WHO IS MY NEIGHBOR?: KOREANS' PERCEPTIONS OF BLACKS AND LATINOS AS EMPLOYEES, CUSTOMERS, AND NEIGHBORS*

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The purpose of this study is to explain why Korean store owners receive greater hostility and rejection from the black community than from the Latino community. To answer this question, I examine Korean store owners' perceptions of blacks and Latinas, and their relations with them as employees, customers, and neighbors. The data for this study come from a sample survey, conducted between December 1993 and March 1994, of 198 Korean store owners in the Koreatown and South Central sections of Los Angeles. A major finding is that the common nativity status of Koreans and Latinos tends to reduce feelings of social distance between the two groups, whereas the different nativity status of Koreans and blacks tends to increase the distance between them. Moreover, blacks' perceptions that they are hosts and deserve social and economic advancements before immigrants makes them more critical of Korean businesses in their neighborhoods than Latinos do.

INTRODUCTION

Korean immigrants in the United States have shown a strong propensity toward small-scale self-employed businesses. According to the one percent Public Use Microdata Sample of the 1990 U.S. census, 24.3 percent of employed Korean Americans were self-employed in 1990. Koreans were ranked the highest in self-employment among all U.S. ancestry groups (Yoon 1996: 129), having rates more than twice the national average of 10.2 percent. The concentration of Koreans in small business is even higher in large metropolitan areas with large Korean populations. For instance, in Los Angeles approximately 60 percent of adult Korean immigrants are estimated to engage in self-employed businesses (Min 1993: 195).

The concentration of Koreans in small business, however, cannot be interpreted entirely as a symbol of economic success. Rather, it may simply reflect a great disadvantage experienced by Koreans in the American labor

market, which prevents them from obtaining the professional and white-collar wage/salary employment for which they had originally been trained. For many Koreans, small business is a bittersweet livelihood entailing enormous physical, psychological, familial, and social costs for a moderate income.

One of the social costs of Korean immigrant business in the inner-city neighborhoods of large American cities is tension between Korean store owners and black and Latino customers. Limited capital and business skills available to Korean immigrants render such low-income minority neighborhoods as South Central Los Angeles the preferred places to establish small businesses. The concentration of Korean businesses in these neighborhoods, however, has caused frustration and opposition among local residents, particularly native blacks, who charge that Koreans drain resources out of their neighborhoods and hinder the growth of black-owned businesses. Such negative perceptions of Korean businesses combined with numerous instances of over-the-counter disputes between Korean store owners and local residents has given rise to anti-Korean business boycotts which have forced several Korean stores out of business. Such events further widened the social distance between Koreans and blacks on one hand, and between Koreans and Latinos on the other, making Korean businesses the targets of arson and looting during the Los Angeles civil unrest on April 29, 1992.[1]

There can be no single explanation of the Korean-black conflict. Prejudice, language barriers, cultural differences, and alleged shoplifting and mistreatment of customers are often the precipitating causes of numerous over-the-counter disputes between Korean store owners and black customers (Chang 1990; Jo 1992; Yoon 1993). Real or perceived economic competition between Koreans and blacks can cause the bad feelings of individual blacks toward individual Korean store owners to escalates into a collective opinion against Korean businesses as a group. Black nationalism, on the other hand, can transform over-the-counter-disputes into essentially political phenomena, causing black boycotts of Korean businesses to be used for political leverage for blacks to gain the economic autonomy in their communities (Lee 1993; Yoon 1993; Min 1996).

Korean-black conflict is by nature a complex issue. This article focuses on the personal and psychological aspects of the conflict. This does not mean that structural and situational factors are less important. Understanding the

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[1] Of a total of 4,500 stores that were either burned down or looted, 2,300 were Korean-owned, and of a total of $1 billion in property damages, $400 million was borne by Koreans.

causes of disputes at the personal and store levels, however, and how conflicting parties interpret the problem are important steps toward the development of a comprehensive understanding of the Korean-black conflict.

Lucie Cheng and Yen Espiritu (1989) developed the "immigrant hypothesis" to explain why Korean store owners in Los Angeles have not encountered the same hostility from Latino communities as they have from black communities. According to these researchers, Koreans and Latinos share an "immigrant ideology" endorsing hard work and frugality as keys to success in American society. In the eyes of immigrants, America is "the land of opportunity," although it may be seen as "the land of opportunity denied" in the eyes of native blacks.

The success of Koreans in small business, according to Chen and Espiritu, does not arouse jealousy and hostility among Latinos, who instead try to emulate them. As fellow immigrants, Koreans and Latinos cannot claim a nativistic sense of superiority one over the other. In contrast, native-born blacks are in a position to harbor nativistic feelings toward Koreans, and for this reason they are more likely than Latinos to get angry when they feel they are disrespected and mistreated by people they consider foreigners:

> Black folks are angry … because here are a bunch of foreigners, a bunch of folks who don't speak English, who can't vote, who come here with money, and that is how it is perceived (Cited in Cheng and Espiritu 1989: 528).

In a similar fashion, Koreans feel that they are racially and socioeconomically superior to blacks. As Jo (1992: 403) explains, "Many Koreans associate American blacks with Africans in Africa and their culture. Africans are inferior people and so are American blacks." Koreans take pride in the success they have achieved despite the language barriers and short residence in the United States. Their self-esteem is enhanced further by comparing their socioeconomic status with that of American blacks, who are seen to be trapped in poverty despite their better English skills and American citizenship.

Chen and Espiritu's immigrant hypothesis seems to hold for Korean-black-Latino relations in Los Angeles. Their data and methodology, however, rely heavily on newspaper articles, thus basing their interpretations mostly upon indirect and conjectural evidence. Additionally, the viewpoints of community leaders cited in the mass media may not necessarily represent those of ordinary people. These leaders, rather, may

exaggerate the level of prejudice and racial tension among Koreans, blacks, and Latinos to advance their own political purposes.

DATA AND METHODOLOGY

This study, attempts to provide a more solid empirical test of the immigrant hypothesis through the data gathered in a survey of 105 store owners in Koreatown and 93 store owners in South Central of Los Angeles. A 13-page standardized interview schedule composed of both closed and open-ended items was used in face-to-face interviews lasting on average between 40 and 50 minutes. I conducted this survey along with five Korean-speaking undergraduate and graduate students of the University of California, Los Angeles and University of Southern California from December of 1993 to March of 1994.

Interviewees were selected from two locations in Los Angeles: Koreatown and South Central. These two areas represent different business environments in which Korean store owners interact with racially diverse clienteles. In Koreatown, Koreans constitute the major customer group, making up 57 percent of the total customers in 1994, followed by non-Hispanic whites (14 percent), and Latinos (14 percent). In contrast, blacks and Latinos are the major customer groups in South Central, accounting for 50 percent and 29 percent of the total customers in 1994.

The two areas are also markedly different in crime rates and the socioeconomic status of customers. About 60 percent of Korean businesses in South Central experienced shoplifting, burglary, arson, looting, and damages to equipment during 1992-1993, as compared to 42 percent of those in Koreatown.

The higher crime rates in South Central are partly due to the lower socioeconomic status of its local residents. The paucity of decent employment in inner-city neighborhoods increases, temptations to engage in shoplifting, burglary, and other crimes among the poor and unemployed morese than among the middle and working classes. Seventy-four percent of businesses in South Central have members of the lower classes as their customers, whereas only 21 percent of those in Koreatown depend on these groups for customers. Such differences could be expected to have a significant impact on the relations of owners in these two areas with their employees, customers, and neighbors.

The interviewees for this study were randomly drawn from Korean business directories and the membership directories of major Korean business associations, such as the Korean Grocers' Association, the Korean

Dry Cleaner-Laundry Association, and the Korean Wig and Hairgood Retailers Association. Membership directories were essential for locating Korean businesses in South Central because businesses that are not dependent upon Korean patronage are rarely listed in the general Korean business directories. Relying solely on the latter would result in the exclusion of those businesses that are located outside Koreatown.

This article is organized as follows. First, I examine how Korean store owners in Koreatown and South Central perceive and relate to blacks and Latinos as employees, customers, and neighbors. These categories represent major dimensions of interpersonal relationships between Koreans and the two minority groups. Second, as an empirical test of the immigrant hypothesis, I compare Koreans' perceptions of blacks and Latimas, and their relationships with them and propose explanations for any differences. Finally, I recommend programs and policies that can ease racial tensions between Koreans and blacks at individual, community, and government levels.

PERCEPTIONS OF BLACKS AND LATINOS AS EMPLOYEES

Korean store owners have a strong preference for Latino as opposed to black employees. Eighty parcent of respondents would rather hire a Latino than a black employee, whereas only ten percent would rather hire a black than a Latino. The preference for Latinas is stronger among Korean store owners in Koreatown than among their counterparts in South Central, due in part to differences in the ethnic composition of the local residents and customers in the two areas. Although Koreatown is an economic center for Koreans, it is not their residential area. The largest residential ethnic group in Koreatown consists of Mexicans, who, along with other Latinos accounted for 36.7 percent of local residents in 1980. Koreans accounted for only 10.5 percent of the total (Min 1993: 189). The proportion of Koreans in Koreatown increased to 19.3 percent in 1990, but Latinos remained more numerous, accounting for 51.6 percent of local residents (U.S. Bureau of the Census 1993: 1057-58).

Reflecting this distribution, more Korean businesses in Koreatown cater to Latino customers than to blacks. About half of the businesses there depend on Latinos as one of their three most important customer groups, whereas only 17 percent rely on black customers. Due to the heavier dependence on Latino customers, store owners in Koreatown seem to be more strongly motivated to hire Latino employees: 83 percent of Korean store owners in Koreatown prefer Latinos to blacks as employees, whereas

TABLE 1. PREFERENCE FOR EMPLOYEES OF DIFFERENT RACES (%)

Preference	%	Korea town	South Central
Prefer Koreans over non-Koreans			
Yes	52.0	63.6	38.7
No	40.0	29.8	50.5
Don't know	9.0	6.7	10.8
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0
N	197	104	93
Prefer Latinos over blacks			
Yes	80.0	83.3	75.8
No	10.0	2.9	18.7
Not applicable	10.0	13.7	5.5
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0
N	193	102	91

Note: The "Not applicable" category refers to those who do not have a need or preference for either
      Latino or black employees.

only 3 percent prefer blacks.

In contrast, Korean store owners in South Central seem to feel greater social pressure than their counterparts in Koreatown to hire black employees. In 1994, blacks accounted for half the customers of such businesses, 84 percent of which catered to them. In contrast, Latinos represented 29 percent of patrons of these businesses, 70 percent of which catered to them. Due to the heavier dependence on black customers, more respondents in South Central (19 percent) than in Koreatown (3 percent) prefer to hire black employees. Yet, an overwhelming majority of Korean store owners in both areas still prefer Latinos to blacks as employees. Thus, the ethnic composition of the customer base is not the determining factor of Koreans' preference for Latino employees.

A more important reason offered by Korean store owners for their preference is the perception that Latinos possess a more desirable work ethic and personality traits than do blacks. More specifically, Latinos are perceived by Koreans as more hardworking, docile, honest, prompt, and responsible than blacks, and thus are more reliable and trustworthy than blacks. However, the other side of such positive perceptions is the idea that Latinos are easier to control and fire without fear of being sued for workers' compensation. As Table 2 shows, 46 percent of the Korean store owners favoring Latino employees cite work ethic and personality traits as the primary reasons for this preference. By comparison, only 15 percent of the Korean store owners favoring black employees cite work ethic and

TABLE 2. REASONS FOR PREFERRING EMPLOYEES OF DIFFERENT RACES (%)

Reason	Prefer Latinos	Prefer blacks
Work ethic and personality traits	45.9	15.0
Racial composition of customers	19.0	75.0
Cultural similarity[a]	18.9	5.0
Lower wage	10.1	0.0
Job-related skills and ability	4.1	5.0
Others	2.0	0.0
Total	100.0	100.0
N	148	20

Note: Respondents were asked in an open-ended question to cite three reasons for preferring Latino employees over black ones or vice versa. Their responses were later coded into the above five broad categories. This table shows what they cited as the most important reason for their preferences.

a. Similarity in culture, values, mentality, and ways of thinking, which leads to a sense of affinity and affection.

personality traits. The majority of these respondents cite instead the situational consideration that blacks comprise their major clientele.

Negative perceptions of blacks as employees are not unique to Korean employers. According to Joleen Kirschenman and Kathryn Neckerman (1991), white employers in Chicago's inner-city area maintain negative stereotypes about blacks and prefer Latinos to blacks as employees. According to the stereotypical images, blacks are "unskilled, uneducated, illiterate, dishonest, lacking initiative, unmotivated, involved with drugs and gangs, did not understand work, had no personal charm, were unstable, lacked a work ethic, and had no family life or role models" (208). The following quotation from that study illustrates whites' preference for Latino and Asian employees over black ones:

> When we hear other employers talk, they'll go after primarily the Latino and Oriental first, those two, and, I'll qualify that even further, the Mexican Latino, and any Oriental, and after that, that's pretty much it, that's pretty much where they like to draw the line, right there (228).

Thus, Korean and white employers alike prefer not to hire inner-city black employees.

Korean employers, however, do consider an additional status marker when hiring employees: nativity. Nativity refers to the country in which an individual is born, and is usually a constant in relations between white employers and black employees. It is, however, a variable in relations

between foreign-born Korean employers and native-born black employees. Past research on relations between whites and blacks has mostly focused on race, with little attention to nativity. However, nativity has a significant effect on the nature and pattern of relations between minority groups, regardless of the race and class of the groups involved.

The common nativity status of Koreans and Latinos tends to reduce the feelings of social distance between the two groups, whereas the different nativity status of Koreans and blacks tends to increase social distance. Because of their similar skin color, immigrant status, and the language barrier, Koreans feel emotionally closer to and more empathetic toward Latinos than they feel toward blacks. One respondent described this feeling with the Korean word Jung, which refers to the force that bonds humans to one another. It is not exactly the same as love, but more like affinity, empathy, sympathy, and affection. Latinos, especially Mexican immigrants, remind some Koreans of the naive, innocent, and simple-minded countrymen in the old days of Korea. Some Korean employers also say that they have a lower language barrier with Latinos than with blacks, although Korean is by no means closer to Spanish grammatically or phonetically than it is to black English. As a matter of fact, Koreans and Latinos should have a greater language barrier because of their equally limited English proficiency. But at least psychologically, Koreans are more comfortable and confident communicating with less fluent and thus less threatening immigrants. This greater confidence puts Korean employers in a commanding position over their Latino employees.

In contrast, Koreans feel less secure about their status in relation to American blacks. From Koreans' viewpoint, blacks tend to think that they are hosts and have chronological seniority over Koreans. In addition, Korean immigrants have a severe language barrier and are not well acquainted with American customs and business practices. These disadvantages put Korean employers in a weaker position to command native-born black employees. The nativity difference between Koreans and blacks seems to conflict, with the roles expected of employers and employees, at least in the eyes of Koreans. With Latino employees, Korean employers can maintain a seemingly proper hierarchy of race, nativity, and class. In Korean stores (particularly grocery stores), it is not difficult to observe that Korean employers order Latino employees in Korean, and these employees understand simple Korean words and expressions. This kind of employer-employee relationship is rare between Korean employers and black employees. Black employees are not interested at all in learning Korean to communicate better with their Korean bosses and customers.

During an interview for this study, one Korean dry cleaner in South Central reported feeling emotionally closer to Latinos than to blacks because he and his Latino employees share the same minority status. By this he meant immigrant status, because of course blacks are also racial minorities in the United States. His remark however, suggests that he does not regard blacks as minorities. It also suggests that blacks are perceived to have greater power than Koreans or Latinos.

Another important reason for the preference for Latino employees is their willingness to accept low wages and menial positions in Korean stores. Ten percent of the respondents cite this as one of the three most important reasons for their preference. Because of their immigrant status (for some, illegal immigrant status) and disadvantages in the general labor market, Latino immigrants are in weak position to bargain for higher wages and better working conditions. In contrast, native-born blacks object more strongly to being used as cheap and docile labor, partly because of the availability of government assistance programs and partly because of their sense of honor. They tend to use the white standard of living as their frame of reference and are not willing to accept low wages and menial positions in immigrant-owned businesses. Service-oriented jobs, such as dishwashers, helpers, and laborers, are perceived to be too demeaning to take.

Immigrant Latinos are in a different situation. They still compare their economic status in the United States with that in their home countries. Wages and work conditions in Korean stores are perceived to be better than, or at least similar to, those at home. Moreover, some of them have only short-term goals to make money in the United States, eventually planning to return to their home countries. Any jobs that accomplish these goals are acceptable, even if they are not desirable. Immigrant Latinos eager to find work often walk into Korean stores and ask for jobs. Such job hunting is less

TABLE 3. RACE OF EMPLOYEES OF KOREAN BUSINESSES (%)

Race	Total		Korea Town		South Central	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
Korean	450	46.8	336	61.0	114	27.9
Asian (non-Korean)	11	1.1	8	1.5	3	0.7
White	15	1.6	10	1.8	5	1.2
Latino	413	43.0	191	34.7	222	54.3
Black	70	7.3	5	0.9	65	15.9
Other	1	0.1	1	0.2	0	0.0
Total	960	100.0	551	100.0	409	100.0

TABLE 4. PERCEIVED LEVEL OF CLASHES WITH CUSTOMERS

	Total		Korea town		South Central	
Race	N	%	N	%	N	%
1 (Very serious)	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0
2	3	1.5	3	2.9	0	0.0
3	5	2.5	1	1.0	4	4.3
4 (Not toward one end or another)	65	32.8	21	20.0	44	47.3
5	19	9.6	9	8.6	10	10.8
6	64	32.3	39	37.1	25	26.9
7 (No clashes at all)	41	20.7	32	30.5	9	9.7
8 (Don't know)	1	0.5	0	0.0	1	1.1
Mean		5.31		5.68		4.90
SD		1.28		1.28		1.15
Balancea		−59.11		−72.33		−44.22
N		198		105		93

Note: The "Don't know" category is not included in the computation of the mean scores, standard deviations, and balance.

a. Balance is the percent difference between those who reported scores of 1 through 3 (serious levels of clashes) and those who reported scores of 5 through 7 (not serious). The negative sign of the percent difference means that more respondents perceived the level of clashes with customers to be "not serious" then perceived it to be "serious".

common among blacks. Thus, both the supply of and demand for Latino employees are greater than those for black workers, resulting in the hiring of far more Latinos than blacks in Korean stores. In 1994, Latino employees accounted for 43 percent of a total of 960 employees in Korean stores in Los Angeles, and their proportion was even higher in South Central, where they constituted 54 percent of the total.

PERCEPTIONS OF BLACKS AND LATINOS AS CUSTOMERS

Contrary to sensational reports in the mass madia, most disputes between Korean store owners and their customers are trivial and not violent — far from racial bigotry and hate crime. As Table 4 shows, out of 198 respondents asked to rate the level of clashes with their customers on a seven-point scale, only eight (4 percent) report very serious or somewhat serious clashes.[2] The

[2] Disputes and clashes are distinguished here from conflicts. The former can occur because of personal and psychological factors, such as language barriers, cultural misunderstandings, and mistreatment of customers. In contrast, conflicts are direct, overt, enduring, and collective

majority of respondents report some clashes with their customers, but mainly over prices, shortchanging, shoplifting, and returned items — all of which could be resolved through better English-speaking ability and greater patience with customers. Although the respondents in South Central report a slightly higher level of clashes than their counterparts in Koreatown, 96 percent of them still report only a moderate level of clashes or none at all.

Despite the generally low overall levels, Korean store owners still experienc more frequent clashes with black customers than with Latino customers. About 40 percent of respondents report this trend, compared with less than 5 percent who report having more frequent clashes with Latino customers. In South Central, where the respondents depend more heavily on both black and Latino customers, 65 percent report more frequent clashes with black customers and only 3 percent with Latino customers. Thus, frequent contact increases the level of clashes with black customers but not with Latino customers. It is also interesting to note that even the Koreatown respondents conformed to this pattern, although blacks are a marginal customer group there, comprising only 3 percent of the total. If more frequent contact increases the potential for intergroup clashes, these respondents should report more frequent clashes with Latino customers. The fact that they do not suggests that different levels of intergroup clashes result from something other than different levels of intergroup contact.

TABLE 5. PERCEIVED DIFFERENCE IN THE FREQUENCY OF CLASHES WITH BLACK AND LATINO CUSTOMERS

	Total		Korea town		South Central	
Frequency	N	%	N	%	N	%
More frequent clashes with						
black customers	83	42.1	23	22.1	60	64.5
Latino customers	9	4.6	6	5.8	3	3.2
No difference	26	13.2	11	10.6	15	16.1
Don't know	20	10.2	14	13.5	6	6.5
Not applicable	59	29.9	50	48.1	9	9.7
Total	197	100.0	104	100.0	93	100.0

Note: The "Not applicable" category refers to those who have no interaction with black and Latino customers.

actions taken by blacks and Koreans against each other. Although frequent clashes are a necessary condition leading to Korean-black conflict, they do not automatically develop into conflicts.

TABLE 6. REASONS FOR FREQUENCY OF CLASHES WITH BLACK (%)

Reason	Total	Korea town	South Central
Blacks are major customers	23.8	4.5	31.0
Blacks are more demanding and assertivea	55.1	63.7	51.7
Blacks's more frequent misbehaviorsb	33.8	27.3	36.2
Blacks' worse economic conditions	7.5	9.1	6.9
Greater cultural difference with blacks	10.0	0.0	13.8
Greater language barrier with blacks	11.3	0.0	13.8
Blacks' prejudice against and mistreatment of Koreans	13.8	13.6	13.8
Koreans' prejudice against and mistreatment of blacks	3.8	9.1	1.7
Mutual prejudice, distrust, and disrespect	2.5	4.5	1.7
Others	1.3	4.5	0.0
Total			
%	162.9	136.3	170.6
N	80	22	58

Note: In an open-ended question, respondents were asked to cite three reasons for having more frequent clashes with black customers than with Latino customers or vice versa. Only the respondents who reported having more frequent clashes with black customers were included for analysis in this table. The total percentage is over 100 because the respondents cited more than one reason.
a. In their requests for better prices, credit, and service.
b. More likely than Latinos to lie, shoplift, and use bad language.

Different sets of attitudes and behaviors among Koreans, blacks, and Latinos seem to be a more important cause of this pattern

The most frequently cited reason for the more frequent clashes with black customers is the perception of Korean store owners that blacks are more demanding than Latinos in their requests for better prices, credit, and refund and exchange of merchandise. Blacks, who are more fluent in English and more aware of customer rights than Latinos, are seen to be more assertive in these demands. For this reason, price haggling and disputes over "No Refund and Exchange Policy" in Korean stores are more frequent with black customers than with Latinos customers. At the height of disputes, some black customers yell at Korean store owners, "Go back to your country," and "Learn English to do business in this country." Unable to counter attack in fluent English, many Korean store owners have to keep their anger and humiliation inside.

The more demanding stance maintained by blacks toward Korean store owners is also seen as a reflection of their sense of seniority. In the words of

many Koreans, blacks tend to think of themselves as hosts and Koreans as strangers who were not invited into this country. Some Koreans coined the term "master consciousness" to describe this attitude. The story of a Korean liquor store owner illustrates his contrasting feelings toward black and Latino customers:

> Blacks often come in with the attitude that they are the king and feel superior to the store owner. They feel that as customers they are entitled to good quality service; no matter how badly they treat the store owner, they are always right. Since blacks have the advantage over language, they look down on me. However, Mexican customers would come in with a more friendly attitude. Many times a group of Mexicans would come in and say, "QuÈ pasa amigo" or "Hi, my friend!" They expect someone on the other side to be friendly and be on an equal level. With many Mexican customers I am able to build friendly relationships. As a gesture of respect, many Mexican customers try to learn Korean or teach me a couple of easy Spanish phrases that would be useful to them. Even though we have language barriers, we are able to communicate adequately with broken English. Since blacks speak fluent English, they are less patient in communicating (Personal interview).

Another factor contributing to the greater clashes with black customers is, as mentioned earlier, their alleged shoplifting. Although Latinos also engage in shoplifting, Korean store owners tend to believe that black customers do so more frequently in their stores. Because of this preconception, Korean store owners and their Korean employees watch more closely when black customers walk into the store and often follow them in the aisles. Although Korean store owners may justify their actions as an effective way to curtail shoplifting, which is rampant enough to threaten the survival of their fragile businesses, their actions nonetheless cause many black customers to feel as if they are treated as criminals. The alleged shoplifting and consequent disputes have been among the most common precipitating causes of Korean-black conflict.

Suspicion and mistrust between Korean store owners and black customers make relations between the two groups abrasive and frustrating. To make matters worse, after several Korean store owners had been murdered in South Central, increasing numbers of Koreans there installed bulletproof glass as dividers between themselves and their customers. All business transactions are now made through a small revolving door underneath the wall of glass. This transparent wall gives them a sense of security, but it nonetheless makes their relations with customers purely economical, impersonal, and full of distrust.

TABLE 7. RACIAL ATTITUDES TOWARD FOUR RACIAL GROUPS (%)

Trait Dimension	Whites	Asians	Blacks	Latinos
Diligence				
1 Hardworking	10.2	28.1	0.5	0.0
2	17.9	43.9	0.5	4.6
3	27.0	16.3	1.0	10.7
4 Intermediate	31.6	7.1	13.3	38.3
5	2.6	1.0	24.5	25.5
6	1.0	0.5	41.0	13.8
7 Lazy	0.0	0.0	12.2	5.1
8 Don't know	9.7	3.1	6.1	2.0
Mean	3.0	2.1	5.5	4.5
Balance[b]	51.5	86.8	−75.7	−29.1
N	196	196	196	19
Violence				
1 Violence-prone	1.5	1.5	21.4	6.6
2	5.6	3.1	32.1	14.8
3	9.2	8.7	19.4	26.5
4 Intermediate	25.0	26.0	13.8	29.6
5	11.7	14.8	2.0	8.2
6	18.4	20.4	1.5	5.1
7 Not violence-prone	9.7	16.8	2.6	1.5
8 Don't know	18.9	8.7	7.1	7.7
Mean	4.7	5.0	2.5	3.4
Balance	−23.5	−38.7	66.9	33.2
N	196	196	196	196
Intelligence				
1 Intelligent	6.2	10.8	0.0	0.0
2	27.2	38.5	1.0	1.0
3	25.6	25.1	3.1	5.1
4 Intermediate	25.6	15.9	19.5	23.6
5	1.0	1.0	25.1	29.7
6	0.0	0.5	30.3	23.1
7 Unintelligent	0.5	0.0	10.3	8.2
8 Don't know	13.8	8.2	10.8	9.2
Mean	2.9	2.6	5.3	5.0
Balance	57.5	72.9	−61.5	−54.8
N	195	195	195	195
Dependency				
1 Self-supporting	25.0	17.9	0.0	0.5
2	38.3	39.3	2.6	3.6

TABLE 7. CONTINUED

Trait Dimension	Whites	Asians	Blacks	Latinos
3	13.8	20.4	3.1	4.6
4 Intermediate	14.8	12.2	11.3	26.7
5	0.5	4.6	22.6	28.2
6	0.0	0.0	39.0	24.1
7 Live off welfare	0.0	0.0	14.4	5.6
8 Don't know	7.7	5.6	7.2	6.7
Mean	2.2	2.4	5.5	4.9
Balance	76.5	73.0	−70.3	−49.2
N	196	196	195	195
Summary ratings[b] (Undesirable - Desirable)				
Mean	20.4	21.9	10.4	13.1
N	135	166	164	166

Note: Respondents were shown a seven-point scale on which to rate the characteristics of people in a group. A score of 1 meant "almost all of the people in that group" had a given positive (negative) trait; a score of 7 meant "almost all of the people in that group" had a given negative (positive) trait; and a score of 4 meant "the group was not toward one end or the other."

a. Balance is the percent difference between positive responses and negative responses. When the mean scores and percent difference are used together, they yield more reliable results than when used alone. The "Don't know" category is not included in the calculation of the mean scores and the percent difference.

b. Summary ratings were computed by summing up the scores of the four trait ratings. They range from 4 (most undesirable) to 16 (intermediate) to 28 (most desirable). Traits one, three, and four were reverse coded before being summed up.

PERCEPTIONS OF BLACKS AND LATINOS AS NEIGHBORS

It is not clear whether their more frequent clashes with black customers are caused by or symptomatic of the greater prejudice Koreans have against blacks. In my opinion, the two factors are closely related in such a way that an initial prejudice against blacks increases the likelihood of clashes with them, which in turn reinforces the prejudice.

Probably because of this reciprocal relationship, Korean store owners have more unfavorable attitudes toward blacks and experience greater feelings of social distance from them than they do from whites, Asians, or Latinos. As Table 7 indicates, blacks are perceived by Korean store owners

as the least hardworking, the most prone to violence, the least intelligent, and the most dependent on welfare. Although Latinos are perceived unfavorably in terms of their personality traits, they are still seen as superior to blacks in terms of work ethic, aversion to violence, intelligence, and self-sufficiency. For instance, 78 percent of the respondents perceive blacks as lazy, whereas 44 percent perceive Latinos as lazy. Similarly, 76 percent perceive that blacks prefer to live off welfare rather than supporting themselves, while 58 percent hold similar perception of Latinos.

The respondents in Koreatown are slightly more favorable toward blacks than their counterparts in South Central, but the difference between the two groups is negligible. For example, the summary trait ratings of blacks, which ranges from 4 (the least desirable) to 16 (intermediate) and to 28 (the most desirable), were 10.62 for Korean store owners in Koreatown and 10.08 for Korean store owners in South Central. In addition, the two groups are almost equal in their attitudes toward Latinos. These results indicate that the prejudice of Korean store owners against blacks and Latinos is not determined by the business environment. In other words, Korean store

TABLE 8. FEELINGS OF SOCIAL DISTANCE FROM MEMBERS OF FOUR RACIAL GROUPS (%)

Social Distance Category	Whites	Asians	Blacks	Latinos
1 Strongly favor	24.7	8.6	0.0	0.0
2	37.4	29.8	1.5	5.6
3 Not favor or oppose	36.4	52.0	16.7	25.3
4	1.5	8.6	49.0	46.0
5 Strongly oppose	0.0	1.0	32.0	23.2
Mean	2.2	2.6	4.1	3.9
Balance	60.6	28.8	−79.5	−63.6
N	198	198	198	198
Intermarriageb				
1 Strongly favor	1.0	4.5	1.0	0.0
2	2.5	16.7	0.5	2.0
3 Not favor or oppose	49.0	47.5	24.7	34.8
4	27.3	19.7	34.8	36.4
5 Strongly oppose	20.2	11.6	38.9	26.8
Mean	3.6	3.2	4.1	3.9
Balance	−44.0	−10.1	−72.2	−61.2
N	198	198	198	198

a. Living in a neighborhood in which half the neighbors are from the given racial group.
b. Having a close relative marry a member of the given racial group.

owners in Koreatown, who interact less frequently with black and Latino customers than their counterparts in South Central, have essentially the same attitudes toward the two minority groups.

The respondents also report feelings of greater social distance from blacks than from any of the other racial groups. Eighty percent are opposed to the idea of living in a neighborhood in which half the residents are black. Seventy-two percent opposed the idea of having a close relative marry a black person. In contrast, 39 percent are opposed to living in a predominantly white neighborhood and 44 percent are opposed to having a close relative marry a white person.

Interestingly, Korean store owners seem to be more prejudiced against blacks than are whites. According to Bobo and Kluegel (1991), who used data from the 1990 General Social Survey, 44 percent of 1,150 white respondents thought blacks were lazy and 56 percent thought they lived off welfare. In contrast, 78 percent and 76 percent of the 196 Korean respondents in the current study hold these views, respectively. Similarly, 47 percent of the white respondents in the GSS survey compared to 81 percent of my Korean respondents were opposed to living in a predominantly black neighborhood and 65 percent compared to 74 percent were opposed to having a relative marry a black person.

One noteworthy finding is that the length of time Korean store owners have lived in the United States is not significantly related to their attitudes toward and feelings of social distance from blacks (see Table 9). It is often said that Koreans are prejudiced against blacks prior to their immigration to the United States (Jo 1992). Coming from a culturally and racially homogeneous society, they are said to be ill prepared to deal with racial diversity in the United States. To make matters worse, their images of blacks are negatively shaped by Hollywood movies and TV programs that stereotyped blacks as being lazy, unintelligent, prone to violence, and inferior to whites.

If that is the case, we may expect that the longer Korean immigrants live in America, the more they will become aware of the limitations and dangers of stereotypes about blacks. The enlightenment effect of length of residence, then, should reduce prejudice against and feelings of social distance from blacks.

Table 9 shows, however, that such an effect is minimal and inconsistent. Length of residence is neither significantly nor consistently related to the respondents' attitudes toward blacks or their feelings of social distance from them. Overall, they maintain unfavorable attitudes toward and feelings of wide social distance from blacks, regardless of the length of their residence

TABLE 9. RACIAL ATTITUDES AND FEELINGS OF SOCIAL DISTANCE BY LENGTH OF U.S. RESIDENCE

| Trait | Length of U.S. Residence (years) | | | | | |
Dimension	Under 10	11-20	Over 21	Total	F-ratio	F.Prob
Diligence (1 (Hardworking) – 7 (Lazy))						
Mean	5.50	5.51	5.54	5.51	.01	.99
Balance	−88.6	−78.2	−84.6	−81.5		
N	44	110	26	180		
Violence (1 (Prone to violence) – 7 (Not prone to violence)						
Mean	2.38	2.44	3.17	2.52	3.23	.04*
Balance	83.0	72.9	54.1	72.0		
N	47	107	24	178		
Intelligence (1 (Intelligent) – 7 (Unintelligent)						
Mean	5.07	5.24	5.48	5.23	1.16	.32
Balance	−60.4	−66.4	−88.9	−69.0		
N	43	101	27	171		
Dependency (1 (Self-supporting) – 7 (Live off welfare))						
Mean	5.23	5.64	5.00	5.44	4.57	.01*
Balance	−70.5	−81.1	−60.7	−75.7		
N	44	106	28	178		
Summary Trait Ratings (4 (Least desirable) – 28 (Most desirable))						
Mean	10.95	9.95	11.09	10.35	2.28	.11
N	40	99	22	161		
Residential Integration (1 (Strongly favor) – 5 (Strongly oppose))						
Mean	4.08	4.21	3.94	4.13	1.89	.15
Balance	−77.6	−83.3	−74.2	−80.3		
N	49	114	31	194		
Marital Integration (1 (Strongly favor) – 5 (Strongly oppose))						
Mean	3.96	4.24	3.77	4.09	4.42	.01*
Balance	−63.3	−80.7	−51.6	−72.2		
N	49	114	31	194		

*Significant at 0.05 level.

Note: This table shows the results of one-way analysis of variance that compares racial attitudes toward and feelings of social distance from blacks among three cohorts of respondents.

in the United States.

To examine in detail those factors which are significantly related to respondents' attitudes and feelings of social distance, I present the results of bivariate correlation and multivariate regression analyses with a list of

variables of respondents' thought to be important in racial attitudes. The dependent variables attitudes toward blacks and respondents' feelings of social distance from blacks are measured by the summary trait ratings and the summary social distance ratings, respectively. The latter was constructed from the two previous questions asking the respondents' tolerance to residential and marital integration with blacks. The independent variables include sociodemographic variables (age, sex, marital status, levels of schooling, English-speaking ability, length of U.S. residence), business-related variables (location of business, distance in miles from home to work, annual gross sales, hours of work, and perceived levels of job-related stress and conflict with customers), and personal views on poverty and inequality in American society. The last variable, which is named "structuralism," is included in the analyses because recent research in racial attitudes argue for the importance of American socioeconomic ideology (Bobo and Kluegel 1991: 26). It is not the simple fact of perceived economic differences between whites and minority groups alone that drives the way whites view them, but the ideological filters through which they are seen. From this viewpoint, people who believe in a "just world" tend to regard individuals' talents and efforts as keys to their success and are likely to blame poor people for their misfortunes. In contrast, people who take a structuralistic view on poverty are likely to blame racism, discrimination, and the lack of opportunities for education and jobs. Previous research shows that people taking more structuralistic views are more likely to have sympathetic and favorable attitudes toward racial minorities (Bobo and Kluegel 1991; Yoon 1995).[3]

Of the 16 independent variables in the multivariate regression analyses, only English-speaking ability and distance in miles from home to work are significantly related to respondents' racial attitudes toward blacks.

These results indicate that the respondents who are more proficient in English and who live closer to the place of their businesses are more favorable toward blacks.

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[3] The variable "structuralism" was constructed from the following four questions: (1) In the United States any one, regardless of race, sex, or nationality, can make it if he or she works hard, (2) In the United States racism makes it more difficult for some minority groups than whites to get ahead, (3) A large proportion of black Americans are poor mainly because of their lack of effort, and (4) A large proportion of black Americans are poor mainly because of a failure of society to provide enough education and jobs for black Americans. The respondents were asked to tell for each one whether they strongly agreed (a score of 1), somewhat agreed (a score of 2), somewhat disagreed (a score of 3), or strongly disagreed (a score of 4). Questions 2 and 4 were reverse coded and scores from each question were then computed in a way that the higher scores represent more structuralistic views on poverty and inequality.

TABLE 10. BIVARIATE CORRELATION AND MULTIVARIATE REGRESSION ANALYSES OF VARIABLES RELATED TO RACIAL ATTITUDES AND FEELINGS OF SOCIAL DISTANCE

Independent Variable	Racial Attitudes		Feelings of Social Distance	
	r	Beta	r	Beta
Personal variable				
Age	-.08		-.12*	
Sex (1=female, 2=male)	.13		.05	
Marital status (0=nonmarried, 1=married)	.02		.00	
English-speaking ability[a]	.16**	.19*	.05	
Levels of formal schooling	-.00		-.08	
Length of U.S. residence	.03		.04	
Business-related variables				
Duration of the current business	.07		.01	
First business[b]	.09		.03	
Location of business (1=Koreatown, 2=South Central)	-.14**		.09	
Plan to leave the current location of business (0=no, 1=yes)	-.02		-.04	
Hours of work	-.11		.03	
Annual gross sales	.05		.03	
Distance in miles from home to work	-.20**	-.22**	-.04	
Levels of perceived job-related stress[c]	-.15*		-.10	
Levels of perceived conflict with customers[c]	-.09		-.12	
Structuralism	.14*		-.10	
R²		7.3%		
F-ratio		5.64		
Signif F		0.004		
N		14.7		

*Significant at 0.05 level, **Significant at 0.01 level.

a. Subjective levels of English-speaking ability (1=not at all, 2=not well, 3=fair, 4=well, and 5=very well)

b. A dichotomous variable with 1 representing the current business as the first business ever owned in the United States and 0 not the first business.

c. Measured at a 7-point scale where 1 representing no stress or conflict at all and 7 an extremely high level of stress or conflict with customers.

No variables are significantly related to respondents' feelings of social distance toward blacks. Overall, these results show that there is little individual variation in respondents' attitudes toward and feelings of social distance toward blacks.

One plausible explanation for respondents' unanimously negative perceptions of blacks is that their postimmigration experiences in the United States have reinforced rather than changed their initial prejudices against blacks. This might have happened primarily because of their limited and biased interaction with the black population. As Korean immigrants established their businesses in inner-city black neighborhoods, their contact with low-income blacks increased, and a growing number of them and their employees became the victims of assault, harassment, and murder by black criminals. In addition, because of their great social and economic isolation in the United States, Korean immigrants have tended to rely on the ethnic mass media and on institutions such as the church for information about the larger society. These ethnic institutions are essentially nationalistic and conservative, making divisions between "us" and "them," and between "the Korean community" and "the American community," and justifying the actions of Koreans while blaming others for any troubles. Such events and processes have tended to solidify Koreans' initial stereotypes about blacks.

The tendency of Koreans to maintain a wide social distance from blacks also results from the perception that blacks have significantly different attitudes toward upward mobility in American society. Like all immigrants, Koreans have strong motivations to achieve such mobility and believe in the American dream. Eighty percent of the respondents in this study agree with the statement that everyone in America can achieve whatever he or she wishes through hard work. Eighty-five percent, however, agree with the statement that racial discrimination makes it difficult for members of minority groups to achieve the same level of success as whites. These apparently contradictory findings may in fact indicate a belief on the part of Korean immigrants that the United States, although not a perfect society, still provides opportunities for upward mobility for hardworking persons.

From this viewpoint, Korean immigrants have difficulty in comprehending why many American blacks — born in this country, fluent in English, and familiar with American customs — remain unemployed and poor. A veteran Korean business owner on the South Side of Chicago expressed his difficulty in understanding the lack of motivation and work ethic among low-income blacks:

> "There are things my employees and customers can learn from me," says Mr. Ku. "My employees spend $3 a day on lunch. But I don't spend my money on lunch. I bring a bag lunch. That means I save $18 or $20 a week." He pauses for a moment and points to his blue polyester trousers.

> "Look at these pants. They're seven years old. My shoes cost $10. I don't spend money on clothes; I save money for specific reasons. We know why we are here — for a better education for our children, the second generation. This country is the best. It offers us golden opportunities for economic success." He laughs and blushes, acknowledging that his enthusiastic recital sounds immodest. Most of his customers, Ku adds, do not share his optimism about the potential for success and achievement in this country. It took him a while to understand that. (Joravsky 1987)

The strong aspirations such immigrants hold for economic mobility and for acceptance by whites discourage them from associating with blacks. Instead, they tend to identify themselves with whites and adhere to the negative stereotypes whites have about blacks. Such an orientation, of course, causes resentment among blacks, who feel that Koreans are free-riding on the advances in social and economic justice that blacks achieved through the Civil Rights Movement. The prejudice Koreans and blacks have toward each other and the different attitudes they have toward social and economic mobility prevent them from acknowledging their common status as disadvantaged minority members and from taking collective approaches to advance their common interests.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

Attitudes and feelings of social distance between members of different minority groups in American society seem to be affected by two contradictory forces. On the one hand, the members of such groups may acknowledge their common status as the disadvantaged and the oppressed in a white-dominated society and join together to challenge the system that created inequality and racism in the first place. On the other hand, members of one group may attempt to be accepted by the majority group and to distance themselves from the other minority group. Additionally, competition for society's scarce resources may reinforce the prejudice and hatred between the two groups.

Findings from this study consistently show that Koreans do not identify with blacks, but rather try to distance themselves from them. They discriminate against blacks, in hiring practices, experience frequent clashes with them as customers, and exhibit negative stereotypes about them as neighbors. By comparison, they maintain smoother relations with Latinos, strongly preferring them as employees and experiencing few clashes with them as customers.

Solutions to the Korean-black conflict are neither simple nor easy, since it

is caused by a myriad of psychological, situational, and political factors. Moreover, it cannot be solved by grass-roots efforts of individuals and the Korean and black communities alone. The efforts of individual Korean store owners to improve their communication skills and service to their customers can reduce to a certain extent over-the-counter disputes and clashes, but they are still only partial solutions. Korean businesses in inner-city neighborhoods — areas plagued by joblessness and poverty — can provide jobs to some local residents, but they are far from able to change the overall economic conditions of inner-city neighborhoods. Any effective solutions to the conflict, therefore, should involve multifaceted and coordinated efforts of individuals, communities, and the government. Although there is no panacea to the Korean-black conflict, I would like to make some practical policy recommendations that can prevent destructive conflicts from developing between Koreans and blacks at the government, community, and individual levels.

First, at the government level, more funding should be allocated for dispute-prevention and resolution centers in areas where there is a high probability of inter-group conflict. The function of these centers is to mediate disputes between Korean store owners and black customers and to provide them with appropriate counseling and assistance, including translation. Staffed by social workers, business owners, local residents, community leaders, scholars, politicians, and government agents, these centers can be effective in preventing minor disputes and accidents from developing into destructive inter-group conflicts. Both Korean and black communities along with city and federal governments should provide funding sufficient to hire qualified, full-time staffs who will devote their time and energy to education, counseling, mediation, and coalition building between Koreans and other racial minority groups.

More effective police protection should also be provided to small businesses in areas of high crime. Many Korean store owners in South Central complain that police do not respond to their calls promptly, and criminals receive penalties too lenient for their crimes. Out of fear that they will be the victims of revenge by arrested criminals, store owners are discouraged from filing police reports, which in turn makes them easy and safe targets for criminal activities. In self-defense, many store owners arm themselves, and this often results in accidents involving firearms.

Two cases in Los Angeles grew out of this context, resulting in the shooting death of black customers. Soon Ja Du and Tae Sam Park, both store owners, had been robbed numerous times and were forced to protect themselves in the absence of proper police protection. Twenty-five Korean

store owners had been murdered by blacks in South Central during the previous two years. To prevent such tragic incidents more bilingual Korean American policemen should be hired to facilitate communication between Korean store owners and the police, and branch police stations should be established in Koreatown and South Central for more reliable police protection.

At the community level, more cultural and educational exchange programs should be developed between the Korean and black communities in an effort to bridge the cultural and ideological gap between the Korean and black communities. Events and activities such as arts festivals, seminars, scholarships for needy black students, essay and speech contests, sponsored trips to South Korea, and joint church worships could promote better understanding and greater appreciation of each group's history, culture, life styles, and living conditions. Particularly, Korean store owners who are too busy to attend English language courses would benefit from educational videotapes that teach practical, business-related English words and expressions as well as black culture. This information would help them communicate more effectively with black customers and to treat them more appropriately. The Korean and black communities should cooperate in the production and wide distribution of such videotapes.

Political empowerment of Korean store owners and Korean Americans in general is another strategy which could protect the community from being victimized in the Korean-black conflict. Although there are many ways to accomplish this goal, one practical means would be to consolidate various Korean community organizations. United, these organizations could mobilize community resources more effectively than they could through the uncoordinated efforts of individuals and small organizations. They could also represent and provide more forceful protection for the interests of Koreans in times of political crisis. The Korean American Inter-Agency Council (KAIAC), formed during the 1992 Los Angeles civil unrest by coordinating the resources and services of nine Korean American voluntary associations, exemplifies the collective approach that the Korean community should pursue in its relations with other ethnic communities and the government.[4] Store owners have traditionally donated money individually to local black charity organizations, but their donations have received attention neither from the mass media nor the black community because of the lack of publicity. If united Korean organizations could collect donations

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[4] See Park (1994) for a discussion of political mobilization of the Korean American community during and after the Los Angeles civil unrest.

from business owners and deliver them to influential and respected organizations, Koreans could make more effective use of their money by improving public relations with the black community. The same strategy could be applied to political donations. By consolidating votes and donations, Korean Americans could put more effective pressure on politicians, and get more tangible returns from their support.

United Korean organizations could fulfill several functions that would help improve Korean businesses and race relations between Koreans and members of other minority groups. One function would be to build coalitions between the Korean and black communities. By participating in and supporting responsible black political organizations, such as NAACP, Urban League, or Rainbow Coalitions, Koreans could in return get their support in times of political crisis and could prevent political demagogues from using Koreans as convenient scapegoats for their selfish political interests. In collaboration with such mainstream organizations, Koreans and blacks could work out solutions to racial problems within the system and deny militant black nationalist organizations any opportunities to use violent means to advance "black-only" interests.

Another important function this coalition could fill relates to market research and social service delivery. Staffed by experts in marketing, banking, and social service administration, the united Korean organizations could explore new business markets and business types beyond the narrow range of those in South Central. By informing Korean business owners of new business opportunities outside South Central and by helping them get the bank and SBA loans necessary for relocation, they could lower the concentration of Korean businesses in such neighborhoods, thus reducing the potential for conflicts between Koreans and blacks.

Finally, at the individual level, Koreans should make a Copernican change in their business philosophies and attitudes toward blacks. Obsessed with the goal of quick upward economic mobility, Korean immigrants have developed what Max Weber called a dual ethic, featuring one morality for in-group members and another for the out-group. As Edna Bonacich (Light and Bonacich 1988: 433) poignantly highlights, many Korean immigrants have been indifferent to the impact of their businesses on the local community. Liquor stores in low-income minority neighborhoods illustrate this duality. When such businesses become a target of opposition by local residents, Koreans should consider changing to more socially and morally acceptable businesses, such as dry cleaning. In short, public relations should figure more seriously into the cost and profit accounting of Korean business owners.

Finally, Koreans should ask themselves, "Who are my neighbors?" By definition, neighbors are those who live close by and suffer from similar problems to ours; thus blacks and Latinos—not whites, by whom Koreans strive to be accepted—are their neighbors. Only when they begin to accept blacks and Latinos as neighbors and participate in collective approaches to challenge discrimination against racial minorities can true racial harmony be achieved among Koreans, blacks, and Latinos.

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