Demystifying Americanness:
The Model Minority Myth and The Black-Korean Relationship

Se-Hyoung Yi[1]
University of Houston-Clear Lake, USA

William T. Hoston
Prairie View A&M University, USA

Abstract: The recent incidents involving both Black American and Korean American communities across the United States have reopened the old wounds between the two minority communities, recalling the two tragic incidents in the 1990s: the death of Latasha Harlins (1991) and the Los Angeles Uprising/Sa-I-Gu (1992). Revisiting and reevaluating these two cases, this article argues that the myth of true Americanness, channeled and reinforced through the concept of model minority, has not only shaped and sustained a contentious relationship between Korean immigrants and Black Americans but also intensified the racial tension among all racial and ethnic groups in the United States. We conclude that American people of all demographics must debunk the myth of model minority and challenge the false Americanism by embracing "deep diversity," not merely distinctive group identities and outlooks, which offers a more diverse and rich interpretation of America as a whole.
Keywords: Americanness, Black Americans, Deep Diversity, Model minority, Honorary White, Korean Americans, Racism.

Introduction: Black-Korean Relationship Since 1990s

Since the death of Latasha Harlins in 1991 and the end of the Los Angeles Uprising of 1992 (the L.A. Uprising/Sa-I-Gu), both considered as the flashpoints with explosive and tragic consequences, the so-called Black-Korean tension in major urban areas in the United States has been wound down.[2] Efforts to enhance mutual understanding and cooperation were made between

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[1] Corresponding author; Assistant Professor of Political Science, Department of Social and Cultural Sciences. E-mail: yi@uhcl.edu

[2] There is no consensus on how to call a series of protests, violence, and looting at South Los Angeles between April 29 and May 4, 1992. "The L.A. Riots" may be the most popular term to describe the events. While this terminology relies on statistical analyses of "official data" to express the underlying logic of "urban unrest" or "civil disorder," it disregards the political meanings of the events, associating the events with negative meanings such as theft, arson, vandalism, and looting. Other alternative terms such as "rebellion" and "uprising" have been suggested. The term "rebellion" investigates issues of ethnic identity, competition, and cooperation, whereas "uprising" addresses inequalities of power in the society, especially among different race, class, and gender groups (Herman, 2004, p. 116). However, all these terms do not account for the Korean immigrants' voices, experiences, and perspectives, even though they were the major victim of the events. A group of Korean and Korean American scholars have introduced a new term "Sa-I-Gu" to emphasize the forgotten voice of the Korean immigrants. Literally meaning 4-2-9 in Korean, Sa-I-Gu adopts the Korean tradition of naming historic events by their dates on which they occur (J. Kim, 2008, p. 45; J. Y. Kim & Kim-Gibson, 2014, p. 145; H. H. Kim, 2016, p. 226). To highlight the perspectives of Black Americans and

the two minority groups after these incidents, and rapid economic growth and demographic changes in inner-city neighborhoods have also opened new possibilities for both Black Americans and Korean Americans to collaborate with each other. Race and ethnicity are not entirely stable terms, but rather have continuously been redefined and reshaped by economic, social, and political changes (Omi & Winant, 1986). Unlike first-generation Korean immigrants, their children have built broader and more diverse relationships with other racial and ethnic groups from their interactions in schools and through careers beyond their ethnic origin, and learn to embrace their new, complex, and fluid identity. It seems only natural that the so-called Black-Korean conflict does not exist anymore.

However, recent incidents involving both Black American and Korean American communities have reopened the old wounds between the communities, recalling the two tragic incidents in the 1990s. In August 2013, Annie Shin, a female Korean immigrant, tried to open a new liquor store in South Los Angeles (L.A). A strange flier began to circulate throughout the neighborhood. On it was a large picture of Soon Ja Du, a 51-year-old female Korean immigrant who murdered a 15-year-old Black girl Latasha Harlins in 1991. The flyer reads: "This Woman Owns Buddha Market. Shop at Your Own Risk!" (Gold, 2013) In March 2017 and May 2018, two Korean beauty store owners in predominantly Black neighborhoods at Charlotte, North Carolina, and Tulsa, Oklahoma, reportedly physically attacked Black American customers over shoplifting suspicions (Blay, 2017; Konstantinides, 2018; Woofter, 2019). The video clips and photos of those incidents went viral online, and the incidents were framed by sensational headlines such as "An Asian owner of Black beauty supply shop has physically attacked a Black woman" and "Korean beauty supply owner punches Black woman in her face – in front of her kids!" Even though there was no connection between these incidents and Latasha Harlins' death or the L.A. Uprising/Sa-I-Gu, the reporters specifically recalled the decades-old events in their articles. One reporter wrote: "The beauty store incident occurred just days before the 26th anniversary of the death of Latasha Harlins, a 15-year-old Los Angeles native. On March 16, 1991, Harlins was shot and killed by a South Korean liquor store owner who mistakenly thought she was shoplifting" (Blay, 2017).

These incidents could have been dismissed as isolated cases if there had not been other examples on a larger scale and a greater impact. In Ferguson, Missouri in 2014, Michael Brown Jr., an unarmed Black teenager, was fatally shot by Darren Wilson, a White police officer, after suspicion of robbery. This incident sparked civil unrest. The protests were focused on police brutality and injustice against Black Americans, and several racial and ethnic minority groups voiced their support for the protests. Reverend Jesse Jackson confirmed that the protests in Ferguson were not just about Black Americans, but about justice and equality for people of all colors:

> *Many are observing Ferguson and witnessing the anger, demonstrations, looting and vandalism and calling for quiet. But quiet isn't enough. The absence of noise isn't the presence of justice — and we must demand justice in Ferguson and the other "Fergusons" around America…We must stand together, black, white, brown, red, and yellow and fight for justice and equality for all. It's the only way to avoid more Fergusons* (Jackson, 2014).

Korean immigrants together, which have been silenced by the term "Riots," we will use both "The L.A. Uprising" and "Sa-I-Gu" throughout this article.

For Reverend Jackson, the people's demand for justice and equality should not be dismissed due to the protesters' sporadic violence. He emphasized that the protests in Ferguson were not just about Black Americans, but rather, people of all colors must stand together and fight for justice and equality for all. The "noises" did occur during the protests, when the protesters finally speak out for justice and equality. However, those noises were not merely the symptoms of chaos and destruction. Fighting injustice and inequality necessarily calls for actions. Some prominent Black Lives Matters activists, while differing with Reverend Jackson on his multi-ethnic approach, also pointed out that fighting police brutality on Blacks and liberation of Black lives benefit not only Blacks but all other racial and ethnic minorities and immigrants:

> *We understand that when Black people in this country get free, the benefits will be wide reaching and transformative for society as a whole… We're not saying Black lives are more important than other lives, or that other lives are not criminalized and oppressed in various ways. We remain in active solidarity with all oppressed people who are fighting for their liberation and we know that our destinies are intertwined* (Garza, 2014).

Indeed, not only Black Americans, but all people of color voiced their support for the people of Ferguson after the death of Michael Brown. For example, several prominent Asian American organizations, including Congressional Asian Pacific American Caucus, National Asian Pacific American Women's Forum, South Asian Americans Leading Together, and National Korean American Service & Education Consortium (NAKASEC) together blamed the grand jury for their decision not to indict Wilson.

Nevertheless, in the midst and aftermath of protests in Ferguson, this societal and cultural climate was devastating to Blacks as well as other racial and ethnic minorities. The liquor store where Brown allegedly had grabbed a handful of cigars before his deadly encounter with the police officer was owned by an Asian American family, leading the small number of Korean immigrants in Ferguson to feeling "a direct threat in their everyday lives" (Han, 2014). They hoped that "Koreans [would not be] targeted in any way," because they had been "on good terms with the people of this community" (Han, 2014). As Johnny Wang, the president of the Asian American Chamber of Commerce of St. Louis said: "Hopefully it [the situation in Ferguson] doesn't devolve into what happened in the L.A. riots…Because if that happens, we're all getting out of Dodge" (Mak, 2017). Despite the efforts by Asian American activists, Black American leaders, and local residents, the repeated protests after the death of Brown drove angry protesters to take their frustrations out on the local businesses occupied by Koreans and other Asians. More than 20 businesses suffered damage on West Florissant Avenue, and at least five of these stores were Asian-American-owned. Across Ferguson, over ten Korean businesses were looted and two stores were set on fire (C.-S. Kim, 2014; C.-W. Kim & S.-E. Lee, 2014). Korean and Asian businesses suffered disproportionally severe damages during the Ferguson protests, considering that just 0.5 percent of Ferguson is of Asian descent. Jay Kanzler, the lawyer who has represented several Asian American business owners in Ferguson, questions if law enforcement authorities allowed the looting of those stores in part because it is a minority-owned small business:

> *One could [ask] that if this had been a Walmart, a Starbucks…would they have done more to make sure this didn't happen?…I believe that absolutely factored into the equation. Their rights may have been*

placed on a lower priority for the people in charge of protecting them
(Mak, 2017).

A year later, a similar situation was repeated. During the series of protests in Baltimore after the death of Freddie Gray, a Black man who fell into a coma while being transported in a police van and died a week later, the shops owned by Korean immigrants in Baltimore were looted during protests. According to the report from the National Public Radio:

Now, across Baltimore, lots of businesses owned by black people were vandalized. But on this particular stretch – picture three treeless blocks of row houses, a lot of them boarded up – the only shops that were targeted were ones owned by Asian immigrants – mostly Koreans
(Aizenman, 2015).

The mass media has portrayed the Black Lives Matter protests against police brutality and structural racism as violent and lawless chaos, frequently displaying the scenes of shouting, looting, and arson. This attitude has dismissed the political motivation of the protests. While the media insisted that the Asian and Korean-owned businesses were particularly targeted by the protesters, it is unclear if the protesters intentionally looted and destroyed those Asian businesses. However, whether or not the Korean business owners' concerns and fears were logically sound and founded, it is important to understand why the Korean immigrants in Ferguson perceived that they were targeted by or alienated from other protesters. For Korean immigrants, the L.A. Uprising/Sa-I-Gu is a deep psychological trauma, which they have wanted to forget and move on but still brings them back to the tragic past whenever a similar racial tension takes place. This is their stigma of unbelonging: Koreans were abandoned by the White system while being attacked by other racial and ethnic minorities. That said, these current examples prove that it is necessary to revisit the past cases – the 1991 death of Latasha Harlins and subsequently the 1992 Los Angeles Uprising/Sa-I-Gu – to identify what really caused the tensions and conflicts between the Korean immigrants and Black Americans and why, despite the continuous efforts from both sides, true reconciliation and mutual understanding between the two minority groups have not been achieved yet. Since the two tragic events in the 1990s, scholars have identified a few major factors. Some scholars weigh on the side of the socio-economic factors. For them, the Black-Korean relationship involves hostility grown out of the unequal and unstable economic status between "immigrant-minority-merchants" and "native-minority-customers," which establishes Black Americans' perception of Korean American merchants as "outsiders" or "aliens" who threaten Black Americans' economic survival (E. T. Chang, 1996, p. 67; C.-J. Kim & T. Lee, 2001, p. 634; J. Lee, 2002, pp. 92-93; Thornton, 2011, pp. 1285-1287). Second, cultural and linguistic misunderstanding has been blamed as the reason why Black Americans and Korean Americans complain about each other's behavior (E. T. Chang, 1996; K. Park, 1996). Black customers found Korean merchants sullen, inhospitable, and disrespectful, which might have been caused by the Koreans' inability to speak English well. In contrast, Korean merchants became wary of the loudness, assertive language, and the occasions of shoplifting by the Black customers. Bailey (2000) summarizes that these socio-economic and cultural factors are interrelated to intensify the tensions between Korean Americans and Black Americans; on the one hand, contrasting communicative patterns between the two minorities and their different cultural background knowledge and assumptions on each other worked as an ongoing source of interracial tensions. On the other hand, their communicative tension in everyday lives as individual storekeepers and customers was radicalized due to the socio-economic inequality between the two minorities.

Finally, confrontations between the two minority groups have been explained by their different ideologies and perceptions of America (E. T. Chang, 1996; C.-J. Kim & T. Lee, 2001; Thornton, 2011). Most Korean immigrants came to the United States after the Civil Rights era, and they were not fully aware of the sufferings and sacrifices Black Americans had to and still have to endure for freedom and equality. To elaborate his analysis of these ideological factors, E. T. Chang (1996) advanced the concept of a "model minority" (p. 68). Associated with Asian American immigrants' higher economic, social, and educational performances in the United States, the term model minority has legitimatized that the "American dream" is real and attainable, regardless of skin color or national origin, as long as one respects the rules in this country and works hard. While model minority is a term in journalism and politics, most literature has only focused on its visible and tangible effects, not paying enough attention to the theoretical and philosophical root that has sustained the concept and made it so convincing, powerful, and pervasive. The idea of a model minority stereotype stratifies different racial and ethnic minorities and encourages them to compete with and marginalize one another, but a deeper analysis is necessary to figure out why this term has become so appealing that all ethnicities and races – both minorities and a White majority alike – have internalized this concept either consciously or subconsciously.

This article argues that the model minority myth derives its rhetorical power from the nonexistent and insubstantial nature of the very ideal after which it was modeled: true Americanness. Since its conception, the model minority myth has reproduced and fortified an imagined Americanness, and from this illusion, the model minority myth has balkanized all racial and ethnic groups in the United States. In this sense, the so-called Black-Korean conflict is not an isolated case about these two specific demographic groups, which is not fully explained by socio-economic differences or trivial cultural and linguistic misunderstandings.

In the following sections, this article describes the conceptual development of the model minority myth and how it has created and reproduced tensions and hostilities among minorities in the United States. This task has asked the murder of Latasha Harlins in 1991 and the L.A. Uprising/Sa-I-Gu in 1992 to be revisited and reexamined to prove how the model minority myth pushed Korean immigrants and Black Americans toward the false illusion of true Americanness. We also suggest that debunking the model minority myth necessarily calls for questioning and challenging the myth behind the myth: the imagined and rigid interpretation of American identity. This article concludes that civic friendship between Korean immigrants and Black Americans, and indeed among Americans of all demographics, will be achieved when they embrace a more diverse and rich interpretation of America as a whole. This has been conceptualized by political theorists Sarah Song and Danielle Allen as "deep diversity" and "wholeness of citizenship."

History of the Myths: Model Minority and Honorary White

The term model minority has been widely used since the mid-1980s to highlight Asian Americans' higher level of achievement than any other racial and ethnic group, especially regarding their economic success, academic achievement, family values, law-abiding spirit, and low levels of criminal involvement (Chou, 2008). Asian Americans are believed to enjoy extraordinary achievements in "education, occupational upward mobility, [and] rising income" as well as being "problem-free in mental health and crime" (Wong et al., 1998, p. 56). For example, according to the 2018 census data, Asian households had the highest median income than any other racial and demographic group (Semega et al., 2019). The 2019 study by the U.S. Department of Education shows a similar pattern in educational attainment; a greater percentage of Asian Americans received college and advanced degrees than did Whites (54% vs. 35%), Blacks (21%),

and Hispanics of any race (15%) (de Brey et al., 2019). All of which led some pundits to describe Asian Americans' success in United States as an "Asian advantage" (Kristof, 2015). The socio-economic success of Asian Americans has been perceived as a proof of the fair and equal opportunities and economic mobility in American society.

This ideology of the "Asian advantage" did not take hold until the 1960s. In contrast, Asian Americans have suffered from systematic political and social discrimination that had been put in place by White European immigrants since the beginning of their immigration history. For example, the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882 unfairly prohibited all immigration of Chinese workers (who had been brought to build the Transcontinental Railroad) as well as naturalization while immigration of European workers continued apace. The Chinese Exclusion Act proves that the immigration of the Chinese workers started as a racist project after the Civil War, bringing Chinese "coolie" laborers and portraying them either "as an industrious labor force that would make slavery unnecessary" or as "an(other) inferior race that was vulnerable to cruel exploitation, just like African American slaves" (E. Lee, 2007, p. 545). In fact, the derogatory term "coolie" originated from the Chinese contract laborers who were part of the virtual slave trade to Cuba, South America, and British Guiana in the mid-19th century, which connotes that Chinese workers were brought to the United States essentially as slaves (Calavita, 2006, p. 251). The Act was not repealed until 1943, but even then Chinese and other Asians were not given equal consideration in immigration (Ma, 2000). Mob violence against Asian Americans was also popular during the latter half of the 19th century, as was illustrated by the Chinese Massacre of 1871 when almost twenty Chinese immigrants in Los Angeles were tortured and killed by a White mob. Since the earliest immigration of Asian Americans, they have been one of the easiest targets of hate crimes, along with Blacks, Jews, and homosexuals ("Racial Violence against Asian American," 1993).

Dubbed as a "yellow peril," the presence of Asian Americans was regarded a threat to White American culture and its socio-economic order. Asian Americans had to endure hatred, prejudice, and discrimination from even other ethnic and socio-economic minorities. Labor unions, members of which were mostly immigrants from European countries, openly discriminated against Asian immigrants and denied them membership. Samuel Gompers, the founder of the American Federation of Labor, once said: "Your union must guarantee that it will under no circumstances accept membership of any Chinese and Japanese" (Omatsu, 1995, p. 33).

At what point then did the image of Asian Americans change from "yellow peril" to "model minority"? Scholars have concluded that the concept arose during the modern Civil Rights movement after World War II when the demands for equal rights and protection for Black Americans were being fought for. In the midst of the Civil Rights and Voting Rights movements in the 1960s, *New York Times* journalist William Petersen (1966) wrote an article titled "Success Story, Japanese-American Style," in which he spoke highly of the success of Japanese Americans in American society and their ability to overcome prejudice, racism, and the label of "problem minority." He wrote: "By any criterion of good citizenship that we choose, the Japanese Americans are better than any other group in our society, including native-born whites" (p. 21). Without discussing the systematic and structural racial discrimination against all Japanese Americans and indeed all Asian Americans, Petersen continued to praise Japanese Americans' "greater attachment to family," "greater respect for parental and other authority," "adaptation to American institutional forms," and "English without an accent [of their American-born children]" (p. 40). He attributes the success of Japanese Americans to their willingness and eagerness to internalize the dominant norms and culture in the United States, which other racial and ethnic minorities and even some Whites had yet to emulate. At the end of his article, he drew a stark contrast between Black Americans and Japanese Americans. Petersen asked why Black Americans do not follow the Japanese Americans' model, even though they were "most thoroughly embedded in American

culture, with the least meaningful ties to an overseas fatherland" (p. 43). As Wu (2015) noted, the portrayal of Japanese in this article as a positive and contributing ethnic minority was boiled down to a racist and discriminatory conclusion that the Japanese were "a definitely not-black model minority" (p. 151).

During the same period, the term "honorary White" also began to be circulated. The honorary White title originated from the honorary Aryan status that was granted to Japanese nationals by Nazi Germany during World War II. In 1961, the apartheid regime of South Africa granted some White privileges to East Asians, mostly Japanese, Korean, and Taiwanese nationals, allowing them to live in the residential areas reserved for White South Africans and to use public recreational facilities such as swimming pools (see Y. J. Park, 2008). Since then, this honorary White title was assigned to non-White immigrants who approximate or even surpass Whites in some selective measures, such as income, education, and low crime rates. Bonilla-Silva (2004) pointed out that this honorary White ideology was transported to America, and since then, has served to justify the combination of White nationalism and color-blind racism.

Throughout the 1960s and 1970s, the image of Asian Americans was reshaped by society to establish a stratified racial dynamic between Asians and other racial and ethnic minority groups, which eventually served as a counterexample to the "violent, dangerous, destructive" Civil Rights movement. Mass media suddenly started projecting Asian Americans as a successful model minority who were eager to be assimilated into "mainstream" American culture and society, as if the model minority title would be a prestigious achievement (Chun, 1980). Scholars like Wing (2007) noted that "Asian Americans via the model minority myth have been used as a wedge between whites and other people of color" (p. 480), while Asian Americans have also had "a proud if subterranean legacy of fighting economic and social injustice" and "spectacular pan-ethnic labor organizing activities" (E. H. Kim, 1998, p. 6). The model minority identity, in turn, has only marginalized Asian Americans from both sides of the racial hierarchy, and certainly not helped them "climb up" through the racial hierarchy in America.

Despite its toxic political and social impact on Asian Americans, a model minority has become widely accepted as a normal and positive term. Journalists and politicians, both liberal and conservative, when not outrightly citing the term itself, appreciate the idea of the model minority and frequently use it. In his recent article in the *New York Times Magazine*, which was originally written as a critique of President Donald Trump's anti-immigration policy, Andrew Sullivan fell into the same trap, praising Asian Americans as "the most prosperous, well-educated, and successful ethnic groups in America" who turned the racist stereotype through "solid two-parent family structures," "social networks," and "enormous emphasis on education and hard work" (Sullivan, 2017). William Otis, former Special White House Counsel for President George H. W. Bush and later a Trump nominee for the United States Sentencing Commission, claimed that "Orientals" would more likely stay out of jail than other demographic groups because "family life, work, education and tradition are honored more in Oriental culture," further proof that a model minority stereotype primarily functions to stabilize the existing racial hierarchy (Philips, 2018). Recently, an anti-affirmative action group called Students for Fair Admissions filed a lawsuit against Harvard University's race-conscious admissions process. They emphasized that Asian Americans and international students from Asian countries, as a model minority, were the main victims of Harvard's "discriminatory [holistic admission] policies," as if Asian American applicants had been unfairly treated in comparison to other minority applicants despite their superior academic and personal qualities (Gee, 2019, pp. 34-35).

We would add two other analyses that have not been widely discussed regarding the model minority myth. First, this myth requires a further analysis of colorism among Asian Americans.

When it started circulating in 1960s, the model minority myth is associated mostly with East Asians only, such as the Japanese, Koreans, Taiwanese, and Chinese immigrants. While the model minority stereotype reached beyond "light-skinned" East Asians to include Southeast Asians as a whole in the 1980s and 1990s, darker-skinned Asians have encountered "a double disadvantage that affects their ability to acquire certain assets and improve their life chances: one layer of disadvantage due to their skin tone and another layer of disadvantage due to their racial minority status" (Gao, 2010, p. 210; Painter et al., 2016, p. 1174). For example, most Japanese, Koreans, and South Asians fell into the upper half of the socioeconomic scale, whereas many Southeast Asians and Pacific Islanders fell into the lower half (Futoshi, 1999). The model minority stereotype lumps all Asian Americans into one homogeneous group, ignoring the political, economic, linguistic, cultural, and religious differences among them.

At the same time, it should be noted that the East Asian countries, including Korea, have taken advantage of the model minority myth to enhance their national images and interests in their relations with the United States. Recognizing the strategic value of overseas Koreans, for instance, the Korea government promulgated a special law in 2000, mainly targeting Korean Americans and Korean immigrants, to allow them to freely work and live in Korea and receive most national healthcare, pension, education, and welfare benefits (Gao, 2010). Considering Korean Americans and Korean immigrants as part of a global Korean community and the representatives of Korea in the United States, the Korean government has embraced and even sometimes promoted the model minority stereotype. After Seung-Hui Cho, a Korean national with a permanent resident card in the United States, carried out a massacre at Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University (Virginia Tech) in 2007, Korea's ambassador to the United States said that the Korean American community needed to "repent" and "prove that they were a worthwhile ethnic minority in America" (Hong, 2007). He also added that "the Korean American community should take the chance to reflect and try to meld once again into the mainstream of American society" (Hong, 2007). Consequently, the model minority myth has also shaped the ideal images of Korean Americans and Korean immigrants for the Korean people in South Korea, producing another layer of social expectation and pressure from their home country. In other words, the myth of model minority, particularly for Koreans, operates in a more complicated level than an interracial dynamic in the United States: They are the victims not only of structural racism in their new country, but also of the excessive and unfair expectation from their old country.[3]

The racist intent of the myths of the model minority and honorary White has been debunked and challenged. However, unlike other openly racist and derogatory terms and myths regarding racial and ethnic minorities that have been invalidated, the myths of the model minority and honorary White still appeal to Americans of all stripes. What, then, has made these myths still convincing and attractive despite their racist and discriminatory root?

The Myth Behind the Myths: True Americanness

While the new positive image of Asian Americans was created, by default, by White Americans as a reactionary mandate to protect the racist structure in the country, Asian Americans

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[3] While this is beyond this article's focus, it is worth noting that the model minority myth has also altered Koreans' beauty standards in deference to the Western, White images of sexuality and attractiveness (Hartlep, 2014, p. 110). In other words, the model minority myth exerts its racist effect even on Koreans in Korea. Another topic regarding the model minority myth is the issue of East Asian adoptees, who have been excluded from Asian immigration history and separated from Asian American communities as they were mostly raised in White families (S. M. Laybourn, 2020). White American families' adoption of Korean children affirmed U.S. perceptions of East Asians as "model minorities" (W. M. Laybourn, 2018).

often believe that it is a compliment. As implied by the term "model," it could be argued that Asian Americans have modeled themselves after the nostalgic ideals all Americans ought to or used to respect. While it is impossible to define what exactly these ideals are, the frequent vocabularies attached to the model minority title reflect the imaginary values and norms of the American past: family-oriented morals, strong work ethic, law-abiding spirit, fervor for education, and respect for the traditional Christian culture. Since the beginning of its history, the American founding fathers defined this new republic as "the land of labor" and hence, "industry and constant employment are great preservatives of the morals and virtue of a nation" (Franklin, 2009, p. 72). Unlike European countries with long and rich histories and cultural backgrounds, however, this pragmatic approach toward a national identity might not be substantive enough. This "blend of naive presentism, relentless utilitarianism, and stimulus-and-response determinism" (Mancini, 2008, p. 261) without unique, tangible and visible cultural and national characteristics may explain why many Americans have been obsessed with defining who they are with a set of definitive cultural and religious characteristics, tying their identity with their White European roots. All the populist and nationalist movements in America have begun with the discovery and assertions of the White European origin. It is not coincidental that the Ku Klux Klan's original motto was: "We must Americanize the Americans" (Evans, 1926, p. 39). Richard Spencer, an American alt-right leader, has argued that his group is dedicated to "heritage, identity, and future of people of European descent in the United States and around the world" (National Policy Institute, 2019).

This paradoxical combination of the pragmatic and utilitarian interpretation of America and a fundamentally White European interpretation of its national root has resulted in a toxic cult of true Americanism. At a superficial level, American identity should be a flexible idea unconnected to issues of racial and ethnic origin. However, in fact, it is also deeply ingrained in White nationalism. Thus, there are two requirements for being a true American. One must meet a set of pragmatic and utilitarian ethical demands. At the same time, however, he should also be willing to acknowledge and confirm the White European culture and system in America. America may still be the land of opportunity for everybody, regardless of one's race, ethnicity, national origin, religion, and cultural background, insofar as one respects a particular set of "American" values and principles while conforming to the White European root of the country. However, such a stable and monolithic definition of America has never existed. No one can live up to the ever-increasing arbitrary list of "American" ethical principles and cultural values. Moreover, this fantasized version of White European interpretation of America has already been proved to be false by the institution of slavery and the denial of equal protection to civil rights based on race and ethnicity. It ultimately placed the unfair burden on non-White Americans to prove that their racial, ethnic, and cultural identities have conformed to the European root of the United States. As a result, non-White minorities are destined to be considered less than American, no matter how strongly they try to prove their Americanness.

In this context, as S. M. Laybourn (2020) notes, Asian Americans are portrayed as "extra-ordinarily equipped to fit into the American ideal," while they are "simultaneously extra-American and not American enough" (p. 4). The idea of a model minority can be justified only when there is a definitive concept of "Americanness." Asian Americans, therefore, have been offered as a mere showcase that proves this fantasized Americanness still exists and works. Once stabilizing the monolithic idea of America, the model minority stereotype eventually forces different racial and ethnic minorities, even including "un-American" and "unpatriotic" Whites, to emulate and reproduce this imagined Americanness. They are compelled to make sure that they are getting closer to the imaginary true Americanness and Whiteness. This illusion of the model minority works powerfully, forcing all racial and ethnic groups to continuously – consciously or

subconsciously – verify themselves and each other: "How American are we?" and "How American are you?"

The tragic reality of the model minority was in play in the early 1990s in Los Angeles, where the newcomer immigrants and the native minority crashed into each other: the death of Latasha Harlins and the L.A. Uprising/Sa-I-Gu. These events brutally showed how the model minority myth had divided Korean immigrants and Black Americans in their shared neighborhood. The two groups were alienated from each other and forced to choose whose interests were more important, while the societal system ignored both groups' needs and demands for well-being.

The Murder of Latasha Harlins and the Los Angeles Uprising/Sa-I-Gu: The Clash of Korean Immigrants and Black Americans

On March 16, 1991, Latasha Harlins, a 15-year-old Black American girl, went to Empire Liquor Market and Deli in South Central Los Angeles to buy a bottle of orange juice. The store was owned by Soon Ja Du, a 51-year-old female Korean immigrant, and her family. The security camera footage and witnesses on the scene confirmed that Harlins put a bottle of orange juice in her backpack and approached the counter. After some verbal exchanges, Du tried to grab Harlins' backpack and her sweater, obviously suspecting Harlins as a shoplifter. Harlins struck Du's face multiple times, but Du managed to grab a handgun from under the counter and shot Harlins in the back. Harlins died immediately. Du was convicted of voluntary manslaughter, which would have given her a maximum sentence of 16 years in prison. The judge, however, sentenced Du to a suspended ten-year term in the state penitentiary, five-years' probation, 400 hours of community service, a $500 fine, and the cost of Harlins's funeral, and medical expenses. This unusually lenient sentence evoked anger and frustration among the Black residents of the community.

This tragic incident should be situated in the larger context of the war on crime and drugs in Los Angeles during the 1990s. Throughout the 1990s, "tough on crime" was a universal agenda across party lines. Even liberals were inclined to a more punitive focus and Democrats were trying to outdo Republicans with punitive anti-crime initiatives (Beale, 2003). Especially in Los Angeles, police militarization and authority had already been drastically expanded since the Los Angeles Olympic Games in 1984. (Felker-Kantor, 2017). The war on crime and drugs resulted in numerous police misconduct and brutality cases, mostly targeting Blacks and Latinos. From 1982 to 1995 the numbers of African Americans in the California Department of Corrections increased from 12,470 to 42,296 while Latino incarceration grew from 9,006 to 46,080, and the targeted enforcement of law and mass incarceration issues eventually promoted distrust and hostility in local communities (Murch, 2015). When one of Du's sons decided to testify for the district attorney against one of the local gangs, the Du family received numerous threats and they eventually had to close the store for two weeks, forcing Du to work under extreme fear and stress (Stevenson, 2004, p. 158). Suspecting a teenager of theft without a good reason and even killing her over a bottle of orange juice would be unthinkable, unless deep doubt and distrust had already been planted in a community long before the incident itself. In this context, Stevenson suggested that the judge might have sympathized with Du as a member of a model minority (Stevenson, 2004). Indeed, Joyce Karlin, the judge who ruled on the case, said in her interview with *The Los Angeles Sentinel* that she considered both women, not only Harlins, to be the victims of the tragedy: "Did Mrs. Du react inappropriately? Absolutely. But was that reaction understandable? I think that it was. This is not a time for revenge" (Bihm, 2017). In a different interview, Judge Karlin admitted that she had considered in her ruling that "Latasha had committed a 'swift and violent attack' on Du" and "Du lived in fear because her store had been repeatedly robbed" (Stolberg, 1992). While giving Du the benefit of doubt, Judge Karlin unfairly and unreasonably related Harlins to other criminal incidents at Du's store, which Harlins

had nothing to do with. Judge Karlin even convicted Harlins postmortem, stating that "had Latasha Harlins not been shot and had the incident which preceded the shooting been reported, it is my opinion that the district attorney would have relied on the videotape and Mrs. Du's testimony to make a determination whether to file charges against Latasha" (J. Kim, 2008, p. 44).

The American justice system arbitrarily picked and choose whom it would favor and whom it would ignore. As a result, it successfully radicalized tensions between Koreans and Blacks. Through a polarizing lens of the time, both Korean Americans and Black Americans showed the friction and misunderstanding. *The Korea Times,* an English-language Korean American newspaper, focused on Du's "self-sacrifice for the sake of her family," "long working hours," "devotion to her church," and the "tormenting she endured from endless harassment from members of Bloods and Crips gangs," (Umemoto, 1993, p. 9) presenting the Du family as a typical model minority who tragically ran into misfortune. On the other hand, *The Los Angles Sentinel*, a Black-owned newspaper, accompanied the coverage of the Du case with the ongoing coverage of the beating of Rodney King, focusing more on the insensitivity and greed of Du and other Korean merchants in the neighborhood (Umemoto, 1993). Although the Du case and the Rodney King case were two separate incidents, Du was described as if she were part of, or an agent of, the systematic discrimination against Black Americans.

The disposition of the Latasha Harlins case left behind an unresolved conflict between Black and Korean communities, and became "a major factor in the targeting of Koreans" during the L.A. Riots one year later (Stevenson, 2013, p. 279). The beginning of the protest was a response to the jury not convicting the police officers of beating Rodney King, a Black American. On March 3, 1991, King and two other passengers had been apprehended by four police officers (three of them White) after a high-speed car chase. King was beaten by the officers with batons and shocked with a Taser, which resulted in severe injuries to King, including a fractured skull and damaged internal organs. A 31-year-old plumber named George Holliday who owned a camcorder took footage from a distance of the scene and sent it to a local news station. Even nowadays, when the cell-phone video footage, pictures available online, and other forms of technological communication provide the American public with the ability to visually observe the deadly acts of racialized state violence against Black men, the law enforcement officers operate with impunity, rarely being punished. In 1991 Los Angeles, the four officers involved were indicted and charged, but the jury, featuring no Black jurors, acquitted all of them. The riot started immediately after the verdict on the evening of April 29, 1992, and spread toward South Los Angeles, specifically Koreatown.

While a state of emergency was soon declared throughout the city, and California Governor Pete Wilson called in more than 23,000 law enforcement officers and National Guard troops, Korean immigrants were completely denied any protection from looting, arson, and other types of mob violence. Law enforcement's main focus was to "geographically constrain this violence from moving into the more affluent White suburbs of Los Angeles" (Oh, 2012). Instead of responding to Korean shop owners' calls for help, the police and military attempted to concentrate the violent crimes within the already destroyed Koreatown. In other words, the system intentionally sacrificed Korean immigrants to ensure the safety of the rich White communities. A Korean vacationer who rushed to help a Korean grocery store asked: "Where are the police? Where are the soldiers…We are not going to lose again. We have no choice but to defend ourselves" (Dunn, 1992). One Korean furniture store owner recalled: "We hid for three hours while people laughed and stole and rioted. That whole time, I kept thinking the police were coming" (J. Lee, 2017, p. 378).

The chaos lasted until May 4, 1992 and left 58 dead and over $1 billion property damage. Korean immigrants suffered massive economic losses: 2,280 Korean American businesses were

looted or burned by violent protesters, resulting in $400 million in property damage (E. T. Chang, 2014). The tragedy of Korean immigrants continued even after the violent protests. Many Korean merchants had to navigate a complicated and exhausting process to obtain government loans to rebuild their businesses, and, in fact, many of them eventually turned down Small Business Assistance and Federal Emergency Management Agency loans because they were too hard to qualify for (Herbert & Wilson, 1992, p. 100). The City of Los Angeles used the L.A. Uprising/Sa-I-Gu as an excuse to drive "problem liquor stores" owned and operated by Korean immigrants out of the neighborhood by imposing unreasonably high operating standards on liquor stores seeking to rebuild after the riots (Mack, 1997, pp. 315-317).

Throughout the violent events in Koreatown and other parts of South and Central Los Angeles, mainstream mass media sensationalized the violent clashes between Koreans and Blacks, showing over and over armed Koreans shooting toward the mostly Black looters, and did not focus on the real causes of the L.A. Uprising/Sa-I-Gu: police brutality and the institutional and systematic racism in the United States. Liberals demonized Korean immigrants as racist vigilantes, as if they were the primary instigators of racism against Blacks, while conservatives stereotyped Korean immigrants as a model minority that stood up for the values of the American dream and bravely "fended off mobs with handguns, rifles, and assault weapons" (Cho, 1993; Valdez, 2018). This is another example of how the model minority myth makes Korean immigrants and Korean Americans vulnerable to political manipulation and exploitation by mass media of both sides for their racist propaganda. Since the L.A. Uprising/Sa-I-Gu, so-called the legacy of "Rooftop Koreans" has been continuously summoned over and over by far-right groups and White nationalist groups as a means to denounce the Black Lives Matter protesters and their causes (E. Kim, 2020; Lin, 2020).[4]

Redirecting Black Americans' anger and frustration toward Korean immigrants worked well to distract Americans' attention from the root cause of the riots. Korean immigrants were scapegoated and deemed to be responsible for the pains of the neighborhood and deserving of blame. This misdirection of justice implied that there was nothing wrong with the system, but rather, either the racist Korean immigrants or violent and lawless Black Americans were the problem. Journalists and pundits "predictably attributed the purported conflict to a clash of cultures," which was the easiest way to shift the blame to the victims, and not hold the systems of oppressive racism responsible (Wu, 2015, p. 252).

Model Minority and the Race to "Americanness"

With their relatively short history of immigration and weak political and social position in the new country compared to other racial and ethnic minority groups, Korean immigrants have quickly absorbed the idea of being a model minority. Most first-generation Korean immigrants, many of whom came with college and advanced degrees, could not find decent jobs commensurate with their training and education due to "structural discrimination, occupational downgrading, and the general anti-foreign sentiment" (Cho, 1993, p. 198). To survive in the new country, they tried to internalize the imagined American values to get rid of the burden of strangeness and foreignness as if this effort toward assimilation would earn them the model minority title. The L.A.

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[4] "Rooftop Koreans" is a slang term referring to Korean American business owners who armed themselves and defended their stores during the L.A. Uprising/Sa-I-Gu. The images and videos of the Korean immigrants with firearms during that time period have gone viral among mostly gun rights advocacy groups, far-right groups, and White nationalist groups, as a means to denounce the Black Lives Matter protesters especially after the death of George Floyd who was murdered by a White police officer on May 25, 2020.

Uprising/Sa-I-Gu revealed that their effort to assimilate into the "mainstream society" would not protect Korean immigrants when they desperately needed it. They were not only ignored by the legal and social apparatus of the White majority but also alienated from other Asian immigrants who feared retaliation from the protesters.

In her article on the Black-Korean conflict, Cheung (2005) highlighted the role of political discourse centered on the perceptions of foreignness and strangeness between minorities: Both Korean Americans and Black Americans intentionally used this narrative to claim their superiority over the other groups. This claim of superiority is justified if a minority group has proven that they are more American than the other minority group. The proximity to so-called true Americanness allows the group to assert its "master status" over the other minority, which, in turn, gives the "master group" better access to the limited political and socio-economic resources available to minorities as well as the recognition and protection from the societal system. Iijima (1997) confirms that the question of "Who is more American," and "who is more native" existed between Black Americans and Korean immigrants during the L.A. Uprising/Sa-I-Gu:

> *It is significant to note that in the construction of the conflict, nativist arguments that Koreans were foreigners and less American positioned African Americans as 'white' relative to Asians. On the other hand, Korean Americans were also placed within the entrepreneurial American Dream and positioned as white* (p. 70).

It should be emphasized that the American "nativism" has nothing to do with one's real birthplace or birthright citizenship. The nativist claim is simply the reassertion of the rigid interpretation of Americanness which White Americans oftentimes tied to European white root of Americanness. Once Americanness and Whiteness are tied with each other, all non-White people, even native Americans, are considered strange, foreign, and exotic (Mason, 1996). While the ancestors of Black Americans were brought to the United States against their will as slaves, their descendants were born in this country. However, despite their birthright legal citizenship, Black Americans had been rejected any real right as a citizen until recently. Whereas they were born in America, Black Americans have "repeatedly paid a higher price for citizenship and received less in return" (Coates, 2014). Most Korean immigrants came to America after the Korean War, looking for a better future and more opportunities. However, even after naturalization, Korean Americans were not able to overcome their inherent foreignness and strangeness. When both groups alienated each other and claimed they were more American than the other, they somehow adopted their versions of nativist claim which White Americans has utilized to establish their superiority. These claims thus exert their rhetorical power only in relation to other racial and ethnic minorities, not to the White majority who have already established their dominant version of Americanness based on the European roots.

From the Black community's point of view, Korean immigrants are merely "foreign intruders" who disrespect and insult Black American customers while making money, thus exploiting, in their neighborhood. The Korean immigrants' "working here, living there" and "earning here, spending there" lifestyle was one of the reasons why the Black Americans in South Central Los Angeles became suspicious of and behaved with hostility toward the Koreans. The editor of *The Los Angeles Sentinel* James Cleaver wrote in 1984: "Black folks are angry … because there 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" (Cheng & Espiritu, 1989, p. 528). One of the Black American protesters during the L.A. Uprising/Sa-I-Gu recalled: "We were getting

[disrespect] from the immigrants coming over; we were getting it from the police, and we were saying, 'no, we cannot stand it' and that's the major reason the dam broke" (Simmonds & Bihm, 2012). Some Black Americans have claimed that their interests must be protected against those of immigrants because they are American-born or established inhabitants in the United States. This type of birthright claim will never be recognized or honored by White Americans. However, Black Americans can still exercise a prerogative of "master narrative" over Korean immigrants as their language and culture appear more American – at least more American than Koreans and Korean culture. Ice Cube's popular 1992 song "Black Korea," which was written to protest against Du's murder of Latasha Harlins, is a good example. Although Ice Cube claimed that the song was never meant to advocate interracial violence, the song mocked Korean immigrants' linguistic and cultural difficulties, intentionally called them "Chinese," and illustrated Korean immigrants as un-American foreigners who exploited Black customers and turned the neighborhood into "black Korea" (Batey, 2011; Choe, 1992).

This nativist rhetoric is oftentimes associated with a sense of entitlement; As Dyson (2005) discussed in his article about a deep fissure in the race relations among West Indians, Africans, African Americans, Asian Americans, and biracial persons, there has been a notion that Black Americans "earned" their civil rights, while other immigrants continue to "free ride on benefits borne out of a legacy of the racial struggle fought by Black Americans over the past 400 years" (p. 967). This nativist narrative combined with the sense of cultural and linguistic superiority empowered Black Americans to claim their superior position over Korean immigrants in the racial hierarchy in South Los Angeles. Although Black Americans are not typically associated with the title of the model minority, a version of the model minority stereotype has proven to be working. Black Americans' utilization of the nativist rhetoric based on language and culture over Korean immigrants exerts its rhetorical power only when they acknowledge and confirm the racial hierarchy that reproduces an unequal and discriminatory racial relationship within a society, putting the fantasized Americanness and Whiteness on top of the hierarchy.

On the other hand, some Korean immigrants also manufactured their own version of nativist claim. Korean immigrants have thought that they were in a superior economic position. However, their economic superiority did not give them the so-called master's position. Cultural as well as linguistic barriers worked against them. Due to their poor command of the English language, Korean immigrants, like many other Asian immigrants, often became the subject of ridicule and derision from American society, including Black customers. This linguistic inferiority was a critical stigma of cultural foreignness for Korean immigrants. Korean immigrants also perceived Black Americans as "part of the powerful American mainstream" (Cheung, 2005, p. 22). When Los Angeles City's Black American Councilman Mark Ridley-Thomas from the 8th District prevented the Korean business owners from rebuilding and reopening the "problem liquor stores" after the protests, using his "ward courtesy" power, the Korean immigrants felt betrayed and abandoned by their own representative because they endorsed and supported Ridley-Thomas in the 1991 election and hoped him to represent all the constituents in the district, not only Black Americans (Carr, 1993; D. Kim, 2012).

Korean immigrants hoped that they could reverse the disproportional power dynamics by actively internalizing the culture and norms of the White majority. When they started claiming the model minority status, instead of recognizing the false claim of American dream, Korean immigrants alienated themselves from other racial and ethnic minorities, particularly Black Americans, with whom they could fight together against the real cause of their hardship and suffering. As N. Kim (2004) pointed out, many Korean immigrants have accepted and reproduced the false racial stereotype of Black Americans, whom they deemed to not have worked hard enough to overcome the racial barriers presented by White superiority. After the L.A. Uprising/Sa-I-Gu,

while many Korean immigrants acknowledged that they failed to respect Black customers and started reflecting how to improve their relationship with Black customers, others who lost their businesses to looting and arson adhered to their negative discourse about Black Americans:

> *Blacks are the most racist people alive. Why do they pick on the Korean community because Rodney King got beat-up? Why didn't they burn down Beverly Hills first!* (K. Park, 1995, p. 73)

> *There is too much racial preference in the U.S. After the riots, our perception of African Americans changed drastically. Initially, we wanted to be friends with them. But now the wall between us has been built up even higher, by both* (K. Park, 1995, p. 76).

As Korean immigrants came to acknowledge that the recognition and protection they expected from the White majority and the system were merely a fantasy, many of them remained quiet about the structural cause of the L.A. uprising/Sa-I-Gu and rather shifted blame for the violence and looting onto the Black protesters, the same victims of the structural racism in the United States. This distorted version of master narrative reaffirms their false sense of superiority over Black Americans, consequently following the same path that was adapted by Black Americans.

Demystifying the Myths: True Americanness and Model Minority

Since the 1980s, a group of scholars have raised a question about the traditional Black/White paradigm (R. S. Chang, 1993; Omi & Winant, 1986; Perea, 1997). For them, while the slavery and White racism should be recognized as the core of American history and society, the history of discrimination against non-Black peoples of color should not be lumped into the Black/White binary paradigm. As critical racial theory has focused on the Black/White racial paradigm, these scholars argue that racial discourse in the United States must include the unique histories and experiences of non-Black racial and ethnic minorities. Akinsola (2020), Iijima (1997) and James (2019) observe a potential danger within the Black/White paradigm as other non-Black minorities would be pushed to choose either side. For example, when immigrants notice structural racism and discrimination against Black Americans despite their birthright citizenship, they recognize that Whiteness would be better and more powerful than citizenship in America. Although many immigrants have chosen to fight with Black Americans against racism and discrimination, other immigrants might have preferred the model minority or honorary White status, especially when they thought that they would be seen and treated as foreigners from both racial groups.

This critique of the Black/White binary paradigm, however, has its own problems. First, this critique does not account for the multiple layers in the binary paradigm and hence ironically follows the essentialist definition of race and ethnicity. There are multiple layers and interpretations of Blackness and Whiteness, and hence Asians are not to be asked if yellow is black or white. Instead, Asians need to answer more complex questions, such as "questions of American identity, Asian American identity, third-world identity, the relationships among people of color, and the nature of American racial formation" (J. Y. Kim, 1999, p. 2392). Second, this approach fails to recognize the potential of the binary paradigm. To identify, recognize, and fight the operation of White supremacy, non-Black minorities may have to rely on the Black/White paradigm for a while. The traditional paradigm may not help non-Black minorities construct their own identity in the context of the multiracial and multiethnic reality in America, but it still allows them to organize

"reverse discourse" for antisubordination and antisupremacist ideologies (J. Y. Kim, 1999, p. 2399). Indeed, the model minority myth has forced Korean immigrants to choose if they would be "near-Black" or "near-White," and, as Iijima points out, the claim of relative Whiteness, or Americanness, becomes coherent "only if the assumptions of the old [binary] paradigm and the placement of whiteness within it are accepted as the operating frame" (Iijima, 1997, p. 70).

While the Black/White binary paradigm helps us recognize and fight structural racism in America, the critics of the binary paradigm are correct in that there are complexities and disruptions within the interracial and interethnic dynamics, which may not be fully described by the Black/White paradigm. The critics are also right to point out that racial and ethnic identities are political, social, and economic products. The fantasy of true Americanness has operated sometimes beyond the Black/White paradigm and has continuously targeted, marginalized, and excluded different groups of people who did not fit into the imagined American identity or Whiteness. Targets may have changed over time, from the Irish, Germans, Jews, Blacks, Asians, communists, anarchists, LGBTQ, and most recently, Muslims and other political and social dissidents. However, the system itself remains intact and pervasive. The dominant political, societal, and cultural system verifies and classifies all the people in America, including Whites, as to whether they fit into the standards of true Americanness. In other words, both Black/White binary paradigm and multiracial/multiethnic pluralist paradigm have their own limits in recognizing and challenging the myth of model minority and false Americanism.

While acknowledging that America historically had been a "racist nation" by "White Americans," historian Arthur Schlesinger Jr. argued that "the multiethnic dogma…belittles *unum* and glorifies *pluribus*" and expressed his concern if the multiethnic dogma would replace "assimilation by fragmentation" (Schlesinger, 1998, p. 21). Sustaining political unity and strengthening common bonds in society are legitimate goals. However, it does not mean that Americans must gain a sense of the monolithic, dogmatic, and nostalgic national purpose and identity. Such a purpose or identity never existed but was rather manufactured to justify the oppressive racist system. Just as the concept of "Whiteness" has continuously changed and has been redefined, American identity has also changed and evolved. Asserting the illusion of true Americanness marginalizes every group of people in society, including White Americans who resist the illusion. This fantasy has destroyed the true unity of the country. What is necessary for true political and social unity is not a myth of true Americanness. Nor do we need the illusion of a model minority who competes with other minorities in futile fights for superiority. No matter how hard model minorities attempt to reach true Americanness, they are destined to fail. It is neither just because they do not work hard, nor because their English is not fluent, nor because their culture is un-American. It is because true Americanness has never existed.

Allen (2004) explained that unity cannot be understood as oneness. It is wholeness that truly unifies different people in this country, encouraging them to come up with different understandings of citizenship and different interpretations of their political community. This idea of wholeness of citizenship invites different groups of people to genuine conversations for the development of democratic and inclusive forms of citizenship. In this sense, Allen (2004) focused on "integration, not assimilation" (p. 20). Similarly, Song (2009) argued that "the United States has a need for the acknowledgement of diverse modes of belonging based on the distinctive histories of different groups," beyond mere distinctive group identities and outlooks (p. 36). "Deep diversity," which acknowledges distinctive ways of belonging and different interpretations of the political community, empowers citizens to debunk the myths of true Americanness and the model minority. While Americans may be able to agree on some shared values and ideals through continuous articulation and re-articulation of those different interpretations of what America is and who Americans are, the stable and rigid dogma of true Americanness should be denied. There is

no right or wrong interpretation. Multiple, sometimes even contending, interpretations of Americanness should be promoted and welcomed. American society has been deeply associated with pluralism, and some may say that pluralism indeed defined the very nature of American politics. If that is true, we can agree with Michael Walzer's conclusion: The fully coherent Americanism does not exist, and what American politics needs is not a coherence but "a certain sort of incoherence" (Walzer, 2004, pp. 652-653).

Although Song notes that the deep diversity model "may be too thin a basis for civic solidarity in a democratic society," (p. 37) civic solidarity does not have to require anything thicker than a minimalist agreement on a set of democratic values. In fact, the obsession to define what America is has resulted in White racism and the fantasy of true Americanness. Overloaded by definitive European White cultural and religious values, the term America itself has become oppressive to anyone who does not and cannot share those imaginary values. At the same time, deep diversity cannot be understood as a sort or nihilism or another version of liberal multiculturalism. Multiculturalism has been sometimes associated with cultural relativism, which implies that any type of commonality or consensus across different racial and ethnic groups cannot exist. Instead, deep diversity recognizes that everyone and every racial and ethnic group in society should be able to discuss what their shared political community should look like, how they interpret the meaning of such a political space, how they negotiate to weave those different interpretations and meanings into an agreeable but unstable consensus, and how they fight together to prevent the emergence of a dominant and stable interpretation of what America is. Americanness is not something to be defined or stabilized, but rather continuously to be redefined and rearticulated by all racial and ethnic groups. In this sense, the concept of deep diversity may offer us a new, if not better, insight to radically destabilize the oppressive model minority myth and false Americanness beyond the Black/White binary paradigm or multicultural pluralism.

Since the L.A. Uprising/Sa-I-Gu, Korean Americans and Black Americans have tried to move forward together. Many efforts have been made by activists and religious and academic leaders to reconcile the two communities. These have included hosting goodwill sports matches, awarding scholarships, and even inviting groups of Black Americans on friendly trips to South Korea. The young generation shows an even brighter possibility: When the Korean pop group BTS donated $1 million to the Black Lives Matter movement after the death of George Floyd, their fan club called BTS A.R.M.Y. immediately matched another $1 million donation to the movement. The A.R.M.Y. also launched a massive attack on racist hashtags, including #WhiteLivesMatter and #AllLivesMatter, with a seemingly endless amount of K-pop fancams, and then overflowed the iWatch Dallas app after the Dallas Police Department encouraged citizens to share videos of illegal protests (Madden, 2020). Despite the examples of successful collaboration between the two minority groups, misunderstandings and frictions still exist. The incidents of conflicts between the two groups recently seem to have even spread to multiple places across the country. White conservatives have attempted to use this tension to solidify a system of racism and oppression in the United States, and they welcome using Korean Americans and other Asian Americans as a pawn of their political projects. The "divide and conquer" strategy shows how systems of racism and oppression still separate racial and ethnic minorities and destroy the true unity of America. The genuine unity among all minorities and Whites, including Korean immigrants and Black Americans, will be achieved only when all Americans from different racial make-ups, socio-economic levels, and cultural backgrounds debunk and challenge the myth of true Americanness.

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Biographical Note

Se-Hyoung Yi, Ph.D., is Assistant Professor of Political Science at the University of Houston-Clear Lake. His research interests include ancient political thought, comparative political theory, deliberative democracy, theories of citizenship, racial and ethnic politics, and civic education.

William T. Hoston, Ph.D., is the author or editor of six academic books and several scholarly articles. He serves as an Interim Associate Dean in the Marvin D. and June Samuel Brailsford College of Arts and Sciences, Director of the Mellon Center for Faculty Excellence, and Professor of Political Science at Prairie View A&M University.