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Korean-Black Relationships in Greater New York

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Abstract

This paper examines Korean-black relationships in Greater New York in the past and at present. It also provides the author's suggestions to improve the relationships between the two communities in the future. Korean immigrants encountered severe business-related conflicts with black customers in black neighborhoods during the 1980-1995 period. Their business-related conflicts have disappeared since the mid-1990s, as they stopped their business activities there. But the Korean community is residentially highly segregated from and has maintained only a moderate level of interactions with the black community. To strengthen the ties with the black community, Korean immigrants need education on blacks' history and their current suffering of structural racism.

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Introduction

The 2020 presidential election year was a memorable year in U.S. history in terms of Americans' awareness of racial inequality and racial justice. On May 25, 2020, George Floyd, a 46-year-old African American man in Minneapolis, was killed by a white police officer's kneeling on his neck for an extended period of time, resulting in cardiopulmonary arrest. The explosive footage of this incident, recorded by a bystander and shared on social media, led to large protests involving not only blacks, but also whites and other minorities for several days. Joe Biden, who was the Democratic Party presidential candidate at the time, condemned the force used by the police officer, and tweeted: "George Floyd deserved better and his family deserves his justice. His life matters." Several other blacks were killed in other U.S. cities through police brutality, the long-standing practices of structural racism against black men carried out in inner-city black neighborhoods, in summer and fall in the same year. The-Black-Lives-Matter demonstrations spread to other U.S. cities and a few European cities in the same year. In this way, George Floyd's and other blacks' killings through police brutality exposed systematic racism against blacks to many Americans and raised their awareness of the racial justice issue.

I am curious how many Asian-American young people joined the protests against police brutality toward black people. The race-relations studies in the United States before 1980

focused on white-black relations. However, the influx of large numbers of Hispanic and Asian immigrants since 1965 had led to a racial increase of the proportions of the two minority groups. As shown in Table 1, the proportion of Hispanics increased from 4.6% in 1970 to 18.4% in 2019, outnumbering African Americans by one-third. In 1970, Asian Americans comprised a tiny fraction of the U.S. population. However, at the time of this writing, nearly twenty-million Asian Americans comprise 6% of the U.S. population. As a result, cases of conflicts among three major minority groups (African Americans, Hispanics, and Asian Americans) have greatly increased (Chang and Leong 1994; Johnson and Oliver 1989; C.J. Kim 2000; Min 1996, 2008). Therefore, how Asian Americans are positioned in U.S. race relations is a very important issue.

Table 1: Percent of the U.S. Population Change by Race/Ethnicity from 1970 to 2019

	1970	1980	1990	2000	2010	2019
Total Population	203,212,877	188,371,622	199,686,070	281,421,906	308,745,538	328,239,523
White	87.7	79.6	75.6	69.1	63.8	60
Black	11.1	11.5	11.8	12.1	12.2	12.4
Hispanic	(4.6) ^b	6.5	9	12.6	16.4	18.4
Asian ^a	-	2.1 ^c	2.8	3.7	4.9	5.8
Others	1.3	0.4	0.8	2.5	2.8	3.5
Total	100	100	100	100	100	100

Source: The U.S. Decennial Censuses and the 2019 American Community Survey (ACS) 1-Year Estimates, U.S. Census Bureau (compiled from www.socialexplorer.com)

^a Native Hawaiian and Other Pacific Islander

^b It is based on a separate survey of 15% of the total population.

^c American Indian, Eskimo, and Aleut.

Among the five major Asian immigrant groups (Chinese, Indian, Filipino, Vietnamese, and Korean), Korean immigrants had the most severe conflicts with African Americans while running businesses in inner-city black neighborhoods between the late 1970s and the early 1990s. As will be shown in the first section, Korean immigrant and Korean American social scientists paid great attention to Korean-black conflicts in the 1990s and the early 2000s. Moreover, there were some labor-related conflicts between Korean immigrant merchants and Latino employees in the late 1990s and the 2000s (Min 2007 & 2008). However, as Korean immigrant business owners have almost disappeared from inner-city black neighborhoods since the mid-1990s, Korean-black conflicts, which were likely to be more or less permanent, have largely disappeared.

Although there has been a drastic decrease in Korean-black conflicts since the mid-1990s due to the near absence of Korean immigrant businesses in black neighborhoods, this does not necessarily mean that the two groups have maintained good relationships. Since Korean immigrants have a tendency to avoid black neighborhoods for residence, Korean immigrants and Korean Americans have not maintained much contact with the black community. In 2020, the Korean community in Greater New York has been highly integrated

to white American mainstream society. Korean community leaders and local politicians have invited many white politicians and community leaders to Korean festivals and galas organized by major Korean organizations. But Korean community organizations, with the exception of the MinKwon Center for Community Action, have invited few black politicians and community leaders to Korean festivals and galas. As will be shown later, due to their failure to understand the legacy of African Americans' history of slavery and contemporary structural discrimination, Korean and Chinese immigrant parents and leaders have opposed policies that give preferential treatment to blacks and other disadvantaged minority groups in admissions to high schools and colleges, and employment.

This paper intends to examine Korean-black relationships by dividing their history into three periods: past, present, and future. The first section focusing on the past is based on the author's extensive research on Korean immigrants' business-related intergroup conflicts with black customers and black residents in the early 1990s and 2005 (Min 1996; 2008). Data sources include personal interviews with Korean business owners in black neighborhoods, participant observations of Korean businesses there and Korean local newspaper articles. My description of Korean-black relationships in the post-1995 period in the second section is based on my own experiences in the Korean community in the form of participant observations, my interviews with several Korean community leaders and a Korean-language teacher at Democracy Prep School in Harlem, Korean newspaper articles, and census data. In the final section, I intend to make several recommendations to help establish closer relationships between the Korean and black communities in New York.

Korean-Black Conflicts in New York between 1980 and 1995

Korean immigrants had more conflicts with the black community than any other Asian immigrant group in the 1980s and the early 1990s. Large numbers of Korean immigrant businesses were concentrated in inner-city black neighborhoods in many American cities between the late 1970s and the early 1990s (Min 1996 & 2008; Yoon 1997). Frequent conflicts between black customers and Korean business owners/managers in Korean-owned stores in black neighborhoods contributed to physical violence, long-term boycotts, arsons of stores, and destruction of many Korean-owned stores in the 1992 Los Angeles Riots.

In particular, Korean immigrant merchants in black neighborhoods in New York City (Jamaica in Queens, Harlem in Manhattan, and Flatbush in Brooklyn) encountered approximately ten long-term boycotts that lasted two months or longer (Min 2008:75). The longest black boycott of two Korean-owned produce stores in Flatbush, Brooklyn that started in January 1990 lasted 16 months (Min 1996: 77-78). It attracted national and international media attention. Black community leaders' main complaints against Korean business owners were Koreans' rude treatments of black customers and their failure to hire local black residents as employees and to donate money to black neighborhoods (Min 1996: 113-117).

Korean immigrant and Korean American scholars tried to explain Koreans' business-related conflicts with local black residents and black community leaders (Abelmann and Lie 1995; Kim 2000; Min 1996, 2008; Yoon 1997). Abelmann and Lie (1995) used racial discourse theories to explain Korean-black conflicts. In their view, American racial ideologies, especially through mass media, depict Korean immigrants as a hard-working model minority

and African Americans as a lazy urban underclass, thus pitting them against each other. Similarly, Claire Kim (2000) emphasized the American racial order as generating Korean-black conflicts. The differential positioning of blacks and Asian Americans in the American racial order creates the immanent tendency for conflict between the two minority groups (racial triangulation theory). Nadia Kim (2008) indicated that Korean immigrants had learned prejudice against blacks from American servicemen, as well as American media, in South Korea before they immigrated to the United States.

I had difficulty in accepting the above three similar explanations of black customers' rejections of Korean stores in black neighborhoods, which blamed U.S. media or "American racial order" for Korean-black conflicts. I agreed that Korean business owners' prejudice against black customers partly contributed to interracial conflicts in Korean-owned stores. But their prejudice against blacks was developed in the process of running businesses in low-income black neighborhoods and their ignorance of African American history.

Moreover, I used middleman minority theory to explain black customers' rejection of Korean stores in their neighborhoods and destruction of many Korean-owned stores in the 1992 riots in Los Angeles (Min 1996 & 2008). Historically, middleman merchants, such as Jews in Medieval Europe and Chinese in Southeast Asian countries, distributed merchandise made by the ruling group to consuming masses in colonial or highly stratified societies (Blalock 1967: 79-84; Bonacich 1973). They encountered various forms of rejection or resistance, including boycotts of their stores and riots. The U.S. was not a colonial society where Korean middleman merchants distributed products made by the ruling group to minority customers. But inner-city black neighborhoods in American cities in the 1970s and 1980s were similar to colonies, which needed middleman merchants who could distribute products made by corporations to black customers.

Most Korean business owners have moved out of black neighborhoods since the early 1990s. As a result, no major conflict between Korean store owners and black residents in the United States has occurred since 1996. Three major factors contributed to the near disappearance of Korean-owned stores in black neighborhoods: (1) urban renovations that allowed many mega stores to move into inner-city black neighborhoods; (2) Korean retail business owners' transition away from retail stores in black neighborhoods to service businesses (e.g., dry cleaning and nail salon services in New York) in white and multiethnic neighborhoods; and (3) most recent Korean immigrants' ability to find professional, managerial and technical occupations in the mainstream economy (Min 2008: 89-94).

Lack of Inter-group Conflicts but Few Connections between the Black and Korean Communities in the Post-1995 Era

Separation in Socioeconomic Status and Residential Areas

The 1970-1989 period was the peak period of Korean immigration to the United States. (Min 2011). Approximately 30,000 to 38,000 Koreans immigrated to the United States annually during the period. However, as South Korea had achieved a high level of economic development and Koreans had replaced the military government with a civilian government in the 1990s, the annual number of Korean immigrants to the United States dropped significantly to the level of less than 15,000 (Min 2011). Moreover, most post-1995 Korean immigrants

seem to have been able to find professional, managerial and technical occupations as the 1990 Immigration Act raised the number of specialty occupation immigrants (professional, managerial, technical and administrative occupations) by three times, to 140,000 (Rumbaut 1995). In addition, old-timer immigrants engaged in small retail and service businesses achieved socioeconomic mobility, with some of them becoming supermarket and real-estate owners.

Moreover, younger-generation (1.5- and second-generation) Korean Americans educated in the United States grew up to be adults in the late 1990s and participated in the mainstream economy. Their self-employment rate dropped to less than 10%, compared over 30% for Korean immigrants (Min 2008: 95). Census data show that they have substantially higher educational, occupational and income levels than their immigrant parents (Kim 2016). Census data in Table 2 shows socioeconomic characteristics of Asian Americans, compared to other groups. Asian Americans have a much higher college graduation rate (59%) than native-born white Americans (39%), who have a much higher college graduation rate than blacks (24%) and Hispanics (18%). In terms of median household income and proportion of people with professional occupations, Asian Americans do substantially better than white Americans.

Many Asian American scholars and social workers have emphasized the diversity of Asian Americans in their socioeconomic status. Some Asian groups, such as Chinese and Indians, do exceptionally well, but many other small Asian groups, such as Indochinese refugees, have serious socioeconomic problems. To see the differential levels of Asian Americans' socio-economic statuses, I have divided Asian Americans into high-status and low-status groups in Table 2. As expected, there are substantial differences between the two groups in their educational and occupational levels, and the median household income. However, the labor force participants belonging to the low-status group compose only 17% of all Asian American workers 25 years old and over. More significantly, the low-status group, consisting of Pakistani, Bangladeshi, Cambodian, Indonesian and others, has a substantially higher socioeconomic status than blacks and other disadvantaged minority groups. In fact, surprisingly, they are comparable to native-born white Americans in their college graduation rate and median household income. Given these small Asian groups' short immigration history, they seem to be on a right track in their socioeconomic adaptation.

Blacks do socioeconomically better than Hispanics because they do not have the language barrier. Many middle-class blacks live in their own or multi-ethnic neighborhoods. But many other lower-class blacks still live in segregated inner-city black neighborhoods with high crime rates and frequent police brutality. Spatially segregated inner-city black neighborhoods still exist in almost all metropolitan areas in the Southern and Northeastern regions. In contrast, by virtue of their exceptionally high socioeconomic status, Asian Americans are highly represented in middle-class multiethnic and suburban white neighborhoods. In particular, Korean and Chinese Americans have a strong tendency to avoid even partially black neighborhoods for security. I can show this tendency of Korean and Chinese immigrants, using settlement patterns of Asian Americans in Queens, New York City where the vast majority of residents are recent immigrants.

As shown in Table 3, among 15 Queens community districts, Korean and Chinese immigrants are overrepresented in Community District 7 encompassing Flushing, Murray Hill and Whitestone. It was a predominantly white district with 96% white Americans in 1970

(New York City and Zuccotti, 1973). Korean, Chinese and other Asian immigrants began to move to the district in 1980, and the district has been turned into a majority Asian district with Asian Americans comprising 52% and white Americans composing only 24% in 2014. Both Korean and Chinese immigrants in District 7 established their own business districts in the Flushing enclave. Korean and Chinese immigrants began to move to District 11, another predominantly white district in Queens, which includes Bayside, Douglaston, Little Neck, and Oakland Gardens. Asian Americans accounted for 45% of the population in the district in 2014, outnumbering white Americans.

Table 2: Socioeconomic Characteristics of the U.S. Population (Ages 25-64) by Race/Ethnicity

	College Degree (%)	Managerial Occupation (%)	Professional Occupation (%)	Household Income (Median)
White	39.2	20.4	27.5	\$85,600
Black	23.9	12.7	20.9	\$53,700
Hispanic	18.4	11.3	14.5	\$65,000
Asian	58.9	18.8	38	\$106,400
High-Status Group^a	62.5	19.5	40.3	\$111,400
Low-Status Group^b	40.8	15.2	25.9	\$85,100
Others	32.2	17.2	26.2	\$74,500
Total population	170,881,003	129,400,422	129,400,422	303,535,900

Source: The 2019 American Community Survey (ACS) 1-Year Estimates, U.S. Census Bureau; Steven Ruggles, Sarah Flood, Ronald Goeken, Josiah Grover, Erin Meyer, Jose Pacas and Matthew Sobek. IPUMS USA: Version 10.0 [dataset]. Minneapolis, MN: IPUMS, 2020.

^a Chinese, Taiwanese, Japanese, Filipino, Asian Indian, Korean, and Vietnamese

^b All other ethnic and intermarried Asians

There were a large number of Asian Indians in the Flushing area in 1980 and 1990. But they began to gradually move to District 12, a majority black area (64%) that includes Jamaica, Hollis, and St. Albans, in 2014. There were 14,400 Asian Indians in the district in 2014, accounting for 6% of the population. District 13 (the Queens Village area) is another majority black district (56%) in Queens. There were an even larger number of Asian Indians (almost 19,000) in the district, accounting for more than 9% of the population. Asian Indian immigrants have established a small ethnic business district in Queens Village. More than 2,000 and 3,000 Filipino Americans were settled in Districts 12 and 13, respectively, although there were a modest number of Filipino Americans in Queens.

Table 3: Asian Americans' Residence in Four Queens Community Districts

	NYC-Quees Community Districts*			
	7	11	12	13
Total populaiton	245,862	119,789	238,619	202,700
White (%)	25.4	39.4	1.8	10.9
Black (%)	2	1.9	61.8	55.8
Hispanics (%)	17.8	11.1	15.9	12.5
Asian (%)	52.8	45.4	12.6	15.4
Korean (%)	8.9	11.7	0.1	0.3
Chinese (%)	35.5	27.6	0.3	1.6
Indian (%)	3.1	1.7	6	9.3
Filippino (%)	1.5	1.4	0.9	1.6
Others (%)	2.1	2.2	7.9	5.5

Source: The 2014-2018 American Community Survey (ACS) 5-Year Estimate, U.S. Census Bureau (compiled from www.socialexplorer.com).

* District 7--Flushing, Murray Hill & Whitestone PUMA; District 11--Bayside, Douglaston & Little Neck PUMA; District 12--Jamaica, Hollis & St. Albans PUMA; District 13--Queens Village, Cambria Heights & Rosedale PUMA

In contrast, only a few or several hundred Koreans were settled in the two black majority districts.¹ The numbers of Chinese Americans settled in these two districts were also very small, although they comprise the largest group in Queens among the four Asian groups. These statistical data suggest that most Asian Indians are unlikely to avoid living in black majority districts whereas Korean and Chinese Americans make all efforts to avoid living there. Some readers may assume that the difference in socioeconomic statuses between Indian/Filipino Americans and Korean/Chinese Americans explain their differential representations in majority black neighborhoods. However, this does not explain it at all. In fact, most recent census data (2019 American Community Surveys) indicate that Indian Americans have much higher socioeconomic statuses than Korean and Chinese Americans in education, occupations, and incomes, with Filipino Americans showing similar statuses to the two East Asian groups. This seems to indicate Indian Americans' greater readiness to have blacks as their neighbors than Korean and Chinese Americans.

The Modest Connection with the Black Community

The Korean community in the New York-New Jersey area has been gradually integrated to the local mainstream society since the late 1990s. An increasing number of Korean community leaders in Palisades Park and other municipalities in Bergen County, New Jersey have been elected as city council members through the Democratic Party since the early 2000s. As of 2020, two Korean Americans in Bergen County respectively serve as mayors of two municipalities while a dozen others serve as city council members. The Korean community in Bergen County has been closely linked to the County Democratic Party's political leaders, most of whom are white.

In the Flushing-Bayside area, Korean American candidates have competed in Democratic Party primaries with Chinese American candidates for city council and state

assembly seats since the early 2000s. All Korean candidates had been defeated by Chinese candidates until Ron Kim was elected as a New York State Assemblyman in 2012. Although the Korean community in the Flushing-Bayside area has been much less successful in electoral politics, it has maintained close relationships with local politicians, especially white and Chinese politicians, to protect community interests. Many local politicians have often participated in Korean cultural festivals, major galas, and unveiling ceremonies of “comfort women” memorials² to express their support for the Korean community.

However, Korean community leaders and politicians have established only modest linkages with the black community in New York City. According to my participant observations and analysis of Korean newspaper articles, Korean community leaders had supported Charles Rangel, a Harlem-based long-time black member of House of Representatives, with donations in the congressional election every two years until he retired in 2017. They had supported him mainly because he participated in the Korean War in 1950 and supported Korean agendas in Congress. Thus, he was the main connection of the Korean community with the black community for many years.

In 2020, Charles Yoon, a second-generation president of the Korean American Association of Greater New York arranged for a Korean social service organization to provide scholarships for three black students in Harlem through Al Sharpton, a well-known black pastor, civil rights activist, and former presidential candidate for the Democratic Party. The Korean community has over 50 scholarship programs established by elderly Koreans and ethnic organizations. The largest scholarship program, Korean American Scholarship Fund, runs with a yearly fund of \$150,000. If 5% of the scholarship funds available in the Korean community are channeled into the black community, several black students would benefit from it.

Finally, the MinKwon Center for Community Action, a powerful Korean civil rights organization in the New York area, has established close relationships with Latino and black community leaders. It has fought to protect wage workers and undocumented residents for many years, establishing close relationships with minority community leaders.

The Popularity of Korean Language Course in Black Schools in Harlem

As summarized above, the Korean community in New York has not established a close relationship with the black community in terms of sharing neighborhoods and community activities. However, the popularity of a large Korean-language program established at three predominantly black charter schools in Harlem has facilitated communications between the two communities. This subsection will summarize how the Korean-language program started and why it is popular among black students.

Seth Andrew, the white American founder of a charter school,³ created Korean-language courses in 2009 three years after its foundation, by virtue of his positive experiences with Korean culture and the Korean educational system during his stint as an English-language instructor in South Korea. He established a charter school (kindergarten through twelfth grade) called Democracy Prep School, in a low-income black neighborhood in the heart of Harlem in 2006. During his residence in South Korea, he was deeply impressed by both Korean parents’ and students’ zeal for education, Korean society’s recognition of the importance of education, and Korean students’ high level of respect shown to him as a teacher. He adopted what he

considered several positive aspects of the Korean education system which emphasizes (1) strong discipline, (2) respect for teachers, and (3) long hours of study (Min 2018).

According to Democracy Prep's first Korean-language teacher, Jungjin Lee, students, predominantly blacks (80%) and Latinos (20%), initially resisted learning the Korean language and the Korean educational system. The Korean educational system included starting the school day at 7:45 and remaining in school until 5:15. But they gradually changed their attitudes and called the teacher Lee, "mom." After regular classes, students engaged in Korean cultural extracurricular activities, including taekwondo and K-pop. Three Harlem charter schools currently provide eighteen Korean-language classes with six Korean teachers. They established a Korean-language department to coordinate eighteen Korean-language classes. About 30 elementary and high schools in the New York-New Jersey area offer Korean as a foreign language (Min 2018). But these three charter schools have the largest number of Korean-language classes.

Surprisingly, the academic achievements of students dramatically improved to the extent that it was selected as the best charter school in New York City. The predominant majority of the high school students did not have parents who had attended college. But most of the graduating students were planning to advance to first- or second-class colleges and universities. In 2013, all 39 students in the graduating class received admissions to two or four-year colleges and universities. Jungjin Lee told me that in addition to utilizing the Korean style of education, these high schools also emphasize leadership skills to "make them leaders to change the world," which also contributed to the students' great achievements. But she agreed that the Korean style of education has definitely contributed to the drastic improvement of their academic achievements. This school's success story and its emphasis on the Korean style of education have been widely publicized in South Korea through an article published in *JoongAng Ilbo*, a Korean daily newspaper, in June 2011 (KangLee, 2012a). When the principal visited Korea in June 2011, just after the publication of the article in the Korean newspaper, he had interviews with more than 25 media outlets in South Korea (KangLee, 2012b). KBS featured a program about the success story of the high school and the principal's emphasis on the superiority of the Korean educational system.

The Harlem high schools established a sister relationship with a high school in Seoul and have sent a group of about 40 students to Seoul every summer for a seven-to-nine-day stay. Each visiting student gets a home stay at a Korean student's home. The students and Korean-language teachers at the three schools organize a major Korean festival in Harlem at the end of each spring semester (in May) and invited about 2,000 black residents. Black parents and residents enjoy Korean food with Korean dances and other Korean cultural activities all day in the festival. In the hall of Democracy Prep School, many Korean universities' photos are exhibited, reflecting the students' dream of going to South Korea for college education.

Many people in South Korea and the Korean community in New York seem to have been excited at what happened at the Harlem charter schools mainly because of the popularity of the Korean style of education, and the Korean language and culture among black students. But I consider the "Harlem miracle" as important for the Korean community because it provides an avenue for improving the interracial relations between the Korean and black communities in New York City. Remember that two long-term black boycotts of Korean retail stores occurred in Harlem in the 1980s (Min 1996: 74-75). In the same neighborhood, Korean

teachers and black students regularly organize a major Korean festival, providing many Korean cultural performances and Korean cuisines for local black residents. Taking advantage of this avenue, the Korean American Association of Greater New York and other Korean ethnic organizations could initiate major programs to strengthen ties between the Korean and black communities.

Recommendations for Closer Korean-Black Relationships in the Future

Historically, the United States organized and enforced the most rigid form of slavery against blacks in the South. Slavery was abolished in 1863 around the end of the Civil War. However, the legacy of slavery against blacks had continued in the form of all kinds of segregation between whites and blacks until the Civil Rights Act was passed in 1964. Black Americans have continued to suffer racial prejudice and discrimination even after the 1964 Civil Rights Act. A significant proportion of black Americans has achieved social mobility as media specialists, actors/actresses, singers, athletes, and politicians. Nevertheless, as previously noted, many poor black Americans are still concentrated in segregated neighborhoods with high crime rates. Many young black men are still subject to police brutality. Black men are often pulled over by the police for “driving while being black” with no criminal activity (Harris 1999). Also, blacks become easy targets in the marijuana arrest crusades (Levine and Small 2007). It is not easy to change blacks’ high residential segregation and a very low interracial marriage rate because they are affected by a high level of social distance between blacks and other Americans, rather than by overt racism.

Chinese, Japanese and other Asian immigrants suffered a high level of racism, racial violence, and exclusion in the US West Coast between the 1850s and the 1950s. The passage of the 1965 Immigration Act, which was helped by the Civil Rights Act, opened the door to all countries for immigration to the United States. The 1964 Civil Rights Act prohibited all forms of discrimination, those based not only on race, but also on religion, gender, and national origin. Thus, post-1965 Asian immigrants have benefitted much from the Civil Rights Act in their adaptations to the United States. Asian Americans still encounter minor racism, and they, especially Asian-American women, often become the victims of hate crimes, including random beatings and homicide by both whites and blacks.⁴ However, as shown in the previous section, Asian Americans have class advantages over Hispanics and black Americans in their adaptation. As a result, Asian Americans now encounter a much lower level of racism than those in the pre-1964 period.

Korean Immigrants’ Social Distance to Blacks

A Korean doctoral student told me around 2000 that her father had refused to meet her sister’s black husband (his son-in-law) even after they had a baby. One black student with two children in my class also told me around 2000 that he had never seen his Korean parents-in-law. These racial bias incidents happened around 2000. Twenty-years later, Korean immigrants’ anti-black prejudice seems to have been moderated. But in a survey study asking about which racial group is acceptable or not acceptable as their second-generation children’s marital partner, a large proportion of Korean immigrant parents responded that, “if he/she is not black, all others are alright.” Today, most immigrant parents are likely to accept black in-laws, but black partners may encounter many uncomfortable situations when interacting with Korean in-laws.

According to a recent study of intermarriage patterns among Asian Americans, 58% of Korean American women and 35% of men who grew up in the United States (U.S.-born and 1.5-generation Koreans) engaged in the intermarriage with a white partner. In contrast, only 1.9% of Korean American women and 1.2% of Korean American men had a black partner (ANZ Identity, 2018).

The unwillingness of Korean immigrants to accept blacks as their neighbors seems to be less common than their unwillingness to accept them as their kin members. Nevertheless, as shown in Table 2, Korean and Chinese immigrants in Queens are highly segregated from blacks. Alem Habtu, an Ethiopian immigrant, had been my best colleague in the sociology department at Queens College until he died several years ago. He used to live in Flushing to be close to our college, but he ended up moving back to Harlem. I asked him why he moved to Harlem, which entailed more than an hour's commute each way to and from campus. He told me that he had "encountered many uncomfortable experiences" in his interactions with Asian (predominantly Korean and Chinese) immigrants in Flushing. I could understand what he experienced and what he meant by "uncomfortable experiences."

As noted in the first section, Korean American scholars used the theoretical orientations that tended to blame the U.S. media and white Americans for Korean immigrants' prejudiced attitudes towards blacks in the 1990s-2000s (Abelmann and Lie 1994; C. Kim 2000; N. Kim 2008). However, at present, major U.S. media, such as *New York Times*, *Washington Post*, MSNBC, and CNN, and progressive white Americans seem to be more open to blacks and put more emphasis on racial justice issues than Korean immigrants. They are currently more progressive because they are more familiar with black history, which includes slavery, segregation laws, and contemporary structural discrimination against blacks. I believe that many Korean immigrants have prejudiced attitudes toward blacks partly because they have not had much contact with these progressive U.S. media. CNN and MSNBC not only have famous black anchors, but also interview many nationally known black leaders. Moreover, they report many cases of racial bias against blacks.

College-educated white Americans have more progressive views of race relations and racial prejudice in American society than their non-college counterparts because they learned about racial justice issues from their courses, seminars, and interactions with minority students. By virtue of diversity education, second-generation Koreans are also more open to blacks than their parents. The Korean community needs to provide classes on African American history and race relations to educate Korean immigrants. Community centers offer classes for elderly Koreans and other groups. They could add courses related to African American history, minority issues, and very successful middle-class and upper-middle-class blacks. Korean empowerment organizations in the New York-New Jersey area, such as MinKwon Center for Community Action and KACE (Korean American Coalition for Empowerment), could frequently invite black leaders for presentations on their history and racial issues.

Political Coalitions with Black/White American Progressive Members of the Democratic Party

The Civil Rights Act, minority-led diversity programs, and the further influx of many non-white immigrants have changed the United States into a highly multicultural and multiracial society over the last forty years. However, as shown before and after the 2020 presidential election, there are still many white supremacists who want to maintain the United States as a white society. Apparently, the four-years rule of the Trump administration has enhanced the

power of white supremacists. At this moment, the Joe Biden government, Democratic Party members—especially white and black leading members—and major U.S. media are working hard to fight together against the white supremacist forces. Korean and other Asian American politicians need to join the progressive movement led by white and black political and civic leaders through the Democratic Party. In the 2020 presidential election year, four Korean Americans were elected as members of the House of Representatives. Two of them belong to the Republican Party, with the other two belonging to the Democratic Party.

Social scientists have emphasized class, race, and gender as important variables in social-scientific analyses of people's education, occupations, income, status, and power. In contrast, they have not paid enough attention to party affiliation as an independent variable for racial justice and democracy. However, what has happened since the beginning of the 2020 presidential election clearly indicates that the Democratic Party is significantly different from the Republican Party on racial issues. The radical differences in political ideology between the two parties have more clearly emerged in the past year than at any other time. As already pointed out, Joe Biden as the Democratic Party presidential nominee started his election campaign by emphasizing "Black Lives Matter" over a white police officer's killing of a black man through excessive force, whereas the Republican Party nominee Donald Trump attacked participants in demonstrations against the killing of the black man.

Moreover, Americans and many global citizens witnessed the former President Trump's attempts to turn over his loss of the presidential election by inciting white supremacists to violently attack Capitol Hill on January 6, 2021 to prevent Congressional members from formally counting and certifying the electoral college votes based on the results of 50 states. Democratic Party congressional members, especially white and black congressional leaders, fought hard to impeach Trump for his inciting white supremacist organizations' violent attacks on Capitol Hill. They also saw that most Republican Senators did not condemn President Trump's criminal activities. Forty-three of fifty Republican Senators rejected the Impeachment Trial of Trump, although there was clear evidence for the former president's criminal activities.

We have witnessed white-black coalitions through the Democratic Party, not only in Congress but also in the Joe Biden Administration. His Administration has more diverse staff members than any other previous administration in terms of race and gender. In particular, the president has appointed many black high-ranking officials, including Lloyd Austin as Secretary of Defense and Linda Thomas-Greenfield as the U.S. Ambassador to the UN. And of course, his Vice President, Kamala Harris, is not only the first female Vice President, but also the first black and Asian person to hold that office. In addition, major U.S. media, such as the *New York Times*, *Washington Post*, MSNBC and CNN, have strongly supported Democratic Congressional members' and Joe Biden Administration's progressive political agendas. American society seems to be deeply divided between the Republican Party, supported by many white supremacists, and the Democratic Party, supported by progressive whites, most other minority members and progressive media.

Korean and other Asian American congressional members cannot do anything to support progressive agendas through the Republican Party. They should join the white and black progressive forces of the Democratic Party to protect their and other minority groups' interests and achieve racial justice in the future. Korean American voters should not support

Korean American political candidates regardless of their party affiliation simply because they are co-ethnic members.

Support of Affirmative Action Programs for Disadvantaged Minority Groups

I intend to emphasize the need of Korean immigrants to support various affirmative action programs for other disadvantaged minority communities in this final subsection. Affirmative action refers to a set of policies, programs, and practices within the U.S. government or an organization to increase the representation of minority groups and women in areas such as education and employment in which they are underrepresented. The Administration of President Lyndon B. Johnson initiated affirmative action policies to improve opportunities for African Americans under the Civil Rights Act of 1964. They call it “affirmative action” to ask the government or an organization to make an active effort to increase minority members and women even by giving preferential treatment to them. However, courts rejected affirmative action in the form of the use of racial quotas or set asides as “reverse discrimination” in the 1970s and after.

New York City has two elite specialized science high schools, Stuyvesant High School and Bronx Science High School. They accept students based on admissions tests (English and math) in the eighth grade. In 2019, Asian American students composed 74% of the students at Stuyvesant and 66% of those at Bronx Science, although Asian Americans composed only 14% of the student population in the city (Shapiro and Wang, 2019a). In sharp contrast, black and Hispanic students composed only 3.5% and 8% at the schools, respectively, although they comprise 70% of the total student population in New York City. Partly because Asian parents have a much higher-class background than black and Hispanic parents, and especially because Asian-American students attend classes focusing on specialized school tests after school, they are overrepresented in these two and other specialized high schools in New York City.

New York City Mayor Bill de Blasio tried to change admission criteria by phasing out the admissions test and accepting top performers in their classes to significantly increase black and Latino students (Fuchs 2018: 6). But his proposal encountered angry resistance by Chinese and Korean parents and activists. A Chinatown activist said: “It attacks the immigrants’ dream of bettering their children” (Fuchs 2018: 1). Under immense resistance by Chinese and Korean communities, the mayor’s proposal has been gradually removed (Shapiro and Wang 2019b).

Chinese parents also resisted the 40% Chinese students cap to overturn the long-standing desegregation court order given to increase Hispanic and Latino students in the San Francisco United School District in 1994 (Hing 200; Nobles 2004). Chinese students composed 43%, compared with 15% of blacks and Hispanic students at Lowell High School. The Chinese American Democratic Committee vigorously pursued the lawsuit to help more Chinese students admitted to Lowell. Min commented:

They won the court battle, but they may have lost more than gained from winning the lawsuit because it has contributed to a further reduction of the proportion of black and Latino students. African and Latino students’ low academic performance is due mainly to the effects of past discrimination and their parents’ low-class background at present. Race-based preferential treatments may be the only way to offset the negative effects of the past

discrimination and family disadvantage to narrow the racial gap in education (Min 2006: 97).

Many Asian American scholars and activists have argued that Asian Americans too should be eligible for affirmative action because they also suffered discrimination in the past. However, this is not a good argument. Remember that blacks and other disadvantaged minority groups should be eligible for affirmative action programs because they have serious disadvantages socioeconomically mainly because of **the legacy of their parents and grandparents' sufferings of racial discrimination**. The vast majority of contemporary Asian Americans are descendants of the 1965 Immigration Act. The post-1965 Asian immigrants and their descendants should not be eligible for affirmative action because they have not encountered much anti-Asian prejudice and discrimination by virtue of the 1964 Civil Rights Act. As already shown in Table 2, Asian Americans have a much higher educational level and even higher incomes than native-born white Americans. There are many Asian immigrants in Chinatown and other areas who do not have enough earnings. But these people are eligible for class-based welfare programs. We need to educate Korean and Chinese immigrants about why other minority groups should be given affirmative action in education in New York City. But it may be more difficult to teach it to them than to simply teach African American history.

Some Asian-American readers may disagree with my argument that affirmative action should be eligible to other disadvantaged minority groups, but not to Asian Americans by indicating that Asian Americans are diverse in their socioeconomic status and that some Asian ethnic groups are almost as bad as other disadvantaged minority groups. I have three responses to this kind of criticism of my position.

First, despite their diversity in their socioeconomic status, those Asian American groups that have significantly lower social status than other high-status Asian groups have substantially higher levels of socioeconomic status than black and other disadvantaged minority groups. In fact, they are very similar to native-born white Americans in the college graduation rate and the median household income. As we noted in Table 2, low-status Asian groups have substantially higher educational and occupational levels and much higher median household incomes than blacks. Given their heavily immigrant background, they seem to do well socioeconomically, compared to black Americans who have been in the United States for many generations. Moreover, these low-status Asian Americans comprise only 17% of total Asian American workers. Policy makers decide the eligibility for affirmative action based on large categories, such as gender and race. The fact that a small proportion of Asian Americans fall behind of other high status Asian Americans when in fact they do as well as white Americans never justify the consideration of Asian Americas for affirmative action programs.

Second, affirmative action programs in jobs and high school/college admissions were created to offset the legacy of past discrimination against blacks, other minorities and women to their children at present. Those small Asian American groups with lower socio-economic status than other Asian groups have difficulty in being considered for affirmative action programs because they and their parents came to the United States in the post-civil right act era. In fact, the immigration of these other small Asian ethnic groups--Pakistani, Bangladesh, Cambodian and Indonesian--started in the 1980s and later. Thus, there is no **legacy-of-past-discrimination issue involved here**.

Third, affirmative action programs were created to increase the representation of disadvantaged minority groups and women in **occupations and educational institutions**. Although the Chinese group's median household income is very high, its poverty rate is also very high too. But affirmative action has nothing to do with helping poor families. Class-based welfare programs have been created to help poor families. There are many class-based programs to help poor minority families, including poor Asian families, as well as poor white families. College scholarships are given largely based the incomes of students' parents. Thus, regardless of their racial background, college students from working-class families are eligible for many scholarship programs.

Conclusion

The brutal killing of George Floyd by a white police officer and the ensuing demonstrations against police brutality in Minnesota in May 2020 seems to have led the editor of *Culture and Empathy* to include an article on relations between the Korean and black communities. I reluctantly decided to write an article on this issue simply because I could not find another Korean American scholar who was willing to write it. But I feel good to have decided to write this article because in my effort to complete it I have spent much time thinking about how to improve Korean-black relations in the future. Unlike many of my previous articles, it is not based on one or more systematically collected data sets. It is based on the findings from my earlier research on Korean business owners' conflicts with black consumers in their neighborhoods, my interactions with Korean community leaders in the form of participant observations, and my readings of Korean daily newspapers in the New York area.

This paper is based on the above-mentioned loosely collected data sets. But the central aspect of this paper consists of my personal opinions about why and how Korean Americans in the New York area should maintain close relationships with the black community. Not only the police brutality against blacks and the ensuing demonstrations, but also the turn of political developments in Capitol Hill and the beginning of Joe Biden's new administration have influenced my personal opinions about what direction the Korean American community should take in its relationships with other minority communities.

As previously noted, Korean American scholars argued that Korean immigrants had learned racial prejudice against blacks from white Americans, especially from white media in the 1990s and 2000s. However, at present most white Americans in large cities and U.S. media seem to be more progressive in accepting blacks than most Korean immigrants. Thus, Korean immigrants' difficulty in accepting blacks as their neighbors or their family members, and their rejection of affirmative action for other disadvantaged minorities are due mainly to their ignorance of black history and blacks' experiences of racial discrimination at present. To live in the United States as a minority group, Korean immigrants should maintain close relationships not only with white Americans, but also with other minority groups. Blacks comprise an important minority group in the United States which has gone through slavery, segregation laws, and contemporary structural racism. Because of their long history of discrimination, black community leaders and politicians are still engaged in fighting against racism. Korean community leaders should maintain closer relationships with the black community, while Korean politicians should join progressive white and black politicians through the Democratic Party.

My suggestions about the needs of the Korean community's closer relationships with the black community, Korean Americans' support of AA-based admission of high school students to the two prominent science high schools in New York City, and Korean politicians' coalitions with white and black leaders through the Democratic Party are based on my personal opinions. But they reflect more than my personal political biases: they are based on my analyses of information and my political philosophy. For example, I presume that, given black and Hispanic students comprising 70% of the students in New York City public schools, but less than 10% of them admitted to the two best science high schools, most sociologists, like me, will support New York City Mayor Bill de Blasio's effort to change the criteria of admission to increase the proportion of the two largest minority groups of students. The party affiliation of Korean American politicians should be their personal choice based on their own political philosophy. But, given the corruptions of the Republican Party shown, especially since the beginning of the 2000 Presidential election, my suggestion that Korean Congressional members should try to coordinate with black and white Democratic Party members to help achieve social and racial justice is more than my personal political bias. Social scientists play an important role in resolving social problems by shedding new light on hidden facts. But we often have more serious social and political problems because different groups do not agree on the solutions to the problems even when they agree on the facts. Therefore, social scientists need to go further than analyzing facts by suggesting the courses of actions for their solutions based on the principle of social and racial justice.

Notes

1. 66% of Korean Americans and 63% of Chinese Americans completed a college education, compared to 80% of Indian Americans and 52% of Filipino Americans. 66% of Korean Americans and 61% of Chinese Americans hold two highest levels of occupations (professional and managerial), compared to 87% of Indian Americans and 61% of Filipino Americans. In terms of median household income, Indian and Filipino Americans (\$138,500 & \$115,700) are much higher than Korean and Chinese Americans (\$95,000 and \$101,700).
2. Three Korean comfort women memorials were installed in Bergen County in New Jersey, with one memorial installed in Long Island, New York.
3. Charter schools are independent public schools founded by non-profit organizations in New York City. They are New York City public schools that are open to all New York City students. Many charter schools have unique educational approaches that may include longer school days and a longer school year.
4. A young white man shot to death eight people at two spas and a massage parlor owned by Asian immigrants in Atlanta for no reason, Georgia on March 16, 2021. Four of the victims were Korean women with two of them being Chinese women.

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