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Notes Toward a Theory of Secondary Integration: Aporias of a Lost Paradigm

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Asian Americans' contributions and experiences add a unique dimension to the nation's ethnic mosaic. While they share many a commonality with other ethnic groups, excursions on the duality of their triumph and failure unfold a host of emerging issues in the study of post-industrial alienation. The premise of this article posits the Asian American experience in the context of secondary integration: a possible reality that, despite delimited access, allows space and humanity in the promised land.

You see now that the Takers and the Leavers accumulate two entirely different kinds of knowledge. . . . Now, you know that the knowledge of what works well for production is what's valued in your culture. In the same way the knowledge of what works well for people is what's valued in Leaver cultures. And every time the Takers stamp out a Leaver culture, a wisdom ultimately tested since the birth of [humankind] disappears from the world beyond recall, just as every time they stamp out a species of life, a life form ultimately tested since the birth of life disappears from the world beyond recall.

Daniel Quinn (1993: 206–207)

When appearance becomes a substitute for substance, life tends to lose its elemental quality. Ethnicity is more than appearance; it is a consciousness of the Being. Nonetheless, appearances ontologized by race, gender and class outweigh human essence and its meaning. The politics of objectivity thus obscures rational considerations; it demeans the purpose of democratic ideals.

I. Premise and Formulations

The diversity of Asian Americans is both a complex and confusing phenomenon.¹ While most Asian Americans—Chinese,

Japanese, Filipinos, Koreans, and Vietnamese—owe historical ties in military and economic affairs with the United States, South Asians by and large remain a product of the post-Kennedy immigration policy. Aside from being people of diverse colors and cultures, the commonality of their collective experiences presents certain challenges to the integrity of the American Creed. Henry James, in a letter, once observed that “It is a complex fate being an American.” Identity reconstruction is a daunting challenge if secondary institutions—the custodians of civility—tend to be regressive in a host culture (Mohan, 1989: 199–212). This article represents aporias of a lost paradigm: We the people, Americans, are one nation guided by a common destiny blessed by the American Dream.

The concept of secondary integration is postulated on the motif that the American Dream has a chameleon character. While its meanings vary to different people, its essence has lost its inherent egalitarian edge. This loss of national innocence is represented by a network of barriers that work against the normal processes of assimilation, i.e., acculturation and integration.² The Asian American experience is a byproduct of this irrationality; its vicissitudes represent the death of an ideal. The following discussion analyzes a reality that, while Kafkaesque to many Asians, remains beyond the consciousness of most other Americans.

Milton Gordon conceptualized the notion of ethnic subsocieties which relate to one another mainly through the secondary relations of their members (Gordon, 1964). Since “primary integration” is neither a goal nor a possibility in a pluralist society organized around the principle of race, the notion of “secondary integration” assumes both legitimacy and importance. Its relevance partakes of special meaning for new immigrants who are often alienated from main stream America. Thus secondary integration, a conceptual reality that seeks to humanize the process of assimilation in an otherwise alien culture, is at the heart of being Asian American; without its connection, Asians remain either Asians or non-Americans.

The American ethnic mosaic has changed during recent decades. The complexity of assimilation, unevenness of pluralism and ubiquity of conflict have radically transformed the design of the ethnic mosaic to which pluralists generally refer. The

emerging paradigm is a new reality: The Asian American experience is an undeniable duality of diasporic existence. Notes toward a theory of secondary integration signifies the salience of civility that harmonizes "secondary" institutional culture in the service of the American Dream. The feckless incivility of contemporary culture reminds us "to regress to Martin Luther King's ideal. The content of one's character, not the color of one's skin, is the sole American criteria" (Morrow, 1994: 106). Lance Morrow succinctly sums up:

At the Lincoln Memorial, Martin Luther King said he looked forward to the day—his "dream"—when his four little children would not be judged by the color of their skin but by the content of their character. He was right then, and now. But from the time of King's death to the present, the country has sunk deeper into the swamp, the essential error." (Morrow, 1994: 106)

While assimilation takes place in American society as an outcome of interpersonal contacts, people of color generally remain alienated seeking accommodation within an inhospitable environment of conflicts. Primary integration is, therefore, a restricted experience of privilege; secondary integration, however, is a functional reality dictated by the rules of an organizational society that legislates civility but accepts racism as a reality. In other words, Asian Americans' assimilation in society is subject to the logic of secondary integration that allows access to a limited extent before glass-ceilings begin to thwart full actualization of the American Dream. "New racism" has fundamentally altered the rules of a pluralist polity. When race becomes enmeshed in public policy issues—whether it is for the purpose of affirmative action or social welfare—political principles as well as prejudice come into play (Sniderman and Piazza, 1993). The politics of race has confounded the ideals of a democratic society in the interest of the privileged groups. This calculated access-withdrawal design is an organizational strategy of ethnic exclusion. The pervasiveness of this phenomenon is refuted only by a few exceptions. A general exclusionary behavior and policy mark the design of a new paradox: Limited assimilation of an "unwanted" "model minority." The perpetual resentment against the "middleman minorities" is a baffling situation. Thomas Sowell wrote: "Middleman minorities

are most hated where they are most needed" (quoted by Raspberry, 1993: 9B). William Raspberry observes:

The outrage, curious enough, is less likely to be directed at the wealthy classes than at the middleman minorities who may be only a step or two above poverty themselves. It's as though even their modest success is a rebuke to poor among whom they do business. (Raspberry, 1993: 9B)

This analysis reflects the hope and despair of an alienated voice who seeks survival with dignity in "the swamps of unreason" (Mohan, 1996a: 59).

The population of Asian Americans has nearly doubled during the last two decades. Demographics aside, they have collectively established themselves as a stable, "overachieving" minority whose contributions are generally recognized in business, academia, medicine, science and the arts. Yet, it seems, Asian Americans have become a victim of their own success: Their delimited access to the reward and recognition system of the host society leaves behind a source of constant stress and strain that has not been adequately explored, let alone analyzed, by many social scientists. Fairness in the reward system is a necessary agent in the lubrication of an otherwise rusty process of integration. Since people of color with alien origins tend to maintain their ethnic identities, primary integration will remain confined to the emerging new ethclasses. Secondary integration, however, serves as the main bridge in the process of Becoming American. The Asian Americans, however, confront a daunting situation. Clarence Page clarifies this paradox:

Today's persecution often consists of benign deafness to Asian complaints since Asian immigrants have a higher household income than the national average for whites. Often left out is the salient fact that, while Asian immigrant income is high, individual Asian immigrant income still ranks below the national average for working whites. (Page, 1995: 7B)

The process of secondary integration in America is fraught with circumstances and barriers that are inherently Un-American. Nonetheless, Asians' divergence and exclusion is as glaring as their visibility and success. The duality of this Asian American

experience is at the heart of a paradox. "X" may be the most accomplished professional in his/her field, but s/he cannot get a well deserved merit raise, let alone due promotion. In the promised land, Anti-Asian stereotypes and prejudices mar the ethos of Being American. Rampant discrimination against Asians goes unnoticed, unprotested, undocumented and unacknowledged despite a general awareness of the phenomenon. The futility of legal and professional recourse to justice is usually marked by the Asians' powerlessness to represent their grievance. The politics of equity is so well designed that Asians by and large remain unrecognized in the overall structure of the social justice system. It is ironic that even in a culture that rewards merit, the rules of the game are not evenly followed in the competitive market of talents. Criteria are often arbitrarily used and unfairly imposed at the expense of organizational productivity. While adversely affected individuals and groups silently suffer, society as a whole pays a heavier price.

The purpose of a theory is to formulate and explain a possible causal relationship of/and/or a phenomenon. Assimilationist conformity is no substitute for the secular homogeneity of secondary relationships that constitute the fabric of a civil order. A plausible theory of secondary integration seeks to unravel the contradictions of Asian American diversity. Notes toward such a theory help unravel the complexity of the hyphenated Asian American existence that represents a perplexing dualism between Being and Becoming. A glossy passport, an acquired accent, and a new environment are not enough to smoothen the rough edges of a competitive secondary culture. To ward off the undesirable consequences of a possible dysfunctional encounter, it is imperative that regressive behaviors are avoided through strategic self-engineering which implies: goal-substitution, sublimation, and creative perceptual reorganization. This adaptive behavior, however, is a coping mechanism at best; it also is an escape from reality. To better understand the dynamics of secondary integration, three formulations are proffered here; each one relates to the identity, the ethos, and the Being of Asian Americans.

1. The experience of Being Asian American is largely a function of voluntary decisions and migratory patterns and policies.

2. The prevalence of prejudice and discrimination against Asian Americans is an evidence of denial, dissonance, and double standards.
3. The integrity of the American Dream is best reflected in the performance and promise of America's oppressed people regardless of their color and origin.

These three premises lay down the structure of Asian American existence. A unified generalization is offered as the synthesis of this framework: In the backdrop of the traditional Black and White paradigm, Asian American dualism emerges as a new dimension of the pluralist society. The polyglot mahogany of Asian Indians, for example, adds color to American diversity and enriches the American spirit of self-reliance by its own Karma. Secondary integration, postulated as a vehicle against incivility, is a surrogate force of immense significance for the survival of the American Dream.

II. Diversity: Contact, Context, and Conflict

Diversity is an exterior of essence. Contemporary discourse on diversity is largely oppositional and dichotomous. This approach is "flawed because it has made the assumption that similarities between people are opposite from the differences between them" (Jones in Trickett, Watts, and Birman, 1994: 27). James M. Jones writes:

When he was asked to compare himself with his famous father Yogi, Dale Berra observed: "I am a lot like him, only our similarities are different!" . . . Specifically, the apparent nonrationality of this statement is so judged because of our cultural penchant for dichotomous, absolute logical thinking. . . . Our conceptual, methodological, and statistical approaches operate so that the more difference we discover, the less similarity we posit. Conversely, the more alike things are, the less different they are. (Jones, 1994: 27-28)

Asians are a conspicuous minority in America. Their appearance—color, collar, and creed—defines their basic character which, in most organizational settings, threaten the latent culture of localism and mediocrity. White America lives in a state of denial; Asian Americans cannot afford this luxury. They live in

a state of unmitigated ambiguity. Stoically, they bear the pain of exclusion, exploitation, and humiliation. Their suffering goes unacknowledged because they have neither advocates nor any protective avenues. This is in contrast with a fellow immigrant from Europe who receives instant acceptance. If s/he is an "under-represented minority," the system nearly adopts him/her. On the contrary, Asian Americans begin their journey in a rather cold, sometimes even hostile, environment. Since their plight does not evoke any white guilt, their problems remain their own. Eventually, in spite of so many cultural and political barriers, they survive. American pluralism does lend them a framework that helps maintain their basic security. In many cases, this strange hospitality of the host society is far better than the given conditions of their native land. A folded-paper sculpture of two bald eagles—symbolizing the dreams and nightmares of 300 Chinese immigrants—is a "still-unfolding story about the endurance of the American dream" (Hirshberg, 1996: 68–75). Chau Tsai-Yun's experience is documented by Charles Hirshberg and Gregory Heisler in *Life*:

Three years ago, the *Golden Venture* ran aground just a few miles from the Statue of Liberty and 300 Chinese immigrants crawled ashore hoping to find freedom in America. What they found instead were American prisons. . . . The Clinton administration was putting new teeth into its immigration policy, and polls showed most Americans approved. The *Golden Venture's* passengers began to run a bureaucratic gauntlet, which, for most, continues to this day. After a few months of imprisonment, one refugee would remark to a reporter: "The United States is a lot like China." (Hirshberg, 1996: 69–72)

Immigrants' saga for freedom beyond their own oppressive cultures is a glaring testimony to the loftiness of the sparkling American dream. I came to this country in 1975 with \$8.00 by Air France. My plight is nowhere close to Chau's. I may be one of America's text book success-failure stories. I had suffered worse discrimination in India than any place in America. However, I had both friends and foes there. I could fight and even win. In the United States, I have only acquaintances that do not go beyond a secondary contact. This realm of functional and shallow

secondary relationships is, nonetheless, crucial for my survival. With a few exceptional encounters, I still remain a stranger despite my twenty years of dedicated service. Appeals and protests have limited value; their strength in a political environment depends on the clout of the petitioner. A documented appeal may well offer a cathartic outlet, however, it is an impotent vehicle of recourse without political support. "Act locally," has become a motif of attaining instant success by thriving on the malignancy of the latent power. It is about time to change this euphemistic paradigm: we must think critically and act globally (Mohan, 1996b).

We are unlike other ethnic groups yet our similarities abound in countless ways. With the sole exception of African Americans, most of us came to the promised land voluntarily. Our diversities affirm our common commitment to the ideals of this nation. Unlike many others from Asia, I unequivocally support affirmative policies for the uplift of historically oppressed people. I have never made a claim, nor do I intend to do so now, for myself based on ethnic or other similar ground. I believe in hard work and I expect due recognition based on my merit. The problem arises when the quality of one's work and contributions is conveniently ignored and the appearance factor becomes a measure of humanity. This amounts to the perversion of the American Creed.

My humanity transcends my ethnicity. However, I have seldom come across an organization which would look at my resume from a color-origin-blind perspective. I am given a "minority" status without being a "minority." The contextual outcomes define my minority status. In other words, my humanity and productivity have lost their meanings in a system which is wedded to the constitutional guarantees against prejudice and discrimination. Each organization has its own work ethic and norms of behavior. Racist organizations, however, look at Asian Americans purely as functionaries devoid of humanity. We are "unwanted minorities" who are marginally accepted to perform a specific role at the lowest rate. Since our horizontal mobility is restricted due to lack of network, the old boys' culture muffles our vertical development under the shadows of glass ceilings. Apartheid is a strong term and slavery is much too strong a word. But I know cases where careers have been ruined when

eminent Asian scholars have been subjected to virtual academic slavery in the Ivory towers. Asian American acquiescence is a general phenomenon born out of fear, anxiety and insecurity. A neoplantation mentality characterizes certain organizational cultures. Social institutions that sustain such barriers to human equality promote *democracies of unfreedom* (Mohan, 1996). To the contrary, the arrogance of "super yankees"³ from Europe, South Africa, and Australia demonstrates the evidence of a privileged class which dwarfs the intensity of the traditional Indian caste system. In other words, a new caste system is developing in America; Asian Americans are the new victims of this oligarchy. Obviously Asian ingenuity is no match to the power of the "Wasp Ascendancy."⁴ Diversities, in such a hierarchical culture, promote "new sovereignties" (Steele, 1992) which are at best insensitive to the needs and aspirations of "strangers from different shores" (Takaki, 1989).

I was recently interviewing at a nationally prominent university for an administrative position. In a large public gathering mainly thronged by students, a female student asked: "A majority of us are females in this school. Why should we hire you?" Obviously the outcome of my interview was predetermined by my anatomical features. Feminism is fraught with its own contradictions. The system applies double—in fact multiple—standards when it comes to assessing the merits of different immigrant groups. Usually, African Americans, Jews and Asian Americans get a raw deal in the general drama of recognition and reward. Some groups are expendable. Their vulnerabilities, however, make a mockery of the system that prides itself on its civility.

Asian Americans' appeals for justice are usually ignored and overlooked. "Lack of communication" is euphemistically used as an alibi to justify blatant injustice. An Asian American once wrote a lengthy letter to an administrator protesting against his rude and arbitrary behavior. Instead of receiving a sympathetic hearing, the aggrieved author was crudely declared mentally sick. The officially commissioned diagnosis was based on the review of his memorandum which was replete with indignation and pain grammar. Documentation of acts and events of harassment, bigotry, and injustice seldom transcends a cathartic value because the system protects and promotes its own people. One tends to

give up if the guardians of equality and justice pamper the perpetrators. The echoes of silence convey an eerie message: "Why don't you go back to your own country?"

In 1986, I was invited to present a paper at the XI *World Congress of Sociology* (Mohan 1986) held in New Delhi. Also, on the heels of this congress, I delivered a paper to the XXIII *International Congress of Schools of Social Work* in Tokyo (Mohan, 1986a). In spite of pre-approved travel authorizations for both conferences, the Vice chancellor I reported to declined to reimburse any expenses, even the registration fee, on the ground that I "had gone over to India." "I did not go to India," I said. "I was invited to deliver a paper to the World Congress of Sociology which was held in New Delhi." The Anti-Asian travel allowance policy of an administration is not an issue here.⁵ The point I am trying to make is that even our best moments are sometimes tastelessly trivialized, arbitrarily rejected and ungraciously belittled in the interest of our competing rivals who subtly use 'race' by denying the prevalence of racism. In other words, our affiliation to and contact with our origin is used against us. We are shortchanged by our own diversity. The "conspiracy of silence," to use Clarence Page's expression (1996), exonerates the perpetrators and condones bigotry at the expense of America's new citizens.

White skin is worth more than any other color. Ted Koppel's recent investigation vividly showed how prevalent and explosive is the issue of race in America (ABC, 1996). African Americans' oppression is a staggering outcome of institutional racism and the legacy of slavery. Asian Americans are not slaves of the old system; they are servants of an organizational culture that needs them for particular roles and positions to a certain level. Beyond this functional necessity, their existence is a meaningless presence under the fabulous glass ceilings.

The promise and pitfalls of the American Dream have systemic implications for our children. Author Nicholas Lemann explores what happens when Asian Americans become the "new jews":

There is another ethnic group in America whose children devote their free time not to hockey but to extra study. . . . This group is Asian Americans. At the front end of the American meritocratic machine, Asians are replacing Jews as the No. 1 group. They are

winning the science prizes and scholarships. Meanwhile Jews, at our moment of maximum triumph at the back end of the meritocracy, the midlife, top-job end, are discovering sports and the virtues of being well rounded. Which is cause and which is effect here is an open question. But as Asians become America's new Jews, Jews are becoming . . . Episcopalians. Scratching out an existence in Phase 1, maniacal studying in Phase 2, sports in Phase 3. Watch out for Asian-American hockey players in about 20 years (*Slate in Time*, 1996: 16–17).

The primary immigrant of my generation may never see the Phase 3 but most of our children are unlikely to become Episcopalians. Their strife—thanks to the Jewish model—will remain confined to the secondary institution from the ivory towers to the hockey field. It is heartening to foresee the sprawling lush of Asian hockey; it's suffocating to feel the continued venality in the ivory towers. Few documented case studies are available about the magnitude of oppression that the Asian Americans suffer. However, there is no lack of evidence that the phenomenon is rampant on the campuses despite a general neurosis of denial. Derick Bell's *Faces at the Bottom of the Well* (1992) and Monte Piliawsky's *Exit 13: Oppression and Racism in Academia* (1982) allude to the tip of the proverbial iceberg.

Diversity, as a manifestation of "multiculturalism," is both transcendental and universal. According to Samuel Fleischacker it is deeply rooted in the Western tradition. J.G. von Herder, whom Fleischacker considers the founder of "multiculturalism" emphasizes a relativism that synthesizes nationalist and universalist elements at the expense of ethnocentrism:

We must look outside our own culture, he says, indeed to all the cultures in the world, to determine how and why our life is valuable, but he says this because relation is to be found precisely in that variety of views. And because he looks to *all* cultures as a source of revelation, rather than to *other* cultures as a consequence of the bankruptcy of the West, Herder manages to be simultaneously a nationalist and universalist, a promoter of German folk traditions and a denouncer of all, including German, ethnocentrism (Fleischacker, 1996: 18).

Post-industrial diversity is both functional and postcolonial. In the new world order one finds little room for myopic parochialism

and triumphal expansionism. Yet the reality is that internationalism and imperialism seem to overlap in the fog of the post-Cold War era. This dubious development of diverse cultures is thriving in the wallows of American pluralism. The emergence of "diverse" hues beyond the traditional black-white model, is changing the whole calculus and design. The paradigm lost is not this established pattern but the transcendental ideal of diversity that springs from Western tradition.

In celebrating the flowering of the diversity movement, some of us have lost sight of the affirmative-positive dimension of diversity. Instead, a cultist orthodoxy permeates the new culture of diversity where a valueless—or, let us say, a sectarian, parochial point of view—is the only way to approach. This perspective is unAmerican and anti-diversity. Freedom of ideology and/or religion does not absolve a particular group of its civic obligation to others. However, acceptance of wholesale diversity is "essentially a form of normlessness" (Longres, 1996: 159). John Longres has a point:

Diversity is not an inherent good, as the standard implies, nor is it an inherent evil. Diversity is a fact of social life. It leads to richness, as we so often hear in the social work literature, but it also leads inevitably to conflict. (1996: 158)

The politics of race, gender, and class has obscured the value dimension of diversity. Individuals and groups that do not "fit into" an established pattern instantly become pariahs of the emerging exclusionary culture which demeans ethnic groups that are alien to the established norms.

Asian Americans find America a fertile land of promises and disappointments. The future of their children as "new jews" is fraught with stereotypes that die hard. Their present is mired in a divisive culture that has increasingly become less tolerant. By and large, they all remain anchored in a past that is simmering in the subconsciousness of their dualistic existence. Secularization of culture may not be a panacea for all social ills but it is a preferable paradigm against the perils of incivility. New immigrants, especially from Afro-Asian countries, bring along with them a cultural baggage that is usually at odds with the latent elements of the primary institutions of the host country. Their own politics

perpetuates regressive behaviors that are incompatible with the ideals of American democracy. Hopefully, it is the humanity of the secondary institutions that will safeguard the contexts, contents, and constructs of multiversity.

The Takers' neoplantation mind set is a regression of the American Dream. The Leavers' seduction in a culturally alienating prison exemplifies a classic dilemma that the hunter-gatherers have always lived (Quinn, 1993: 220; 228). The new paradigm—eclipsed under the Hobbesian-Darwinian clouds—of human existence is still an unborn reality. However, the old one can be reinvented if bridges can be built across the barriers of race, gender, class and national origin. This may eventually vindicate the triumph of the American Creed.

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Notes

- 1 The term "Asian American" is identical to the U.S. Census Bureau category of "Asian and Pacific Islander." According to the 1990 census, there are 28 different Asian groups and 21 different Pacific Islander groups. The growth of Asian-American community, both in size and diversity, is noteworthy: The 1.6 million people of Chinese decent top the list, followed by Filipinos (1.4 million), Japanese (848,000), Asian Indians (815,000), and Koreans (799,000). Koreans, Vietnamese, and Asian Indians are likely to overtake the Japanese. However, Chinese and Filipinos doubtless will remain the two most populous groups (*The Advocate*, 1992: 4B). Asian-Americans will grow to 20 million, or more than 6 percent of the total population by the year 2020, according to a report entitled "The State of Asian Pacific America." Shirley Hune, University of California at Los Angeles, writes in the introduction of this study: "For over a quarter of a century, Asian Pacific Americans have been the fastest growing minority group in the United States. We are an integral part of the country's

historical development and its future." Paul Ong, one of the contributors, divided most Asian-Americans into six ethnic groups: Chinese 23 percent; Filipino, 19 percent; Japanese 12 percent; Indian and Korean 11 percent each; and Vietnamese 8 percent. Asian-Americans now number about 7.3 million or 3 percent of the population. Ong's study showed that 64 percent of the Asian-American population is foreign-born now. This percentage will fall but still be more than half in 2020. According to the U.S. Census Bureau, U.S. population is projected to be 320 million in year 2020 (*The Associated Press*, 1993: 6A).

- 2 There is an evidence of rise in racially motivated violence in the South (Sullivan, 1993). Asian-bashing is not a new phenomenon, however. Public and social policies continue to be divisive and discriminatory. The concept of "model minority" itself is stereotypical attempt to isolate and disengage the Asians from the mainstream America. Frank H. Wu, Stanford Law School, is right in his contention when he says that much of the current concern voiced on behalf of Asian Americans is disingenuous since it puts Asians against African-Americans, as if one group could succeed only by the failure of the other. "The real risk to Asian-Americans," he writes, "is that they will be squeezed out to provide proportionate representation to whites, not due to marginal impact of setting aside a few spaces for African-Americans" (quoted by Page, 1995: 7B).
- 3 Phrase owed to Gunnar Myrdal (*See* Southern, 1987).
- 4 Joseph Alsop's expression (quoted by Blumenthal, 1996: 225).
- 5 A well documented administrative appeal was submitted to the President, LSU System, on November 8, 1989. It chronicled the plight of an individual against institutional racism in general and certain manipulative administrators in particular. Officially, it never received any attention but, unofficially, the murky events that followed became my nightmare. I am yet to recover from the irreparable loss that I suffered during those years.

