
**Margins and
Mainstreams**

*Asians in
American
History and
Culture*

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“but the word liberty makes me think of the fact that this country is the land of liberty for men of all nations except the Chinese. I consider it an insult to us Chinese to call on us to contribute toward the building in this land a pedestal for a statue of liberty. That statue represents liberty holding a torch which lights the passage of those of all nations who come into this country. But are the Chinese allowed to come? As for the Chinese who are here, are they allowed to enjoy liberty as men of all other nationalities enjoy it?”⁶⁵ For China’s prodemocracy students in 1989 and for Asians in America, the “goddess of liberty,” featured so prominently by the American news media, situated squarely within the mainstream, and lifting up her torch above the masses in Tiananmen Square, was not their symbol of liberation. Instead, their true symbol, relegated to the background as the camera panned the crowd, situated inconspicuously along the margins, was the declaration emblazoned by the Chinese students on the banners they waved, the shirts they wore, and the fliers they distributed: the words were, “We Shall Overcome.”

⁶⁵ Renqiu Yu, *To Save China, To Save Ourselves: The Chinese Hand Laundry Alliance of New York* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1992), pp. 199–200.

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Is Yellow Black or White?

*Everytime I wanna go get a fucking brew
I gotta go down to the store with a tool
Oriental ones (can you count) mother-fuckers
They make a nigger mad enough to cause a rickus
Thinking every brother in the world's on the take
So they watch every damn move that I make
They hope I don't pull out a gat and try to rob
their funky little store, but bitch, I gotta job.
So don't follow me up and down your market
Or your little chop-suey ass will be a target
Of the nationwide boycott
Choose with the people
That's what the boy got
So pay respect to the Black fist
Or we'll burn down your store, right down to a crisp
And then we'll see you
'Cause you can't turn the ghetto into Black Korea.'*

BETWEEN 1985 and 1990 in New York City, there were three major protests against Korean storeowners in African com-

¹ “Black Korea,” by Ice Cube, from the album *Death Certificate*, Priority Records. In a letter dated February 8, 1992, O’Shea Jackson (Ice Cube) explained that the album “was not intended to offend anyone or to incite violence of any kind” and promised that during his concerts he would “discourage violence against store owners or anyone else” (*Korea Times*, May 4, 1992).

munities, while in Los Angeles, as one boycott ended in the summer of 1991, another began, and within a six-month period, five Korean grocery stores were firebombed. In a Los Angeles courtroom, the television monitors showed fifteen-year-old Latasha Harlins punch Soon Ja Du and turn to leave the store, when Du lifts a gun and fires pointblank at Harlins's head, killing her. On December 15, 1991, Yong Tae Park died of bullet wounds received during a robbery on his liquor store the previous day; Park was the seventh Korean storeowner killed in Los Angeles by African male suspects that year. "Black Power. No Justice, No Peace! Boycott Korean Stores! The Battle for Brooklyn," the poster read. "Crack, the 'housing crisis,' and Korean merchants is a conspiracy to destabilize our community. . . . The Korean merchants are agents of the U.S. government in their conspiracy to destabilize the economy of our community. They are rewarded by the government and financed by big business."² In south central Los Angeles in April and May 1992, following the acquittal of police officers in the beating of African American Rodney G. King, Koreatown was besieged, eighteen-year-old Edward Song Lee died in a hail of bullets, nearly fifty Korean merchants were injured, and damage to about 2,000 Korean stores topped \$400 million. Parts of Japantown were also hit, and losses to Japanese businesses exceeded \$3 million. Is yellow black or white?

In laying the intellectual foundation for what we now call the model minority stereotype, social scientists William Caudill and George De Vos stated their hypothesis: "there seems to be a significant compatibility (but by no means identity) between the value systems found in the culture of Japan and the value systems found in American middle class culture." That compatibility, they cautioned, did not mean similarity but rather a sharing of certain values and adaptive mechanisms, such that "when they [Japanese and white middle-class Americans] meet under conditions favorable for acculturation . . . Japanese Americans, acting in terms of

2. Poster of the December 12th Movement, Brooklyn Chapter, 1990.

their Japanese values and personality, will behave in ways that are favorably evaluated by middle class Americans."³ Although Caudill and De Vos tried to distinguish between identity and compatibility, similarity and sharing, subsequent variations on the theme depicted Asians as "just like whites." And so, is yellow black or white?

The question is multilayered. Is yellow black or white? is a question of Asian American identity. Is yellow black or white? is a question of Third World identity, or the relationships among a people of color. Is yellow black or white? is a question of American identity, or the nature of America's racial formation.⁴ Implicit within the question is a construct of American society that defines race relations as bipolar—between black and white—and that locates Asians (and American Indians and Latinos) somewhere along the divide between black and white. Asians, thus, are "near-whites" or "just like blacks."⁵ The construct is historicized, within the progressive tradition of American history, to show the evolution of Asians from minority to majority status, or "from hardship and discrimination to become a model of self-respect and achievement in today's America."⁶ "Scratch a Japanese-American," social scientist Harry Kitano was quoted as saying, "and you find a Wasp," and Asians have been bestowed the high-

3 William Caudill and George De Vos, "Achievement, Culture and Personality: The Case of the Japanese Americans," *American Anthropologist* 58 (1956): 1107.

4 For a definition of racial formation, see Michael Omi and Howard Winant, *Racial Formation in the United States: From the 1960s to the 1980s* (New York: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1986), pp. 57-86.

5 See, e.g., James W. Loewen, *The Mississippi Chinese: Between Black and White* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1971).

6 *U.S. News & World Report*, December 26, 1966. See also Dan Caldwell, "The Negroization of the Chinese Stereotype in California," *Southern California Quarterly* 53 (June 1971): 123-31, on the convergence of the Chinese and African American physiognomy; and Dennis M. Ogawa, *From Japs to Japanese: The Evolution of Japanese-American Stereotypes* (Berkeley: McCutchan Publishing, 1971), on the progression of Japanese American stereotypes.

est accolade of having "outwhited the Whites."⁷ The construct, importantly, is not mere ideology but is a social practice that assigns to Asian Americans, and indeed to all minorities, places within the social formation. Further, the designations, the roles, and the relationships function to institute and perpetuate a repression that begets and maintains privilege. Asian Americans have served the master class, whether as "near-blacks" in the past or as "near-whites" in the present or as "marginal men" in both the past and the present. Yellow is emphatically neither white nor black; but insofar as Asians and Africans share a subordinate position to the master class, yellow is a shade of black, and black, a shade of yellow.

We are a kindred people, African and Asian Americans. We share a history of migration, interaction and cultural sharing, and commerce and trade. We share a history of European colonization, decolonization, and independence under neocolonization and dependency. We share a history of oppression in the United States, successively serving as slave and cheap labor, as peoples excluded and absorbed, as victims of mob rule and Jim Crow. We share a history of struggle for freedom and the democratization of America, of demands for equality and human dignity, of insistence on making real the promise that all men and women are created equal. We are a kindred people, forged in the fire of white supremacy and struggle, but how can we recall that kinship when our memories have been massaged by white hands, and how can we remember the past when our storytellers have been whispering amid the din of Western civilization and Anglo-conformity?

We know each other well, Africans and Asians. Some of the first inhabitants of South and Southeast Asia were a people called "Negrito," who were gatherers and hunters and slash-and-burn cultivators. They may have been absorbed or expelled by the Veddoids, a later group of immigrants to the Indian subcontinent, but remnants survive today as the Semang of the Malay Peninsula,

the Mincopies of the Andaman Islands, and the Negritos of the Philippines. One branch of the Dravidians, who arrived in South Asia probably after 1000 B.C.E., were black people, who at first apparently intermarried with the lighter-skinned Indo-Aryan branch of Dravidians, but who were later demigrated in the caste system that evolved on the Gangetic plains.⁸

Trade, if not migration, between Africa and Asia predated the arrival of Portuguese ships in the Indian Ocean by at least a thousand years. African ambergris, tortoiseshell, rhinoceros horns, and especially ivory left African ports for Arabia, India, Indonesia, and China. The *Periplus of the Erythraean Sea*, a handbook compiled by a Greek-Egyptian sailor sometime during the first three centuries C.E., described Indonesian food crops, such as coconuts, and cultural items, such as sewn boats, along the East African coast perhaps as far south as Mozambique, and historians believe that Indonesians may have settled on Madagascar in the early centuries C.E., but after the time of the *Periplus*.⁹ The Chinese Cheng-shih Tuan, in his *Yu-yang-tsa-tsu* written in the ninth century C.E., described East Africa, or the "land of Po-pali," where the women were "clean and well-behaved" and where the trade products were ivory and ambergris.¹⁰

From the eighth through twelfth centuries, the Hindu kingdom of Sri Vijaya, centered on Sumatra, was the dominant mercantile power in the Indian Ocean; it controlled the sea routes between India and China and likely traded directly with people along the East African coast. About the same time, the Chola kingdom in southeast India sent traders to East Africa, where their cowrie currency, system of weights, and trade beads became standard and

8 Hugh Tinker, *South Asia: A Short History* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1990), pp. 1-5.

9 J. E. G. Sutton, *The East African Coast: An Historical and Archaeological Review* (Dar es Salaam: East African Publishing House, 1966), p. 8.

10 G. S. P. Freeman-Grenville, ed., *The East African Coast: Select Documents from the First to the Earlier Nineteenth Century* (London: Oxford University Press, 1962), p. 8.

7 "Success Story: Outwhiting the Whites," *Newsweek*, June 21, 1971.

widespread. By the thirteenth century, both Sri Vijaya and the Chola kingdom fell into decline, and the west Indian Ocean became an Islamic sphere. Still, the Ming dynasty, which gained control of China in 1368, sent a fleet to East Africa in 1417 and again in 1421, and Ming porcelain has been found in abundance among the ruins of mosques, tombs, houses, and palaces on the islands and on the mainland along the East African coast. Fei-Hsin, a junior officer on the 1417 expedition, described the townspeople of Mogadishu: "the men wear their hair in rolls which hang down all round and wrap cotton cloths round their waists" and the women "apply a yellow varnish to their shaven crowns and hang several strings of disks from their ears and wear silver rings round their necks."¹¹

Besides the trade in goods, Africans and Asians engaged in a slave trade that was "probably a constant factor" in the Indian Ocean from the tenth to the thirteenth centuries.¹² Much of that trade was conducted by Africanized Muslims, who sent African slaves to the shores of the Persian Gulf, to India, and to China. In the year 1119, "most of the wealthy in Canton possessed negro slaves," and East African slave soldiers were used extensively by the Sassanian kings of Persia during the seventh century and by the Bahmanid kings of the Deccan in India during the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries.¹³ Africans in Asia sometimes rose from the ranks of slaves to become military and political leaders, such as Malik Sarvar of Delhi, who became the sultan's deputy in 1389, was appointed governor of the eastern province, and eventually ruled as an independent king. Perhaps most influential was Malik Ambar, who was born in Ethiopia around 1550, sold into slavery in India, and rose to become a commander and ruler in the Deccan. Ferista, a contemporary Arab historian, called Ambar "the

most enlightened financier of whom we read in Indian history," and he reported that "the justice and wisdom of the government of Mullik Ambar have become proverbial in the Deccan."¹⁴ The East African slave trade remained small in volume until the nineteenth century, when European colonies in the Americas and the Indian Ocean opened a larger market for slaves.¹⁵

The creation of that global system of labor and the conjunction of Africans, Asians, and Europeans began long before the nineteenth century. African and Asian civilizations contributed much to the dawning of European civilization in the Greek city-states. The armies of the Islamic Almoravids ranged across the Sudan and North Africa to Carthage and the Iberian Peninsula, and the Mongol armies of Chingiz Khan penetrated the European heartland. The invaders brought not only devastation but also religion, culture, and science. That intimacy would later be denied by the Europeans, who, after crusades to expel the "infidels" from Christendom and after the rise of nationalism and mercantile capitalism, conceived an ideology that justified their expansion and appropriation of land, labor, and resources in Africa, Asia, and the Americas. That ideology, in the name of religion and science, posited the purity and superiority of European peoples and cultures, unsullied by the anti-Christian, uncivilized non-Europeans—the Other—and found expression in European colonization of the Third World.

Seeking first the kingdom of gold, Europeans set sail for Asia down the African coast and around the Cape of Good Hope to India and China, and later west across the Atlantic Ocean to India, where instead they stumbled into the landmass they named the Americas. Colonization followed trade just as surely as capital required labor. European plantations in the Americas devoured

¹⁴ Joseph E. Harris, *The African Presence in Asia: Consequences of the East African Slave Trade* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1971), pp. 78–79, 91–98.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 7–10; and Edward A. Alpers, *The East African Slave Trade* (Dar es Salaam: East African Publishing House, 1967), pp. 4–5.

¹¹ Gervase Mathew, "The East African Coast until the Coming of the Portuguese," in *History of East Africa*, ed. Roland Oliver and Gervase Mathew (London: Oxford University Press, 1963), 1:116, 120–21.

¹² *Ibid.*, p. 106.

¹³ *Ibid.*, pp. 101, 108, 121.

the native inhabitants and, unsated, demanded African laborers from across the Atlantic in the miserable system of human bondage that supplied an outlet for European manufactures and produced the agricultural products that enriched the metropole. The reciprocal of European development was Third World underdevelopment, and the web spun by European capitalism crisscrossed and captured the globe, creating a world-system in which capital and labor flowed as naturally as the ocean currents that circled the Atlantic and Pacific.

Some of the earliest Asians in the Americas came by way of the Spanish galleon trade between Manila and Acapulco in the early seventeenth century. Chinese and Filipino crew members and servants on those Spanish ships settled in Mexico, and Filipino "Manilamen" found their way to Louisiana, where, in 1763, they created the oldest continuous Asian American communities in North America.¹⁶ The Filipinos named their fishing and shrimp-ing settlements Manila Village, St. Malo, Leon Rojas, Bayou Cholas, and Bassa Bassa. But the main body of Asian migration to the Americas came after the termination of the African slave trade in the nineteenth century and the consequent need for a new source of labor for the plantations, mines, and public works in Central and South America, Africa, and the islands of the Pacific and Caribbean.

A forerunner of the nineteenth-century coolie trade and the successor of the earlier East African slave trade was the use of Asian and African slaves on board European ships in the Indian Ocean and a European carrying trade that took Asian slaves from Bengal, southern India and Sri Lanka, the Indonesian archipelago, the Philippines, and Japan to Dutch and Portuguese possessions in Asia and Africa. Beginning in the early sixteenth century, largely because of the debilitating effects of disease upon European sailors, Arab, South Asian, Malay, and African slaves frequently made up the majority of the crews on Portuguese vessels plying In-

dian Ocean waters.¹⁷ Asian slaves were joined by Africans taken from Madagascar and East Africa and were brought to the Dutch settlement at the Cape of Good Hope after 1658. By 1795, there were 16,839 slaves in the colony, and in 1834, the year slavery was abolished at the Cape, there were approximately 34,000 slaves.¹⁸ The slaves produced mixed offspring with the indigenous San and Khoikhoi and with whites, forming the group the Europeans called the Cape Coloured. South Asians arrived on the East Coast of eighteenth-century America as indentured workers and slaves. Brought to Massachusetts and Pennsylvania on board English and American trade vessels possibly during the 1780s and 1790s, South Asians with Anglicized names such as James Dunn, John Ballay, Joseph Green, George Jimor, and Thomas Robinson served indentures, were sold and bought as slaves, likely married African American women, and became members of the local African American communities.¹⁹

In 1833, slavery was formally abolished in the British Empire, but during the period of transition, slaves over six years of age served apprenticeships from four to six years as unpaid and later as paid labor. Apprenticeships ended in the British colonies in 1838, leading to the claim by sugar planters of a chronic labor shortage and a determination "to make us, as far as possible, independent of our negro population," according to John Gladstone, father of Robert and William Gladstone and one of the largest slaveholders and proprietors of estates in British Guiana.²⁰

¹⁷ Arnold Rubin, *Black Nanban: Africans in Japan during the Sixteenth Century* (Bloomington: African Studies Program, Indiana University, 1974), pp. 1-2, 9.

¹⁸ R. L. Watson, *The Slave Question: Liberty and Property in South Africa* (Hanover: Wesleyan University Press, 1990), pp. 9-10; and Robert Ross, *Cape of Torments: Slavery and Resistance in South Africa* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1983), pp. 11, 13.

¹⁹ Joan M. Jensen, *Passage from India: Asian Indian Immigrants in North America* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1988), pp. 12-13.

²⁰ Alan H. Adamson, *Sugar without Slaves: The Political Economy of British Guiana, 1838-1904* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1972), pp. 31, 41.

¹⁶ Marina E. Espina, *Filipinos in Louisiana* (New Orleans: A. F. Laborde & Sons, 1988), p. 1.

Slavery, as pointed out by historian Hugh Tinker, produced both "a system and attitude of mind" that enabled a new system of slavery—coolieism—that incorporated many of the same oppressive features of the old.²¹

White planters saw the "new slaves" as subhuman and mere units of production. In 1836, anticipating the end of African slave apprenticeships, John Gladstone inquired about purchasing a hundred coolies from Gillanders, Arbutnot & Company, who had supplied thousands of South Asians to Mauritius. The firm assured Gladstone that the Dhangars, or "hill coolies" of India, were "always spoken of as more akin to the monkey than the man. They have no religion, no education, and in their present state no wants beyond eating, drinking and sleeping: and to procure which they are willing to labour."²² In May 1838, the first contingent of what would become a veritable stream of indentured labor arrived in British Guiana. The 396 Asian Indians were contracted to work nine to ten hours a day (as compared with seven and a half hours daily under apprenticeships) for sixteen cents (compared with thirty-two cents for free workers). In addition to economic exploitation, the indentured laborers were subject to disease and harsh treatment, particularly during the "seasoning," or breaking-in, period, resulting in numerous runaways and high mortality rates. From May 1845 to December 1849, 11,437 Asian Indians were indentured on sugar estates in British Guiana. Of that total as of December 1849, only 6,417 still remained on the estates, whereas 643 were listed as sick, vagrants, paupers, or children, 2,218 had died on the estates in jails and hospitals or were found dead elsewhere, and 2,159 were unaccounted for, of

21 Hugh Tinker, *A New System of Slavery: The Export of Indian Labour Overseas, 1830-1920* (London: Oxford University Press, 1974), p. 19. For overviews of Asian Indian and Chinese migration and indentureship in the Caribbean, see K. O. Laurence, *Immigration into the West Indies in the 19th Century* (Mona, West Indies: Caribbean Universities Press, 1971); and William A. Green, *British Slave Emancipation: The Sugar Colonies and the Great Experiment, 1830-1865* (London: Oxford University Press, 1976), pp. 276-86, 289-93.

22 Tinker, *New System of Slavery*, p. 63.

whom more than half were probably dead. Even those who had served their period of contract were left to wander "about the roads and streets, or lie down, sicken and die" or were castigated as "vagrants" who were stereotyped as "eating every species of garbage . . . filthy in [their] habits, lazy and addicted to pilfering."²³ Little wonder that Asian Indian indentures composed and sang this song as they sailed for Trinidad:

*What kind plate,
What kind cup,
With a ticket to cut
in Trinidad,
O people of India
We are going to die there.*²⁴

Chinese and Asian Indian "coolies" were sold and indentured to European and American ship captains in a barter called by the Chinese "the buying and selling of pigs." The Chinese coolies, or "pigs," were restrained in "piggins"; one such barracoon on Amoy in 1852 was described in a British report: "the coolies were penned up in numbers from 10 to 12 in a wooden shed, like a slave barracoon, nearly naked, very filthy, and room only sufficient to lie; the space 120 by 24 feet with a bamboo floor near the roof; the number in all about 500."²⁵ On shore, the coolies

23 Adamson, *Sugar without Slaves*, p. 48. Asian Indian and Chinese indentured laborers inherited, in the minds of the white planters, the alleged vices of African slaves in Trinidad. See David Vincent Trotman, *Crime in Trinidad: Conflict and Control in a Plantation Society, 1838-1900* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1986), pp. 69, 87-88.

24 Noor Kumar Mahabir, *The Still Cry: Personal Accounts of East Indians in Trinidad and Tobago during Indentureship (1845-1917)* (Tacarigua, Trinidad: Calaloux Publications, 1985), p. 41. For life on the sugar estates, see Adamson, *Sugar without Slaves*, pp. 104-59; and Judith Ann Weller, *The East Indian Indenture in Trinidad* (Rio Piedras, P.R.: Institute of Caribbean Studies, University of Puerto Rico, 1968).

25 Cited in Ching-Hwang Yen, *Coolies and Mandarins: China's Protection of Overseas Chinese during the Late Ch'ing Period (1851-1911)* (Singapore: Singapore University Press, 1985), p. 59.

were stripped naked and on their chests were painted the letters C (California), P (Peru), or S (Sandwich Islands), denoting their destinations. Once on board the ship, they were placed below deck in the hold, where they were usually confined for the duration of the transpacific passage. Overcrowding and a short supply of food and water led to revolts, suicides, and murders. Fearing a revolt, the crew of an American ship, the *Waverly*, drove the Chinese coolies below deck and closed the hatch on October 27, 1855: "on opening them some twelve or fourteen hours afterwards it was found that nearly three hundred of the unfortunate beings had perished by suffocation."²⁶ Chao-ch'un Li and 165 other coolies petitioned the Cuba Commission about ill-treatment and abuse: "When quitting Macao," they testified, "we proceeded to sea, we were confined in the hold below; some were even shut up in bamboo cages, or chained to iron posts, and a few were indiscriminately selected and flogged as a means of intimidating all others; whilst we cannot estimate the deaths that, in all, took place, from sickness, blows, hunger, thirst, or from suicide by leaping into the sea."²⁷ As many as a third of the coolies died during the journey across the Pacific on board ships bound for the Americas. During the years 1860 to 1863, for example, of the 7,884 Chinese coolies shipped to Peru, 2,400, or 30.4 percent, died en route.²⁸ The African slave and Asian coolie were kinsmen and kinswomen in that world created by European masters.

²⁶ Shih-shan H. Tsai, "American Involvement in the Coolie Trade," *American Studies* 6, nos. 3 and 4 (December 1976): 54. For a more detailed account of U.S. involvement in the coolie trade and coolie resistance, see Robert J. Schwendinger, *Ocean of Bitter Dreams: Maritime Relations between China and the United States, 1850-1915* (Tucson: Westernlore Press, 1988), pp. 18-62.

²⁷ Yen, *Coolies and Mandarins*, pp. 61-62.

²⁸ Persia C. Campbell, *Chinese Coolie Emigration to Countries within the British Empire* (London: P. S. King & Son, 1923), p. 95; and Watt Stewart, *Chinese Bondage in Peru* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1951), pp. 62, 66, 97. See also Yen, *Coolies and Mandarins*, p. 62.

Between 1848 and 1874, 124,813 Chinese coolies reached Cuba from Macao, Amoy, Canton, Hong Kong, Swatow, Saigon, and Manila. Within Cuba's plantation system, wrote historian Franklin W. Knight, the Chinese became "coinheritors with the Negroes of the lowliness of caste, the abuse, the ruthless exploitation. . . . Chinese labor in Cuba in the nineteenth century was slavery in every social aspect except the name."²⁹ Coolies were sold in the open market, following advertisements that appeared in the local newspapers. Prospective buyers inspected the human merchandise, lined up on a platform, before the bargaining began, and the Asians were "virtually sold to the planters."³⁰ Conditions on Cuba's plantations were desperate. Chien T'ang, Chao Chang, A-chao Wen, and about three hundred of their compatriots in labor testified that they worked daily from between 2 and 4 a.m. until midnight, including Sundays, and others described the harsh treatment they received at the hands of overseers and masters. Confinement, shackling with chains, flogging, and cutting off fingers, ears, and limbs were methods employed to ensure docility and productivity in the workplace. A-pa Ho reported that for making a cigarette, "I was flogged with a rattan rod so severely that my flesh was lacerated and the bones became visible." A-chen Lu stated: "I have seen men beaten to death, the bodies being afterwards buried, and no report being made to the authorities"; A-sheng Hsieh told of Chen and Liang, who committed suicide after having been severely beaten. "The administrator accused them of cutting grass slowly," testified Hsieh, "and directing four men to hold them in a prostrate position, inflicted with a whip, a flog-

²⁹ Franklin W. Knight, *Slave Society in Cuba during the Nineteenth Century* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1970), p. 119. African slavery in Cuba, of course, was governed by slave codes that differed significantly from the institutions that regulated the coolie system. On the complementarity and distinctions between African slavery and Chinese indentured labor, see Rebecca J. Scott, *Slave Emancipation in Cuba: The Transition to Free Labor, 1860-1899* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1985), pp. 29-35, 109-10.

³⁰ Yen, *Coolies and Mandarins*, p. 63; and Knight, *Slave Society*, p. 116.

ging which almost killed them. The first afterwards hanged himself, and the second drowned himself."³¹

In the United States, white planters similarly saw Chinese laborers as the "coinheritors with the Negroes of the lowliness of caste, the abuse, the ruthless exploitation." Before the Civil War, southern planters saw African slaves as a counter to immigration to their region by, in the words of Edmund Ruffin, "the hordes of immigrants now flowing from Europe." After the war, the planters saw free blacks as a troublesome presence and sought to deport and colonize them outside the United States and to replace them with Europeans and Asians.³² In 1869, Godfrey Barnsley, a Georgia planter and New Orleans factor, predicted that Mississippi Valley planters would recruit "large numbers of Chinese to take the place of negroes as they are said to be better laborers[,] more intelligent and can be had for \$12 or \$13 per month and rations." William M. Lawton, chair of the Committee on Chinese Immigrants for the South Carolina Agricultural and Mechanical Society, put it more bluntly: "I look upon the introduction of Chinese on our Rice lands, & especially on the unhealthy cotton lands as new and essential machines in the room of others that have been destroyed [or are] wearing out, year by year."³³ Africans and Asians, according to that point of view, were mere fodder for the fields and factories of the master class.

Africans and Asians, however, were not the same. After the Civil War, southern employers viewed African Americans not

only as essential laborers but also as political liabilities insofar as they voted and voted Republican.³⁴ The problem, thus, was how to maintain white political supremacy while employing cheap and efficient "colored" workers, thereby ensuring white economic supremacy. William M. Burwell, in an essay published in the July 1869 issue of *De Bow's Review*, described the challenge: "We will state the problem for consideration. It is: To retain in the hands of the whites the control and direction of social and political action, without impairing the content of the labor capacity of the colored race." Asian migrant workers, it seemed to some southerners, provided the ideal solution to the problem in that they were productive laborers and noncitizens who could not vote. Further, Asian workers would be used to discipline African workers and depress wages. On June 30, 1869, the *Vicksburg Times*, a proponent of Asian migration, editorialized: "Emancipation has spoiled the negro, and carried him away from fields of agriculture." The *Times* went on to exult at the impending arrival of several hundred Chinese coolies: "Our colored friends who have left the farm for politics and plunder, should go down to the *Great Republic* today and look at the new laborer who is destined to crowd the negro from the American farm." Arkansas Reconstruction governor Powell Clayton observed: "Undoubtedly the underlying motive for this effort to bring in Chinese laborers was to punish the negro for having abandoned the control of his old master, and to regulate the conditions of his employment and the scale of wages to be paid him."³⁵

African and Asian workers, nonetheless, were related insofar as they were both essential for the maintenance of white supremacy, they were both members of an oppressed class of "colored" laborers, and they were both tied historically to the global network of labor migration as slaves and coolies. As anthropologist Lucy M. Cohen has shown, the planters in the American South were members of a Caribbean plantation complex, and the plans they

31 Yen, *Coolies and Mandarins*, pp. 64, 66-68. For a comparison, see Jan Breman, *Taming the Coolie Beast: Plantation Society and the Colonial Order in Southeast Asia* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1989); and Wing Yung, *My Life in China and America* (New York: Henry Holt, 1909), p. 195, on Chinese coolies in Peru.

32 James L. Roark, *Masters without Slaves: Southern Planters in the Civil War and Reconstruction* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1977), p. 165. See also Rowland T. Berthoff, "Southern Attitudes toward Immigration, 1865-1914," *Journal of Southern History* 17, no. 3 (August 1951): 328-60; and George E. Pozzetta, "Foreigners in Florida: A Study of Immigration Promotion, 1865-1910," *Florida Historical Quarterly* 53, no. 2 (October 1974): 164-80.

33 Roark, *Masters without Slaves*, p. 167.

34 Loewen, *Mississippi Chinese*, pp. 21-24.
35 *Ibid.*, p. 23.

formulated for Chinese migration drew from their cultural bonds with West Indian societies.³⁶ For example, during the 1850s, Daniel Lee of the *Southern Cultivator* and J. D. B. De Bow of *De Bow's Review*, despite their preference for African slaves, informed their readers about the growing use of Asian coolie labor in the plantations of the West Indies, and after the Civil War in October 1865, John Little Smith, an eminent jurist, reported in several southern newspapers that, according to an American ship captain who had taken Chinese coolies to Cuba, the Chinese were the "best and cheapest labor in the world" and would make good plantation workers and unparalleled servants.³⁷

Despite their interest in Asian coolies, southern planters were stymied by the 1862 act of Congress that had prohibited American involvement in the coolie trade. To skirt federal restrictions on the importation of Asian workers, the planters and labor contractors crafted a distinction between coolies, who were involuntary and bonded labor, and Asian migrants, who were voluntary and free labor. That distinction, they noted, enabled the comparatively easy entry of Chinese into California, and when a shipload of Chinese from Cuba was impounded in 1867 at the port of New Orleans, planter Bradish Johnson argued: "What if the government should forbid the employment of the thousands of Chinese who have worked on the railroads, on the mines, and agriculture of California? No reason had been found for their exclusion and they were valuable for that country. The cultivators of cane and cotton would not be made an exception."³⁸ Johnson won his point, and the case was discontinued. Meanwhile, planters held Chinese labor conventions, such as the 1869 Memphis conven-

tion that drew delegates from Alabama, Arkansas, Georgia, Kentucky, Louisiana, Mississippi, Missouri, South Carolina, Tennessee, and California, representing agricultural, railroad, and other business interests, and formed immigration committees and companies, and labor agents continued to bring Chinese workers, under contract, to the South, procuring them from Cuba, California, and China. After 1877, when white supremacist Democrats had broken the grip of Reconstruction through fraud and violence, southern planters reverted to a preference for African American workers, and interest in Asians declined and vanished.³⁹

Although advocates of Chinese labor in the South learned to distinguish slave from coolie, and coolie from migrant, the migration of Asians to America cannot be divorced from the African slave trade, or from the coolie trade that followed in its wake. Both trades were systems of bonded labor, and both trades formed the contexts and reasons for the entry of Asians into America. Contract labor was the means by which Chinese and Japanese migrated to the Hawaiian kingdom and the American South, whereas the credit-ticket system was the means by which many Chinese gained admittance into California. But a system that advanced credit to laborers and constrained those workers to a term of service until the debt was paid was a scant advance over the earlier forms of coolie and contract labor,⁴⁰ and, perhaps more importantly, all of the successive systems of labor—from slave to coolie to contract to credit-ticket—were varieties of migrant labor

³⁹ Loewen, *Mississippi Chinese*, p. 26.

⁴⁰ Cohen, *Chinese in the Post-Civil War South*, p. 44; and Gunther Barth, *Bitter Strength: A History of the Chinese in the United States, 1850-1870* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1964), p. 67. See also Shih-shan Henry Tsai, *The Chinese Experience in America* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1986), pp. 3-7; idem, "American Involvement"; Roger Daniels, *Asian America: Chinese and Japanese in the United States since 1850* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1988), pp. 13-15; and Sucheng Chan, *This Bitter-Sweet Soil: The Chinese in California Agriculture, 1860-1910* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1986), pp. 21, 26.

³⁶ Lucy M. Cohen, *Chinese in the Post-Civil War South: A People without a History* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1984); idem, "Entry of Chinese to the Lower South from 1865 to 1879: Policy Dilemmas," *Southern Studies* 17, no. 1 (Spring 1978): 5-37; and idem, "Early Arrivals," *Southern Exposures*, July/August 1984, pp. 24-30.

³⁷ Cohen, "Entry of Chinese," pp. 8-12.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 20.

and functioned to sustain a global order of supremacy and subordination.⁴¹ The lines that directed Africans and Asians to America's shore converge at that point, and the impetus for that intersection came from the economic requirement and advantage of bonded labor buttressed by the belief in the centrality of whiteness and the marginality of its negation—nonwhiteness.

African Americans recognized early on the wide embrace of racism and equated racism directed at Asians with racism directed at Africans. Frederick Douglass pointedly declared that the southern planters' scheme to displace African with Asian labor was stimulated by the same economic and racist motives that supported the edifice of African slavery. The white oligarchy of the South, he stated, "believed in slavery and they believe in it still." During the late 1870s and early 1880s, when a Chinese exclusion bill was being debated in the Congress, Blanche K. Bruce of Mississippi, the lone African American senator, spoke out and voted against the discriminatory legislation, and the *Christian Recorder*, an African American newspaper in Boston, editorialized: "Only a few years ago the cry was, not 'The Chinese must go,' but 'The niggers must go' and it came from the same strata of society. There is not a man to-day who rails out against the yellow man from China but would equally rail out against the black man if opportunity only afforded."⁴²

41 June Mei, "Socioeconomic Origins of Emigration: Guangdong to California, 1850 to 1882," in *Labor Immigration under Capitalism: Asian Workers in the United States before World War II*, ed. Lucie Cheng and Edna Bonacich (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1984), p. 220; and Sucheng Chan, *Asian Americans: An Interpretive History* (Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1991), p. 4.

42 David J. Hellwig, "Black Reactions to Chinese Immigration and the Anti-Chinese Movement: 1850-1910," *Amerasia Journal* 6, no. 2 (1979): 27, 30, 31. See also Philip S. Foner, "Reverend George Washington Woodbey: Early Twentieth Century California Black Socialist," *Journal of Negro History* 6, no. 2 (April 1976): 149-50. In their 1943 struggle for repeal of the exclusion laws, Chinese Americans recognized a common cause with African Americans in their quest for equality. Renqiu Yu, "Little Heard Voices: The Chinese Hand Laundry Alliance and the *China Daily News'* Appeal for Repeal of the Chinese Exclusion Act in 1943," in *Chinese America: History and*

In his *Observations Concerning the Increase of Mankind*, published in 1751, Benjamin Franklin divided humankind along the color line of white and nonwhite. The number of "purely white people," he noted with regret, was greatly exceeded by the number of blacks and "Tawneys," who inhabited Africa, Asia, and the Americas. Whites had cleared America of its forests and thereby made it "reflect a brighter light"; therefore, argued Franklin, "why should we . . . darken its people? Why increase the sons of Africa, by planting them in America, where we have so fair an opportunity, by excluding all Blacks and Tawneys, of increasing the lovely White . . . ?"⁴³ According to historian Alexander Saxton, the same racism that sought to increase the "lovely White" and that justified the expulsion and extermination of American Indians and the enslavement of Africans was carried, like so much baggage, west across the American continent, where it was applied to Asians, the majority of whom resided along the Pacific coast.⁴⁴

Franklin's binary racial hierarchy found expression in a book written by Hinton R. Helper of North Carolina, who would become a chief Republican antislavery polemicist. Describing his visit to California in his *The Land of Gold*, published in 1855, Helper wrote of the inhabitants of a small coastal town north of San Francisco: "Bodega contains not more than four hundred inhabitants, including 'Digger' Indians, 'niggers,' and dogs, the last by far the most useful and decent of the concern." Of the Chinese, Helper charged that the "semibarbarians" had no more right to

Perspectives, 1990, ed. Marlon K. Hom et al. (San Francisco: Chinese Historical Society of America, 1990), pp. 28-29, 31-32.

43 Quoted in Takaki, *Iron Cages*, p. 14.

44 Alexander Saxton, *The Indispensable Enemy: Labor and the Anti-Chinese Movement in California* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1971), pp. 19-45; and idem, *The Rise and Fall of the White Republic: Class Politics and Mass Culture in Nineteenth Century America* (London: Verso, 1990). See also Luther W. Spoehr, "Sambo and the Heathen Chinese: Californians' Racial Stereotypes in the Late 1870s," *Pacific Historical Review* 42, no. 2 (May 1973): 185-204; and Müller, *Unwelcome Immigrant*.

be in California than "flocks of blackbirds have in a wheat field," and he offered his view of American race relations: "No inferior race of men can exist in these United States without becoming subordinate to the will of the Anglo-Americans. . . . It is so with the Negroes in the South; it is so with the Irish in the North; it is so with the Indians in New England; and it will be so with the Chinese in California."⁴⁵ Within months after the end of the Civil War, the *New York Times* warned of allied dangers: "We have four millions of degraded negroes in the South . . . and if there were to be a flood-tide of Chinese population—a population befouled with all the social vices, with no knowledge or appreciation of free institutions or constitutional liberty, with heathenish souls and heathenish propensities . . . we should be prepared to bid farewell to republicanism."⁴⁶ In popular culture, the stereotype character of the "heathen chinee" made its debut in American theater by way of the blackface minstrel shows, and Chinese were paired with black sambos in Wild West melodramas.⁴⁷

The institutionalization of Africans and Asians as the Other, as nonwhites, was embraced in American law and proposed legislation. California's state assembly passed two companion bills excluding from the state both Chinese and African Americans, modeled on the black codes of midwestern states.⁴⁸ In 1854, Justice Charles J. Murray delivered the California Supreme Court's ruling on *The People v. George W. Hall*, in which Hall, a white man, was convicted of murder based upon the testimony of Chinese witnesses. Murray outlined the precedents that established that "no black or mulatto person, or Indian, shall be allowed to give evidence in favor of, or against a white man," and

45 Saxton, *Indispensable Enemy*, p. 18; and Caldwell, "Negroization of the Chinese Stereotype," p. 127.

46 Cited in Ronald Takaki, *Strangers from a Different Shore: A History of Asian Americans* (Boston: Little, Brown & Co., 1989), pp. 100-101.

47 Saxton, *Indispensable Enemy*, p. 20.

48 *Ibid.*, pp. 19-20. For comparisons of Chinese and African American intelligence, see U.S. Congress, Senate, *Report of the Joint Special Committee to Investigate Chinese Immigration*, 44th Cong., 2d sess., 1877, pp. 942, 1133-34.

he considered the generic meaning of the terms "black" and "white." The words, Murray contended, were oppositional, and "black" meant "nonwhite," and "white" excluded all persons of color. In addition, the intent of the law was to shield white men "from the testimony of the degraded and demoralized caste" and to protect the very foundations of the state from the "actual and present danger" of "a race of people whom nature has marked as inferior, and who are incapable of progress or intellectual development beyond a certain point . . . differing in language, opinions, color, and physical conformation; between whom and ourselves nature has placed an impassable difference."⁴⁹ The Chinese testimony thus was inadmissible, and Hall's conviction was reversed.

Like exclusion, antimiscegenation laws helped to maintain the boundary between white and nonwhite. Virginia banned interracial marriages in 1691.⁵⁰ Besides withholding state sanction of interracial cohabitation, antimiscegenation laws sought to prevent race mixing and the creation of "hybrid races" and the "contamination" and lowering of the superior by the inferior race. The issue of Chinese and white parents, predicted John F. Miller at California's 1878 constitutional convention, would be "a hybrid of the most despicable, a mongrel of the most detestable that has ever afflicted the earth." California enacted its antimiscegenation law two years later, prohibiting marriages between whites and nonwhites, "negro, mulatto, or Mongolian."⁵¹ Based on the same reasons for antimiscegenation laws, African, Asian, and Ameri-

49 Quoted in Wu, "Chink!" pp. 36-43.

50 George M. Fredrickson, *The Arrogance of Race: Historical Perspectives on Slavery, Racism, and Social Inequality* (Middletown: Wesleyan University Press, 1988), p. 196. Cf. Takaki, *Strangers from a Different Shore*, p. 101, who, like Winthrop Jordan, claims that a 1664 Maryland law that discouraged the marriage of "Negro slaves" with "freeborne English women" by imposing a penalty requiring such women and their children to be consigned into slavery should be viewed as a ban on interracial marriage. Fredrickson, however, argues that before the 1690s, bans on interracial unions were largely class as opposed to race-based.

51 Takaki, *Strangers from a Different Shore*, pp. 101-2.

can Indian children were excluded in 1860 from California's public schools designated for whites, and the state's superintendent of public instruction had the power to deny state funds to schools that violated the law. Nonwhite children attended separate schools established at public expense.⁵²

Asian laborers might have been ideal replacements for African slaves because they were productive and incapable of becoming citizens, but they were also useful in that they were neither white nor black. Although some believed that the addition of yet another group of people to society would only add to the complexity and hence difficulty of race relations, others saw the entrance of Asians as a way to insulate whites from blacks. Asians were simultaneously members of the nonwhite Other, despite their sometime official classification as white, and an intermediate group between white and black. The foundations of that social hierarchy can be found in the economic relations of the plantation system. Franklin Knight informs us that in nineteenth-century Cuba, Asians were classified as whites, yet "their conditions of labor tended to be identical to those of slaves," and on plantations with a mixed labor force, Asians "bridged the gap between black and white," assisting slaves in the fields and factories but, unlike slaves, performing simple semiskilled tasks and handling machines.⁵³

In Louisiana before the 1870 census, Chinese were counted as whites in the absence of a separate category for people who were neither white nor black.⁵⁴ Despite that classification, whites perceived Asians as belonging to the economic, if not social, caste assigned to Africans. In 1927, taking up a Chinese American

challenge by Gong Lum to Mississippi's Jim Crow schools, the U.S. Supreme Court, citing its 1896 landmark decision *Plessy v. Ferguson*, which set forth the "separate but equal" doctrine, affirmed the state supreme court's ruling that Chinese were nonwhite and hence "colored" and thus could be barred from schools reserved for whites. A Chinese man who married an African American woman during the 1930s recalled: "Before 1942, the Chinese had no status in Mississippi whatever. They were considered on the same status as the Negro. If a Chinese man *did* have a woman, it *had* to be a Negro." Mississippi planter William Alexander Percy described Delta society in his autobiography, *Letters on the Levees*, published in 1941: "Small Chinese storekeepers are almost as ubiquitous as in the South Seas. Barred from social intercourse with the whites, they smuggle through wives from China or, more frequently, breed lawfully or otherwise with the Negro."⁵⁵

The Chinese, however, occupied an ambiguous position racially, as reflected in Louisiana's census. In 1860, Chinese were classified as whites; in 1870, they were listed as Chinese; in 1880, children of Chinese men and non-Chinese women were classed as Chinese; but in 1900, all of those children were reclassified as blacks or whites and only those born in China or with two Chinese parents were listed as Chinese.⁵⁶ In Mississippi, according to sociologist James W. Loewen, the Chinese were initially assigned "a near-Negro position" with no more legal rights or political power, but neither whites nor blacks "quite thought of them as Negroes," and they later served in some respects "as middlemen between white and black."⁵⁷ In fact, that function both mediated and advanced the prevailing social relations.

52 Elmer Clarence Sandmeyer, *The Anti-Chinese Movement in California* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1973), p. 50; Victor Low, *The Unimpressible Race: A Century of Educational Struggle by the Chinese in San Francisco* (San Francisco: East/West Publishing Co., 1982), pp. 6-37; and Charles M. Wollenberg, *All Deliberate Speed: Segregation and Exclusion in California Schools, 1855-1975* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1976), pp. 30, 31, 39-43.

53 Knight, *Slave Society*, p. 71.

54 Cohen, *Chinese in the Post-Civil War South*, p. 167.

55 Loewen, *Mississippi Chinese*, pp. 59, 61, 66-68.

56 Cohen, *Chinese in the Post-Civil War South*, pp. 167-68. Sociologists Omi and Winant point out that racial classification is "an intensely political process" and is not a mere academic exercise but denies or provides access to resources and opportunities (Omi and Winant, *Racial Formation*, pp. 3-4).

57 Loewen, *Mississippi Chinese*, p. 60. Similarly, the biracial offspring of Africans, Europeans, and American Indians occupied an ambiguous social

In 1925, two months after the founding of A. Philip Randolph's Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters, the Pullman Company hired Filipinos to serve on its private cars as attendants, cooks, and bus-boys. African Americans, who had for more than fifty years worked in those capacities, were henceforth relegated to the position of porter and denied mobility to easier, more-lucrative positions. At first, the Brotherhood called Filipinos "scab labor" and sought their elimination from Pullman lines; however, during its most desperate years, the 1930s, the Brotherhood, unlike the racist American Federation of Labor that had excluded both Africans and Asians, recognized the hand of capital in dividing workers and saw the common plight of black and yellow: "We wish it understood," explained a policy statement, "that the Brotherhood has nothing against Filipinos. They have been used against the unionization of Pullman porters just as Negroes have been used against the unionization of white workers. . . . We will take in Filipinos as members. . . . We want our Filipino brothers to understand that it is necessary for them to join the Brotherhood in order to help secure conditions and wages which they too will benefit from."⁵⁸

Amid such examples of solidarity, African Americans were severely tested by the capitalist system, which deliberately pitted African against Asian workers, whereby Asians were used to discipline African workers and to depress their wages. The root cause of African and Asian American oppression was further clouded by mutual ethnocentrism and prejudice that frequently devolved from the ideas and practices of the master class. It is not surprising, therefore, that some African Americans, like Howard University professor Kelly Miller, saw a danger in linking the

and legal position in the South. See Adele Logan Alexander, *Ambiguous Lives: Free Women of Color in Rural Georgia, 1789-1879* (Fayetteville: University of Arkansas Press, 1991).

⁵⁸ Barbara M. Posadas, "The Hierarchy of Color and Psychological Adjustment in an Industrial Environment: Filipinos, the Pullman Company, and the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters," *Labor History* 23, no. 3 (1982): 363.

claims of African and Asian Americans. "The Negro is an American citizen whose American residence and citizenry reach further back than the great majority of the white race," wrote Miller. "He has from the beginning contributed a full share of the glory and grandeur of America and his claims to patrimony are his just and rightful due. The Japanese, on the other hand, is the eleventh hour comer, and is claiming the privilege of those who have borne the heat and burden of the day."⁵⁹

What is surprising, instead, was the extent and degree of solidarity felt by African Americans toward Asian Americans. The *Chicago Defender* explained that Chinese and Japanese learned from racist America, having been "taught to scorn the Race or lose the little footing they may now boast," and Mary Church Terrell believed that Japanese shunned African Americans in an attempt to avoid the stigma of inferiority that whites had placed upon blacks.⁶⁰ And despite dismay over Asian American ethnocentrism, African Americans steadfastly realized that the enemy was white supremacy and that anti-Asianism was anti-Africanism in another guise. Thus, in 1906 and 1907, when the San Francisco school board ruled that Japanese children had to attend "Oriental schools" and when President Theodore Roosevelt intervened to avoid an international incident, the *Colored American Magazine* declared: "We are with the President in the California muddle, for as California would treat the Japanese she would also treat the Negroes. It is not that we desire to attend schools with the whites at all, per se, but the principle involved in the attempt to classify us as inferiors—not because we are necessarily inferior, but on the grounds of color—forms the crux of our protest."⁶¹

The Philippine-American war, like many of America's imperialist wars, provided an extraordinary test for American minori-

⁵⁹ Kelly Miller, *The Everlasting Stain* (Washington, D.C.: Associated Publishers, 1924), p. 163.

⁶⁰ David J. Hellwig, "Afro-American Reactions to the Japanese and the Anti-Japanese Movement, 1906-1924," *Phylon* 38, no. 1 (March 1977): 103.

⁶¹ *The Colored American Magazine* 12, no. 3 (March 1907): 169.

ties. The late nineteenth century, America's period of manifest destiny and expansionism overseas, was a time of severe repression at home for African Americans. Shouldering the white man's burden was an opportunity for making domestic claims and gains, but at the expense of peoples of color with whom African Americans identified: the Cubans, Puerto Ricans, and Filipinos. Bishop Henry M. Turner of the African Methodist Episcopal church characterized the U.S. presence in the Philippines as "an unholy war of conquest" against "a feeble band of sable patriots," and Frederick L. McGhee, a founder of the Niagara Movement, observed that America was out "to rule earth's inferior races, and if they object make war upon them," and thus concluded that African Americans could not support the war against the Filipinos.⁶² From the Philippines, an African American soldier wrote home to Milwaukee, where his letter was published in the *Wisconsin Weekly Advocate* on May 17, 1900:

I have mingled freely with the natives and have had talks with American colored men here in business and who have lived here for years, in order to learn of them the cause of their [Filipino] dissatisfaction and the reason for this insurrection, and I must confess they have a just grievance. . . . [Americans] began to apply home treatment for colored peoples: cursed them as damned niggers, steal [from] and ravish them, rob them on the street of their small change, take from the fruit vendors whatever suited their fancy, and kick the poor unfortunate if he complained, desecrate their church property, and after fighting began, looted everything in sight, burnings, robbing the graves.

I have seen with my own eyes carcasses lying bare in the boiling sun, the results of raids on receptacles for the dead in search of diamonds. The [white] troops, thinking we would be proud to emulate their conduct. . . . One fellow . . . told me how some fellows he knew had cut off

a native woman's arm in order to get a fine inlaid bracelet. . . . They talked with impunity of "niggers" to our soldiers, never once thinking that they were talking to home "niggers" and should they be brought to remember that at home this is the same vile epithet they hurl at us, they beg pardon and make some effeminate [*sic*] excuse about what the Filipino is called.

I want to say right here that if it were not for the sake of the 10,000,000 black people in the United States, God alone knows on which side of the subject I would be.

General Robert P. Hughes, a commander in the Philippines, entertained some doubt over "which side of the subject" African American troops fell when he reported: "The darkey troops . . . mixed with the natives at once. Whenever they came together they became great friends." And according to a contemporary report, white troops deserted because they found the Army irksome, whereas black troops deserted "for the purpose of joining the insurgents," whose cause they saw as the struggle of all colored people against white domination. Perhaps the most famous African American deserter was David Fagan of the Twenty-fourth Infantry, who joined the Filipino freedom fighters and fought the Yankee imperialists for two years.⁶³ After the war—the war in which General "Howlin' Jake" Smith ordered his men to "kill and burn, kill and burn, the more you kill and the more you burn the more you please me" and the war that cost over 600,000 Filipino lives for the sake of "civilizing" those who remained—about 500 African Americans, many of whom had married Filipino women, chose to stay in the Philippines.⁶⁴

Asians, like African Americans, resisted their exploitation and subjugation, and in the shared struggle for equality secured the blessings of democracy for all peoples. On this point, we must be

63 Gatewood, "Smoked Yankees," pp. 14, 15.

64 Luzviminda Francisco, "The First Vietnam: The Philippine-American War, 1899-1902," in *Letters in Exile: An Introductory Reader on the History of Filipinos in America*, ed. Jesse Quinsaat (Los Angeles: UCLA Asian American Studies Center, 1976), pp. 15, 19; and Gatewood, "Smoked Yankees," p. 15.

62 Willard B. Gatewood, Jr., "Smoked Yankees" and the Struggle for Empire: *Letters from Negro Soldiers, 1898-1902* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1971), p. 13; and William Loren Katz, *The Black West* (Seattle: Open Hand Publishing, 1987), pp. 323-24. On African American soldiers and the Vietnam War, see Byron G. Fiman, Jonathan F. Borus, and M. Duncan Stanton, "Black-White and American-Vietnamese Relations among Soldiers in Vietnam," *Journal of Social Issues* 31, no. 4 (1975): 39-48.

clear. Inclusion, human dignity, and civil rights are not "black issues," nor are they gains for one group made at the expense of another. Likewise, the democratization of America fought for by African and Asian Americans was advantageous for both groups. The "separate but equal" doctrine of *Plessy v. Ferguson*, for instance, was a basis for the 1927 case *Gong Lum v. Rice*, and both were cited as precedents in the 1954 *Brown v. Board of Education* decision.⁶⁵ In addition to those parallel and conjoining struggles for freedom, African and Asian American lives converge like rivers through time. In full knowledge of intergroup conflicts and hatreds among America's minorities and their sources and functions, I will recall here only acts of antiracism and solidarity between Asian and African Americans.⁶⁶

During the late 1840s and early 1850s, African Americans gathered with Chinese and whites at San Francisco's Washerswomen's Bay to wash clothes, and relations between Chinese and Africans were apparently friendly. William Newby, a prominent African American leader in the city, reported to Frederick Douglass "that the Chinese were the most mistreated group in the state and that blacks were the only people who did not abuse them." Both shared with Indians, Newby pointed out, the "same civil rights disabilities," insofar as they were denied the franchise and debarred from the courts.⁶⁷ In 1869, the first Japanese settlers arrived in California and established the Wakamatsu Tea and Silk Farm Colony near Sacramento. The colony failed, but among that

group of adventurers was Masumizu Kuninosuke, who married an African American woman, had three daughters and a son, and operated a fish store in Sacramento for many years.⁶⁸ Sacramento Chinese shared their church with African Americans for some time during the nineteenth century, and in San Francisco, Jean Ng, an African American married to a Chinese American, was buried in a Chinese cemetery. In 1913, Charley Sing, a Mobile, Alabama, Chinese laundryman, tried to get permission to marry Lillie Lambert, an African American.⁶⁹ A Filipino band made sweet music under the baton of its African American conductor, Walter Loving, at the San Francisco Panama-Pacific International Exposition in 1915, and touring African American musicians sometimes stayed at Chinese-owned lodging houses in San Francisco.⁷⁰ In 1927, Lemon Lee Sing, a sixty-eight-year-old Chinese laundryman in New York City, sought permission to adopt Firman Smith, an abandoned African American child he had found sleeping in a hallway. Sing fed and clothed Firman, enrolled him in school, and ultimately won from the courts custody of the child.⁷¹ Sam Lee, a Chinese restaurant owner in Washington, D.C., refused to fire one of his African American employees, despite threats on his life, while in Chicago, in 1929, a Chinese restaurant was dynamited for serving African Americans.⁷²

Many of us, Asian and Pacific Americans, several generations native-born, came of age during America's imperialist war in

68 Bill Hosokawa, *Nisei: The Quiet Americans* (New York: William Morrow, 1969), pp. 31-33.

69 Lapp, *Blacks in Gold Rush California*, pp. 104-5, 109-10; Douglas Daniels, *Pioneer Urbanites: A Social and Cultural History of Black San Francisco* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1980), p. 97; and Shankman, *Ambivalent Friends*, pp. 31-32. On marriages between Africans and Asians in the South, see Loewen, *Mississippi Chinese*, pp. 135-53; Cohen, *Chinese in the Post-Civil War South*, pp. 149-72; and Doris Black, "The Black Chinese," *Sepia*, December 1975, pp. 19-24.

70 Kenneth G. Goode, *California's Black Pioneers: A Brief Historical Survey* (Santa Barbara: McNally & Loftin, 1974), p. 110; and Shankman, *Ambivalent Friends*, p. 30.

71 Shankman, "Black on Yellow," pp. 15-16.

72 *Ibid.*, p. 16.

65 Richard Kluger, *Simple Justice: The History of Brown v. Board of Education and Black America's Struggle for Equality* (New York: Vintage Books, 1975), pp. 120-22, 191, 423, 448, 554, 565-66, 670, 703-4.

66 On African and Asian American conflicts, see Arnold Shankman's three publications: "Asiatic Ogre" or 'Desirable Citizen'? The Image of Japanese Americans in the Afro-American Press, 1867-1933," *Pacific Historical Review* 46, no. 4 (November 1977): 567-87; "Black on Yellow: Afro-Americans View Chinese-Americans," *Phylon* 39, no. 1 (Spring 1978): 1-17; and *Ambivalent Friends: Afro-Americans View the Immigrant* (Westport: Greenwood Press, 1982).

67 Rudolph M. Lapp, *Blacks in Gold Rush California* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1977), pp. 104-5.

Vietnam and the African American freedom struggle of the 1960s. Many of us found our identity by reading Franz Fanon and Malcolm X, Cheikh Anta Diop and W. E. B. Du Bois, Leopold Senghor and Langston Hughes. Many more of us, however, have migrated to the United States since 1965; we came of age in Reagan's America, the era of yuppies and yuppies, and wasn't that the time when history came to an end?—announced, significantly, by an Asian American.⁷³ During fall semester 1990, I asked my Asian American students with whom they felt a closer kinship: African or European Americans? They almost universally expressed affinity with whites, and I recalled how in 1944, amid strident, anti-Japanese wartime propaganda and concentration camps for Japanese Americans, the *Negro Digest* conducted a poll among its readers. To the question, "Should negroes discriminate against Japanese?" 66 percent in the North and West and 53 percent in the South answered "No."⁷⁴ During spring semester 1991, I asked my Asian American students the same question, and all of them claimed kinship with African Americans, and I recalled how in 1960, Yuri Kochiyama, born in San Pedro, California, and interned during the war at the Jerome concentration camp in Arkansas, and her husband, a veteran of World War II, enrolled in the Harlem Freedom School established by Malcolm X to learn African American history and to engage in the struggle for civil rights.⁷⁵

We are a kindred people, African and Asian Americans. We share a history of migration, cultural interaction, and trade. We share a history of colonization, oppression and exploitation, and

parallel and mutual struggles for freedom. We are a kindred people, forged in the fire of white supremacy and tempered in the water of resistance. Yet that kinship has been obscured from our range of vision, and that common cause, turned into a competition for access and resources. We have not yet realized the full meaning of Du Bois's poetic insight: "The stars of dark Andromeda belong up there in the great heaven that hangs above this tortured world. Despite the crude and cruel motives behind her shame and exposure, her degradation and enchaining, the fire and freedom of black Africa, with the uncurbed might of her consort Asia, are indispensable to the fertilizing of the universal soil of mankind, which Europe alone never would nor could give this aching world."⁷⁶

Is yellow black or white? In 1914, Takao Ozawa, a Japanese national, filed for naturalization on the basis of his over twenty-eight-year residence in the United States and the degree of his "Americanization." Further, Ozawa contended, Asians were not specifically excluded under the naturalization laws, and thus he should be considered a "free white person." The U.S. Supreme Court rendered its decision on November 13, 1922, rejecting Ozawa's application and claim. Only whites and Africans were accorded the privilege of naturalization, wrote Associate Justice George Sutherland, and although the founding fathers might not have contemplated Asians within the meaning of either black or white, it was evident that they were not included within the category of "free white persons." Ruled Sutherland: "the appellant is clearly of a race which is not Caucasian, and therefore belongs entirely outside the zone on the negative side."⁷⁷ The marginaliza-

76 W. E. B. Du Bois, *The World and Africa, An Inquiry into the Part Which Africa Has Played in World History* (New York: International Publishers, 1965), p. 260.

77 Frank F. Chuman, *The Bamboo People: The Law and Japanese-Americans* (Del Mar, Calif.: Publisher's Inc., 1976), pp. 70-71. See also Yūji Ichioka, *The Issei: The World of the First Generation Japanese Immigrants, 1885-1924* (New York: Free Press, 1988), pp. 210-26.

73 Francis Fukuyama, "The End of History?" *National Interest* 16 (Summer 1989): 3-18. The symbol of a man of color, particularly a man of Japanese ancestry, schooled in the West proclaiming "the triumph of the West" added substance to the finality of that "triumph," especially to those dubbed by Allan Bloom "we faithful defenders of the Western Alliance" (Allan Bloom, "Responses to Fukuyama," *National Interest* 16 [Summer 1989]: 19).

74 *Negro Digest*, September 1944, p. 66.

75 Yuri Kochiyama, "Because Movement Work Is Contagious," *Gidra*, 1990, pp. 6, 10.

tion of Asians—"entirely outside the zone"—was accompanied by their negation as "nonwhites"—"on the negative side"—in this institutionalization of the racial state. Yellow is not white.

But yellow is not black either, and the question posed is, in a real sense, a false and mystifying proposition. The question is only valid within the meanings given to and played out in the American racial formation, relations that have been posited as a black and white dyad. There are other options. Whites considered Asians "as blacks" or, at the very least, as replacements for blacks in the post-Civil War South, but whites imported Chinese precisely because they were not blacks and were thus perpetual aliens, who could never vote. Similarly, whites upheld Asians as "near-whites" or "whiter than whites" in the model minority stereotype, and yet Asians experienced and continue to face white racism "like blacks" in educational and occupational barriers and ceilings and in anti-Asian abuse and physical violence. Further, in both instances, Asians were used to "discipline" African Americans (and other minorities according to the model minority stereotype). That marginalization of Asians, in fact, within a black and white racial formation, "disciplines" both Africans and Asians and constitutes the essential site of Asian American oppression. By seeing only black and white, the presence and absence of all color, whites render Asians, American Indians, and Latinos invisible, ignoring the gradations and complexities of the full spectrum between the racial poles. At the same time, Asians share with Africans the status and repression of nonwhites—as the Other—and therein lies the debilitating aspect of Asian-African antipathy and the liberating nature of African-Asian unity.

On November 27, 1991, about 1,200 people gathered outside Los Angeles City Hall to participate in a prayer vigil sponsored by the African-Korean American Christian Alliance, a group formed the previous month. A newspaper reporter described the "almost surreal" scene:

Elderly Korean American women twirling and dancing with homeless men in front of the podium. Koreans and street people in a human chain,

holding hands but not looking at each other. Shoes and clothing ruined by cow manure, which had been freshly spread over the rally grounds in an unfortunate oversight. Alliance co-chair Rev. Hee Min Park startled rally-goers when he began quoting from Martin Luther King's famous "I have a dream" speech. Black homeless people listened in stunned silence at first, as the pastor's voice with a heavy immigrant accent filled the slain black minister's familiar words. Then a few began chanting "Amen" in response to Park's litany.⁷⁸

Park's articulation of King's dream reminds me of Maxine Hong Kingston's version of the story of Ts'ai Yen, a Han poetess kidnapped by "barbarians," in her book *The Woman Warrior*. Although she had lived among them for twelve years, Ts'ai Yen still considered the people primitive, until one evening, while inside her tent, she heard "music tremble and rise like desert wind." Night after night the barbarians blew on their flutes, and try as she might, Ts'ai Yen could not block out the sound. "Then, out of Ts'ai Yen's tent, which was apart from the others, the barbarians heard a woman's voice singing, as if to her babies, a song so high and clear, it matched the flutes." After she was ransomed, Ts'ai Yen brought her songs back to her people, who sang them to their own instruments. Concluded Kingston, "They translated well."⁷⁹

⁷⁸ *Korea Times*, December 9, 1991. In Los Angeles, after a meeting between the Korean American Grocers Association and several African American gang leaders on May 25, 1992, the merchants announced plans to hire gang members, and a participant in the negotiations reported a "total bond between the two groups," which included the widely feared gangs the Bloods and the Crips (*Asian Week*, May 29, 1992; and *Korea Times*, June 8, 1992).

⁷⁹ Maxine Hong Kingston, *The Woman Warrior: Memoirs of a Girlhood among Ghosts* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1976), pp. 241-43.