Use and Abuse of Race and Culture: Black-Korean Tension in America

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They hope I don’t pull out a gun and try to rob their funky little store, but bitch, I gotta job.

So don’t follow me up and down your market
Or your little shop-suey ass will be a target of the nationwide boycott
Choose with the people
That’s what the boy got
so pay respect to the Black fist
Or we’ll burn down your store, right down to a crisp
and then we’ll see you

‘Cause you can’t turn the ghetto into Black Korea

—from Ice Cube’s “Black Korea”

ICE CUBE’S 1991 album Death Certificate was boycotted by Korean American community leaders, who said it contained lyrics that peddle bigotry and violence. In south central Los Angeles, on March 18, 1991, a black teenager, Latasha Harlins, was shot and killed by a Korean grocer, Soon Ja Du, in a dispute over a $1.79 bottle of orange juice. Superior Court Judge Joyce Karlin fined Du $500, put her on probation, and ordered her to perform 400 hours of community service. While few killers are granted such an easy sentence, there was no reason to send Du to jail, said the judge. She was not a menace to society. The African American community of Compton rose up in anger. “You shoot a dog,” they said, “and you go to jail. You shoot a black kid and you get probation.” Committees were formed and rallies held.

The media described this Los Angeles controversy as a racial confrontation between blacks and Koreans.

Headlines in the Los Angeles Times announced: “Boycott: Business Has Plummeted in a Store Where Korean American Owner Killed a Black Man”; “Korean Stores Firebombed; 2 of 3 Hit Have Seen Black Boycott”; “Blacks Won’t End Korean Store Boycott.” An editorial in the same paper stated that protesters may feel they have a legitimate gripe, “but in the long run, boycotts rarely address the real, core problem and only add to community tension” (1991c).

In this portrayal of the controversy, one needs to ask what and who are missing here. Where, for example, are white people in this interpretation of the conflict? Are Koreans simply another “white” group? What kind of racial discourse or structure is the media creating, and what role does race play in this conflict?

In contrast to the media’s focus on race, black and Korean community leaders explain tensions in terms of culture. They claim that cultural differences account for the majority of the disputes involving merchants and customers. In addressing a boycott in New York, a Korean Human Relations staff member testified:

Korean merchants’ seeming attitudes toward their customers are the source of many tensions. . . . It is their frustration . . . they appear arrogant and rude. . . . Western culture is very open. It is kind, always smiling, that is the tradition. But we are very different. If a Korean woman smiles at an unknown man we would think she is a prostitute. Even if they don’t smile it is not their intention to be rude or arrogant . . . they are not trained to smile.

While there are some real cultural differences between Korean merchants and African American residents, it is questionable whether these differences are the root of the problem.

Whereas community leaders emphasize culture and the media focus on race, scholars have stressed the importance of structural forces in race relations—for instance, the commercial role of minority merchants. Korean merchants, when they operate outlets that serve as the intermediary between a local population and individuals in economic and political power, play a role similar to that of other ethnic minorities in third-world colonies. Middleman theory orients us to the conflict-ridden relationships between customers and merchants of different ethnic backgrounds. Although the middleman minority concept is a useful starting point for understanding the role of Korean merchants, the situation is far more complex.

The emergence of conflict among nonwhite minority groups has been explained as the direct consequence of increasing immigration and major changes in the social, economic, and demographic structure of American society that place minority groups in competition for scarce and valuable resources (Johnson and Oliver 1989). Although economics may be at the base of potential conflicts, the problems between Korean merchants and black buyers are also social, because these roles are strongly defined along racial-ethnic lines (Ong et al. 1994). This conflict is further heightened by racially based and racially distinct perceptions and misperceptions (Stewart 1991), and by sharp cultural and linguistic differences, which produce a gulf of misunderstanding.

Black-Korean conflict is not only about economics but also about meanings. The clash of values and meanings happens in the context of a power relationship. “Inequality and hierarchy come already embedded in symbolic systems as well as elaborated through
contextualized material practice” (Yanagisako and Delaney 1995:ix–x). Douglas Massey and Nancy Denton’s American Apartheid (1993) shows how whites develop a tangible stake in their whiteness through residential segregation. More recently, David Palumbo-Liu (1994) examined the white media construction of race relations in the aftermath of the Los Angeles uprising, showing how Koreans are deployed as surrogate whites in black-white conflicts. Here, I want to explore how white racism is reconstructed in the context of black-Korean tension.6

African Americans and Korean Americans in South Central Los Angeles

Tensions between Koreans and African American residents have developed in inner-city neighborhoods during the past two decades. Tensions between white, especially Jewish, merchants and African American residents in New York City have existed since the 1920s and were evident in the riots of the 1960s. However, the circumstances of conflict now are different from the 1920s and even from the 1960s. The increasing numbers of Asian Americans and Latin American immigrants living or working in inner cities as a result of the Immigration Act of 1965 complicate the political situation in ghetto areas.7

Race has shaped and been shaped by U.S. politics (Omi and Winant 1986). But the changes in south central Los Angeles have occurred in the context of post-civil rights racial politics. Although race continues to be important in America, racial oppression has declined over the last half-century. However, this waning of oppression is not a linear, irreversible process (Espiritu and Ong 1994:297). In fact, with the restructuring of the global order and the recurring economic crises in the United States, racially motivated state policies and hate crimes are once again on the rise. In the 1980s the Reagan administration attempted to reverse the political gains of the 1960s racial minority movements. The current attack on affirmative action has had effects in south central Los Angeles.

Disinvestment has occurred not only in the private sector but also in the public sector.8 Under successive Republican administrations, the federal and state governments withdrew funds for community-based organizations, thus undermining key institutions in the community. As in many other inner-city communities throughout the nation, the state abandoned the War on Poverty in South Central long before poverty was eliminated. The combination of New Federalism and declining dollars for community action led to increasingly scarce funds for social programs in depressed neighborhoods (Logan and Harvey 1987). The deindustrialization of America, accompanied by the flight of American capital, plant closings, and further transnationalization of capital flow and labor migration, has intensified the suffering of the urban poor.9

Analyses of the political economy of south central Los Angeles show a community that has been increasingly isolated, politically and economically, from mainstream society. As the traditional industrial core of the city, South Central bore the brunt of the decline in manufacturing employment, losing 70,000 high-wage, stable jobs between 1978 and 1982. Major companies such as General Motors, Goodyear, Firestone, and Bethlehem Steel closed plants in or around the area (Johnson et al. 1992). According to a study by the United Way, a total of 321 plants or industries left the area over a 15-year period. The 1990 census shows that approximately one in three South Central residents lived in households with incomes below the official poverty line, a rate over twice that for the county as a whole. In 1990, only 59 percent of adults (ages 20–64) in South Central worked, 16 percentage points lower than the rate for the county (Ong and Research Group n.d.).

During this period of growing poverty and oppression for inner-city blacks, Korean immigrant merchants entered urban neighborhoods where the cost of starting or purchasing a business was relatively low.10 Korean Americans opened small businesses by relying on various sources of sociocultural capital, the Korean traditional financial system based on the kye (rotating credit association), and, to some extent, capital brought from Korea, as well as family labor and educational resources. As new immigrants they experienced downward mobility, from employment as white-collar professionals in Korea to small business owners in America. This was due to a combination of language and cultural barriers, nontransferable professional credentials, and discrimination in workplaces.

In Los Angeles, one in three Korean immigrants operates a small family business with few or no employees. According to a study by the Korean-American Grocers Association (KAGRO), there were 3,320 Korean American–owned liquor stores and markets in Southern California, with annual sales totaling $1.8 billion. In south central Los Angeles, a predominantly African American and Latino community, the NAACP estimates that up to 70 percent of the area’s gas stations are now owned by Koreans. Korean business leaders report that as many as one-third of the community’s small markets and liquor stores are Korean-owned. However, in the county of Los Angeles, the proportion of Korean business ownership in black neighborhoods accounts for only 10 percent of all Korean businesses.11
class neighborhoods in Los Angeles, including Koreatown. Despite their volume of business ownership in South Central, most Korean American merchants reside outside the area. In addition, despite the popular portrayal of Korean Americans as a model minority, they have little political power or wealth.

Construction of Race and Ethnicity among Korean Immigrants

Koreans believe themselves to be more civilized than any other people except the Chinese. Jeongdük Yi (1993:20) reports that Koreans dismissed whites as yangi, Western barbarians, until the late 19th century, when Korea was confronted by the military power of the supposedly inferior yangi and waenom (a derogatory term for the Japanese). After the turn of the century, whites occupied a higher position in the Korean conception of the world racial hierarchy because of their superior economic, military, and political power. Since 1945, the predominance of U.S.-educated Koreans in government and business and the presence of the U.S. Army in South Korea have contributed to this conception (Yi 1993:21). The pervasive American cultural presence in South Korea, especially since the Korean War, has influenced Korean immigrants' racial attitudes. The experience of running small business enterprises also helps to structure Koreans’ emergent ideologies of race and ethnicity. While some develop elaborate conceptualizations of the United States as a multiethnic society, others develop simpler notions—for example, the lighter one’s skin, the better one is treated.

For Koreans operating small businesses, interethnic encounters arise in their day-to-day operations. Business proprietors become aware of their subordinate position to white Americans in the U.S. system of ethnic stratification. They recognize their role in replacing white American small business proprietors via “ethnic succession” and understand that whites are aware of this as well. In the United States, many Koreans experience discrimination as an ethnic minority for the first time, and some unfortunately reapply the treatment they receive to other minorities.12

In the current urban turmoil, African Americans have picketed and boycotted Korean merchants in South Central and complained about being overcharged and not treated with respect. In 1991 the Brotherhood Crusade, a vocal black organization headed by the charismatic Danny Bakewell, organized a boycott against Chung’s Liquor Mart. Earlier, Tae Sam Park, the owner, had killed Lee Arthur Mitchell during an attempted robbery. What prompted the protest was a belief that the killing was unwarranted because Mitchell had been unarmed. There were further deaths on both sides, culminating in the looting and burning of Korean businesses during the Los Angeles crisis of 1992.13

The Instigating Role of Whiteness in Black-Korean Conflict

The African American–Korean American discourse is a triadic relation, not a dyad. It begins with their respective relationships to whites, and it puts Asians, in particular Koreans, in a paradoxical position in U.S. race relations. The triad is exemplified by the court’s sentencing of Korean immigrant shopkeeper Du for shooting black teenager Harlins. Despite the fact that a gun was used, Judge Karlin, a white woman, argued that the rules against probation should not apply in the Harlins-Du case. The judge stated three reasons that this was an unusual case, thus justifying Du’s lenient sentence:

First, although the basis for the presumption against probation is technically present, that is, a gun was used, I find that it does not apply. The statute [Pen. Code, 1203, subdivision (e)(2)] is aimed at criminals who arm themselves and go out and commit crimes. It is not aimed at shopkeepers who lawfully possess firearms for their own protection. Secondly, the defendant has no recent record, in fact, no record at all of committing similar crimes or crimes of violence. Third, I find that the defendant participated in the crime under circumstances of great provocation, coercion, and duress. [Daily Appellate Report, April 23, 1992:5315; emphasis added]

Racial inequality is routinely played out in judicial sentencing, usually in favor of whites against blacks. Blacks know well that whites who kill blacks get less rigorous sentences than blacks who kill blacks, and they know that blacks who kill whites get the most stringent sentences. Given this racialized formula, black community members could see that storekeeper Du got judicial treatment as a white because she killed a black. They could also see that she would have been sentenced as a black had she dared to kill a white. An African American male, a 26-year-old United Parcel Service carrier, explained:

Soon Ja Du should not have shot Latasha. If Latasha was another race, such as white, I do not think Soon Ja Du would have received a light sentence. I believe that Soon Ja Du thought that she could get away with it. Tension exists between the two groups because the Koreans have their stores in the black neighborhoods and do not employ blacks. Blacks have to shop at the Korean stores because they are in their neighborhoods. Members of Korean descent are different. Koreans have stereotypes of blacks from television.
An African American female graduate student states clearly:

The role of race is high. The tensions have always been there and the last straw has broken the camel's back. The judge was unfair. A black postal carrier received six months in jail for beating a dog, but this woman receives probation for killing a human. The police and government officials have a code among themselves: Cover each other's ass. They avoid accountability and do not like to take responsibility for their actions. I do not trust cops.

These comments contrast with Korean merchants' evaluation of the role of race. Several of them indicated that race was not a real factor in a situation between a shopkeeper and a customer, and they felt that the media had injected race into a situation where it was not relevant. A 52-year-old grocery market owner and former pharmacist in Korea, Mr. Kim, maintains:

This Du Soon Ja incident has nothing to do with race. This is not so much a racial confrontation but rather a problem between merchants and customers. I see cultural differences as contributing to similar conflicts. I find fault with the American media. They kept spreading a message along racial lines and exaggerated the incident in order to satisfy themselves, which is often their job. It is like doctors who keep warning you that you are ill.

Similarly, many Korean merchants believe that for many years the mainstream media has inflamed the rage and passion black people feel toward Koreans through superficial, insensitive, and unbalanced coverage of incidents involving customers and shopkeepers. Kapsen Lee, editor of Korea Times, English Edition, wrote:

First, the media unduly emphasized the Korean ancestry of Du, thus, indirectly and perhaps inadvertently, contributing toward a negative image of Korean Americans in the eyes of Black people. Second, it played into the hands of those whose vested interest it was, and is, to exploit such fallacious images. [1994:255]

Unraveling “Culture”

Korean merchants attribute the main causes of these incidents to social and cultural differences—difficulties with merchant-customer communication, poverty in the African American community, situational or psychological factors, or the media. African American residents, despite their awareness of cultural differences, do not. In conflicts, the role of culture emerges in four different ways: (1) Korean Americans’ approach toward business, (2) black and Korean Americans’ perceptions of each other’s cultures, (3) the impact of the dominant society’s discourse on black and Korean relations, and (4) the social construction of race by both Koreans and blacks, mediated by the dominant cultural discourse. Here I present Korean shopkeepers’ views first, then move on to African American ones.

Mr. Kim actually had known the Du family before the incident. His assessment of the shooting implicates the cultural traditions informing Korean Americans’ approach to business. Their reliance on family labor means that individuals work long hours, a stressful situation that leads to fatigue and irrational responses.

That shooting occurred as they were overworked and under lots of stress. They might be too tired to control themselves even over very trivial things. Like other Korean immigrant families, Mr. Du relied upon family labor, especially his wife, Du Soon Ja. I find it problematic to rely on family labor heavily. You might save some money on wages, but you do not realize that family members force themselves to work beyond their capability. I know it from my own experience with running a drugstore in Korea. That’s why I do not allow my wife to work here. Mr. Du used to be in full feather, and always went to the bank and took part in other activities in the Korean community. Therefore, it was always Mrs. Du who ran the store. They own another store. In this context, I really want fellow Koreans to reflect on the way they operate their stores. Even a small store should hire at least part-time local help, if possible African Americans, instead of just exploiting family labor.

Another grocer, Mrs. Song, feels overwhelmed by difficulties in running a small business in a poor urban neighborhood. Nonetheless, she tells us that the dominant society, through mass media, can amplify interracial tension in a shopkeeper’s store by focusing on shootings and boycotts involving Korean merchants and black customers:

Even this morning a customer threatened us, mentioning a possible boycott. I am very scared. I do not want to cause trouble. If they do damage to goods, it is hard for me to be pleasant toward them. We try to treat and serve our customers, but sometimes they just expect us to serve them better. However, too much has been reported, and the media aggravated the whole matter.

In exploring the issue of culture, I asked my interviewees to describe themselves and their culture, and to show how their culture is similar to and different from other cultures. The shared and yet problematic opinion was that Koreans have more culture than blacks. References to “more culture” or “less culture” or “no culture” revealed popular notions of culture different from anthropological ones. Reflecting these notions, Mrs. Song compares Korean American culture with African American culture in the following way:

We are enlightened not to steal, unlike African Americans in this neighborhood. Their parents do not pay attention to their children’s education. Especially, since doing busi-
necesses in this south central L.A., I found that they do not have jobs. Lack of employment—they usually do not work.

Mr. Pai differs from others in that he has some structural understanding of African American history:

I try to understand them better. Thanks to their civil rights movement, we Koreans, as *yakso minjok* [a lesser nation], are able to live now in America. As blacks have been oppressed for a long time, they have accumulated their hostility toward others, including us. Both Koreans and blacks are the same. However, our social background and way of thought are drastically different from theirs. For example, as far as children's education is concerned, it is common for Korean parents to sacrifice themselves to educate their children, which you cannot find either among whites or blacks.14 White parents do their duty to a certain extent but not fully like Korean parents, and black parents seem to ignore their children's education. For example, I raised my children to go to graduate school. In addition, strong family ties and respect for their parents are virtues, which one cannot find in America due to its welfare system.

While sharing some sentiments expressed by Korean shopkeepers, Jennifer, an African American woman, explains cultural differences as follows:

They [Koreans] have more of a culture than Americans. They are not yet Westernized. They have rituals. They believe in Buddha. They have Buddhas in their stores and offer food to the Buddhas. I went into a nail salon. It freaked me out when I saw the Koreans worshipping Buddhas in the store. Koreans have a culture. We do not. I cannot speak African or Jamaican.

Here, culture becomes something foreign to America.

### Racial and Cultural Discourses

Through their assumptions and ongoing constructions of race and culture, blacks, Koreans, and white institutions interpret black-Korean conflict in different ways. Blacks attribute problems to racist exploitation and discrimination, Koreans focus on business practices and communication, and the white establishment reflects the biases of capitalism (property owners over customers) and a white-Asian-black racial hierarchy.

Meanwhile, the media-led discourse portrays black-Korean conflict as a racial confrontation yet describes the details largely in terms of cultural differences, seldom mentioning the lack of public policy that deals with urban problems such as racism and poverty. Whether the media blame it on race or culture, their coverage is ahistorical. They further racialize black-Korean tension by conveying black intolerance of Koreans, which fuels Korean merchants' perspectives. At the same time they contribute to Koreans' negative portrayal of African Americans through stereotypical images of blacks. They reify and misrepresent the nature of interethnic tension by ignoring the historically situated social process that lies behind it.

The mass-media portrayal is interpreted differently by Koreans and blacks. In the view of many Korean Americans, the media's frequent showing of the videotape of the Harlins killing and the constant refrain of "the Korean-born grocer killing a black teenager" sowed the seeds of social conflict. They wondered whether there was a conspiracy among the white-dominated media to pit one ethnic group against another and then sit back and watch them destroy one another. For many African American viewers, the same videotape reminded them that the criminal justice system is grossly unjust to the black community. Indeed, in the Harlins-Du case, the judiciary system applied a racialized formula. As a consequence, black-Korean tension was more drastically intensified by state intervention than by the actions of blacks or Koreans.

In addition to the white media and judiciary, educational institutions also construct an exclusionary public sphere. Here, Korean merchants lack an understanding of the alienation of African Americans from public education. Although Korean merchants have become skeptical of the way the media handle black-Korean conflict, they have not expanded this insight into an understanding of the judiciary or educational system. Nor do they seem to understand the structural linkage between white media, the court system, and educational institutions.

State agents, such as Judge Karlin in the Harlins-Du case, are major players in the development of racial tension. As David Goldberg (1993:11) argues, the state plays the role of articulating, legitimating, elaborating, and transforming racialized expression and racist exclusion, and in rendering them acceptable. One result is that racial discourse has been confused with and replaced by cultural discourses. Here it is important to note the emergence of a new definition of race, replacing old concepts based on biology:

Race is coded as culture, what has been called "the new racism," making no reference to claims of biology or superiority...[this is] a style of cultural self-construction that is not just nostalgic but future oriented, not simply static but transformative, concerned not only with similarity and continuity but also with difference and rupture. [Goldberg 1993:73]

Since neither blacks or Koreans want to be criticized for racial bigotry, they attribute their conflicts to cultural differences. Korean community leaders can ignore their own responsibility by emphasizing the right
to private property. African American community leaders can ignore broader issues by emphasizing maltreatment by Korean merchants.

Anthropological conceptualizations of culture give insufficient attention to problems of power and social conflict (Wolf 1982). My interviewees' cultural conception is along the line of Gramsci's proposition that "cultural processes unfold within a sharply divided society, a hierarchy of class domination backed by political power. Culture becomes part of the process of domination" (Alexander and Seidman 1990:6).

Rudeness, lack of smiles, and other bad manners of Korean merchants have been explained as cultural baggage from Korea. Do Koreans have such elements in their culture? Let us take the example of the smile. All of my Korean merchant interviewees worked 7 days a week and often 16 hours a day—112 hours per week. Some said, "We are too tired to smile and be nice to our customers." Nonetheless, smiling must be studied in relation to the gender, class, and historical backgrounds of Koreans. For instance, if a woman is from the countryside, she tends not to smile in encounters with strangers. Given the fact that most new immigrants are from the cities and have professional backgrounds, this argument cannot be applied. I contend that if they ran businesses in middle- or upper-income neighborhoods in America, they might smile lest they be treated badly by affluent white customers. But most likely they do not smile in ghettos.

Koreans value themselves and explain their successes in terms of having "more culture" (family unity, ethnic solidarity, education) than blacks. Blacks also present Koreans as having more culture than themselves. Nevertheless, as Eric Wolf (1994:7) reminds us, culture is changing and manifold, not a fixed and unitary entity. As in the case of black-Korean conflict, cultural differentiation produces a politics of meaning. Though there is some grudging respect, there is also the implication that people with strange rituals and unknown Asian beliefs are in some sense not like "us" Americans. It would seem that the more American you are, the less culture you ought to have. Is the assumption that being deculturated is what being American is all about, and that therefore Koreans with their cultural richness have fewer claims to belong?

At the same time, the continuing black-Korean conflict is contributing to the creation of a new racial discourse: race as culture. This conflict focuses on relations between African Americans and Korean immigrant merchants, but it evokes larger issues: the reproduction of capitalist relations in contemporary America and the redefinition of race and culture in today's multiethnic society.

Notes

Acknowledgments. I thank Wendy L. Ng, Allen Johnson, Thomas Burgess, and anonymous reviewers for their valuable comments. I also thank Glenn Omatsu for editing assistance and suggestions. A modified version of this paper was presented in the Faculty Colloquium Series, Asian American Studies Center, UCLA, February 6, 1992. I appreciate the assistance of Caroline Kim, Jeff Saito, and Kathleen Kim in my research.

3. Ella Stewart (1991) documented the communication problems that Korean merchants/employees and black patrons have with one another. "Korean respondents most frequently mentioned loudness, bad/false language, and shoplifting as inappropriate behaviors exhibited by Black patrons. . . . By comparison, Black patrons most frequently described Korean merchants/employees' negative attitude and being watched constantly, as well as throwing money on the counter as inappropriate behaviors" (Stewart 1991:16-17).
5. I draw on recent historical scholarship that has focused on the role of white racism as a hidden element in creating an exclusionary public sphere. Works such as David Roediger's Wages of Whiteness (1991), Alexander Saxton's Rise and Fall of the White Republic (1990), and Michael Rogin's (1992) article about The Jazz Singer, along with Michael Omi and Howard Winant's Racial Formation (1986), examine the roots of racism and its different manifestations in different time periods.
6. For my ethnographic research, I focus on the geographical area of Figueroa Street to the east, Western Avenue to the west, the University of Southern California to the north, and 90th Street to the south. A total of 30 African Americans and 19 Korean American small business people were interviewed. Most of the interviews focused on the 1991 Soon Ja Du–Lataasha Harlins incident. Most African American interviews were obtained at African American-run businesses such as hair salons and barber shops, and most Korean American interviews were collected at their stores, mainly liquor stores and grocery markets.

Korean merchants were receptive, with certain exceptions, toward the Korean American researcher. As expected, African American residents showed various responses. Some were glad to talk to us, a group of multiracial researchers. While one researcher interviewed an African American woman, the other people in the hair salon became very curious about the research. They began to ask questions, and soon others wanted to be interviewed as well. Another man was interviewed while he styled a patron's hair. The place was filled with excitement and laughter. Everyone had something to say, and it became difficult to interview just one person. Others whom I met on the street were quick to show their anger. A lady shouted to me, "Yeah, that's the treatment for a colored woman's death. Bullshit! I already sent a letter to request the judge's recall. That's all I can say." However, it was remarkable to see many others.

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respond very calmly with a historical view of this tragic incident.

7. For the case of Harlem, see Yi 1993; on the tensions between Jewish merchants and African American residents in New York City, see Naison 1984 and Malcolm X 1989 [1964]:283. The 1965 Immigration Act abolished “national origins” as the basis for allocating immigration quotas to various countries, finally placing Asian countries on equal footing with other nations.


10. See Light and Bonacich 1988 and Park 1990 regarding their business practices.

11. According to Professor Eui-Young Yu, the customer base of Korean-owned businesses throughout Los Angeles is 48 percent white, 22 percent Korean, 17 percent Latino, and only 10 percent African American (quoted in LA Weekly 1992).

12. Koreans in Japan have experienced severe discrimination; however, the Korean experience in Japan is not often mentioned in relation to the Korean American experience. Perhaps Korean Americans tend to view the Korean experience in Japan in terms of Japanese colonialism, a different context from the Korean American experience.

13. For instance, since January 1, 1990, at least 25 Korean American merchants have been killed by non-Korean gunmen (Los Angeles Times 1992). However, I argue that these statistics rhetorically serve activists and leaders in both communities, and have little to do with race per se. Because many merchants in South Central are Koreans doing business in an African American community, any urban violence, including murder, automatically involves both groups.

14. I suspect this is true only of Koreans.

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Conceptual Differences between Mexican and Peruvian Archaeology

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THROUGHOUT THE 20th century the archaeologists of Mexico and Peru have selected different analytical categories to organize their understanding and discussion of the past. They have given special emphasis to two categories out of an ensemble of concepts used in Latin America since the Enlightenment.1 These categories are “civilization” and “culture.” Mexican archaeologists have emphasized the concept of civilization in their descriptions of the country’s past, whereas Peruvian archaeologists have usually framed their accounts in terms of culture. By this I do not mean that Mexican archaeologists have never used the term culture or that Peruvians have never deployed the word civilization. I mean that their analyses are typically framed in terms of one concept rather than the other.

The distinction was maintained even through the 1950s and 1960s when the accounts of Mexican and Peruvian archaeologists were rooted in the language of evolutionism and economic growth. It began to wane in the mid-1970s as both countries fell under the neoliberal policies of the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank. In the wake of this catastrophe archaeologists in both Mexico and Peru came increasingly to view commerce as the motor that underwrote stability, development, and progress but perhaps not change.

The reason for the difference, I believe, rests ultimately on the fact that political domination and hegemony were not exercised in the same way in Mexico and Peru during most of the 20th century (Patterson in press a). My historian colleague Peter Gran (1992, in press)—building on the observations of Marx, Lenin, and Gramsci—would argue that the power structures of Mexico and Peru and the intellectuals who served them developed along different roads. Florencia Mal- lon compared the development of two roads or trajectories that were set in motion around the turn of the century. In her view, while the Mexican state incorporated parts of various popular agendas, the Peruvian state marginalized and repressed them (1995:311–317).

The fact that hegemony and power relations developed differently in the two nation-states during the 20th century has had a number of consequences. One is that Mexican intellectuals and politicians spoke about a national mestizo culture that was forged as various regionally based popular agendas were brought under the umbrella of the state. This was the sign of progress toward a higher, more refined or civilized stage of development (Sáenz 1939). In contrast, Peruvian politicians and intellectuals viewed the existence of regionally based peoples and their agendas—Indian cultures that they called the “Indian stain”—as an impediment to national unification and progress (Mariátegui 1971[1928]:22–37). Another consequence is that the Peruvian state appeared less stable than the

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