on race generally. Rather, Taeku Lee finds that survey researchers continue to assess Asian Americans based on stereotypes mostly associated with black Americans, such as those pertaining to intelligence, family, criminality and cultural community patterns. Yet studies of Asian Americans should focus on immigration, citizenship, the glass ceiling, entrepreneurship and U.S. relations with Asian nations, including imperialism and war. Indeed, survey respondents in the *Los Angeles Times* poll did not stereotype Asian Americans as welfare dependent, but they did stereotype them as inscrutable and as perpetual foreigners. The public also expressed feelings of hostility towards Japan and other Asian nations. Interestingly, whites and Latinos who stereotyped Asian Americans as not properly integrated into American culture were more likely to hold anti-Asian attitudes (Lee 2000).

Finally, not only have surveys been inattentive to the specific struggles of Asian Americans, but so have the criminal justice system and the mass media. Although anti-Asian violence rose steadily in the 1990s and has been spiking in years such as 2001 after 9/11, the American public is largely unaware of the high rates of anti-Asian violence and other hate crimes. For example, the middle to late 1990s witnessed high rates of anti-Asian violence, those that remained steady. The rates are indeed most likely higher, as reports are plagued by problems of underreporting.

Despite the nationwide decline in general hate crimes in recent years – hence, a decline in anti-Asian crimes – violence against Asian Americans has increased sharply in various states like Connecticut, Michigan, Nevada and Wyoming; murders on the whole have also increased (National Asian Pacific American Legal Consortium 2002). Also troubling is that the National Asian Pacific American Legal Consortium found that Asian Americans are increasingly subject to racially motivated crimes in their homes, workplaces and schools (those who lived in public housing tended to suffer crimes at home). They also report that in Asian Americans' places of employment, hate crimes increased 117 percent between 1995 and 1996. In school settings the FBI found a similar increase in school-based hate crimes against Asian Americans. That includes college campuses. There, Asian Americans have experienced a disturbing 100 percent increase in hate incidents. A 2000 report by the National Asian Pacific American Legal Consortium found that anti-Asian crimes on college campuses were a formidable problem, one

which had not been adequately addressed. In the same year an online survey by *aMagazine*, an Asian-American interest magazine, found that a third of the 559 college students had suffered racial epithets and similar verbal attacks on their campuses. Another 5 percent had been the victims of race-based physical attacks.

More tragically, countless Asian Americans have been murdered because of their race since they first arrived in the country centuries ago, from the bloodthirsty white male tax collectors in California to perpetrators of race-hate at the dawn of the new millennium. Despite the poison of racism that took the lives of such Asian Americans as Thien Ly, Kuan Chung Kao, Won Joon Yoon, Joseph Ileto and Balbir Singh Sodhi, to name a few, these murders have received very little public, media or scholarly attention. While I can only provide a small snapshot of the murders here, I believe that they merit a brief summary. In 1996 Thien Ly, a young Vietnamese American with degrees from UCLA and Georgetown University, was gruesomely stabbed to death by two white male supremacists while he was exercising in Tustin, CA. In 1997, Rohnert Park, CA police shot a 33-year-old Chinese American engineer named Kuan Chung Kao, intoxicated at the time, for carrying a stick that they presumed to be a martial arts weapon. The officers shot Kao within *34 seconds* of arriving at his home, immediately handcuffing him and preventing his wife, a registered nurse, from administering potentially life-saving CPR to him on the driveway where he lay bleeding. Kao died shortly thereafter. Despite mass protests, neither of the police officers has been punished for any misconduct. During a California summer in 1999, white supremacist Buford Farrow asked Filipino American postal worker Joseph Ileto to mail a letter for him. As Ileto obliged, Farrow shot him a total of nine times, firing at Ileto as he attempted to flee for his life. After the murder, Farrow admitted to shooting Ileto because he was "Hispanic or Asian" as well as a federal employee. Finally, one of the first-known racially-motivated murders in the wake of 9/11 cost Balbir Singh Sodhi, a South Asian American, his life. In Mesa, Arizona, four days after 9/11, Sodhi was landscaping at his Chevron gas station when Frank Roque shot him dead because of his so-called resemblance to Al-Qaeda members. Roque was finally arrested after attempting to murder Afghani and Lebanese Americans, all the while justifying his actions as patriotic. All of these incidents reveal that this silent dilemma of hate crimes against Asian Americans requires greater public awareness and, more importantly, solutions. Reaching solutions will require, however, a much better understanding of the racial subordination of Asian Americans in the first place.

Conclusion

Concerning the fate of the American racial landscape, this essay challenged the increasingly accepted sociological forecast that Asian Americans (and Latinos) are whitening or aligning with whites in a new black/non-black divide. As noted, these studies do not incorporate the dimensions along which Asian Americans' racial status depends, namely hierarchies of citizenship within a context of global inequalities (i.e., U.S.-Asian relations). As such, scholars need to address both the limits and dangers of Asian Americans' high social class status and an American national identity as a cornerstone of whiteness. Methodologically, this essay questioned why the racial assimilation literature does not engage the qualitative and quantitative studies that directly investigate issues of racialized citizenship. To support the point, the data presented here problematized and contextualized three major predicates of the thesis on Asian Americans' racial mobility: high socioeconomic status, high rates of intermarriage with whites and racial attitudes and ideology.

Taken together, these arguments yield to a larger and more pressing point: the need to consider how white-American dominance has been secured for about 400 years by exercising racial power over *all* non-whites. Of the racial assimilation studies on Asian Americans, Bonilla-Silva (2002) and Gans (1999) acknowledge this larger project of racial hegemony. Both contend that lighter-skinned and higher class Asian Americans could, respectively, join an honorary white and residual category (while darker-skinned, lower income Asian ethnics would "blacken"). These "middle" Asian ethnics would thereby shore up white racial dominance by being politically palatable and serving as a buffer for black counter-movements, a purpose which "in between" groups have often served. While these studies should be applauded for their claims about tripartite models, they need also investigate, and act on, the *specificity* of Asian-American racialization – to take seriously the denial of social citizenship to Asian groups on a racial basis and to capture how it is linked to anti-black subordination and the racial system writ large. In other words, Asian and black Americans have been played off of one another, respectively, as "harder working than blacks" and "more American than Asians" and, at different points in time, "more like those blacks" ("Filipino brown brothers") and "more like us." (whites and blacks after 9/11) (see Almaguer 1994; C. Kim 1999) While it does matter that white America ideologically valorizes Asian ethnics above blacks in the color order, this tripartite arrangement also reveals a citizenship order in which Asian Americans experience their most profound

subordination. This white-led racial system, then, has racialized Asian and black Americans vis-à-vis one another not only to ensure an internecine minority war, but to legitimize the “foolproof” existence of American meritocracy. That is, if the system can racially lump and stereotype all Asian Americans as model minorities, then blacks have only themselves, not the system, to blame. This point is also crucial insofar as it shows that Asian Americans have been valorized for their success as a *racial minority* group, not as a white majority. They have also experienced the highest rates of discrimination and violence precisely for being *too model* a minority, from the Chinese gold miners to engineer Vincent Chin to the college students who systematically face racial animus. While it matters, then, that Asian Americans are non-black, what matters most is that Asian and black people in the United States are both non-white.

Much of the social scientific literature on race and immigration, however, seems to have been swayed by the model minority ideology to the extent that it does not examine the origins of the ideology or, more urgently, critically interrogate the hegemonic purpose that it serves. This is crucial, in my view, for just as James McKee (1993) lamented the failure of assimilation-minded sociologists to predict the racial upheavals of the 1960s and 1970s, I fear that like-minded sociologists are not grasping the centrality of race in Asian and Latino groups’ lives and thus not considering the big picture that is America’s racialized system. As I have argued, U.S. relations with Asian nations have profoundly shaped the social treatment of Asian Americans (e.g., Espiritu 1997, 2003); therefore, the bubbling tensions with “evil” North Korea and the threat of China’s and India’s global dominance will likely bring renewed attention to the Yellow Peril and Asian Menace. But if we sociologists neglect this historical and perpetual inequality, then we have failed to grasp the fullness of our reality. Similarly, if we do not grasp how white racial dominance has depended on racializing *all* non-white groups in different and related ways (Kim 1999), we as a society will never get past ranking each other’s oppressions to meet the core need of dismantling the racial system that ultimately hurts us all.

Notes

1. I put “race” in quotes to denote its socially constructed character.
2. I thank Charles Gallagher for this point.
3. At the same time, Yen Espiritu (2003:47) makes clear that marginalized groups like Asian Americans in the United States have never been fully excluded. Rather, she believes that US groups of color have undergone “differential inclusion” at the hands of elite White America.
4. Much of these data come from Lai and Arguelles (2003).
5. In addition, many Asian groups conform to age hierarchies whereby the first generation members are the leaders of the communities, even if they are not as English-fluent and able to navigate US society as their offspring. The first generation is therefore central, not peripheral, to the fate of Asian America more broadly.
6. “Taking America’s Pulse” Survey 2000, 2005.
7. 2001 “American attitudes toward Chinese Americans & Asian Americans: A Committee of 100 Survey.”
8. 1993 Los Angeles Times Poll cited in Taeku Lee (2000).
9. The information in this paragraph comes from Taeku Lee (2000).

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