Interminority Relations in the Early 1990s in California: Conflicts among African-Americans, Latinos, and Asian-Americans

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INTERMINORITY RELATIONS IN THE EARLY 1990S IN CALIFORNIA

Conflicts among African-Americans, Latinos, and Asian-Americans

A Thesis

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Akiko Yamazato

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Akiko Yamazato

Approved, April 2003

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ABSTRACT

This essay focuses on interminority conflicts during the early 1990s in California. The declining economy and the rapidly changing demographics intensified relations between African-Americans, Latinos, and Asian-Americans at this time. Examining the written press of the three racial/ethnic groups on Proposition 187 also show how and why interactions among the groups were limited and animosity enhanced. Based on the case study of African-Americans, Latinos, and Asian-Americans relations during the social chaos in California in the early 1990s and the debate of Proposition 187, this essay seeks for what is needed to enhance interminority political coalitions.
INTERMINORITY RELATIONS IN THE EARLY 1990S IN CALIFORNIA
Introduction

There is a large body of literature on race relations between the Anglo-Americans and African-Americans in the United States. It is so prevalent that Howard University law professor Frank H. Wu has argued that the term “American” generally means “white” while the term “minority” means “black.” (Wu 2002, 20) Interracial dynamics have also focused on relations between Anglo-Americans and non-white ethnic/racial groups (Morris 2000, 78). However, there is not much literature on the relations between non-white ethnic/racial groups, or in other words, interminority relations.1 As the United States continues to diversify with various ethnic/racial groups, I am interested in examining the character of interminority relations and how different non-white ethnic/racial groups perceive one another.

In order to examine interminority relations, I have mainly focused on California in the early 1990s and the written press of the African-American, Latino, and the Asian-American communities during Proposition 187. By looking at the relations of African-Americans, Latinos, and Asian-Americans during this period, I have examined the relations of the three ethnic/racial groups and how they perceived one another.

During this period, California was in the midst of social chaos. Not only was the demographic rapidly changing, but the state economy was declining. Therefore, as

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1 Irwin L. Morris uses “interminority” in “African American Voting on Proposition 187: Rethinking the Prevalence of Interminority Conflict” (Political Research Quarterly, March 2000) to describe the relations between non-white ethnic/racial groups.
demographic change brought close contact among African-Americans, Latinos, and Asian-Americans, the deteriorating economy exacerbated job competition and generated conflict and animosity between ethnic/racial groups.

Out of this chaotic situation Proposition 187 appeared on the ballots during the gubernatorial election in 1994 aiming to bar undocumented immigrants access to state-level social service programs, health care services (except emergency care), and public education at the elementary, secondary, and post-secondary levels. It also required various governmental agencies to report illegal aliens or those suspected to be illegal aliens to the California Attorney General and the U.S. Immigration and Naturalization Service. The initiative also made the manufacture, distribution, sale, or use of false residence or citizenship documents a felony (Morris 2000, 78). As such, Proposition 187 also turned out to be a highly racially-charged initiative.

Historian John Higham notes that nativism is the “intense opposition to an internal minority on the ground of its foreign (i.e. un-American) connections” and heightens during critical economic times. Higham’s argument describes the situation of California in the early 1990s. Nativism emerged with California’s declining economy. First of all, although it was never mentioned in the ballot, “illegal aliens” directly referred to the Latino immigrants. Secondly, not only were the illegal immigrants turned into the target of the initiative, but those who were legally in the country or U.S. citizens were turned into suspects as well. Finally, African-Americans and Asian-Americans were also intimidated by Proposition 187, as it seemed to target those who looked foreign or who were from a non-white ethnic/racial group.

By quoting the actual voices from the written press of the three ethnic/racial communities, I have made clear the opinions on Proposition 187 of the African-American,
Latino, and Asian-American communities and how they perceived each other. Reading the written press of these three ethnic/racial groups, I have found that interminority relations were limited among the three ethnic/racial groups. Therefore, because the African-American, Latino, and Asian-American communities faced rapid demographic change, and Proposition 187 increased competition and intimidated these three ethnic/racial groups, little cooperation was seen. In fact, animosity was common and interminority political coalitions\(^2\) were rare.

While I find that interminority conflict was common, Irwin L. Morris, an assistant professor of Government and Politics at the University of Maryland, has argued quite the opposite. In his article, “African American Voting on Proposition 187: Rethinking the Prevalence of Interminority Conflict” that was published in *Political Research Quarterly* in March 2000, Morris mainly focuses on the voting pattern of African-Americans on Proposition 187 to examine the relations of African-Americans, Latinos, and Asian-Americans.

In order to examine the relations of the three ethnic/racial groups, Morris uses interminority conflict theory that suggests (1) the spatial proximity of ethnical/racial groups is directly related to animosity between the groups and, (2) interminority animosity will be greatest among the poorest segment of the population. Using these assumptions, he addresses the following two questions:

(1) Is there evidence for the contention that African-Americans perceive a threat from Hispanics and Asians and react accordingly in the immigration policy arena?

(2) Do poor African-Americans, as the interminority conflict perspective predicts, tend to view anti-immigrant policies such as Proposition 187 more than well-to-do

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\(^2\) For coalitions among non-white ethnic/racial groups, Morris uses this term.
African-Americans? (Morris 2000, 79)

In order to answer these two questions, Morris uses data from the 1994 *Los Angeles Times* Exit Poll of California voters and from the U.S. Census. The *Times* Exit Poll provided individual-level data on actual voters, including voting choices on Proposition 187. The *Times* Exit Poll sampled 85 separate voting precincts in 25 of California’s 58 counties, 5.2 percent of the sample, producing a total usable sample size of 4,204. These 217 were identified as African-Americans. The social demographic variables that were used in the study included those such as “sex,” “age,” “income,” “education,” “partisanship” and “personal financial situation.” In addition, using the 1990 Census, Morris creates two contextual variables - “Hispanic Context” and “Asian Context” - to represent the percentage of Latinos and Asians, respectively, residing in each of the sampled counties. This allowed him to get hold of the relative size of the Latinos and Asian population in an African-American respondent’s county (Morris 2000, 84).

Analyzing the data collected from the two resources, Morris argues that the voting patterns of African-Americans on Proposition 187 do not correlate with the interminority conflict theory’s prediction. First of all, he finds that the population of Latinos in an African-American respondent’s county had no significant effect on the voting patterns of African-Americans: thus the correlation between space and animosity is not necessarily true. In fact, Morris found that the greater the relative size of the Asian-American population the less likely African-Americans were to support Proposition 187 (Morris 2000, 88). Therefore, Morris makes it clear that interminority proximity and increased contact has a mitigating effect on interracial relations, rather than causing conflict and aversion.

Morris also argues that voting results from the three groups put the interminority
conflict hypothesis into doubt. Overall, African-Americans were, on average, less supportive of Proposition 187 than either Anglo-Americans or Asian-Americans. Anglo-Americans voted most for the initiative with 62.6 percent support. By contrast, only 22.5 percent of Latinos showed support while 77.5 percent opposed it. The voting pattern of the African-American community and Asian-American community were similar: 46.8 percent of African-Americans supported the initiative while 53.2 percent opposed it; 47.3 percent of Asian-Americans supported the ballot while 52.7 percent opposed (Morris 2000, 86).

Furthermore, Morris casts a doubt on the other assumption of interminority conflict theory, which suggests that interminority animosity is greatest among the poorest segments of the population. He argues that voting patterns of African-Americans showed that those who have achieved financial success tend to take a more conservative view of the provision of government service for undocumented immigrants. In other words, the support for Proposition 187 was greater among the financially successful than among those who considered themselves worse off (Morris 2000, 91).

Overall, Morris concludes that he finds no evidence of interminority conflict. Morris does admit that his analysis is based on individual level research and suggests that conflicts manifested at the aggregate level may be different. However, he is definite that at least at the individual level, the conventional wisdom that interminority conflict is ubiquitous should be re-examined (Morris 2000, 91).

I do not completely disagree with Morris. I agree with his analysis of “personal financial situation” where he argues that African-Americans with greater financial success tend to have a more conservative view of governmental services to undocumented immigrants than poor African-Americans. The difference in class
mattered even within one ethnic/racial group. For example, through the written press of the Asian-American community, I found that wealthier Asian-Americans tend to refuse to identify with the Asian newcomers with lower income.

However, there are aspects of Morris's conclusion and method that I do not agree with Morris. While he concludes that there was no evidence of interminority conflict, I find it important to understand relations between African-Americans, Latinos, and Asian-Americans prior to Proposition 187 and California's social condition when the initiative occurred. I also find it critical to hear the actual voices of all three groups and how they perceived each other at the time, as they appeared in the press. In addition, Morris derives his conclusion mainly from two resources; the 1994 Los Angeles Times Exit Poll and U.S. Census, which has allowed him to look at the interminority relations mainly through numbers. This method, I argue, does not manifest the actual opinions of African-Americans, Latinos, and Asian-Americans. Finally, while Morris mainly focuses on interminority relations through the views of African-Americans, my research brings in the views of the Latino, and Asian-American communities, and thus gives a deeper perspective into interminority relations. Also this essay focuses on interminority relations among African-Americans, Latinos, and Asian-Americans, it looks further into what is needed for interminority political coalitions and how the three communities can overcome their racial barriers and cooperate.

Chapter One introduces how rapid demographic change and California's declining economy contributed to interminority conflict among African-Americans, Latinos, and Asian-Americans in the early 1990s. Demographic change that brought close contact among the three ethnic/racial groups generated animosity as job competition increased. Chapter Two examines the press of the African-American, Latinos and Asian-American
communities. In this material, voices and opinions show that animosity existed not only in the African-American community but also in the Latino, and Asian-American communities as well. Limited understanding about each other prevented the three ethnic/racial groups from seeking commonalities and cooperating during social uncertainty. Chapter Three refutes Morris's argument on interminority conflict theory. However, it also agrees with Morris's argument that personal financial success did matter by introducing how those with higher social economic status tended to have a more conservative view on immigrations policies, even toward those of the same ethnic/racial group. While the first three chapters focus on interminority conflicts, Chapter Four introduces how there have been efforts to organize interminority political coalitions despite conflicts among African-Americans, Latinos, and Asian-Americans. Both successful and failed coalitions among the African-American, Latinos and Asian-American communities were seen in Los Angeles and Chicago.

The final chapter seeks a way to mitigate interminority conflict and create successful relations and coalition. It introduces what kind of stereotypes African-Americans, Latinos, and Asian-Americans face in U.S. society. It also argues that while the three ethnic/racial groups are stereotyped, they stereotype each other as well. This was a factor that led to the limited coalition building and cooperation during the early 1990s in California. Therefore, it suggests that a relationship where the three ethnic/racial groups can see each other beyond ethnicity and seek commonalities rather than differences is needed for coalition and cooperation.
Chapter I

Changing Demographics and a Declining Economy: How Proposition 187 Evolved

Interminority conflict was already prominent in California even before Proposition 187 appeared on state ballots. One main element that intensified relations among the African-American, Latino, and Asian-American communities was California’s rapidly changing demographics. The following statement by an African-American shows how the large influx of immigrants was perceived by some.

Ethnic groups that have made it into the American Dream have traditionally stepped on the neck of African-American communities on their way up. Jews, Italian, Greeks, Chinese, Arabs, and now East Indians and Koreans have all, to a greater or lesser degrees, quickly assimilated this Fundamental Law of Immigrant Upward Mobility (Kim and Kim 1999, 33).

The growth of the Latino, and Asian-American population was particularly significant. Many large cities in the United States experienced a high growth rate of both Latin and Asian-American populations in the 1980s. Los Angeles, which had been 71 percent Anglo-American in the 1970s, was mixed variously with 41 percent Anglo-American, 38 percent Latino and as many Asian-Americans and African-Americans by 1990. This meant that over a period of a decade, the Latino population increased by 1.3 million and the Asian population doubled, while Anglo-Americans actually declined and the percentage of African-American remained the same. By 1992, South Central Los
Angeles was mostly Latino (Baldassare 1994, 244). As Latinos moved into African-American neighborhoods, conflict exacerbated as job competition increased and Latinos began to displace poor African-Americans.

Korean merchants' entry into inner-city minority markets led to interminority conflicts as well. The Korean immigrants carried out their business in locations where their customers and employees usually were African-American and Latino (Baldassare 1994, 5). Their entry into the inner-city minority markets stemmed from several factors. According to Kwang Chung Kim and Shin Kim, Korean merchants were excluded from the mainstream professional, administrative and managerial occupations which were usually dominated by Anglo-Americans. Therefore, the Korean merchant opportunities were often limited to businesses in inner-city areas (Kim and Kim 1999, 29). However, African-Americans felt that the Korean merchants were outsiders exploiting them, undermining African-American communities' economic autonomy, and preventing them from establishing businesses (31).

While the Korean-African-American conflict was more visible, the conflict between Latinos and Korean-Americans, known as the "hidden conflict," was significant (Bobo et al. 1994, 120). Lawrence Bobo, Camille L. Zubrinsky, James H, Johnson Jr. and Melvin L. Oliver carried out interviews with African-Americans, Latinos, Anglo-Americans, and Asian-Americans on the subject of intergroup relations and residential segregation (120). The interviews showed that Latinos held the same grievances African-Americans had toward the Korean merchants.

Disputes between Latinos and Korean-Americans often occurred in a patron/client situation or sometimes in an employer/employee context. Latinos expressed frustration in how they were being treated at Korean merchant stores. "We see the Korean people
when we go to shop (sic). They look at you. But maybe if the same race as theirs goes in, they even bow for them. They think that we’re going to steal from them. They see very much how one is dressed and they don’t give us the same service they give to their own people,” a Latino complained during a group discussion (Bobo et al. 1994, 121).

In the same way that Latinos expressed grievances regarding Asian-Americans, Korean-Americans and other Asian-Americans such as the Chinese-Americans had very negative perspectives toward Latinos as well. Opinions such as “Hispanics drink too much and play loud music,” or “Latinos are dirty and messy. They don’t take care of where they live,” show how Latinos were seen by Asian-Americans (Bobo et al. 1994, 123).

The Los Angeles County Social Survey (LACSS) of 1992 is another source that reveals how African-Americans, Latinos, and Asian-Americans held negative views about one another. In this survey, respondents ranked members of each ethnic group on a seven point scale in terms of their intelligence, self-reliance, and sociability (Bobo et al. 1994, 118). The respondents were Anglo-Americans, African-Americans, Latinos, and Asian-Americans.

Results showed that African-Americans and Latinos faced the highest degree of negative stereotyping. Approximately 45 percent of non-blacks in Los Angeles county rated African-Americans as “lower in intelligence” and 63.4 percent rated them as “hard to get along with.” Among non-Latinos, 44.6 percent rated Latinos as “less intelligent,” and 52.2 percent rated them as “more likely to be living off welfare.” Furthermore, 34.5 percent of non-Latinos rated Latinos as “hard to get along with.” Such negative

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3 The groups were asked if they perceived each other as “intelligent” or “unintelligent,” “preferring to live off of welfare” or “preferring to be self-supporting” and “hard to get along with” or “easy to get along with.”
perspectives were not so prevalent toward Anglo-Americans and Asians-Americans. However, non-Asian-Americans showed great negativity toward Asian-Americans when asked if it was easy for them to get along with Asian-Americans. Approximately 45.5 percent said that they could not. Other findings showed that a higher percentage of Asian-American and Latinos or Anglo-Americans held negative views of African-Americans with regard to intelligence and “desire to live off welfare.” Latinos were the most likely to view African-Americans as “hard to get along with.” (Bobo et al. 1994, 118)

To the extent that interminority conflict was becoming prominent, not only were the three ethnic/racial groups were able to deal with the animosity generated toward one another, the public sector of Los Angeles were also unable to bridge the serious divides between the ethnic/racial groups. James A. Regaldo argues that the public sector lacked the will and resources to commit to “human relations” in the city. Staffing was extremely limited both at the City’s Department of Human Relations and the County’s Commission on Human Relations in the early 1990s. Regaldo’s study shows that, at one time, the City of Los Angeles, with a population well beyond three-million residents, employed only a single full-time person in its Department of Human Relations. The County of Los Angeles, with a population closing in on ten million residents, employed only fifteen “consultants” to deal with conflicts among racial and ethnic groups in its jurisdiction (Regaldo 1994, 229).

In the spring of 1991, the Los Angles riots occurred. I argue that the riots were the outcome of the rapidly changing demography that brought close contact between African-Americans, Latinos, and Asian-Americans. Mark Baldassare argues as well that the changing demographics which led to ethnic diversity in Los Angeles seemed to be the
most critical contributing factor of the riots. The newly arrived immigrants had led to economic restructuring which exacerbated the interminority hostilities (Baldassare 1994, 3).

The Los Angeles Riots began with the beating of Rodney King. In March 1991, a shocking video tape image of four white policemen beating Rodney King, an African-American, aired on national television. Allegedly, King had been stopped by the police for speeding, and when he acted aggressively toward them, the beating began. Around the same period, Latasha Harlins, an African-American teenager, was shot to death by a Korean merchant over a dispute about a bottle of orange juice. The shooting had been videotaped by the store camera and it went on television as well. The two incidents fueled tensions among African-Americans, Latinos, and Asian-Americans and led to severe interminority conflict. By 1992, Los Angeles was tense with ongoing riots. Korean grocery stores were attacked by African-Americans and Latinos and some merchants were shot. Looting from these stores also became a serious problem (Kim 1999, 1).

Another factor that also contributed to interminority conflict in Los Angeles was the critical economic conditions California faced. By looking at the Los Angeles Times during this period, we can see how anti-immigrant sentiment increased as the economy declined.

At the beginning of 1993, Pete Wilson, the governor of California, had announced a $51.2 billion budget proposal which included a $2.1 billion carryover of a deficit from the year before (Los Angeles Times, 12 January 1993). Wilson often made trips to Washington, D.C. to lobby the federal government for funds. On his visit to Washington, D.C. in 1993, Wilson strongly urged the federal government to provide $1.45 billion
more so that the state could cover the cost of health, welfare, and prison programs for immigrants and their children (*Los Angeles Times*, 9 January 1993). He claimed that the federal government was responsible for the increasing illegal immigrant population by not securing the borders and therefore should provide support to the state. Despite his insistence, however, the federal government did not take Wilson’s request under serious consideration. While Wilson complained that the federal government was responsible for immigration issues and had done little to solve the problem, the federal government said that Wilson was overstating the problem and inflating the numbers of illegal immigrants (*Los Angeles Times*, 21 May 1994). Therefore, as Proposition 187 became the key issue in the 1994 gubernatorial election, Wilson, as a candidate, blamed the illegal immigrants for the state’s poor economy. “It’s time to say ‘enough,’” Wilson said as he revealed that more than three quarters of a billion dollars a year was being spent on education for illegal immigrants in public schools (*East side Sun*, 12 August 1993). In September, 1994, he announced that several assistance programs had been cut from the state budget due to the cost of illegal immigrants. He also introduced a package of immigration reform that focused on denying citizenship to children born in California to illegal parents (*East Side Sun*, 16 September 1993).

Interestingly, as the economy declined and tensions rose, rhetoric on immigration changed in the *Los Angeles Times*. Rather than highlighting the valued immigrant labor, commentary had an increasingly derogatory tone toward immigrants and nativistic messages became the norm.

When the *Los Angeles Times* first started talking about immigrants, in general, it took a stance that defended the immigrants instead of blaming them for the struggling economy. An editorial of March 1993, for example, argued that immigrants who moved
back and forth across the border were needed to meet U.S. labor needs (*Los Angeles Times*, 7 March 1993). A related article in January 1993 referred to how the immigrants in California contributed to the state’s economy through their labor, enterprise and taxes. In addition, the article highly praised the immigrants for bringing diversity to the state.

“California has a proud history of attracting newcomers to the United States,” the article said as it mentioned how fortune seekers came during the Gold Rush and how people had arrived from around the world to plant roots in the state. “The fusion of new residents, whether immigrants or refugees, has helped to enrich and diversify California.” (*Los Angeles Times*, 18 January 1993) In May, the *Los Angeles Times* began an editorial series titled “Defusing Xenophobia; Myths and Realities of the Immigration Issue” in which it refuted the myth that immigrants were the cause of economic woes. Again in August, it warned the public that the anti-immigrant proposals were just “mean-spirited.” (*Los Angeles Times*, 11 August 1993)

By the end of the year, however, the “Defusing Xenophobia” series had changed its title to “Dealing with the Border” and was adopting a stricter tone toward immigrants. “Despite a painful economic readjustment that has led to heavy job looses in California’s aerospace and defense industries, this state remains a huge magnet for economically ambitious foreigners,” a December editorial argued (*Los Angeles Times*, 20 December 1993). California, it further insisted, could not absorb all the illegal immigrants who were using the public hospitals and sending their children to school. “Congress must also find a way to guard the nation’s borders,” it stressed. Both the content and tone of this later editorial was very different from what the editorials were saying earlier in the year when they criticized the anti-immigrant bills and negative myth-making regarding immigrants.
Many began to voice their negative views toward immigrants through the *Los Angeles Times*. "We are paying outrageous taxes to support this folly, and California is broke," Mike Trout, a reader from Dana Point argued. He also questioned if there were any other countries that actually allowed immigrants to collect welfare or let them use public schools to educate their children (*Los Angeles Times*, 10 May 1993). Lawmakers in California already had begun carrying out legislation that was designed to stop the entry of undocumented immigrants. In 1993, two dozen bills in California were introduced to ban undocumented children from public schools and deny drivers licenses to illegal immigrants (*Los Angeles Times*, 3 May 1993).

The articles in *Los Angeles Times* show that coinciding with Proposition 187 was an emergence of nativism. Although Proposition 187 used the terms "immigrants" and basically targeted Latinos, those who looked "un-American," that is, non-white ethnic/racial groups, were easily turned into scapegoats and blamed for the declining economy. Kevin R. Johnson, a law professor at University of California, Davis, explains who is targeted by contemporary nativism:

People of color who are citizens often are viewed as the other, foreign, un-American, and an internal minority. Dominant society views immigrants of color, especially those of non-western cultural heritage who speak a language other than English, as more foreign and more un-American than other immigrants (Johnson 1997, 167). Johnson also argues that nativism today generally is not limited to aliens of a particular immigration status but ordinarily is directed at all persons of a group, whatever their immigration status, perceived to be different and "un-American." (180) Juan F. Perea, a law professor at University of Florida, has also argued that "the deteriorating treatment and scapegoating of undocumented persons is vitally linked to the deteriorating treatment
and scapegoating of persons of color, minorities and women.” (Perea 1997, 4)

Therefore, even those Latinos who were naturalized U.S. citizens or those who could trace back their ancestry in the United States became a target during the tension surrounding Proposition 187. African-Americans and Asian-Americans as well, were turned into scapegoats as the declining economy of California generated nativism and xenophobia. Hate crimes were already prominent, for example, against the Asian-American community, but they increased throughout 1993. In Sacramento, fire bombs destroyed the office of the Japanese-American Citizen League’s office and a home of Sacramento City Council member Jimmie Yee (Nichi Bei Times, 8 October 1993). Frequent gatherings and conferences in the Asian-American community were held to discuss these problems. The San Francisco Board of Supervisors publicly denounced the rise of anti-immigrant sentiment and urged community leaders to fight the scapegoating of immigrants (Nichi Bei Times, 8 October 1993). For the Asian-Americans, fighting the scapegoating of immigrants also meant fighting the discrimination toward the Asian-American community that became prominent at this time.

Therefore, the declining economy that generated nativism strongly affected the interaction of African-Americans, Latinos, and Asian-Americans during this time. The situation not only intensified job competition but may have made African-Americans, Latinos, and Asian-Americans see each other as “un-American” and the root cause for the declining economy. Their interactions with one another were not surprisingly, limited.
Chapter II

Proposition 187 in the African-American, Latino, and Asian-American Press

To hear the actual voices of African-Americans, Latinos, and Asian-Americans on Proposition 187 and their interminority relations, I have explored the most widely read newspapers of the three ethnic/racial groups.

The African-American Press

African-American views and their perception of Latinos, and Asian-Americans during this time is evident in the Los Angeles Sentinel and the Oakland Post. The New York Amsterdam News, a New York based paper is also rich with African-American perspectives. Articles in these papers urged the community to vote against the initiative. An article titled "Why Blacks Need to Vote: 187 Now, Restrictive Rights, Later" argued that voting "no" on Proposition 187 also meant voting for African-American's "personal rights, freedoms, and guaranteed protection under the law." "Well, how do you determine an illegal? Is it the same way this country has historically determined who's criminal?" (sic) the article argues. "It's Latinos today, somebody else (most likely us) tomorrow. That's why we need to support them (the Latinos) on this," the article concludes (Los Angeles Sentinel, 9 November 1994).
At the same time, many articles were critical of how African-Americans reacted toward Proposition 187 and criticized how some African-Americans actually supported the initiative. An article in *Los Angeles Sentinel*, for example, argued that the African-American community could have done better in trying to defuse the “wide-spread anti-Latino feelings” and misinformation. “From individual perception and ego,” one article pointed out, “many seem disposed to treat Latinos and other people as whites treated them.” (*Los Angeles Sentinel*, 31 January 1995) Another article argued:

African-Americans appeared as receptive to immigrant bashing as whites. Why? Because they accepted, uncritically the tales about Latinos pushing African-Americans out of jobs and the distortion that Latinos were unalterably anti-black. The fact that some Latinos are anti-black and some African-Americans are anti-Latino proves nothing. What is significant is the acceptance of the race-baiting description by many African-Americans that illegal and undocumented persons are responsible for the massive unemployment among African-Americans (*Los Angeles Sentinel*, 16 November 1994).

*The Oakland Post* carried out interviews with several African-Americans that support this accusation of race-baiting. A director of a legal service center in Watts explained why he voted for the ballot: “They bring illegal immigrants across the border and move them into Watts and Compton, twelve to a room. Black people don’t want to live next to that type of situation so they move out, creating more room for these illegal immigrants.” (*The Oakland Post*, 23 November 1994) “A bunch of Mexicans moved in, crowding into these small apartments, playing that music all loud. Now look at it, trash all around, dirty,” an African-American women stated (*The Oakland Post*, 23 November 1994).

Through these articles it is clear that interminority conflict existed for the most part,
and African-Americans viewed Latinos as competitors. Phrases such as the “browning of South Central” or the “browning of L.A.” often appeared in the papers, which show that African-Americans viewed negatively the rapid demographic change that brought Latinos into their neighborhoods (Oakland Post, 23 November 1994).

However, it is also clear that African-Americans did view the situation surrounding Proposition 187 with complexity. There were voices that opposed the initiative and voiced support for the immigrants. An African-American man who opposed the initiative mentioned that Proposition 187 was just scapegoating immigrants and creating more racism (The Oakland Post, 23 November 1994).

In addition, one factor that was consistently stressed in the papers during this time was the “color.” African-Americans claimed that the initiative was simply racist that targeted those with “darker” skin. An article titled “Proposition 187 and African-Americans: Harmful Shortsightedness,” argued that color mattered in Proposition 187: “African-Americans know very well that they remain ‘suspect’ by virtue of their color (this is confirmed through continued police brutality, fewer employment opportunities, poor education, etc). Virtually every African-American knows this is true despite individual attainment,” it stated (Los Angeles Sentinel, 16 November 1994).

The New York Amsterdam News brought up the issue of color in an article titled “Nov. 8 Elections: Triumph of Racism and Meanness.” The article argued that the national election on November 8th basically put the “White males” into power at the local, state and federal level.

Another major concomitant of the Nov. 8 general election, other than a persistent racism, is the surfacing of meanness. Blacks, Hispanics, and Native Americans for now are the primary targets of the national meanness. However, we are people who
understand that troubles are not new to us, nor do they last always (The New York Amsterdam News, 26 November 1994).

This article is indicative in the sense that it shows who African-Americans were able to identify with during the situation surrounding Proposition 187. While African-Americans, Latinos and Native-Americans are mentioned, Asian-Americans are not. In other words, the “yellow race” was not considered to be affected by the initiative.

Therefore, while animosity existed toward Latinos, at the same time African-Americans were able to identify with the Latino plight as they interpreted Proposition 187 as an initiative that targeted those with “darker” skin. In this sense, African-Americans saw Proposition 187 as an initiative that targeted those who were categorized by race/color.

The Asian-American Press

In order to understand the Asian-American perspectives on Proposition 187, I mainly looked at the Nichi Bei Times, a Japanese-American newspaper based in California and Asian Week which is a journal published in San Francisco.

There were often voices that supported Proposition 187 in the Asian-American community. Not everyone was sympathetic toward Latinos - the main targets of the initiative. Bill Kashiwagi, a Japanese-American from Sacramento, California, voiced his opinion in a letter to the editor in the Nichi Bei Times one week before the voting day. “The Golden State indeed is facing one of the most austere economic periods since the turn of the century. Who will pay the rent and grocery bills of the illegals?” he wrote, commenting that illegal immigrants were a threat to California. He also agreed with the
prevalent argument at this time that the budget cuts on immigration issues would reduce costs and the financial chaos of California. “Let’s take care of our own people in need,” he argued, while urging the Japanese-American community to vote for Proposition 187 (*Nichi Bei Times*, 3 November 1994).

However, as African-Americans did, Asian-Americans also viewed the situation ambivalently. Asian-Americans seemed to interpret Proposition 187 as an initiative that would generate discriminatory policies. “Historically, anti-immigrant movements have been anti-Asian movements,” an article in *Asian Week* argued. The article referred to the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882 that prohibited Chinese-Americans from immigrating to the United States and becoming naturalized (*Asian Week*, 26 August 1994, 6). Japanese-Americans in particular, related the situation surrounding Proposition 187 to the internment of Japanese-Americans during World War II. The frequent references to the internment camps showed how intimidated the Asian-American communities were. Christopher Kakimi from Hacienda Heights, California, wrote to the *Los Angeles Times* and reminded the readers how Japanese-Americans were “relocated” during World War II: “This is a crisis. Remember, when Executive Order 9066 was issued, I was among the 110,000 who were forced to evacuate to incarceration camps! It’s déjà vu. We should know better,” he argued, as he recalled his own experience as an internee (*Nichi Bei Times*, 4 October 1994). A week before the election, Ignatuis Bau, a San Francisco immigration attorney who was against Proposition 187, wrote to the *Nichi Bei Times* and warned the Japanese-American community that they were in particular danger and urged them to vote “no” on the initiative.

Japanese-Americans have particular reasons to vigorously oppose Proposition 187. We are the ones who will be most ‘suspected’ and targeted by this ill-conceived and
mean-spirited initiative. This initiative is a dangerous echo of the internment of
Japanese-Americans during World War II (Nichi Bei Times, 1 November 1994).

Therefore, while some showed animosity toward Latinos and African-Americans, the
Asian-American community was somewhat able to identify with them as well because
they perceived Proposition 187 as a racially charged immigration policy. They were
aware that Latinos and Asian-Americans were the two fastest growing populations at the
time. Bill Tamayo, a member of a San Francisco-based Asian Law Caucus and an
opponent of Proposition 187, strongly argued that the initiative followed the immigration
policy patterns that had excluded Asian Pacific American immigrants historically.
Furthermore, he pointed out that current immigration law was racist and unfair to certain
ethnic/racial groups. “Why are immigrants coming here illegally? The immigration laws
are unfair to Asian and Latin American countries,” he argued (Asian Week, 2 September
1994, 5). Paul Igasaki, the executive director of the Asian Law caucus, pointed out how
appropriate it was for Americans as to remember that they are a nation of immigrants.
Although all the people came from different shores, Igasaki argued, they shared a
common journey (Nichi Bei Times, 4 March 1994). A national conference of Asian
Pacific American workers held in Seattle condemned Proposition 187, claiming that the
initiative would “encourage discrimination against all Asian and Latino workers and their
families.” (Nichi Bei Times, 27 August 1994) Therefore, for Asian-Americans,
Proposition 187 was an initiative that targeted those who were categorized as
immigrant/non-Americans. In this sense, African-Americans were not seen by Asian-
Americans as an ethnic/racial group that was effected by Proposition 187.

However at the same time, the Asian-American community was not able to cooperate
with Latinos to face the situation. The community was more concerned with how the
initiative would effect its own members. In addition, Asian-Americans did not quite seem to understand the plights of the African-American community, their intimidation by Proposition 187, and their perception of the initiative as targeting those with "darker" skin.

The Latino Press

In order to understand the Latino community's perception of Proposition 187, I have looked mainly at the *East Side Sun*, a Latino community paper based in California, *Hispanic*, which is published in Florida. Other journal articles I referred to included *Hispanic Outlook in Higher Education*. Well aware that they were the main targets of Proposition 187, Latinos basically defended themselves throughout the debate.

The announcement of Proposition 187 did not seem to surprise the Latino community. Hostility directed toward Latinos was already frequent as California searched for scapegoats for the declining economy. By 1993, a year before the initiative appeared on the ballot, the *East Side Sun* was already warning the Latino community of the emerging anti-immigrant movement. Articles showed how government officials in California threatened to cut off medical care to undocumented citizens: "Every poll taken shows that Americans overwhelmingly want illegal immigration controlled and legal immigration reduced," claimed Dan Stein, head of the Federation for American Immigration Reform (*East Side Sun*, 8 July 1993). Another article reported on the continuous abuse occurring at the U.S.-Mexico border. "Once again, a know-nothing, anti-immigrant fever is rising in the country . . . . Politicians have criminalized immigration from Mexico and Central America while turning a blind eye on the U.S./Canada border," it argued (*East Side Sun*,
3 June 1993).

The Latino press also often refuted the arguments that blamed Latinos for economic woes. "They [immigrants] aren't the problem. These people bring economic prosperity to our border areas and don't deserve to foot the bill for securing our borders," an article argued (East Side Sun, 12 August 1993). Latino papers instead attributed California's critical economic condition to issues such as high taxes. An editorial stated that the state's bond rating had fallen to "double A" from maximum "triple A" ranking after Pete Wilson had become governor. "The record must be set straight: California's economic woes are not the fault of immigrants but its politicians!" it argued (East Side Sun, 5 August 1993). Hispanic introduced a statistics that showed how more Latino males were in the labor force (80 percent) than African-American males (67 percent) and Anglo-American males (76 percent). It also stressed that only 6 percent of the Latinos population was on welfare in Los Angeles county compared to 12 percent Anglo-Americans and 33 percent African-American (April 1994, 20-26). "Politicians use tactics that enable people to feel better during difficult times," a Latino reader of the journal from Orangevale, California wrote (Hispanic December 1994, 6).

While arguing that they were not the cause of the declining economy, Latinos were also aware of how the initiative seemed to target them for their color. Articles related to "skin color" often appeared in Latino papers. An article implied that the issue was not only anti-immigrant bashing but also discrimination toward the "brown race." "Not coincidently, brown people came across from the Southern border, whereas whites come through the Northern border . . . . Much of the abuse, which included shooting and beating and sexual abuse, occurred after illegal detentions based solely on ethnic/racial appearance," it argued (East Side Sun, 4 March 1993). An article titled "Brown,
Northbound and Suspect” argued that their “red-brown skin” turned the Latinos into suspected illegal aliens. Furthermore, the article referred to those with “black and yellow skin” arguing that they were also blamed for the economic woes. This is similar to what the African-American papers were saying. African-Americans also perceived Proposition 187 as an initiative that categorized them by race/color and turned them into scapegoats.

However, cooperation among African-Americans and Latinos was limited due to severe job competition. In fact, an article in Hispanic emphasized the need for coalition among the two communities instead of conflict in times when demographics were changing so rapidly. “Unfortunately for both groups the politics of exclusion has them fighting all too often, not for economic and social justice with the majority groups, but frequently with each other for the same limited piece of the economic pie,” the article argued (Hispanic, January/February 1995, 32-38).

The Latino press also often related Proposition 187 to discriminatory immigration policy. Like the Asian-American community, they too worried about how the initiative may restrict the entry of certain ethnic/racial groups and lead to exclusionary immigration policies. Therefore, the influence of Proposition 187 on the Latino and Asian-American communities also became a major concern. “The United States interned the Japanese-American in concentration camps during World War II and forcibly deported Mexicans during the Depression,” an article warned its readers (Hispanic, April 1994, 20-26). “In hard times, California has historically been quick to look upon immigrants as the source of its ills,” an article in Hispanic Outlook in Higher Education mentioned. It argued that “Latinos and Asians in particular,” would be the first to be challenged as suspects (Hispanic Outlook in Higher Education, 31 January 1995). This is similar to what the Asian-American press was saying: Proposition 187 categorized Asian-Americans and
Latinos as immigrant/non-American and turned them into scapegoats.

By looking at the Latino press, we can see how the community was intimidated by Proposition 187 in ways similar to the African-American and Asian-American communities. However, although African-Americans and Latinos perceived Proposition 187 as an initiative that targeted those with "brown" or "black" skin, conflicts generated from job competition limited cooperation between the two communities. In addition, while Latinos identified with Asian-Americans because they perceived Proposition 187 as a discriminatory immigration policy, cooperation between the two communities was not mentioned in the press.
Chapter III

The Two Conflicts: Interminority Conflict and Intraminority Conflict

By looking at the background of California in the early 1990s and examining how Proposition 187 occurred, I have found that Morris’s argument on interminority conflict can be both refuted and agreed with. I mainly disagree with his argument because I have found evidence of conflict, limited interaction and little cooperation among the African-American, Asian-American and Latino community. However, I agree with Morris where he argues that African-Americans with higher social economic status supported Proposition 187 more. In addition to economic success, I have found that the degree of assimilation strongly related to the support of the initiative. Those who were well off and assimilated into the mainstream held a negative view even toward those of their own ethnic/racial group which generated animosity even within one group. Therefore, while presenting historical evidence of interminority conflict, in this chapter I would also like to show how difference in class and degree of assimilation in one ethnic/racial group generated “intraminority” conflict.

As we have seen, California in the early 1990s was in a situation where interminority conflict was easily generated. The declining economy worsened the job competition and generated nativism that limited interaction among African-Americans, Latinos, and Asian-Americans. Studies show that job competition often generated conflicts and negative stereotyping among the communities. The written press of the African-
American, Latino, and Asian-American community during the debate on Proposition 187 showed that little understanding and cooperation existed among the communities. The papers also proved that interminority conflict and animosity existed, especially between African-Americans and Latinos. Therefore, although they could identify each other as ethnic/racial groups categorized through race/color and immigrant/non-Americans, limited interaction among African-Americans, Latinos, and Asian-Americans prevented the three communities from cooperating to fight the intimidating situation. Therefore, Morris arguing that racial proximity does not generate interethnic conflict can be refuted.

Documents and newspapers from the 1800s demonstrate that interminority conflict has been prominent historically. For example, in the 1850s, interminority conflict was often seen between African-Americans and the Irish, Italian, and German immigrants (Hellwig 1991, 248). The African-American press through the late 1860s and early 1930s show how animosity existed between African-Americans and Japanese-Americans. As Japanese-American businesses became successful in Los Angeles during this time, the job competition between the two groups also became prominent. African-Americans feared that the large influx of Japanese-American immigrants would replace them in occupations such as maids, butlers, and hotel employees. Therefore, the African-American press often described Japanese-Americans as “ambitious,” or their service as “discontented.” (Shankman 1991, 443) The Chicago Defender, for example, openly favored the exclusion of Japanese-Americans saying that they were “less assimilable than any other nationality in the country.” (452)

The utilization of the “divide and conquer” strategy also proves that diversity has generated interminority conflict historically. For example, when Hawaii’s plantations
multiplied nearly eight times during the late 1800s and early 1900s, the labor force was increased but also diversified by various nationalities in order to prevent union strikes. In 1903, for example, Korean laborers were imported and placed with the Japanese laborers. Not only were planters aware of the antagonism between the two groups but also they knew that nationalistic consciousness would be cultivated and stimulate the competition (Takaki 1993, 253). On a cotton plantation in the early 1800s, the Anglo-Protestant ruling elites privileged the European-Americans by providing them the rights of personal liberty, travel and voting in order to prevent them from joining with African-Americans in worker organizations (Feagin 1997, 20). In the early 1900s, when the U.S. economy was reviving, expanding industries stimulated a massive immigration of Mexican immigrants. The Mexican immigrants at this time were considered as valuable strike breakers and were employed to help the employers diversify and balance nationalities so that the ethnic groups would not unite and organize strikes (Rodriguez 1997, 235).

While I have found Morris's study refutable, his analysis on financially successful African-Americans holding a conservative view toward undocumented migrants turns out to be somewhat true. In addition to social economic status, I find that the degree of assimilation also strongly matters. For example, even in the Asian-American community, it seemed that the more you achieved, the more conservative view you held, even toward the people of the same ethnic/racial group. "I would walk through Bowery into Canal Street and frown at the bucktoothed, scrawny Chinamen who sweated and toiled over a kitchen. As a middle-class suburbanite, I felt high and mighty and found myself angry at their broken English and tattered shirt," Amy Wu, a Chinese-American wrote to the Asian Week (Asian Week, 3 February 1995, 8). Wu admits that she and her parents supported
Proposition 187. “We feel a burning anger when we watch the news and see people border hopping, or coming onto shore in leaky barrels. Stories of smugglers, people selling fake green cards, and false identities makes us angry,” she wrote as she also explained how her parents waited in line and followed the law in order to become legal U.S. citizens (Asian Week, 13 October 1995, 2). “And there are others who take advantage of American democracy, and once they get beyond the authorities they stick with their own kind, speak their own language, and refuse to share the responsibilities of citizenship,” she argues while opposing immigrants.

Therefore, Wu’s views show how the degree of assimilation strongly matters. Differences in social economic status and the degree of assimilation intensify animosity or conflicts not only between ethnic/racial groups, but also generates hierarchical divisions even within an ethnic/racial group.

A similar situation was seen in the Latino community as well. Assimilation was a major factor that led to the division in the community. “I am a Hispanic republican who supports Proposition 187,” David Tamez from Las Cruces, New Mexico wrote to Hispanic. He makes it clear that he is against illegal immigrants and explains how his great-grand parents had “played by the rules” to become U.S. citizens (Hispanic, April 1995, 6). “Now the illegal aliens are not only given the glorified name of ‘undocumented aliens’ but we even enact laws like the 1986 Immigration Reform and Control Act to allocate our hard earned tax money to teach them the language,” Del S. Esguera from Downey wrote to the Los Angeles Times. He also complained that illegal immigrants were not even taking the written test to become citizens but were being educated with public tax money (Los Angeles Times, 1 March 1993).
Clearly, difference in class and degree of assimilation not only generated interminority conflict but “intraminority conflict” as well.
Chapter IV

Interminority Political Coalitions

With conflict and divisions between African-Americans, Latinos, and Asian-Americans, and even within a single ethnic/racial community, it is clear that strong interminority political coalitions in the early 1990s in California were limited. Not only were interminority conflicts seen, but cooperation did not exist. The following statement made by Arturo Vargus, executive director of the National Association of Latino Elected and Appointed Officials shows how limited the interaction was during the debate of Proposition 187. “The coalition to assemble to defeat Proposition 187 was impressive; it was extraordinarily broad. It was also extraordinarily shallow,” he argued (Hispanic, January 1995, 88). “Majority of African-American and Asian voters voted for Proposition 187, and an overwhelmingly two-thirds of white voters favored the proposition,” he claimed. “For Latinos, coalition politics has often been a frustrating experience . . . . when issues important to the Latino community have been at stake, the traditional coalition members have not been there to reciprocate.” (Hispanic, January 1995, 88) Vargus’s argument proves that there were few strong interminority political coalitions to fight both Proposition 187 and the nativism that increased with it. The question, then, is can African-Americans, Latinos, and Asian-Americans overcome interminority conflict and coalesce?

While interminority conflicts have been prominent, and interactions limited,
nonetheless, there have been efforts to organize “interminority political coalitions.”

Efforts to bring the three groups together were often seen during the 1980s in Los Angeles while the demography continued to change rapidly. These coalitions were built to try to create a common agenda among the ethnic/racial groups instead of seeing each other as competitors for jobs and public assistance. Most calls for unity since the mid-1980s were aimed at bridging the gap between Korean-Americans and African-Americans (Regalado 1994, 229). This may be due to the fact that the conflict between African-Americans and Korean-Americans was the most visible as demographic change brought Korean merchants into African-American neighborhoods.

In 1986, the Black-Korean Alliance was organized in Los Angeles in order to ease the tensions between the two groups. Their goal was to increase contact through dialogue and find a common ground. Members of the alliance included people such as religious leaders, lawyers, and human relation consultants from both sides (Regalado 1994, 221). However, the alliance confronted various limitations. First of all, as the members of the alliance were professionals, such as religious leaders, lawyers and educators, the Alliance could never get beyond an “elite” dialogue stage (221). Therefore, the broad needs and voices of people of the two communities were not reflected in discussions. The alliance, for example, was unable to discuss topics such as issues affecting working and impoverished classes. In addition, the alliance could never get beyond its “racial group loyalties” which further limited understanding toward one another. For these reasons, the Black-Korean alliance eventually broke up (221).

The Black-Latino Roundtable was created in 1986 in order to promote interaction between the African-American community and the Latino community. However, same problems emerged: the primarily elite membership was unable to mobilize the grassroots
community and overcome their “racial-group loyalties” and racial boundaries. Therefore, face to face discussions were limited and the two ethnic/racial groups were unable to find what was really needed for unity. The Black-Latino Roundtable eventually broke up as well.

For influential and successful coalition building, James A. Regaldo emphasizes the importance of policy and decision making. He argues that interminority political coalitions should get involved actively with the city and other organizations in order to have their voices and views heard and reflected in the process. In addition, he assesses critical concerns such as those relating to the (1) practical meaning of representative democracy and political incorporation, particularly among communities of color, (2) the degree to which working class and poor communities can become incorporated into economic development planning and outcome scenarios in the city, (3) interlinked issues of race and class which act as communication barriers and socio-economic divides, and (4) the practical meaning and application of multi-cultural pluralism as a goal for the city (Regaldo 1994, 231). Regaldo is focused on policy and decision making and how coalitions can get involved actively with the city and other organizations in order to have the voices and views of the interminority political coalitions heard.

As a model for interminority political coalition, Regaldo introduces the Multicultural Collaborative. The Multicultural Collaborative was formed after the 1992 Los Angeles riots. The three co-directors of the coalition were a Latino, a Korean-American and an African-American. The Multicultural Collaborative mainly focused on three program areas: neighborhood economic development, public education (developing curricula in high schools dealing with racial tensions), and media relations that provide openings for alternative voices and views. The Multicultural Collaborative’s policy-making and multi-
racial board of directors was made up of members from a number of organizations which were constituency groups and had histories of seeking solutions to interminority conflicts in Los Angeles. (Regalado 1994, 227).

Along with the Multicultural Collaborative, there have been successful coalitions that have focused on face to face dialogue and discussions between ethnic/racial groups. The Community Mediation Project of Chicago, for example, has actively been involved in community services to try to promote cultural exchange between Korean-Americans and African-Americans through holiday concerts, athletic and journalistic programs and youth exchange programs (Choi and Kim 1999, 180). This has provided opportunities for the Korean merchants and the African-American community to have face to face discussions. The meetings have included discussions of issues such as refund and exchange policies in order to mitigate the tensions between the merchants and customers (Choi and Kim 1999, 183).

The Korean-American Merchant Association of Chicago as well, promotes harmonious relationships between African-American consumers and Korean merchants in the community. The association has been actively involved in church activities and has carried out events such as cross-cultural concerts (Choi and Kim 1999, 170). Athletic, cultural programs and scholarships have also been helpful for both communities in educating their youths about different culture from a young age. Korean-American children have been taken on tours to African-American history and cultural museums, while African-American children are introduced and presented to Tae Kwon Do performances (184, 186).

These coalitions of African-Americans and Korean-Americans in Chicago motivated the communities in a way that enabled them to get to know each other through immediate
cultural exchange and direct discussions. The two communities were able to organize at a grass roots level, where not only professionals were leading projects, but people in the community were interacting individually. Through face to face interactions and dialogues, the two communities were able to mitigate the tension by breaking the boundary of an ethnic/racial group.

In addition to coalitions, several identity politics have been suggested for unity among non-white ethnic/racial groups. In identity politics, the identity of the non-white ethnic/racial group is formed by seeking common features within the group. For example, Angie Y. Chung and Edward Taehan Chang have defined several identity politics that are often formed among non-white ethnic/racial groups. In “racial identity politics,” race is considered the only salient feature. Other features of identity such as class, gender and sexuality are regarded as either insignificant or secondary. On the other hand, “multi-oppression politics” consider race as a mere social construction that constitutes only one aspect of an individual’s identity. Therefore, with “multi-oppression politics,” non-white ethnic/racial groups coalesce around interests other than race. Thus, through this politics, non-white ethnic/racial groups are able to make a greater effort to clarify common interest among themselves besides racial and ethnic perspectives (Chang and Chung 1998, 85). African-Americans, Latinos, and Asian-Americans could coalesce around the “multi-oppression politics” as Chang and Chung suggest. This will help the three ethnic/racial groups to find commonalities other than race and seek interests that will enhance their unity.
Conclusion
Looking Beyond Race

As we have seen, what is needed to defuse interminority conflict and limited understanding, and to increase interaction among African-Americans, Latinos, and Asian-Americans, is to understand each other’s situation and make efforts to find common factors among all ethnic/racial groups.

Another aspect that may be considered when thinking about interminority relations is the general view African-Americans, Latinos, and Asian-Americans have of each other. For example, in their report “Anti-Hispanic and Anti-Asian Sentiments among African-Americans,” Scott Cummings and Thomas Lambert suggest that the views held toward Latinos, and Asian-Americans by African-Americans “do not differ strongly from the Anglo American majority.” They argue as follows:

Because findings show that rates of prejudice toward Asian-Americans and Hispanic-Americans do not strongly differ between the Anglo-American majority and African-Americans, one can tentatively conclude that there is no reason to assume that minority status keeps individual African-Americans from adopting racial stereotypes. While the evidence suggests that recent public concerns over potentially high rates of anti-Hispanic and anti-Asian sentiments among African-Americans are probably exaggerated, the findings clearly show that prejudice toward these two groups is widely distributed throughout all sectors of American
society, irrespective of majority or minority status (Cummings and Lambert 1997, 350).

This statement can also be applied to the Latino community and Asian-American community. Not only do African-Americans hold the common stereotypes toward the two ethnic/racial groups, but Latinos and Asian-Americans hold stereotypes that the majority of the society has toward African-Americans as well. This was also seen through the LACSS report of 1992 that showed how African-Americans, Latinos, and Asian-Americans held similar negative images of each other. Therefore, it is arguable that the limited interaction and abundant animosity generated during the early 1990s in California and Proposition 187 came from worn, negative stereotype and prejudices.

What stereotypes and problems do African-Americans, Latinos, and Asian-Americans exactly face? Seeing each other beyond stereotypes and understanding that these images are exaggerated may help African-Americans, Latinos, and Asian-Americans interact instead of categorizing each other into one ethnic/racial group.

African-Americans are subjected to constructed images. In “Public Perception of Race and Crime: The Role of Racial Stereotypes” published in American Journal of Political Science, author Jon Hurwitz and Mark Peffley argue that in the media, African-Americans are more likely than Anglo-Americans to be portrayed as criminal suspects in news stories about crime (Hurwitz and Peffley 1997, 376). They are also more likely to be depicted as physically threatening. Thomas E. Ford argues that African-Americans on comedy programs are often based on disparaging stereotypes. “Fun-loving,” “happy-go-lucky,” “clownish,” and “poor” are some of the common traits associated with African-Americans. Ford also argues that African-Americans were more likely than Anglo-Americans to be portrayed in menial “personal service” occupations. While only one-
third of African-Americans on television were depicted as having an identifiable job, one-half of all Anglo-American characters were depicted as having a job (Ford 1997, 267).

African-Americans also continue to struggle with their ambiguous position in the United States. They are still excluded from the mainstream despite their long presence in this society. Sociologist Nathan Glazer examines the ambivalent position of African-Americans today and asks the critical question: how and when will the full incorporation of African-Americans into American life take place? “Only twenty years ago we could still believe that African-Americans would become, in their ways of life, their degree of success, their connection to society, simply Americans of darker skin. I still believe that will happen eventually,” he argues (Glazer 1997, 251).

Asian-Americans continue to struggle with the “model minority” stereotype. However, as former Senator Bill Bradley is quoted in the Nichi Bei Times, being classified as a “problem-free minority” has also created tensions with other groups. He comments on the interminority conflict that exists among Asian-American and African-Americans and Latinos as following:

“Why can’t you be more like Asian-Americans?” blacks and Latinos are told.

“They have succeeded without asking for a lot of government handouts.” As a result, Asian-Americans become the targets of resentment, creating tension and backlash in their relationships with other groups of Americans (Nichi Bei Times, 13 July 1994).

Therefore, the “model minority” stereotype has been reinforced in the relationship with African-Americans and Latinos and thus, has generated animosity among them. Frank H. Wu, a law professor at Howard University fights this constructed image.
I am an Asian-American, but I am not good with computers. I cannot balance my checkbook, much less perform calculus in my head. I would like to fail in school, for no reason other than to cast off my freakish alter ego of geek and nerd. I am tempted to be very rude, just to demonstrate once and for all that I will not be excessively polite, bowing, smiling, and deferring. I am lazy and a loner, who would rather reform the law than obey it and who does not have business skills. I yearn to be an artist, an athlete, a rebel, and above all, an ordinary person (Wu 2002, 40).

The general stereotype held toward Latinos is constructed as well and mainly comes from the media. Raoul Lowery Contreras, a reader of the East Side Sun from San Diego, argued that TV producers often pointed their cameras to people who were “black and brown.” “Mexican and Dominicans have been smeared by ’60 Minutes’, now who’s next? (sic) You can bet one thing, the group probably speaks Spanish,” he wrote to the East Side Sun (East Side Sun, 6 May 1993). In another article, Contreras argued that such positive facts as 103,000 businesses owned by Latinos in Los Angeles would never be reported on television. Instead, the only time Latinos made news, he argued, was when they were selling dope, protesting, or committing crime (East Side Sun, 9 September 1993).

Esther Renteria, the chair of the National Hispanic Media Coalition, argued that most television stations did not reflect the demography in Los Angeles County, despite the fact that the county had a “minority majority population” of 61 percent. Because of the lack of news managers and editors from non-white ethnic/racial groups, what gets covered is not relevant to the communities in the county, Renteria argued. Furthermore, Latinos had the worst television images: “We’re nearly invisible on television and in most movies
made in this country. If we’re shown at all, it’s as maids, gardeners, gang bangers, dope dealers and ‘illegal aliens’” (East Side Sun, 24 June 1993). Latinos were constructed in a negative way during the 1994 gubernatorial election campaign as well. During this time, an ad was aired on television that showed people making a dash at the U.S./Mexican border. The ad was aired in order to gain supporting votes for Proposition 187. “They keep on coming,” a narration said. It was apparent that “they” were the Latinos. Thus, Latinos were automatically turned into “illegal.”

Therefore, understanding that the image they hold of each other is the general stereotype that is socially constructed and seeing the problems each community faces may improve the relations among African-American, Latinos, and Asian-Americans. Rebecca Leonard and Don C. Locke make a similar argument.

Is interracial communication possible? Are there insurmountable obstacles or barriers to genuine interracial communication? Although barriers still exist, acquiring knowledge of existing stereotypes is a major step in the process of developing interracial interactions . . . . Because interracial communication is desirable, both Black and White communicators must work to make it possible, despite the stereotype inherent in the communication situation (Leonard and Locke 1993, 342).

I argue that this argument can also be applied to not only the relations between Anglo-American and African-Americans but also between the interminority relations of African-Americans, Latinos, and Asian-Americans.

“Many whites and Asian-Americans do not have enough contact with African-Americans to have formed a sense of any individual African-Americans as a human being,” argues Frank H. Wu (Wu 2002, 319). This statement can be applied to the
interminority relations among African-Americans, Latinos, and Asian-Americans as well. The interminority conflict and limited interaction among African-Americans, Latinos, and Asian-Americans during the early 1990s in California and the situation surrounding Proposition 187 was generated not only by the declining economy, nativism and job competition, but also by negative views the three ethnic/racial groups held of one another. This is one of the main factors that also prevented interminority political coalitions.

Face to face contacts and dialogues as seen through successful coalitions will help the three ethnic/racial groups to see beyond their stereotypes, understand the plights and problems each group faces, seek commonalities, and most of all, interact individually beyond race. This, I argue, will lead to deeper understanding and enhance cooperation not only among African-Americans, Latinos, and Asian-Americans but also among the relations of various ethnic/racial groups in the U.S. society.
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