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## Education and Labor Relations: Asian Americans and Blacks as Pawns in the Furtherance of White Hegemony

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# EDUCATION AND LABOR RELATIONS: ASIAN AMERICANS AND BLACKS AS PAWNS IN THE FURTHERANCE OF WHITE HEGEMONY

Xiaofeng Stephanie Da\*

*Asian Americans and Blacks have been, and continue to be, racialized relative to each other in our society. Asian Americans and Blacks have come to occupy marginalized positions as the polarized ends on the economic spectrums of education and labor relations, with an expanding "Whiteness" as the filler in the middle as Whites manipulate the differing interests of both subordinated groups to align with White (the dominant group's) interests. Although Whites purport to champion the interests of one subordinate group over the other, in reality the racialization of Asian Americans and Blacks in our country is rooted in the preservation of White hegemony; this racialization is harmful to both subordinate groups and serves to reinforce White hegemony by exploiting areas of White privilege and domination, particularly in the context of education and labor relations. However, many mainstream theories and historical attempts to characterize the racialization of Asian Americans and Blacks (the theory of a monolithic form of racism that just happens to result in differing effects on Asian Americans and Blacks, the theory of a Black-White binary, the racial triangulation of Asian Americans against Whites and Blacks, and the "model minority" myth) fail to fully describe and capture the different positions within a multidimensional social hierarchy that Asian Americans and Blacks occupy. Therefore, we must look beyond these theories in order to fully understand race relations and the position of Asian Americans and Blacks in our society.*

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## INTRODUCTION

Asian American and Black racial identities, as distinct subordinated racial groups in our society, developed throughout the years against the background of mainstream White society. Mainstream theories often explain the relationship among different races by focusing on Whites and Blacks as opposite ends of the socioeconomic ladder.<sup>1</sup> “[T]he [B]lack/[W]hite paradigm has played a leading role in shaping race discourse and ideology in the United States . . . .”<sup>2</sup> However, this “ordering” assumes a single socioeconomic hierarchy, does not adequately account for the multidimensional spectrum of social and economic hierarchies, and thus should not be the end of the inquiry. In the realms of education and labor relations, Asian Americans<sup>3</sup> and Blacks<sup>4</sup> continue to occupy different posi-

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1. See, e.g., *THE BLACK-WHITE TEST SCORE GAP* (Christopher Jencks & Meredith Phillips eds., 1998) (supporting the theory that Blacks’ inferior scores compared to Whites on standardized tests are more the result of nurture rather than nature); RICHARD ROTHSTEIN, *CLASS AND SCHOOLS: USING SOCIAL, ECONOMIC, AND EDUCATIONAL REFORM TO CLOSE THE BLACK-WHITE ACHIEVEMENT GAP* (2004) (supporting the theory that economic disadvantages widen the student achievement gap between Blacks and Whites); Ransford W. Palmer, *Reparations and the Black-White Income Gap*, 6 HOW. SCROLL SOC. JUST. L. REV. 71, (2003) (supporting the Black/ White paradigm by focusing on the income gap between Blacks and Whites).

2. Janine Young Kim, *Are Asians Black?: The Asian American Civil Rights Agenda and the Contemporary Significance of the Black/White Paradigm*, 108 YALE L.J. 2385, 2395 (1999).

3. The definition of “Asian American” is broad and is often understood to encompass “Asians” as well as “Pacific Islanders” (as defined by the U.S. Census Bureau). According to the U.S. Census Bureau:

“[A]sian” refers to those having origins in any of the original peoples of the Far East, Southeast Asia, or the Indian subcontinent including, for example, Cambodia, China, India, Japan, Korea, Malaysia, Pakistan, the Philippine Islands, Thailand, and Vietnam. “Pacific Islander” refers to those having origins in any of the original peoples of Hawaii, Guam, Samoa, or other Pacific Islands. The Asian and Pacific Islander population is not a homogeneous group; rather, it comprises many groups who differ in language, culture, and length of residence in the United States.

Terrance Reeves & Claudette Bennett, *The Asian and Pacific Islander Population in the United States: March 2002*, 1 U.S. CENSUS BUREAU MAY 2003, available at <http://www.census.gov/prod/2003pubs/p20-540.pdf#search=%22asian%20definition%20difference%22>. Although the majority of the research used in this paper—and therefore the analysis of the paper itself—primarily focuses on “Asians” and not “Pacific Islanders,” this focus is not intended to be dismissive of the important cultural, ethnic, linguistic, and other differences that exist between different subgroups of “Asian Americans.”

4. According to the U.S. Census Bureau, “Black” or “African American” means “[a] person having origins in any of the Black racial groups of Africa. It includes people who indicate their race as ‘Black, African Am[erican], or Negro,’ or provide written entries such as African American, Afro American, Kenyan, Nigerian, or Haitian.” U.S. Census Bureau, *State and County QuickFacts*, [http://quickfacts.census.gov/qfd/meta/long\\_68176.htm](http://quickfacts.census.gov/qfd/meta/long_68176.htm) (last visited Oct. 11, 2007).

tions within a multidimensional social hierarchy. As a result, the two racial minorities are often viewed as polar opposites and continue to be racialized relative to each other (in the process of racialization, racial groups are categorized and differentiated on the basis of race and are perceived of in a racial context).<sup>5</sup> The two groups occupy different positions on the socioeconomic ladder based on this racialization.

However, I posit that current and historical approaches to the racialization of Asian Americans and Blacks fail to adequately portray the position of both groups. The theory of racialization as an open-ended process with resulting disparate effects on different groups (adopted by scholars such as Omi and Winant and described below), as well as the theory of racialization as a single one-dimensional Black-White bipolar hierarchy (adopted by scholars such as Okiihiro and Matsuda and described below), fails to fully describe the current racial classification of Asian Americans and Blacks in education and labor relations. I further contend that the alternative theory of the racial triangulation of Asian Americans against Whites and Blacks<sup>6</sup> is also deficient because it fails to capture the present conditions and status of both subordinate groups. I propose that on the social and economic spectrums of education and labor relations, Asian Americans and Blacks have become the polarized ends, with an expanding "Whiteness" as the filler in between. Whites are viewed as the mainstream players in the middle of the spectrum, while Asian Americans and Blacks are marginalized on the ends. The resulting message to society is that "[W]hite culture [is] the majority culture as well as the favored culture. White is normal. Whiteness is desirable."<sup>7</sup> This paper will focus on how the racialization of Asian Americans and Blacks is harmful to both groups and serves to reinforce White hegemony by exploiting areas of White privilege and domination, particularly in the context of education and labor relations.

#### A. *The Racial Playing Field*

The current racial field<sup>8</sup> of power can be analogized to a multidimensional battle field with different groups lobbying for positions of power and dominance over others. This battle field metaphor aids in understanding the struggle of minority racial groups in a majority-dominated society that

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5. See Dictionary.com, <http://dictionary.reference.com/browse/racialization> (last visited Oct. 11, 2007).

6. Claire Jean Kim, *Racial Triangulation of Asian Americans*, 27 *POL. & SOC'Y* 105 (1999) (contending that the position of Asian Americans is defined only with respect to the position of Blacks or Whites, as Blacks and Whites are the two fixed points against which Asian Americans are measured).

7. FRANK H. WU, *YELLOW: RACE IN AMERICA BEYOND BLACK AND WHITE* 318 (2002).

8. See Kim, *supra* note 6, at 106–08 (discussing the "field of racial positions").

results in success for only the White majority. If different racial groups are represented by different game pieces on this field, then the number of game pieces attributed to each race should be proportional to that group's categorical makeup in society. Based on the 2000 U.S. census, out of 100 battle pieces, Whites would have approximately 75 pieces, Blacks, approximately 12 pieces, and Asian Americans, approximately 4 pieces.<sup>9</sup> Already short on players, minority groups must constantly jockey for favorable positions to define their positions relative to other minorities.

Majority group players also have an interest in ensuring that no racial minorities will form coalitions and coordinate uprisings against the dominant group. To prevent this resource pooling, members of the majority group attempt to factionalize and foster distrust between and among subordinate groups in order to decrease risks and threats to their own dominance. "The *Chicago Defender* explained that Chinese and Japanese learned from racist America, having been 'taught to scorn [Blacks] or lose the little footing [Chinese and Japanese] may now boast,' . . . Japanese shunned [Blacks] in an attempt to avoid the stigma of inferiority that [W]hites had placed upon [B]lacks."<sup>10</sup> Similarly, Blacks came to resent Asian Americans, because Blacks viewed themselves as "American citizen[s] whose American residence and citizenry reach further back than the great majority of the [W]hite race . . . [having] from the beginning contributed a full share of the glory and grandeur of America . . . [while viewing Asian Americans as] the eleventh hour comer . . . [who] is claiming the privilege of [Blacks] who have born the heat and burden of the day."<sup>11</sup> Nobel laureate Toni Morrison even described Asian immigrants as having made it "on the backs of [B]lacks."<sup>12</sup> As a result factions are created, and minority groups each face an uphill battle against the dominant group that is actually the common source of their oppression. The zero-sum game enforces the notion that groups are evaluated and racialized relative to one another, and that racial relations do not exist in a vacuum. "Although the most powerful always have the most to say in defining it, this field is continuously contested and negotiated within and among racial groups, both at the elite level and at the level of popular culture and

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9. U.S. CENSUS BUREAU, U.S. SUMMARY: 2000 (2002), available at <http://www.census.gov/prod/2002pubs/c2kprof00-us.pdf>. (Note: the 2000 census accounts for Hispanics/ Latinos separately from the method used to account for Whites, Blacks, and Asian Americans. Therefore, when combined with individuals who identify as more than one race, total percentages for Whites, Blacks, Asian Americans, Hispanics, and others together exceed 100%.)

10. GARY Y. OKIHIRO, MARGINS AND MAINSTREAMS: ASIANS IN AMERICAN HISTORY AND CULTURE 55 (1994).

11. *Id.* (quoting KELLY MILLER, THE EVERLASTING STAIN 163 (Associated Publishers 1924)).

12. WU, *supra* note 7, at 336 (citing Toni Morrison, *On the Backs of Blacks*, in ARGUING IMMIGRATION: THE DEBATE OVER THE CHANGING FACE OF AMERICA 97, 97-100 (Nicholaus Mills ed., 1994)).

everyday life."<sup>13</sup> When Whites redefine the positions of Asian Americans and Blacks on this racial playing field in a way that best suits White objectives, they instigate a struggle between and among the minority groups that each struggle to gain battle field position and power for their own group.

### B. Defining the Actual Players

Due to the fluid nature of minority positions on the racial playing field, it is difficult to characterize which group in society represents each of the different groups on the battle field. It may be convenient to conclude that if White elected officials, journalists, scholars, community leaders, and business elites represent the dominant players in the game,<sup>14</sup> then recent immigrants, ethnic communities, poorer communities, and disenfranchised people must represent the subordinated minority groups. However, any attempt to characterize the representatives of these minority groups is inherently flawed since one of the basic characteristics of minority groups is that they lack proper representation in society.

Assume the battlefield plane is defined by a superior-inferior axis as well as an insider-foreigner axis (see Figure 1).<sup>15</sup> In the context of Asian American and Black positions along these axes, Asian Americans are viewed as more "superior" than Blacks, although certain language, cultural, and other barriers degrade them to perpetual "foreigner" status.<sup>16</sup> On the other hand, although Blacks are culturally recognized and accepted as American (and therefore "insiders" in the United States), they are often viewed as "inferior" to many other races in other respects.<sup>17</sup> This means that although the minority players are racialized differently from each other, they are at the same time racialized relative to the positions of other minority groups in society. Claire Kim states that, "[a]s a normative blueprint for who should get what, this field of racial positions profoundly shapes the opportunities, constraints, and possibilities with which subordinate groups must contend, ultimately serving to reinforce White dominance and privilege."<sup>18</sup>

History provides evidence of the shifting roles of minority groups and their relative positions within society, and how the majority has helped in constructing these roles for its own benefit. For example, in the 1800s Whites characterized Asian Americans as intellectually inferior in

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13. Kim, *supra* note 6, at 107.

14. *Id.*

15. *Id.* at 107-08.

16. *See id.*

17. *See id.*

18. *Id.* at 107.

order to justify denying Asians Americans equal access to education.<sup>19</sup> Currently, Asian Americans are characterized as intellectually superior and are used by Whites as an argument against affirmative action programs for minorities. Similarly, Black slaves in America were portrayed as childlike, “happy-go-lucky” people<sup>20</sup> who needed the guiding hand of their White masters in the past, and are now portrayed as street thugs and troublemakers<sup>21</sup> in order to rationalize the strict scrutiny that they receive by law enforcement. Subordinated racial minorities (Asian Americans, Blacks, Hispanics, among others) have seen their roles in society change with the times; the players on the racial battle field and their positions on the battle field shift as transient alliances form and break apart. To better understand the role of Asian Americans and Blacks in our society, we must analyze the past and current characterization of the two races.

## I. CRITICISM OF HISTORICAL APPROACHES TO THE RACIALIZATION OF ASIAN AMERICANS AND BLACKS

### A. *Monolithic Processes and the Black-White Binary*

Current racial scholarship examines the racialization of Asian Americans and Blacks from different approaches (scholar Claire Kim cites two theories that each examine and describe racialization differently).<sup>22</sup> One approach, adopted by scholars such as Michael Omi and Howard Winant, examines racialization as a process that happened to result in different effects for different racial minority groups.<sup>23</sup> “Native Americans faced genocide, [B]lacks were subjected to racial slavery, Mexicans were invaded and colonized, and Asians faced exclusion.”<sup>24</sup> However, Omi and Winant’s theories fail to adequately account for and discuss the majority’s racialization of different minority racial groups *relative to each other*. “[T]he [W]hite man had a different set of fear reflexes for each race he was dealing with,”<sup>25</sup> and Omi and Winant’s theories seem to presume a single monolithic racism without closely scrutinizing the different forms of racialization and discrimination applied by Whites against specific minority groups throughout the years. Omi and Winant’s theories seem to assume

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19. See OKIHIRO, *supra* note 10, at 158–59 (stating that White supremacists characterized Chinese Americans as Mongolian barbarics).

20. See ERIC SUNDQUIST, *TO WAKE THE NATIONS: RACE IN THE MAKING OF AMERICAN LITERATURE* 272–77 (1993).

21. See WU, *supra* note 7, at 205.

22. Kim, *supra* note 6, at 107.

23. See MICHAEL OMI AND HOWARD WINANT, *RACIAL FORMATION IN THE UNITED STATES: FROM THE 1960S TO THE 1990S* 1 (Routledge 2d ed. 1994) (1986).

24. *Id.*

25. WU, *supra* note 7, at 131 (quoting TOM WOLFE, *RADICAL CHIC AND MAU-MAUING THE FLAK CATCHERS* 105–07 (1970)).

that different minority groups are racialized in a vacuum, removed from and unaffected by the discrimination and racialization of other minorities. In reality, as our society's racial groups and categories are becoming increasingly more diverse and less homogenous, this could not be further from the truth. Throughout history, the majority achieved its goals by typifying and combatting individual minority groups against one another. As a result, the racialization of any single racial minority group does not occur in a vacuum completely separate from the racialization of other racial minority groups as Omi and Winant's theories suggest.

Another approach, adopted by scholars such as Gary Okihiro and Mari Matsuda, recognizes a single scale of social and economic status and privilege, with Blacks on the bottom and Whites on the top.<sup>26</sup> Other racial minorities compete for positions along the middle. Under this approach, Asian Americans are an intermediate group set against the backdrop of the Black-White binary.<sup>27</sup> The fact that Asian Americans were neither White nor Black allowed them to occupy this middle ground; "[some Whites] saw the entrance of Asians as a way to insulate [W]hites from [B]lacks. Asians were simultaneously members of the nonwhite Other, despite their sometime official classification as [W]hite, and an intermediate group between [W]hite and [B]lack. . . . Asians 'bridged the gap between [B]lack and [W]hite . . .'"<sup>28</sup> Matsuda's classification of Asian Americans as a "racial bourgeoisie" further confirms the Black-White hierarchy recognized by Okihiro and Matsuda. However the bipolarity of a *single* socioeconomic scale of measurement with Whites on the top and Blacks on the bottom is deficient. As I will further discuss, Asian Americans were historically more privileged in certain areas of society than Blacks and less privileged in others. On one socioeconomic plane, while Blacks suffered from being labeled as inferior in areas such as education, intellect and economic well-being, Asian Americans have often been praised as the "model minority" for achieving successes that other minority groups should strive to emulate. On another plane, while Asian Americans suffered from being characterized as perpetual foreigners unable to fully assimilate into mainstream U.S. society, Blacks have enjoyed more privilege in this area as they are seen as less of a "foreign" face.<sup>29</sup> Thus, the fact that Asian American and Black racial identities have been constructed along more than a single socioeconomic plane further supports the idea that the single-dimension Black-White binary cannot fully explain the racialization of Asian Americans and Blacks.

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26. See Mari Matsuda, *We Will Not Be Used*, 1 ASIAN AM. PAC. IS. L.J. 79, 79 (1993); OKIHIRO, *supra* note 10, at 52-53.

27. See *id.*

28. OKIHIRO, *supra* note 10, at 52.

29. ANGELO N. ANCHETA, RACE, RIGHTS AND THE ASIAN AMERICAN EXPERIENCE 64 (1998).



“The challenge, it seems, is to find a way to talk . . . [about] the ‘other non-Whites’ in a way that appreciates both how racialization processes are mutually constitutive of one another and how they can unfold along more than one dimension or scale at a time.”<sup>30</sup> No monolithic form of racism can explain this, and the theory of a one-dimensional Black-White binary also fails to encapsulate the shifting positions of various racial minorities along the myriad of axes in the spectrum. Therefore, we must look beyond the simple Black-White binary in order to fully understand the niche that Asian Americans and Blacks occupy in fulfilling our society’s race classifications. Thus, a successful approach to this racialization process must look beyond the approaches advocated by Omi and Winant and Okihiro and Matsuda.

### B. Racial Triangulation of Asian Americans: Fact or Fiction?

Merriam-Webster’s Collegiate Dictionary defines triangulation as “finding a position or location by means of bearings from two fixed points a known distance apart.”<sup>31</sup> Those who subscribe to the theory of the racial triangulation of Asian Americans argue that Asian Americans are racially triangulated against Blacks and Whites because they occupy a position on the racial field with reference to the two other (Black and White) points.<sup>32</sup> “Racialization by association with [B]lackness and [W]hiteness endures . . . Asian Americans have stood on unstable ground between ‘[B]lack’ and ‘[W]hite,’ falling under the honorary [W]hite category in anti-affirmative action arguments, but considered constructive [B]lacks for the purposes of school segregation or antimiscegenation laws.”<sup>33</sup> The theory of the racial triangulation of Asian Americans is best understood by exploring the ideas behind racial triangulation.

According to Claire Kim, racial triangulation of Asian Americans occurs through the processes of “relative valorization” and “civic ostracism.”<sup>34</sup> The process of “relative valorization” is characterized by a dominant group assigning values to and constructing the identity of one subordinate group in relation to another subordinate group. The relationship between the subordinate groups is based on racial and cultural differences, and by constructing the identity of the subordinate groups in a way that furthers its own interests, the dominant group is able to be superior to both subordinate groups. Where Whites are the dominant group, they use relative valorization to dominate both Asian Americans and

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30. Kim, *supra* note 6, at 106.

31. Merriam-Webster Online Dictionary, <http://www.m-w.com/dictionary/triangulation> (last visited Oct. 11, 2007).

32. Kim, *supra* note 6, at 107.

33. Kim, *supra* note 2, at 2395.

34. Kim, *supra* note 6, at 107.

Blacks, but especially to dominate the latter.<sup>35</sup> For example, in the 1800s White lawmakers constructed Chinese immigrants as “alien, despotic, and backward”<sup>36</sup> (although they were still “lauded as superior to Blacks on cultural-racial grounds”)<sup>37</sup> while simultaneously constructing Blacks as “infantile, imitative, and cultureless.”<sup>38</sup> These racial constructions allowed Whites to oppress and to assert their domination over both groups. In “civic ostracism,” the dominant group (Whites) constructs one subordinate group (Asian Americans) as perpetual foreigners incapable of assimilating with Whites on racial and cultural grounds in order to ostracize that group.<sup>39</sup> Asian immigrants were characterized as both unfit for and uninterested in the American way of life, and “were also constructed as immutably foreign and ostracized from the body politic on these grounds.”<sup>40</sup> Civic ostracism also aids in the furtherance of White hegemony. Claire Kim argues that the two processes of relative valorization and civic ostracism work together to wedge Asian Americans in between Whites and Blacks and thus racially triangulates them. “Triangulated between Black and White, Asian Americans have been granted provisional acceptance for specific purposes, but they have never been embraced as true Americans.”<sup>41</sup>

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35. *Id.*

36. *Id.* at 109.

37. *Id.* at 110.

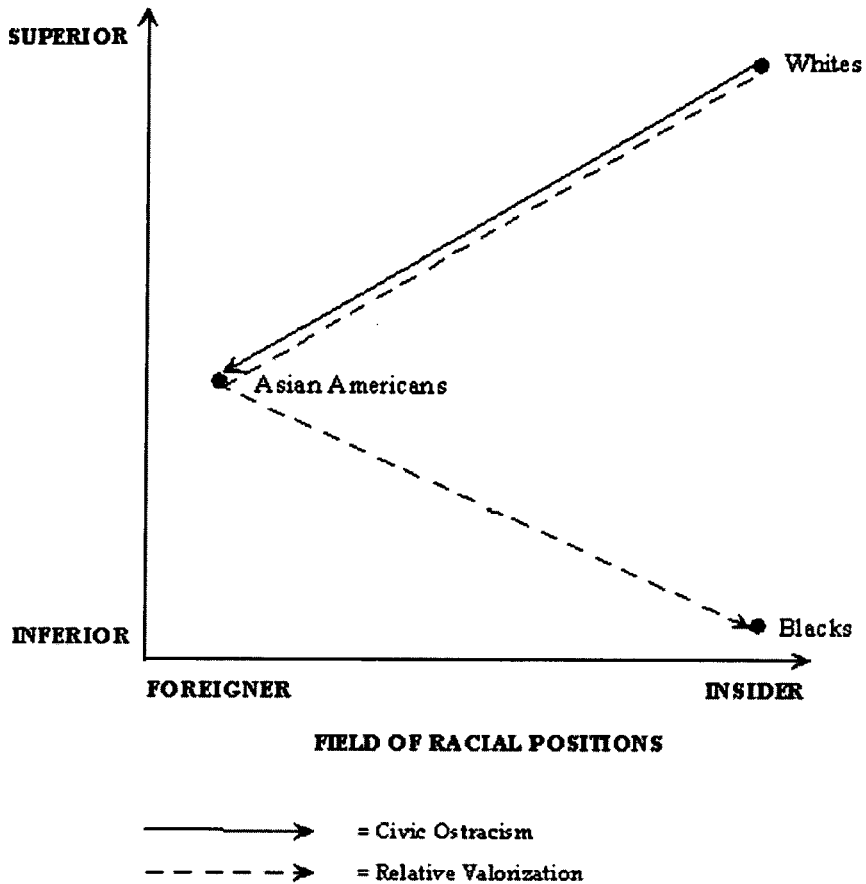
38. *Id.*

39. *Id.* at 107.

40. *Id.* at 112.

41. *Id.* at 129.

FIGURE I RACIAL TRIANGULATION



Graph taken from Kim, *supra* note 6, at 108.

As demonstrated on the graph, the two processes of relative valorization and civic ostracism are linked to and affect each other. "Functionally, the two . . . processes of relative valorization and civic ostracism work in a complementary fashion to maintain Asian Americans in a triangulated position vis-à-vis Whites and Blacks."<sup>42</sup> A change in either process would fundamentally shift the position of Asian Americans within the racial playing field.<sup>43</sup>

Claire Kim notes, "the field of racial positions (and racial triangulation specifically) reinforces White dominance in various ways and . . . White opinionmakers sometimes deploy it quite strategically in defense of

42. *Id.* at 107.

43. *Id.*

their own group's interest."<sup>44</sup> I agree with Kim that the jockeying for racial positions on the battle field serves to maintain and further White hegemony and that the dominant group takes steps to fuel tensions between minority groups to further the majority group's own interests. However, because the theory of racial triangulation posits that the position of Asian Americans is defined only with respect to and in relation to the position of Whites and Blacks, I do not agree that the status of Asian Americans and Blacks on today's multi-dimensional and multi-axial battle field can fully be explained by the racial triangulation of Asian Americans against Blacks and Whites.

Asian Americans and Blacks have always been racialized relative to each other and have been characterized as polar opposites in various categories. In the realm of education and intellect, Asian Americans are stereotyped and classified as a superior race while Blacks are classified as the inferior race. In the realm of labor relations, Asian Americans are stereotyped as the most diligent and hard-working race, while Blacks are stereotyped as a lazy race that lacks discipline. Therefore, Kim's triangulation theory which establishes Blacks and Whites as the two bookends on a spectrum and then positions Asian Americans between these two groups fails to adequately define the relationship among the three groups. Part II will discuss how, in reality, the racialization of Asian Americans and Blacks in the areas of education and labor relations actually results in these two groups occupying positions as the polarized ends on a multi-axial spectrum. Whites occupy a position in the middle, and the positioning of Asian Americans and Blacks as the two bookends serves to strengthen the "Whiteness" in between which expands to consume any gaps along the racial battlefield.

### C. *The Model Minority*

Many theorists use the "model minority" to explain the status of racial minorities in relation to each other (especially in relation to Asian Americans).<sup>45</sup> Subscribers to this "model minority" theory state that

[t]he Asian immigrants . . . started out in this country as persecuted pariahs and are now the new American achievers. There are obvious parallels between the success they know in their homelands . . . and the success they know as immigrants. It is difficult to avoid the conclusion that culture-positive values and attitudes about work, education, parental responsibility,

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44. *Id.* at 131 n.10.

45. See, e.g., David A. Bell, *America's Greatest Success Story: The Triumph of Asian Americans*, THE NEW REPUBLIC, July 15 & 22, 1985, at 28; William Petersen, *Success Story, Japanese-American Style*, N.Y. TIMES MAG., Jan. 9, 1966, at 20.

saving money, self-reliance, community- has played an important role in these success stories.<sup>46</sup>

Although the “model minority” concept is both inaccurate and disingenuous, it is crucial to understand the general “model minority” concept as well as the repercussions of this myth on both Asian Americans and Blacks in order to understand the specific effects of racialization on both groups in education and in labor relations.

Since the 1960s, Asian Americans have been racialized and constructed as the “model minority.”<sup>47</sup> This theory suggests that Asian Americans are a model group whose unique “cultural values of diligence, family solidarity, respect for education, and self-sufficiency have propelled it to notable success.”<sup>48</sup> Since its inception, and “despite an unending barrage of attacks, the model minority image has persisted . . . .”<sup>49</sup> However, Asian Americans do not exist in a vacuum as the “model minority,” and their “model” status is often contrasted with Blacks’ status in society. The characterization of Asian Americans as the race that other minorities (including Blacks) should strive to model themselves after inherently suggests that Blacks are responsible for their own failures in different aspects of society. This improperly places the blame on Blacks, and leads Blacks to become (understandably) “angry that Asian Americans are seen as the model minority, but recurring [Black] anger only fortifies the saintly aura of Asian Americans as that model minority.”<sup>50</sup> This reinforces the Asian “model minority” stereotype while ignoring the role that White hegemony plays in the social status of both Asian Americans and Blacks.

### 1. Failures of the “Model Minority” Classification

Members of the dominant group racialize Asian Americans as a superior minority group on one end of the spectrum, and suggest that other minority groups could be equally as successful with proper drive and diligence. However this mentality fails to account for the different types of racialization and discrimination that different minority groups have been subjected to in the past. Since the differing mechanisms of discrimination employed against different racial groups in our nation’s history have never resulted in “equal discrimination” or in similar effects among different

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46. LAWRENCE E. HARRISON, *WHO PROSPERS? HOW CULTURAL VALUES SHAPE ECONOMIC AND POLITICAL SUCCESS* 190 (1992).

47. See Gary Mar, *Are Asians Model Minorities?*, Apr. 29, 2006, <http://academic.udayton.edu/race/01race/model01.htm>.

48. Kim, *supra* note 6, at 118.

49. Lucie Cheng & Philip Q. Yang, *The “Model Minority” Deconstructed*, in *CONTEMPORARY ASIAN AMERICA: A MULTIDISCIPLINARY READER* 459, 464 (Min Zhou & James V. Gatewood eds., 2000).

50. Wu, *supra* note 7, at 73.

minority groups, the mindset of “If the Asians can do it, why can’t the Blacks?” is inherently flawed.

As such, the model minority theory is mythological. This characterization of Asian Americans is grounded in attempts to compare Blacks in a way that benefits White hegemony. At the same time, Asian Americans continue to face various forms of discrimination and have never been fully accepted by the dominant group (Whites) in society. Asian Americans have higher poverty rates than Whites.<sup>51</sup> Additionally, although Asian Americans on average have higher education levels than Whites,

[t]hey gain less money than [W]hite Americans on average for each additional degree. They are underrepresented in management, and those who are managers earn less than [W]hite Americans in comparable positions. . . . Even though Asian Americans are associated with education, they remain underrepresented even in higher education at all levels beyond students and entry-level teaching positions in a few departments. . . . Asian Americans generally are severely underrepresented throughout administrative ranks, from department chairs and deans to provosts and presidents.<sup>52</sup>

Asian Americans also remain victims of “outsider racialization”<sup>53</sup> since they are still seen as foreign faces who are and remain culturally unassimilable.<sup>54</sup> Outsider racialization is exemplified by the response of a sixty-six-year-old American-born Japanese man who was interviewed about being an Asian American in the United States, “I think of myself as Japanese American. The racism that I and my friends have experienced over the years is a constant reminder that I am different and will never be accepted simply as American.”<sup>55</sup> Fred Korematsu, a Japanese-American held in an internment camp during World War II, summarizes his experience with “outsider racialization” and its resonating frustration:

[A]ccording to the Supreme Court decision regarding my case, being an American citizen was not enough. They say you have to look like one, otherwise they say you can’t tell a difference between a loyal and a disloyal American. . . . As long as my record stands in federal court, any American citizen can be held

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51. *Id.* at 54.

52. *Id.* at 51.

53. ANCHETA, *supra* note 29, at 64–66.

54. Kim, *supra* note 6, at 118.

55. ANCHETA, *supra* note 29, at 127 (citing Bill Ong Hing, MAKING AND REMAKING ASIAN AMERICA THROUGH IMMIGRATION POLICY 1850–1990 180 (1993)).

in prison or concentration camps without a trial or a hearing  
 . . . if they look like the enemy of our country.<sup>56</sup>

Although *Korematsu v. United States*<sup>57</sup> was decided in 1944, the Supreme Court has never overturned its initial decision.

The “model minority” myth does not welcome Asian Americans as members of the dominant (White) society, leaving scholars to continue to debate the characterization of Asian Americans as the “model minority.” However, “[t]he myth’s teflon quality, its stubborn survival, suggests that its value lies less in truth telling than in erecting a racially coded good minority/bad minority opposition supportive of the . . . imperative to roll back minority gains while appearing nonracist.”<sup>58</sup> Whites benefit by portraying themselves as advocates for both Asian Americans and Blacks. On the one hand, Whites praise Asian Americans for achieving success despite their status as a subordinated minority group. This praise advances the underlying message that Asian American success despite systemic discrimination means that other minority groups (including Blacks) should not be entitled to government aid in order to achieve a similar success. “In other words, no amount of externally imposed hardship can keep a good minority down.”<sup>59</sup>

Although the “model minority” myth may serve Asian Americans in certain capacities, the myth uses the success of Asian Americans against Blacks<sup>60</sup> and simultaneously provides a justification for Whites to ignore the discrimination and oppression faced by Asian Americans. Scholar Robert Chang stated that, “[w]hile people usually concede that [Blacks] suffer from discrimination, they often question the extent or pervasiveness of it. For Asian Americans, however, people do not even reach the question of extent because the majority of Americans do not believe that

56. *Id.* at 63 (citing JUSTICE DELAYED: THE RECORD OF THE JAPANESE AMERICAN INTERNMENT CASES, 220–21 (Peter Irons ed., 1989)).

57. *Korematsu v. United States*, 323 U.S. 214 (1944), *reh’g denied*, 324 U.S. 885 (1945).

58. Kim, *supra* note 6, at 118.

59. *Id.* at 120.

60. Scholar Frank Wu comments,

Even if the praise of the model minority myth were genuine and not feigned in a particular instance, it cannot help but send a message about [Blacks]. [Blacks] know full well what the model minority myth is all about. In Spike Lee’s movie *Do The Right Thing*, a chorus of elderly [Black] men sitting in lawn chairs both respect and envy the Asian American shopkeeper across the street. The corner men . . . “have no steady employment, nothing they can speak of” except that “they do, however, have the gift of gab” and with the aid of a bottle “they get philosophical.” Watching the Asian American toil in his business, [one Black man] frets, “Either dem Koreans are geniuses or we Blacks are dumb.”

Wu, *supra* note 7, at 64 (quoting Spike Lee, *Do The Right Thing* 174 (1989)).

Asian Americans suffer from discrimination.”<sup>61</sup> The result of this racial classification allows Whites to dominate both Asian Americans and Blacks and to reaffirm White hegemony without the use of overtly racist tactics.

The theory of a monolithic form of racism that just happens to have differing effects on Asian Americans and Blacks, the theory of a one-dimensional Black-White binary, the racial triangulation theory of Asian Americans against Blacks and Whites, and the model minority theory all fail to adequately describe the position of Asian Americans and Blacks in our society in the realms of education and labor relations. Therefore, we must look beyond these theories to see how the two groups have been characterized as polar ends on a multidimensional socioeconomic spectrum, and how this characterization has (in both past and in present) resulted in the furtherance of White power and hegemony.

## II. THE RACIALIZATION OF ASIAN AMERICANS AND BLACKS IN EDUCATION AND IN LABOR RELATIONS

### *A. Education*

Construction of the racial identity of Asian Americans and Blacks in the realm of education finds deep roots in our nation’s history. In 1879, Charles Wolcott Brooks, former U.S. consul to Japan, addressed the Joint Congressional Committee hearings on Chinese immigration and stated,

[I] think the Chinese are a far superior race to the negro race physiologically and mentally. . . . I think that the Chinese have a great deal more brain power than the original negro. The negro[s]. . . mind is undisciplined and it is not systematic as the Chinese mind. For that reason the negro is very easily taught; he assimilates more readily. . . . The Chinese are non-assimilative because their form of civilization has crystallized[.]<sup>62</sup>

The above demonstrates the nineteenth-century mindset that Asian Americans were above Blacks but still below Whites in the realm of education and intelligence. Although the concept of a “spectrum” may convey the idea that positions along the spectrum are fixed, the realm of education is a type of situational racialized relationship where the different positions along the spectrum are fluid. In the past, Asian Americans “were regarded as a kind of inferior species . . . [and] could never be accepted as equals into the [W]hite community. And yet [Asian Americans] survived and eventually flourished until they came to be regarded as even

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61. Robert S. Chang, *Toward an Asian American Legal Scholarship: Critical Race Theory, Post-Structuralism, and Narrative Space*, 1 *ASIAN L.J.* 1, 35 (1994).

62. Luther W. Spoehr, *Sambo and the Heathen Chinese: Californians’ Racial Stereotypes in the Late 1870s*, 43 *PAC. HIST. REV.* 185, 198–99 (1973).



higher achievers, educationally and vocationally, than the [W]hite majority."<sup>63</sup> Thus, the education spectrum has evolved since the nineteenth century, and current societal views generally place Whites above Blacks but below Asians in the spectrum. Therefore, Asian American and Black educational positions cannot be explained by triangulation of Asian Americans since Asian Americans do not occupy a middle position between Whites and Blacks. Rather, Asian Americans maintain the superior position on one end of the spectrum, serving as a stark contrast to the racialization of Blacks as "the underclass" on the opposite end of the spectrum which relegates the latter group to being perpetual inferiors in the realm of education. Whites occupy a position in between Asian Americans and Blacks, and Whites racialize Asian Americans and Blacks relative to one another to the detriment of both minority groups in order to further White interests.

The racialization of Asian Americans as the "model minority" is most prevalent in education, where the opposing characteristics imposed on the Asian American "model minority" and the Black "underclass" are reinforced constantly in politics and in the media (see Table 1). White lawmakers recognize and praise Asian American success, but "pay lip service to intra-Asian diversity and anti-Asian discrimination even as they reiterate the same essentialized good minority/bad minority trope."<sup>64</sup> Asian Americans are characterized as a homogenous group in education (although they are in fact not)<sup>65</sup> because lumping all Asian Americans together produces the type of double elision between Asian Americans and Blacks which allows White lawmakers and educators to perpetuate their own agendas in the realm of education. The myth that all Asian Americans are identical "renders the oppression and discrimination of Asian Americans invisible"<sup>66</sup> in education as White lawmakers either intentionally or ignorantly disregard any deviations from the "model minority" stereotype because doing so allows lawmakers to further the interests of the dominant group.

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63. PHILIP E. VERNON, *THE ABILITIES AND ACHIEVEMENTS OF ORIENTALS IN NORTH AMERICA* ix (1982).

64. Kim, *supra* note 6, at 120.

65. See *Asian Immigrants in the Postindustrial Economy*, ASIAN NATION, <http://www.asian-nation.org/postindustrial.shtml> (last visited Oct. 11, 2007) ("Rather than being one homogenous category, the history of Asian Americans has evolved so that they now include families who have lived in the U.S. for several generations and have no connections whatsoever with their ancestral lands and languages along with those who just arrived on American shores yesterday, eager to start their new life. Asian Americans can also include those who are of one ethnicity, a mixture of two or more Asian ethnicities, multiracial (Asian in combination with White, Black, Latino, and/or American Indian), or mono-ethnic adoptees who were raised exclusively by non-Asians (mainly Whites)").

66. Harvey Gee, *Race, Rights, and the Asian American Experience: A Review Essay*, 13 *GEO. IMMIGR. L.J.* 635, 645 (1999).

TABLE I  
THE MODEL MINORITY VERSUS THE UNDERCLASS

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

Table taken from Kim, *supra* note 6, at 121.

Subscribers to this double elision theory argue that “Confucian-Americans’ (Chinese Americans, Japanese Americans, and Korean Americans) have imparted pro-work, pro-education, pro-merit values to the melting pot at a time when those values are much in need of revival.”<sup>67</sup> However the double elision theory must be classified as a myth because the attempt to classify “the model minority” and “the underclass” in the realm of education not only stereotypes, but assumes a homogenous racial group.

In the realm of education, the stereotypes perpetuated by this double elision theory are detrimental to the educational performance of Blacks. Psychologist Claude Steel has conducted studies on the existence of the “stereotype threat” that has emerged as a result of these stereotypes, and describes his findings:

[Blacks] who have done well in the past on standardized tests continue to do well on the tests, if they are told beforehand that [Blacks] and [W]hites have performed comparably. However, if they are told nothing or if they are asked merely to identify themselves by race prior to starting the test, their scores are lowered. They need not be told [B]lacks do less well than [W]hites, and nobody need intimate to them that they are under scrutiny. They already know full well that there is a racial gap that makes others suppose they are stupid, and that more rides on their performance than on that of [W]hites or Asian Americans. . . . [Blacks], especially those who value academic achievement, are plagued by “stereotype threat,” a fear, brought on by racial stereotypes, that they risk confirming images of

67. Kim, *supra* note 6, at 121 (citing HARRISON, *supra* note 46, at 221–23).

[B]lack intellectual inferiority. . . . “Blacks in America are like people on thin ice. Any little crack means a lot.”<sup>68</sup>

Additionally, the stereotypes perpetuated by the double elision theory are debilitating to the educational advancement of all students.

The [W]hite president of Stanford University related an apocryphal story about a professor who asked a [W]hite student about a poor exam answer in an engineering course, only to receive the comeback, “What do you think I am, Chinese?” The student body president of Berkeley has said, “Some students say that if they see too many Asians in a class, they are not going to take it because the curve will be too high.” A Yale student has said, “If you are weak in math or science and find yourself assigned to a class with a majority of Asian kids, the only thing to do is to transfer to a different section.”<sup>69</sup>

By forcing characteristics of diligence, discipline, strong family values, respect for authority, thriftiness, morality, self-sufficiency, and respect for education onto Asian Americans, the double elision theory creates an artificially high “norm” or “baseline” for Asian Americans, and discounts the efforts and struggles of Asian Americans who are able to achieve this “model minority” success. Similarly, by forcing the characteristics of laziness, lack of discipline, weak family values, criminal inclinations, inability to defer gratification, deviance, dependency, and tendency to drop out of school onto Blacks, the double elision theory creates an artificially low “baseline” for Blacks. This starting point suggests that Blacks have little incentive to strive beyond their “underclass” characteristics, and only reinforces societal stereotypes by creating the expectation that Blacks will perpetually remain inferiors. Scholar John H. McWhorter voices this frustration:

We are underestimating [B]lack people. Frankly it insults me . . . Chinese in San Francisco in the early 1900s can be tortured on the streets and barred from employment anywhere but in laundries, sweatshops, and restaurants and have their children be expected to reach for any bar. But pull a well-fed suburban black kid over for a drug check one afternoon and subject him to a couple of teachers who don’t call on him as often as other students and he’s forever subject to lower expectations.<sup>70</sup>

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68. Wu, *supra* note 7, at 153–54 (citing Claude M. Steele, *Thin Ice: “Stereotype Threat” and Black College Students*, ATLANTIC MONTHLY, August 1999, at 44).

69. *Id.* at 48.

70. JOHN H. MCWHORTER, *LOSING THE RACE: SELF-SABOTAGE IN BLACK AMERICA* 112 (HarperCollins 2001).

The model minority myth and the underclass myth are mirror images of each other which “affix the two groups in their respective places within the field of racial positions. By emphasizing internal sources of success or failure, both myths decisively shift attention away from structural determinants of group outcomes, including institutionalized White dominance.”<sup>71</sup>

### 1. Affirmative Action

The stereotypes posited by the model minority myth and the underclass myth also play a role in the debate over affirmative action. Affirmative action continues to be a central topic in the dispute over equal opportunities in education, and Asian Americans and Blacks continue to be racialized on opposite ends of this debate with resulting benefits to Whites. Historically, affirmative action aided in leveling the playing field between the dominant group (Whites) and minorities by providing benefits that unfairly disadvantaged groups would not otherwise have access to.<sup>72</sup> Affirmative action goals include remedying present effects of past discrimination, preventing ongoing and future discrimination, and encouraging inclusiveness and diversity within an institution.<sup>73</sup> Although the true battle in racial affirmative action should be characterized as a battle between Whites and non-Whites, by positioning Asian Americans and Blacks as polar ends of the “intellectual” and “education” spectrum, the battle lines are instead drawn between Asian Americans and Blacks. “Blacks become evil, Asian Americans saintly. When Whites then side with Asian Americans in an effort to push back Black political demands, they can come across as antiracist champions of the underdog rather than as acutely self-interested actors.”<sup>74</sup> This reclassification of battle lines weakens the validity of affirmative action as a tool to remedy past societal injustices and discrimination (a tool which was designed to focus on the battle between the majority versus the minority), and (incorrectly) shifts the focus to a battle between minority groups. As Frank Wu points out, affirmative action

pits Asian Americans against [Blacks], as if one group could succeed only by the failure of the other. Asian Americans are encouraged to view [Blacks], and programs for them, as threats to their own upward mobility. [Blacks] are led to see Asian Americans, many of whom are immigrants, as another group that has usurped what was meant for them. Indeed, Asian

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71. Kim, *supra* note 6, at 121.

72. See Dan Froomkin, *Affirmative Action Under Attack*, WASHINGTON POST, Oct. 1998, <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-srv/politics/special/affirm/affirm.htm>.

73. ANCHETA, *supra* note 29, at 158.

74. Kim, *supra* note 6, at 122.

Americans frequently are imagined as the beneficiaries of special consideration, although they almost always are excluded from race-based college admissions and employment programs.<sup>75</sup>

Although the dominant group (Whites) argues that Asian Americans would benefit the most from the abolishment of affirmative action programs in education, Whites are often the real beneficiaries in the affirmative action/ education debate.

While Whites outwardly lobby for Asian American interests on the one hand, they secretly discriminate against Asian Americans on the other. In the 1970s and 1980s the admissions programs of several prestigious universities were called into question when increasing Asian American application rates did not result in a comparable increase in admissions rates. One "smoking gun" memo, written by an admissions director at a nationally-renowned public university and leaked to the press in the 1980s, stated, "The campus will endeavor to curb the decline of Caucasian students. . . . A rising concern will come from Asian students."<sup>76</sup> Further investigation of admissions procedures led to findings of irregularities in some schools. Even UC Berkeley's Chancellor Ira Michael Heyman apologized for "disadvantaging Asians" in the admissions process.<sup>77</sup> White school administrators work behind the scenes with "secret quotas to keep down Asian admissions . . . because Asians are seen as destroying the predominantly [W]hite character of the university."<sup>78</sup>

However, emphasis on the racially classified and polarized positions of Asian Americans and Blacks in education shifted much of the public debate. The emphasis moved from the real issue—whether or not universities were placing quotas on Asian Americans in order to preserve the Whiteness of their student bodies—to the artificial issue of whether affirmative action programs protecting groups such as Blacks were unfairly discriminatory against Asian Americans and constituted "reverse discrimination."<sup>79</sup> By incorrectly equating quotas against Asian students with affirmative action programs, Whites are able to oppose affirmative action under the pretense of acting as an advocate for Asian American rights while simultaneously benefiting themselves. Therefore the model minor-

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75. Frank Wu, *Neither Black nor White: Asian Americans and Affirmative Action*, 15 B.C. THIRD WORLD L.J. 225, 226 (1995).

76. Grace W. Tsuang, *Assuring Equal Access of Asian Americans to Highly Selective Universities*, 98 YALE L.J. 659, 676 n.117 (1989).

77. Kim, *supra* note 6, at 136 n.83 (citing DANA TAKAGI, *THE RETREAT FROM RACE: ASIAN AMERICAN ADMISSIONS AND RACIAL POLITICS* 9 (1992)).

78. Matsuda, *supra* note 26, at 81.

79. Kim, *supra* note 6, at 123 (stating that Whites were able to "recast[] the opposition between Whites and non-Whites over affirmative action into an opposition between Whites and Asian Americans, on one hand, and Blacks, on the other.").

ity myth uses Asian Americans to protect White privileges from Black encroachment and from the use of affirmative action in education.

Additionally, the model minority myth is often used as an argument in the battle against affirmative action, and the portrayal of Asian Americans as

a model minority who have made it on their own cultural steam only to be victimized by the 'reverse discrimination' of race-conscious programs allows White opinionmakers to lambaste such programs without appearing racist—or to reassert their racial privileges while abiding by the norms of color-blindness. It allows them to displace what is fundamentally a White—non-White conflict over resources . . . onto a proxy skirmish between non-Whites, thus shifting attention away from the exercise of White racial power.<sup>80</sup>

Thus Whites are able to use the polarized positions of Asian Americans and Blacks to their own advantage in opposing affirmative action programs. First the "model minority" status and the hard work of Asian Americans is lauded in a way to suggest that other subordinated groups should not require or demand additional help from affirmative action. Then, when Blacks benefit from affirmative action, affirmative action is criticized as a type of "reverse discrimination" against the "model minority." Because Whites are able to champion the group whose interests align with their own, in the realm of education Whites are able to "[take] away from Asian Americans to give to Whites," but if challenged, to make the claim that they are "taking away from Asian Americans to give to [Blacks] (or to maintain diversity, meaning fewer Asian Americans and more [Blacks])."<sup>81</sup> This fallacious behavior allows Whites to pretend to champion the interests of both Asian Americans and Blacks while in reality working to undermine the interests of both subordinate groups. Frank Wu concludes,

[T]he real risk to Asian Americans is that they will be squeezed out to provide proportionate representation to [W]hites, not due to the marginal impact of setting aside a few spaces for [Blacks]. The linkage of Asian Americans and affirmative action . . . is an intentional maneuver by conservative politicians to provide a response to charges of racism. . . . Asian Americans and affirmative action should be understood as an issue which has been manufactured for political gains.<sup>82</sup>

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80. *Id.* at 117–18.

81. Wu, *supra* note 75, at 278.

82. *Id.* at 226–27.

Therefore, the debate over affirmative action allows the dominant group to use both Asian Americans and Blacks as mere pawns in championing their own interests (the abolishment of affirmative action programs that are detrimental to Whites) by manipulating the differing interests of both subordinated groups to align with White interests. Whites then utilize the polarized positions of Asian Americans and Blacks in order to maintain White privilege and hegemony.

### B. Labor Relations

Asian Americans and Blacks have been polarized and racialized relative to each other throughout our nation's history in the realm of labor relations. In the mid nineteenth century, even before the first Asian immigrants arrived in the U.S., diplomats and businessmen depicted and stereotyped Asians (particularly the Chinese) as foreign people with a backwards culture.<sup>83</sup> Political debates and public hearings barring the naturalization and inclusion of Asian immigrants further demonstrate the establishment of a negative Asian image in racial relations during this time.<sup>84</sup> The dominant group expected Asians to fill the role of laborers whose temporary employment would eternally be conditional upon their acceptance in society and the usefulness of their labor. East Coast newspapers at the time even stated "that while the Chinese were not biologically suited for America's melting pot, it would be foolish not to exploit their cheap labor before shipping them back to China."<sup>85</sup>

White businesses that wished to exploit Black labor often faced significant obstacles since many states voted to enter the Union as a "free" nonslave state. To ameliorate this obstacle, Whites acknowledged Blacks as "non-slaves" while simultaneously attributing Black attributes to Asian Americans in order to maintain the status of Asian Americans as inferior "non-Whites."<sup>86</sup> This method effectively deprived Asians of their political enfranchisement.<sup>87</sup> "[E]lites overtly constructed each racial group as a

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83. See STUART CREIGHTON MILLER, *THE UNWELCOME IMMIGRANT: THE AMERICAN IMAGE OF THE CHINESE, 1785-1882* 158-60 (1969).

84. See Kim, *supra* note 6, at 132 n.22.

85. MILLER, *supra* note 83, at 159.

86. During this period Asian Americans and Blacks were racialized relative to each other with Asian Americans being "negroized" or treated as "near [B]lack." See Dan Caldwell, *The Negroization of the Chinese Stereotype in California*, 53 S. CAL. Q. 123 (1971). Cartoons at the time often depicted the "heathen Chinee" character alongside the Black "Sambo" character and recognized the unassimilability of Asians (versus the relatively easier assimilability of Blacks). See *id.*

87. In 1854, California Supreme Court Chief Justice Murray reasoned that the term "Black" meant not just "negroes" but all non-Whites, including Chinese immigrants. *People v. Hall*, 4 Cal. 399, 403-04 (Cal. 1854). Justice Murray cautioned that if the Chinese were accepted as equal to Whites, they would be given

fixed cultural-biological entity and [then] justified [the minority group's] subordinated status accordingly."<sup>88</sup> Thus, Whites treated Asian Americans and Blacks differently, but adopting Whites' framing of the issue meant that both minority groups remained subordinate to the majority and mere pawns in the furtherance of White hegemony. This allowed White elites and leaders to preserve their dominance over Asians in a way that still enabled these leaders to maintain their opposition to slavery. A Southern journalist writing in 1869 summed up the goal of the dominant group at the time: "We will state the problem for consideration. It is: To retain in the hands of the [W]hites the control and direction of social and political action, without impairing the content of the labor capacity of the colored race."<sup>89</sup> Set against this backdrop, the civic disenfranchisement of Asian laborers made them useful pawns in maintaining White dominance over Blacks.

By recognizing Blacks as "non-slaves" (and giving them illusory rights and employment protections) on one end of the spectrum while characterizing Asians as unassimilable foreign laborers on the other end (who were not protected from unfair labor practices), Whites were able to use relative racializations of Asians and Blacks in favor of Whites. White employers exploited their Asian labor force while using the easy accessibility of this labor force to simultaneously exploit and displace Black laborers who were seen as less docile and therefore more troublesome.<sup>90</sup> During the Reconstruction Era, Asians were described as "more obedient and industrious than the negro, [able to] work as well without as with an overseer, and at the same time are more cleanly in their habits and persons than the freedman."<sup>91</sup> Whites placed Asian immigrants on one end of the labor scale and depicted them as diligent and obedient, while simultaneously placing Blacks on the other end and depicting them as lazy,

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[t]he equal rights of citizenship and we might soon see them at the polls, in the jury box, upon the bench, and in our legislative halls. This . . . is an actual and present danger. The anomalous spectacle of a distinct people . . . whose mendacity is proverbial; a race of people whom nature has marked as inferior, and who are incapable of progress or intellectual development beyond a certain point . . . between whom and [Whites] nature has placed an impassable difference, is now presented . . . [the] privilege of participating with us in administering the affairs of Government.

*Id.* at 404–05.

88. Kim, *supra* note 6, at 109.

89. JAMES LOEWEN, *THE MISSISSIPPI CHINESE: BETWEEN BLACK AND WHITE* 22 (1971).

90. One planter's wife stated, "Give us five million of Chinese laborers in the valley of the Mississippi, and we can furnish the world with cotton and teach the negro his proper place." ERIC FONER, *RECONSTRUCTION: AMERICAN'S UNFINISHED REVOLUTION, 1863–1877* 419–20 (1988).

91. Wu, *supra* note 75, at 231 (citing LUCY M. COHEN, *CHINESE IN THE POST CIVIL WAR SOUTH: A PEOPLE WITHOUT A HISTORY* 124 (1984)).



disobedient and less deserving of the opportunity to work. This permitted the dominant group to use the Asian workforce as a threat against Blacks who were not “diligent” or “obedient” enough, and to simultaneously exploit Asian laborers who were expected to live up to “Asian” work ethics.

These practices and characterizations encouraged the mentality that “[o]ne White man is worth two Chinamen; that one Chinaman is worth two negroes, and that one negro is worth two tramps,”<sup>92</sup> and served to further White power and hegemony.

Another example of the polarization of Asian Americans and Blacks in the realm of labor relations is the 1992 Los Angeles riots. Claire Kim defines how the tension between Asian Americans and Blacks served to further White hegemony:

White racial power decisively shapes the backdrop to such conflict by slotting Korean immigrants and Blacks into their respective places in the urban political economy. . . . Yet the mass media consistently interprets Black-Korean conflict as a morality play—or as the bad minority’s persecution of the good minority. By focusing on each group’s putative characteristics and deflecting attention away from the architectonic exercise of White racial power, this interpretive move works to depoliticize the conflict and delegitimize Black grievances about discrimination and racial inequality. Blacks come across as bullies picking on the little guy rather than as bona fide political actors challenging White dominance; Whites once again come across as antiracist champions of the underdog even as they protect their own institutionalized privileges.<sup>93</sup>

Prior to the riots, the media (usually controlled by the (White) majority)<sup>94</sup> paid only limited attention to the tension between Asian American (mostly Korean) shop owners and Blacks in Los Angeles. However, after the eruption of the riots the mass media quickly seized the opportunity to exploit the tensions between the two groups and to fuel the fire by filtering stories of interethnic conflict.<sup>95</sup> Again, Asian American and Black stereotypes led each group to view the other as threats. Blacks were stereotyped as lazy and quarrelsome. The underlying message suggested that Korean shopkeepers needed to watch out for Blacks in their

92. Arnold Shankman, *Black on Yellow: Afro-Americans View Chinese-Americans, 1850–1935*, 39 *PHYLON* 1, 5 (1978).

93. Kim, *supra* note 6, at 124.

94. See Wu, *supra* note 7, at 31 (stating that in a world in which Whites were oppressed and Blacks were powerful, in a society “flipped around from ours,” Blacks would control media images).

95. See Lisa C. Ikemoto, *Traces of the Master Narrative in the Story of African American/Korean American Conflict: How We Constructed “Los Angeles,”* in *CRITICAL RACE THEORY: THE CUTTING EDGE* 302, 306–07 (Richard Delgado & Jean Stefancic eds., 2000).

stores who were there to steal and cause trouble. Korean shopkeepers were portrayed as the “middleman minority” who gained some economic power through entrepreneurship. Blacks were encouraged to despise these immigrant shopkeepers for usurping a role and status that, based on the amount of time these immigrants had spent in the country, should have belonged to Blacks. The resulting tensions between the two groups again shifted the focus away from the real issue—the struggle between minority groups and the majority group responsible for their oppression. Instead, the focus shifted to an artificial struggle between the two minority groups, allowing the dominant group to once again shirk its responsibilities for the creation of the status quo.

The racialization of Asian Americans and Blacks in relation to each other served an essential function in strengthening the cohesiveness of the dominant group and in expanding the filler of “Whiteness” in labor relations. “African and Asian workers . . . were related insofar as they were both essential for the maintenance of [W]hite supremacy, they were both members of an oppressed class of ‘colored’ laborers . . .”<sup>96</sup> Asian immigrants in California attributed to creating a cohesive White racial identity among the Irish, German, Catholic, Protestant, urban and rural, immigrant and native labor force,<sup>97</sup> and “[t]he presence of Chinese in the Far West served generally to strengthen the position of [W]hite craftsman” because the Chinese were “always available for unskilled tasks, were excluded from entry . . . into skilled occupations [while] [a]t the same time their presence inhibited immigration to California of young and aggressive unskilled workingmen.”<sup>98</sup> While Asians were racialized as unassimilable (albeit diligent) foreigners, Blacks were racialized as lazy workers who needed to be replaced by more diligent (Asian) workers. By juxtaposing ‘diligent’ Asian workers against ‘lazy’ Blacks, Whites were able to preserve their dominance over Blacks while still maintaining a useful labor force. Thus, the polarization and racialization of Asian Americans and Blacks in relation to each other benefited Whites, who could then deflect responsibility for the subordinated groups’ social standings by blaming the downfalls of one group on the other.

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96. OKIHIRO, *supra* note 10, at 45.

97. See ALEXANDER SAXTON, *THE INDISPENSABLE ENEMY: LABOR AND THE ANTI-CHINESE MOVEMENT IN CALIFORNIA* 17 (1995) (stating that the non-Chinese labor force – Irish, German, Catholic, Protestant, urban and rural, immigrant and native – all shared “common denominators,” and that these shared elements of experience helped develop the unity of the White California labor force against the Chinese). See also *id.* at 261 (stating that the anti-Chinese crusade was used as a powerful organizing tool to unify Whites).

98. *Id.* at 263.

## CONCLUSION

The racialization of Asian Americans and Blacks in our country is rooted in the preservation of White hegemony, however historical and current attempts to characterize this racialization (the theory of a monolithic form of racism that just happens to result in differing effects on Asian Americans and Blacks, the theory of a Black-White binary, the racial triangulation of Asian Americans against Whites and Blacks, and the "model minority" myth) do not adequately explain race relations or the position of Asian Americans and Blacks in our society. Although Asian Americans and Blacks are both racial minorities and were both historically subordinated and discriminated against, the racialization and characterization of the two groups in our society extends beyond these similarities, is quite complex, and has resulted in the positioning of the two groups as the polar ends of various realms which comprise the multidimensional spectrum of social and economic status. This positioning provides a 'hierarchical order' to each of these different spectrums along which Asian American and Black identities have developed and shifted over the years.

However, shifting does not occur in a vacuum. The prejudices experienced by both groups result from systematic discrimination as well as from forms of discrimination that treat these groups differently based upon their polarized positions on the spectrum. Hence, theories such as Omi and Winant's which portray racism against the two groups as monolithic discrimination fail to fully encapsulate the situation. Theories such as Okihiro's and Matsuda's which recognize only a single spectrum of hierarchical order with Whites on top, Blacks on the bottom, and Asian Americans in the middle similarly fail to adequately describe the status of Asian Americans and Blacks. In reality, Asian Americans and Blacks are placed on opposite ends in the multidimensional spectrum of social and economic status. "Whiteness" acts as a filler between the two ends and expands into either end when Whites act in their own best interest while purporting to champion the interests of one subordinate group over the other. Asian Americans and Blacks are marginalized on the ends of the multidimensional spectrum, while Whites are the mainstream players in the middle. Whites serve as the puppeteers of minority race relations, tweaking the fluid racial hierarchies to further White hegemony while leaving in the dust a trail of minority factions and infighting as minority groups struggle to gain battlefield position on the racial playing field. Because racial triangulation of Asian Americans against Whites and Blacks similarly places Asian Americans in a "middle" position between these two groups, when in reality Asian Americans and Blacks are polarized on opposite ends of the spectrum, racial triangulation also fails to portray the relationship between the three groups in the realms of education and labor relations. Similarly, the "model minority" theory is a myth, and also

fails to accurately account for the positions of Asian Americans and Blacks in our society.

The racial oppression of Asian Americans “has as its starting point the enslavement and continued subjugation of [Blacks].”<sup>99</sup> Okihiro comments that Asian Americans and Blacks “are a kindred people, forged in the fire of [W]hite supremacy and struggle, but how can we recall that kinship when our memories have been massaged by [W]hite hands, and how can we remember the past when our storytellers have been whispering amid the din of Western civilization and Anglo-conformity?”<sup>100</sup> The fact that the two groups are racialized relative to each other and placed in polarized positions in education and in labor relations inevitably pits the two groups against each other as they compete for what is perceived to be limited resources. This shifts the focus away from the real issue of conflict between the dominant racial group and minorities. Whites benefit from the resulting conflict between Asian Americans and Blacks because it allows them to pick and choose their role as the champions of both subordinated groups. By siding with the interests of the group that are more aligned with their own (or even altering the interests of one group to be in line with their own), Whites are able to exploit the situation for their own gain and to preserve White hegemony, while “representations are struggled over and contested by those who are the objects of hegemony.”<sup>101</sup>

Additionally, the polarization of Asian Americans and Blacks against each other and the pitting of one group against the other results in negative stereotypes against both, which in turn leads to systematic racism against both minority groups. As a result, Asian Americans and Blacks continue to face racism in our society. While theorists such as Omi, Winant, Okihiro, Matsuda, and Kim have begun to address these issues, many available remedies have yet to fully redress the racism prevalent in the realms of education and labor relations, particularly in the legal context. However, the “proposition that racism is a permanent fixture in American life should not imply that racial justice is an impossibility, nor should it imply that the law cannot promote racial equality.”<sup>102</sup> In order to move toward racial equality, we must be cognizant of and recognize the status quo, but must also take steps to rectify the current paradigm which characterizes Asian Americans and Blacks as polar opposites of the multidimensional spectrum for the benefit of an expanding “Whiteness” in the middle.

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99. Kim, *supra* note 2, at 2401.

100. OKIHIRO, *supra* note 10, at 34.

101. *Id.* at x.

102. ANCHETA, *supra* note 29, at 171.

