

CONSTRUCTING MULTIETHNIC SPACE:
EAST ASIAN IMMIGRATION IN FORT LEE, NEW JERSEY

by

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Abstract

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Adviser: Professor Philip Kasinitz

This dissertation investigates the social formation and organization of the East Asian ethnic communities in Fort Lee, from the 1970s to the present. Beginning in the later-twentieth century the American suburb became an important site for immigrant settlement. A rapid influx of Chinese, Japanese, and Korean immigrants into Fort Lee, located in the metropolitan area of New York, has had an important influence on the social structures and everyday practice of this formerly white suburban community. The research is considered against existing social scientific theories of immigration including models of “spatial assimilation” and “ethnoburb.” The central research question concerns how assimilation and ethnic retention are structured among East Asian immigrants and their offspring in Fort Lee.

The findings suggest that three East Asian groups have formed distinct co-ethnic communities with different institutional structures and social organization. At the same time, coterminous residency in a specific suburban space has offered the possibility for development of new interrelations and informal pan-Asian affinities. Although the

borough's diversity has facilitated immigrant incorporation, this has neither erased group differences nor the racialization of East Asians. The middle-class status of immigrants and the relative receptiveness of the locality have had a significant bearing on the processes of assimilation and ethnic retention.

The dissertation proposes the concept of "multiethnic space" to account for the synchronicity of these processes as a product of everyday practice, relational power, and group formation. Assimilation and ethnic retention are considered as relational--rather than as mutually exclusive polarities. Practice is enacted in social relations with others: the various transformations of the multiethnic suburb are interdependent.

Multiple methods were employed for the collection and analysis of the data, including: in-depth interviews with members of East Asian groups and native whites; ethnographic observations of community life and local events; analysis of census data (1950-2009); the analysis of archival records, including local community documents, and press accounts from the 1970s through the first decade of the twenty-first century.

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Introduction

The foremost purpose of sociology is “to explain a present reality that is near to us and thus capable of affecting our ideas and actions.”¹ The social reality at issue in the present study is human mobility--an essential component in social change. International migration is a field of key importance for the understanding of a changing American society.

The present thesis examines the social structure and organization of East Asian ethnic communities in Fort Lee, New Jersey, from the 1970s to the present. A rapid influx of Chinese, Japanese, and Korean immigrants over the last forty years has had a profound influence on this formerly white community. How are the social processes of immigrant assimilation and ethnicity being shaped in this suburb of the city of New York? To investigate the relationship between assimilation and ethnic retention, the focus here is on the everyday practice and perceptions of social actors. The inquiry leads into discussion of frameworks of immigrant assimilation. Rather than mutually exclusive processes, assimilation and ethnic retention will be considered here as relational--as *practice*, enacted by immigrants in relation to native-born Americans and according to shared meanings.

Passage of the Immigration and Nationality Act of 1965 (Hart-Celler Act) resulted in a surge of immigration from Asia and Latin America into the United States. The Act abolished the racially restrictive immigration laws based on national origin quota

¹ Durkheim (1912) 1995, 1.

systems, in place since 1924.² The effect was to promote immigration from countries in Eastern and Southern Europe and, to a lesser extent, from Asian countries, along with establishing preferential categories based on family reunification and professional skills (Zhou 2000).

Asian and Latino populations have grown rapidly since the seventies and now comprise the two fastest growing groups in the United States. From 1980 through 2000, the percentage of Asians and Hispanics doubled. Between 1990 and 2005, Asian immigration grew at more than five times the national rate. Asians represented 4.2 percent (12.1 million) of the nation's population, according to the estimate of the American Community Survey of 2004 (U.S. Bureau of the Census 2007).³ The continuous flow of immigrants has increased the proportion of foreign-born in the United States in an unprecedented way. The number of foreign-born individuals is currently at its highest level and the percentage of foreign-born and children of foreign-born (23 percent of the U.S. population in 2002) is at its greatest level since the Second World War (Waters and Jiménez 2005). The new immigrants from Asia and Latin America are from diverse countries of origin and are heterogeneous in social, economic, political, and cultural characteristics.

Suburbs in the United States became increasingly diverse racially and ethnically in the late twentieth century. Beginning in the 1960s, a large number of Asians and

² The Immigration Act of 1924 banned immigration from Asia and restricted immigrants from Southern and Eastern Europe, stipulating that visas for permanent residence be distributed according to the ethnic composition of the U.S. population--thus favoring immigrants of Northern and Western European origin. Restrictions on Asian immigration predated 1924, however, notably through the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882 (repealed in 1943). See Lee 2004.

³ The figure for Asians represents those who reported Asian as their only race.

Latinos who had become economically and socially established, began to move out of central city areas to settle in outlying suburbs. This development was in part a reflection of the rise of an American-born middle class in both groups, but the driving factor was immigration from Asia and Latin America. By the year 2000, suburbs were home to a majority (52 percent) of foreign-born residents (Nicolaidis and Wiese 2006). In 2000, 58 percent of the Asian and 49 percent of the Hispanic populations lived in suburbs (Logan 2001b). This pattern challenges the prevailing stereotype of U.S. suburbs as homogeneous havens of a white middle class. The increasing gravitation of immigrants to suburban neighborhoods has drawn scholarly attention to new trends of immigrant dispersal (for example, Foner 2006; Fong 1994; Kalita 2003; Li 1998, 2006; Logan 2001b; Singer, Hardwick, and Brettell 2008; Water and Jiménez 2005).⁴

Against the contemporary backdrop of a changing residential and racial/ethnic landscape, the present thesis offers a case study of a metropolitan suburb deeply affected by social demographic shifts. The site is a borough of Bergen County in northern New Jersey. Ten miles from midtown Manhattan, Fort Lee is a locale that continues to undergo major social and economic transformation in the twenty-first century. Fort Lee has been in the vanguard of multiethnic suburban development in the New York area.

Yet despite the rapid increase of middle-class East Asian immigrants, detailed accounts

⁴ Many of the methods and theories still in use are derived from study of the previous mass migration between 1880 and 1920, which may not be appropriate for the analysis of post-1965 immigrant groups. Waters and Jiménez (2005) argue that it is necessary to consider two emerging trends in accounting for the experience of new immigrant assimilation: continuous flow and spatial dispersion of new immigrants. Generational diversity, as a result of the continued flow, leads in part to the divergent process (in terms of degree and rate) of assimilation by nonwhite immigrants, both across and within immigrant groups (Gans 1999).

of this specific locality remain scarce.⁵ Previous research on East Asian groups in Fort Lee has focused on the adaptation of Japanese expatriate wives to life in the U.S. (Flory 1989; Kawai 2000; Shinkai 1994) and specific social aspects of Korean immigration (Ha 1988, on parental attitudes towards bilingual education in public school). Oh's study (2007) concerning relationships between spatial dispersion and ethnic linkages among Korean immigrants includes Fort Lee within a wider study of Bergen County and others have mentioned Fort Lee in passing (McGlenn 2002; Min 2001, 2006). There has been, however, no in-depth sociological study of immigrant and native groups in Fort Lee from a comparative perspective.

1. Review of the Literature

i. Spatial Assimilation and Assimilation

Historically, immigrants have settled in separate communities, defined by national origin, within urban areas of the United States. At the time of the last mass migration, around the turn of the twentieth century, immigrant groups were primarily Europeans of relatively low socioeconomic status. They established ethnic "enclaves" within central cities. Later immigrants were drawn to the same communities, which offered assistance with housing and jobs and a familiar culture. Marcuse (1997) defines "enclave" as a, "spatially concentrated area in which members of a particular population group, self-defined by ethnicity or religion or otherwise, congregate as a means of enhancing their economic, social, political, and/or cultural development" (242).

⁵ There are a number of studies on Asian immigrant settlement in the outer boroughs of New York City. See Hum on Brooklyn (2002); Khandelwal on Flushing, Queens (2002); Smith and Logan on the same (2006); Zhou and Kim on Flushing (2003).

The immigrant enclave, a space inhabited by recently-arrived immigrants with limited resources, has been seen as providing mutual support and an orientation to the new land--a transitional phase in the incorporation of new groups into American society (Logan, Alba, and Zhang 2002; Marcuse 1997). Research has long stressed the transitory nature of central city ethnic enclaves as a springboard for integration.⁶ Immigrant enclaves were seen as “a way of moving toward integration and upward mobility in the society as a whole, in which moving out of the enclave was seen as a sign of success” (Marcuse 1997, 245). Eventually, some members of the minority groups acculturate and establish themselves in American labor markets, leaving behind the less successful in the urban enclave. The former convert occupational mobility and economic assimilation into residential gain by “purchasing” residence in places with greater advantages and amenities--frequently suburbia (Alba and Nee 1997).

Immigration to the suburb from urban enclaves has attracted increasing scholarly attention. The major theoretical framework has been the “spatial assimilation” model proposed by Massey (1985). The fundamental tenets of “spatial assimilation” hold that the move into white suburbs is associated with immigrant acculturation and gains in socioeconomic status, indicative of integration into mainstream society. The concept is rooted in the Chicago School’s ecological tradition (e.g. Park) which views the spatial distribution of groups as a reflection of their human capital and state of assimilation. The ecological model posits that residential mobility is an intermediate step on the way to “structural assimilation”--a greater degree of assimilation than “acculturation” (absorption of cultural norms, beliefs, and behavioral patterns, e.g. language of the host

⁶ But see Portes and Zhou (1993) on the argument for the benefits of spatial separation, characteristic of the enclave.

society). The process of moving out of urban ethnic enclaves entails dispersion of minority group members, opening the way for increased contact with members of the white majority and, thus, desegregation (Alba and Nee 1997). The spatial assimilation model has a parallel in Gordon's classic assimilation model (1964) which held assimilation as the ultimate goal, with the Anglo American mainstream as the reference point. Suburbs would promote the assimilation of immigrants through increased association with members of the majority group, eventually leading to the disappearance of ethnic groups. Spatial assimilation, closely connected with the idea of residential integration, may be viewed as a form of suburban attainment in part based on status attainment theory (Massey and Denton 1985).

Spatial assimilation has been used to assess the degree of residential segregation of major racial or ethnic populations or the patterns of residential distribution of contemporary immigrants in the United States and beyond (e.g. Canada). There has been considerable research--primarily quantitative, based on census data--regarding whether or not suburbanization implies assimilation.⁷ A number of studies have found empirical evidence to support spatial assimilation. For example, English proficiency (a measure of acculturation) and high socioeconomic status are strongly correlated with the suburbanization of ethnic minority groups (Alba and Logan 1991). Hwang and Murdock (1998) found that minority suburbanization can be viewed as a process driven primarily by motivations for status attainment (i.e. spatial upward mobility) rather than ethnic preference. White, Biddlecom, and Guo (1993) found that among Asian-origin groups

⁷ Alba, Denton, Leung, and Logan 1995; Alba and Logan 1991; Alba, Logan, and Crowder 1997; Alba, Logan, Stults, Marzan, and Zhang, 1999; Allen and Turner 1996; Fong and Wilkes 1999; Frey 1995; Hwang and Murdock 1998; Logan, Alba, and Zhang 2002; Myles and Hou 2004; Skop and Li 2005; Waters and Jiménez 2005.

socioeconomic achievement translates into residential assimilation. It has been documented that since the 1970s, Asian representation in suburbs with large white populations has increased more than that of African American and Hispanic groups (Massey and Denton 1988; Phelan and Schneider 1996). Some scholars interpret this as an indication of spatial assimilation and the declining significance of “race” for Asians (Massey and Denton 1987).

That suburbs with large Asian populations tend to be wealthier and more self-sufficient than other types of suburbs (Phelan and Schneider 1996) may be indicative of socioeconomic achievement and supportive of a dimension of the spatial assimilation model. When the likelihood of residential proximity among panethnic subgroups is analyzed, native-born Asians are more likely to be dispersed in terms of residence compared with other panethnic groups such as blacks or Latinos (Kim and White 2010). Yet residential propinquity among pan-Asian groups tends to increase among foreign-born: the more recent the arrival, the greater the likelihood of co-residence with panethnic groups. Most Asian newcomers do not live in predominantly Asian suburbs, but are more likely to move to suburbs that have an Asian presence but which are predominantly white (Palen 1995, 152). Although it should be noted that the degree of residential integration varies according to Asian national-origin groups (Le 2007) the evidence suggests that Asians, in general, tend to be spatially assimilated and residentially integrated.

Residential proximity to whites, however, does not automatically imply greater contact. In other words, Asians, though spatially assimilated, are not necessarily socially and culturally assimilated. The general trend of the white population to decrease when

non-white groups enter white suburbs has been observed with regard to Asians, although not to the extent for blacks or Hispanics (Phelan and Schneider 1996). Logan's studies (2001a, 2001b) suggest that the degree of segregation among Asians in the suburbs remained stable between 1990 and 2000. Frey and Myers (2005) report that the degree of suburban segregation between whites and Asians is declining, though highly variable according to region. These authors note that cities (with over 25,000 inhabitants and over 1,000 minority inhabitants) with high levels of Asian demographic growth tend to exhibit an increase in Asian-white segregation; on the other hand, higher relative Asian incomes are associated with a decrease in segregation.

Although the immigrant move to the suburbs was previously assumed to reduce the probability of ethnic aggregation, it was found by 1990 that most groups had established ethnic communities in suburbia. Ethnic concentration tends to persist; today, suburban residency is compatible with an ethnic environment and in some cases suburban neighborhoods may have higher concentrations of ethnic group members than city neighborhoods. In metropolitan New York and Los Angeles, "suburban residence does not necessarily imply living outside of ethnic neighborhoods." For several groups, "the suburban enclave provides an alternative to assimilation--it is an ethnic community in a relatively high-status setting" (Logan, Alba, and Zhang 2002, 299).

Rather than racial segregation, some scholars interpret the tendency among Asian immigrants to form ethnic concentrations in the suburbs as a reflection of their greater resources and volitional selection (Logan et al. 2002; Palen 1995). It is argued, in the light of such developments, that it is necessary to reconsider whether, "ethnic choice stems from constraint or from preference." (Logan et al. 2002, 300). Alba and Logan

(1993) have found that Asians seem to be the exception to the ecological model, since many newly arrived Asians immediately move to suburbs, even without the signs of acculturation such as English proficiency. High socioeconomic status matters, however, in regard to proximate residence with native whites. Given the various findings and interpretations, it remains open to question whether suburbanization today has the impact on general assimilation that it had for earlier European immigrants (Alba, Logan, Stults, Marzan, and Zhang 1999; Allen and Turner 1996).

The concept of “assimilation” is central to spatial assimilation theory. Classic theoretical frameworks--the “race relations cycle” (Park 1950) and identification of different types of assimilation (Gordon 1964)--shared the view that the assimilation of ethnic minorities or immigrants progresses through distinct phases of adjustment to America. With the arrival of new immigrants since 1965, and the emergence of a second generation, such unilateral evolutionary perspectives have been revised. Three main reconceptualizations have been proposed. The first, the “straight-line” model, holds that assimilation is occurring in the traditional manner (Gans 1979). The passage of time and succession of generations lead to increasing economic, cultural, political, and residential integration into American society. Ethnic pluralism, on the other hand, posits the resilience of ethnicity, arguing that later generations may revive old cultural traditions and choose to be less assimilated in favor of a sense of uniqueness based on ethnic differences (Le 2007). The third view, “segmented assimilation” holds that different outcomes depend on different societal and group-level circumstances (Portes and Rumbaut 2001; Rumbaut and Portes 2001; Zhou 2000). According to segmented assimilation, one possible path involves the experience of downward assimilation among

new immigrant groups who experience discrimination because of racial association.⁸ The contrary path is rapid economic and occupational advancement, but with a deliberate attempt to maintain traditional ethnic values, norms, and behavior. Examples of the latter are the well-educated, affluent Asians who settle into middle- and upper-class suburbs that were once exclusively white and who then proceed to establish their own ethnic enclaves (Portes and Zhou 1993; Le 2007). Segmented assimilation suggests the importance of social class for mobility among immigrants and their offspring. As Zhou (2000) argues, the consequence of being middle-class, with financial and social capital, needs to be considered for assimilation: such immigrants choose more desirable places to live, such as suburbs, which in turn affects outcomes for their offspring.

Recent theories of “new assimilation” focus on the process of assimilation--as “something accomplished,” an, “unintended consequence of myriad individual actions and choices in particular social, cultural, economic, and political contexts” (Brubaker 2001, 542). In the “new assimilation” assimilation is not a dichotomous outcome and does not require the disappearance of ethnicity; the ethnic group may still bear ethnic markers. In other words, assimilation does not contradict ethnic pluralism since, “assimilation is very much assimilation within a pluralistic framework, which changes over time” (Alba 1995, 83). In other words, assimilation and ethnic persistence are compatible (Alba 1995). Assimilation may be viewed as a form of “ethnic change,” defined as the decline of ethnic distinction and cultural and social difference (Alba and Nee 2003). Thus, individuals from both sides of the boundary may mutually perceive

⁸ The degree of downward assimilation postulated by the segmented assimilation model is questioned by critics as essentializing minority culture and treating class as an overdetermining factor. See Alba and Nee 2003; Kasinitz et al. 2008.

themselves with diminishing frequency in terms of ethnic categories. The notion of “boundary blurring” refers to this ambiguity or indeterminacy of boundaries differentiating ethnic minority members (Alba 2009). As ethnic boundaries become blurred or weakened, individual ethnic origins become less and less relevant in relation to members of another ethnic group. Assimilation into the mainstream may be eased, insofar as these immigrants “do not sense a rupture between participation in mainstream institutions and familiar social and cultural practices and identities” and when they do not “feel forced to choose between the mainstream and their group of origin” (Alba 2009, 43).

ii. Suburb, Ethnoburb, Immigrant Community without Propinquity

While newcomers continue to converge in the central city as a first stop for residence and work, recent research indicates that many new immigrants from Asia settle directly in middle-class suburbs, bypassing the urban ethnic enclaves.⁹ In other words, they situate themselves among the middle or upper-middle strata on arrival in the United States. Recent Asian immigrants often arrive with considerable amounts of financial capital, high levels of education, desirable occupational skills (e.g. computing and related fields) and the social capital necessary for settlement in desirable locations, frequently in suburban areas (Alba, et al. 1999; Logan, et al. 2002; Kwong and Mišćević 2005; Li

⁹ The increasing diversity of settlement patterns is, “inextricably bound up with the growing volume of immigration” (Massey 2008, 3). Increasing immigrant dispersion into “new destinations”--small and medium size towns throughout the United States beyond the traditional gateway cities--is attributed to the saturation of immigrant niches in traditional gateway cities with resultant increasing competition for opportunities among immigrants there, in addition to large-scale industrial restructuring (Massey 2008).

1998; Min 2006; Zhou and Kim 2003). Successful families tend to choose suburban ethnic enclaves even when spatial assimilation is possible (Logan, et al. 2002, 300) and those who settle in the suburbs tend to maintain traditional customs and a strong sense of ethnic identity (Alba, et al. 1999; O'Hare and Frey 1994; Skop and Li 2005). The movement of Asian immigrants directly into the suburbs lends support to the proposition that suburbs are now restricted more by class than by race--that is, the suburbs are now open, if one has an acceptable level of income and education (Palen 1995). Suburban Asian ethnic communities, with many of the characteristics of the traditional urban enclave, have developed in the last few decades of the twentieth century in metropolitan suburban areas to accommodate affluent U.S.- and foreign-born Asians (Le 2007). In light of this new trend, the proposed correlation between levels of acculturation and residential mobility in the spatial assimilation model appears less tenable (e.g. Li 1998, 2006; Min 2006; Zhou and Kim 2003).

New types of emerging suburban ethnic communities have been designated "ethnoburbs"--defined as, "suburban ethnic clusters of residential areas and business districts in large American metropolitan areas" (Li 1998, 482).¹⁰ Ethnoburbs are "multi-ethnic communities, in which one ethnic minority group has a significant concentration, but does not necessarily comprise a majority" (ibid.). According to Li (1997, 1998, 2009) the factors leading to the formation of an ethnoburb include: i) changes in

¹⁰ The first ethnoburb to gain national prominence was the Chinese community in northeastern Los Angeles County around the San Gabriel Valley (Fong 1994; Li 1997, 1998, 1999, 2006; Mydans 1994). Other suburban Asian communities have also been identified--for example, the "post-suburban" communities of Koreatown and Little Saigon in Orange County, California (Vo and Danico 2004) and Asian communities in New York/northern New Jersey (Le 2007; Zhou and Kim 2003).

geopolitics; ii) economic restructuring; iii) changes in U.S. trade and immigration policy; iv) local demographic, economic, and political context and their changes. The conditions of Chinese ethnoburbs render them both quantitatively and qualitatively different from urban enclaves, the traditional ethnic settlement type. For Li, such suburban clustering is not the “suburban Chinatown” proposed by Fong (1994) but something new. The ethnoburb is not an enclave in a new geographical location.¹¹ While allowing for retention of ethnic identity and heritage, ethnoburban residents have greater interaction with the host and can integrate into the mainstream society through economic activities, political involvement, and community life (Li 2009).

If the ethnoburb contributes to ethnic persistence, in what ways does it differ from the urban ethnic enclave? First, there is a close connection to the globalized economy: many in the ethnoburb are involved in international trade. As an outpost of the global economy, high-wage, highly-skilled professionals tend to live in the ethnoburb, with an overrepresentation of those in the Finance, Insurance, and Real Estate (FIRE) sector. But Li (1998) also states that the ethnoburb retains, “some features of an ethnic enclave economy” (484). Traditional ethnic economic niches remain important sites of employment for ethnoburban Chinese. The combination of global ties and local service

¹¹ According to Li (1998) after 1946, major geopolitical ruptures (end of the Cold War, regional conflicts) generated pressures for migration to the United States and other industrialized countries. Economic restructuring of the period included the rise of post-Fordism, deindustrialization, expansion of the service-sector, foreign direct investment, and the growth of multinational corporations. Such developments have produced major changes in the domestic economy and labor demand, creating new needs for highly-skilled professionals and adding to the perennial demand for cheap labor. Changes in national economic and immigration policies have produced the conditions for immigrants of different backgrounds to enter the U.S. and for settlement of the ethnoburb. At the local level, demographic dynamics may change rapidly due to continued immigrant flows.

jobs gives the ethnoburb its unique aspects as a fully functioning global economic outpost with a distinctive ethnic character. Greater diversity among residents, in terms of socioeconomic status and geographical origin, produces greater stratification than in the urban enclave (Li 1998).¹²

Contrary to spatial assimilation, the ethnoburb model posits resistance to complete assimilation and maintenance of an immigrant cultural heritage (Li 1998, 1999, 2006). According to Li, the ethnoburb is a voluntary concentration of ethnic groups through deliberate effort and is highly self-contained as a place of residence and work. Because of this concentration, the assimilation process is thought to slow down and to take different forms (Li 2006). At the same time, it is assumed that immigrants with high socioeconomic status exert control over the rate of assimilation given their greater freedom of choice in the process; accordingly, despite the ethnic concentration, residents of the ethnoburb assimilate socially, economically, and politically (Li 1998; 2009). The centrality of locale in the ethnoburb model relates to the view that place continues to reinforce immigrant community identity (see, for example, Aguilar-San Juan [2005] on Vietnamese Americans in Orange County, California). While spatial assimilation anticipates the dissolution of attachment to place among upwardly mobile immigrants, Aguilar-San Juan's study (2005) proposes suburban place as central for immigrant ethnic solidarity, while at the same time offering a way of forging new identities--both ethnic and American.

¹² The evidence of the structural transformations of urban Chinatown--e.g. the expansion of the FIRE sector and the increase of professional employment there since the 1980s--may challenge the premise of the ethnoburb and entail further consideration of distinctions between "old" and "new" types of immigrant settlement. See, Chung 2000.

Emergent multiethnic suburbs and changes brought on by immigration in such communities have been documented in several ethnographic studies, whose findings underscore the increasing significance of immigration and ethnic relations for suburbia. The majority of studies have considered the Los Angeles area, including Monterey Park and the San Gabriel Valley, focusing on intraethnic and interethnic political strife, racial/ethnic representation, and the development of panethnic coalitions (Fong 1994; Horton 1995; Saito 1998) as well as the ethnic and transnational economy (Li 1998, 2005). These studies report tensions in multiethnic communities between established residents and newcomers (Chinese) with relatively privileged backgrounds. New immigrants are nevertheless not isolated from the larger community as in the case of urban enclaves. Ultimately, the newcomers are incorporated into civic life through participation in ongoing political and social struggles under conditions of diversity. In turn, such incorporation contributes to the transformation of the community and redefinition of the meaning of “American.” In the process of inclusion, however, race remains significant (Horton 1995; Saito 1998).

At the same time, different emerging patterns among contemporary immigrant communities call for reconsideration of the concept of community as physically bounded. Relatively privileged, new immigrants devise ways of sustaining their ethnic heritage “without propinquity”—i.e. the retention of ethnic linkages without clustering in a physically defined community. Such “heterolocalism,” proposed by Zelinsky and Lee (1998), offers an alternative to the spatial assimilation or pluralist models for those immigrants who manage to maintain ethnic identity in spite of spatial dispersion (e.g. Hong Kongers and Taiwanese in California). Heterolocalism posits that recent

immigrants with resources “promptly adopt a dispersed pattern of residential location, all the while maintaining strong social cohesion by various means, despite the lack of propinquity (Zelinsky and Lee 1998, 293). The concept of “cultural communities,” defined as, “the common cultural practices and beliefs of its members” (Ling 2009, 11) refers to Chinese immigrant communities without physical boundaries, sustained by ethnic organizations such as Chinese schools and religious or community organizations. According to Ling (2009), the majority of immigrant members of cultural communities are professionals who are integrated into the mainstream. Their socioeconomic status obviates the necessity of clustering together for ethnic support, but their immigrant culture remains distinct from the larger society. Similarly, Oh’s research (2007) on Korean immigrant households in Bergen County, New Jersey, found that ethnic services and institutions in suburban locations allow residentially dispersed immigrants to maintain ethnic linkages, a tendency that contradicts the spatial assimilation model. Oh concludes that suburbanized Korean immigrants are not necessarily socially or culturally assimilated and that the primary factor in Korean choice of residence is the reputation of the school district for the child’s education (see also Palen 1995). These studies indicate that suburban Asian immigrants selectively assimilate to the host society, maintaining ethnic ties without forming physically defined communities.

Research on the emergence of multiethnic suburbs has assumed the concept of “suburb” as a given. Yet it is important to consider the concept to examine whether and how designated “suburbs” have a bearing on processes of community formation and assimilation and ethnic retention, when compared with urban areas. Are the implications of immigrant assimilation, or ethnic affinity, different in suburbia and cities? What does

it mean to live in a suburb which is becoming multiethnic and how does such a multiethnic environment affect immigrant assimilation and ethnic retention? Might it be that immigrants and their offspring are assimilating into minority cultures in the suburb in a manner similar to that in a multiethnic city such as New York? (Kasinitz, Mollenkopf, and Waters 2002). One question concerns the extent to which the ethnoburb can be analytically distinguished from ethnic communities that are not in suburbs, or those without physical boundaries.

Although the term suburb is often vaguely understood, Palen (1995) offers a working definition. Suburbs are:

incorporated or unincorporated spatial communities of moderate density that lie outside the central city but within the metropolitan area. The area's primary economic activities are nonagricultural, and government is usually through independent and sometimes uncoordinated local units. Suburban areas do not have to be primarily residential, but their densities are moderate, and both their population and their economic activities are spread throughout a wide area (12-13).

Suburbs today are not “necessarily dependent economically on the central city they surround” but are “tied to the city (and to other suburbs) by a dependency on the automobile” (Palen 1995, 13). Suburbs differ from central cities in their sprawling, low density land use, the absence of a central downtown district, and the experience of a politically fragmented local government. They are also different from rural areas in that the economic activities of residents and businesses are primarily in manufacturing and services rather than agriculture (Baldassare 1992).

The increasing social, political, and economic significance of suburbs in American social life in the post-World War Two period has been widely studied (Jackson 1987; Muller 1981; Palen 1995). Suburbs, rather than cities, according to one view, are

the “transformer” of America (Fishman 1987). Mass suburbanization in the postwar period dramatically increased the number of suburbanites during the 1950s and 1960s. From the 1970s through the 1990s, increasing numbers of jobs became suburbanized (Muller 1997; Palen 1995). Suburban growth is also attributed to retail and industrial development, which has accelerated since the early 1960s, in tandem with decentralization and economic restructuring in cities. Today, half of the American population lives in suburbia--urban areas outside central cities, as defined by the U.S. census (Nicolaidis and Wiese 2006).

Contrary to the mythic image of suburbs as a locus of white, middle-class families governed by conformism, the reality reflects a heterogeneity of residents in terms of race, ethnicity, class, homeownership, divergent lifestyles, and cultural milieu. The impact of large-scale forces that have affected cities equally affects the suburbs. Suburbs are no longer mere peripherals of cities (Gober 1989). Contemporary suburbanization processes are characterized by distinctive labor markets, demographic differentiation, and economic specialization. Still, the supposed difference between cities and suburbs is more tenuous than is generally assumed; the contrast between them is less marked than might at first be thought (Aguliar-San Juan 2005; Dobriner 1962; Gans 1962a). Muller (1997) has indicated that the New York region should be considered a “world city,” including its suburban areas. The American suburbs have been transformed by globalization, one indication being the steadily growing presence of foreign enterprise. Increasing heterogeneity, according to economic function, class, and ethnic and racial characteristics, suggests that the suburb is becoming more “classically urban” (Dobriner 1963, 27).

The importance of community for collective identity and social relationships is a wide ranging thematic (Cohen 1985; Elias and Scotson 1994; Gans 1967; Keller 2003). Classic sociological thought considered the idea of community as central to its inquiry.¹³ Collective identity rests on the distinction between “we” and “they.” This scheme of social inclusion/exclusion is parallel with the contradictory processes that immigrants face in their adaptation to the life in America: being encouraged to abandon their roots to attain upward mobility, while subject to the pressure to claim their cultural roots (Keller 2003). Work on suburban communities and resident relationships has illuminated the importance of the role of class in defining resident relationships. In-depth, qualitative studies of relatively racially homogeneous suburban communities (Gans 1967; Keller 2003) have found that while segregation among residents has remained problematic, perceived economic parity--middle-class status--is connected with the formation of affinity among residents, and overrides religion, race, or ethnicity. Horton’s study (1995) on a multiethnic suburb shows that class was the major precondition for accommodation of nonwhite minority members: relative economic equality between newcomers and established residents, despite initial resistance, eventually facilitated interethnic alliances. Baumgartner’s study (1988) of behavior in a predominantly middle-class suburb demonstrated avoidance of open confrontation, attributed to high status and material equality. Lack of social cohesion, in this view, not intimacy and connectedness, produces the civil order characteristic of middle-class suburban relationships.

iii. Ethnicity and Race

¹³ The influence of modernity and its impact on community and social solidarity are important themes in the work of Durkheim, Simmel, Tönnies, and Weber.

Recent immigration to the United States from Asia and Latin America has problematized notions surrounding race relations, long characterized by the bipolar relationship of black-white (cf. Myrdal [1944] 1962). The nation's changing racial and ethnic composition has given rise to reconsiderations of how race and ethnicity should be defined and the necessity for incorporation of the Asian and Latino minority experience (Bean and Lee 2004; Foner and Fredrickson 2004; Omi and Winant 1994; Sanders 2002). While some scholars predict that changing racial/ethnic boundaries may facilitate incorporation for some groups (Bean and Lee 2004) others suggest that race will remain significant, even if racial classifications change. Consideration of the classificatory systems of race and ethnicity is essential for the analysis of immigrant assimilation (Gans 1999). Bashi and McDaniel (1997) argue that the assimilation process for immigrants necessarily subsumes immigrants into the dominant social organization, including the system of racial stratification.

Current sociological theorization recognizes that the concepts of race and ethnicity are social and political categories without biological basis.¹⁴ Social categories are nevertheless rendered as “natural” categories that are widely considered beyond dispute and thus remain unquestioned. The classification of people into social and political categories is fundamentally ideological and exerts social effects. The census and official enumeration, for example, promote the reification of socially-constructed categories (Petersen 1987). Omi and Winant (1994) argue that race is “a concept which signifies and symbolizes social conflicts and interests by referring to different types of human bodies” (54). In other words, “race” is a construct within political processes.

¹⁴ For a survey of different conceptualizations of race and ethnicity see Cornell and Hartmann (1999).

Racial and ethnic classification has been related to the question of identity--where identity is considered as imposed by the dominant group (Du Bois [1903] 1989; Fanon 1967). Ethnic boundaries, according to Du Bois and Fanon, are imposed by the dominant group: blackness is constructed by whites. By the same token, it has been argued that "Asian" is a historical construction of cultures and people considered as foreign--the exotic objects of Western scrutiny. "Orientalism" was developed as an instrument of power, dividing the world into "Orient" and "Occident" through the latter's domination of the former (Said 1978). In this view, "Asian" is a fundamentally Western construct based on an essentializing sense of difference between east and west. For people of Asian origin in the U.S., to understand oneself as "Asian" means to "internalize the racial definitions" of the dominant group (Kasinitz, Mollenkopf, and Waters 2004). Moreover, the racial designation and summary of diverse national groups under the category "Asian" obscures the internal diversity of the category. Asians continue to be seen as different from whites--namely, "foreign"--notwithstanding greater integration into the mainstream (e.g. less residentially segregated) compared to other ethnic minorities (Foner 2006; Tuan 1998).

The notion of agency has been introduced into the conceptualization of boundary definition and maintenance--members of ethnic groups are not passive subjects but negotiate boundaries (Hall 1997). The sociology of ethnicity and immigration has turned to consider the concept of "panethnicity" (see Espiritu 1992, 2004; Kibria 2002; Lopez and Espiritu 1990). Lopez and Espiritu (1990) define "panethnicity" as "the development of bridging organizations and solidarities among subgroups of ethnic collectivities that are often seen as homogeneous by outsiders" (198). The concept of panethnicity--

emergent in the latter half of the twentieth century--is premised on the assumption that identities are multi-leveled and that individuals have multiple and malleable social identities, conflicted and negotiated at times, but which nevertheless co-exist.

The panethnic term "Asian American" arose in the late 1960s, within a new, self-defining, political vocabulary and is considered a "contemporary, post-Civil Rights construct" (Kibria 1998, 943). Although the category of "Asian" was initially imposed by the majority group, shared experience as a racial minority has been used as a strategy of Asian Americans in their struggle against racism. Such solidarity allowed for the establishment of alliances with the aim of gaining greater representation and political inclusion. Lopez and Espiritu (1990) observe that panethnic identity may be supplanting both assimilation and ethnic particularism in the United States. According to the authors, the process of generalization of ethnicity--the development of panethnicity--embodies ethnic change, which can be understood as a "general assimilation process" (ibid. 200). This dynamic may be significant for the future of race and ethnic relations in the U.S. At the same time, ambiguities surrounding the notion of "Asian American" reflect uncertainties about racial boundaries in America in general (Kibria 1998). Although the term "Asian American" was originally constructed by U.S.-born, middle class Asians, it remains unclear how ordinary Asians view the term and who is included in it (Kibria 1998). Considered a racialist construction (which reinforces the privileges of the dominant group) the varying usages of "Asian" over time, whether internally (by the group) or exogenously (by the state), are indicative of the fluid and contested character of the term.

Another dimension of ethnic identity has to do with the links between socioeconomic status, ethnic identification among immigrants, and assimilation outcomes (Bean and Stevens 2003; Brown and Bean 2006). The higher the socioeconomic status, the more options and leverage immigrants tend to have in terms of how they racially and ethnically identify. While lower-class immigrants may identify “reactively” as a result of racial discrimination, immigrants with greater resources and better socioeconomic prospects may “selectively” identify with their race and ethnicity. With “selective identification,” agents choose to be ethnic on certain occasions but not on others--one of the aims of the latter being the facilitation of economic achievement.¹⁵ For those already assimilated economically, ethnicity may be “symbolic.” “Symbolic ethnic identification” is most likely to occur among the most privileged, who have achieved success--the members of this stratum are likely to have the greatest interest in their sociocultural heritage along with the freedom to assume an ethnic identity without incurring discrimination. In other words, affluent immigrants have greater options regarding whether to assimilate or not assimilate. Brown and Bean (2006) argue that self-identification is becoming increasingly more subjective and autonomous, with the consequence that, “immigrants may be maintaining racial/ethnic identifications despite considerable economic incorporation and despite social networks and perhaps even marriages that cross racial/ethnic boundaries” (ibid. 11). Examples of incongruence

¹⁵ The related concept of “strategic assimilation” may be applicable to middle-class immigrant groups who choose to reside in suburbs. Strategic assimilation refers to the tactic employed among middle-class blacks, who reside in white suburbs to facilitate access to good schools, while maintaining black identity through socialization in black institutions. The middle-class minority group, rather than seeing themselves constrained by racial hierarchy, thus exercise leverage in social space. See Lacy (2004) and Martin (2010).

between ethnic identification (ethnic persistence) and behaviors suggestive of assimilation (e.g. economic success, intermarriage) have complicated the interpretation of immigrant assimilation.

2. Definition of the Research Problem and Theoretical Approach

Drawing on the literature of spatial assimilation, immigrant suburban settlement, race and ethnicity, the central question for this dissertation concerns the structuring of immigrant communities and processes of assimilation and ethnic retention. While acknowledging the importance of large-scale social forces that shape these patterns, the dissertation pays attention to everyday practice enacted by social actors and how the processes are negotiated in the transformation of suburbs. The dissertation hypothesizes that neither spatial assimilation nor the ethnoburb can fully explain the development and dynamics of social relations in Fort Lee. The basic premise is that assimilation and ethnic relations are dialectically related processes, which in turn structure a specific multiethnic suburban community. The specific questions are as follows:

- i. Which factors have contributed to the formation of East Asian communities in Fort Lee over the past forty years? Does the case of Fort Lee follow the premises of the ethnoburb, or is it more representative of spatial assimilation? Does it represent something different?
- ii. What are the conditions that contribute to the social structuring and organization of assimilation and ethnic retention (or separation) in a multiethnic suburb? How do actors--immigrants and their offspring--negotiate assimilation and ethnic retention? How does the class status of immigrants relate to their race and ethnicity in the way immigrants negotiate assimilation and retention? What are the distributions of social power--e.g. race, class--that help explain these processes? In what ways do East Asian groups vary in this regard?

- iii. How has East Asian immigration shaped the ways in which immigrants and natives construct the meaning of ethnicity in a multiethnic suburb? Is there pan-Asian solidarity or a sense of pan-Asian community in Fort Lee?

Assimilation concerns the formation and development of social relationships and the nature of social boundaries (Alba and Nee 2003). From this, the dissertation draws on theorizations of practice and considerations of a relational perspective.¹⁶ To understand assimilation as a form of “boundary shifting” (Alba 2010) shifts the focus of inquiry to social relationships and their interpretations--that is, how the meanings of boundaries are changing for social actors. It is proposed here that ethnic retention and assimilation are enacted and negotiated by immigrants and natives through *practice*. Modes of assimilation and ethnic retention may be viewed as either individual and collective but they are ultimately social, occurring in relation to others. Assimilation and ethnic retention are interdependent processes that are dialectically related and lead to changes and development in society. The relational perspective considers individuals as connected and society as comprising sets of social relations (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992).¹⁷

Processes of assimilation and ethnic relations are the social practice produced and reproduced by immigrants in relation to co-ethnic and non-co-ethnic groups (including the host), which in turn create and transform social structure. “Practice” refers to the routinized actions produced and reproduced in social life by social actors. Being contingent on shared understandings, according to which agents act habitually, such

¹⁶ Proposed by Bourdieu (1990b) and Giddens (1984).

¹⁷ “Society does not consist of individuals, but it expresses the sum of interrelations, the relations within which these individuals stand” (Marx [1857] 1973, 265).

actions follow a rule, insofar as a meaning can be imputed to them by other members of the group. Practice depends on both past knowledge and the possibility of future repetition, and is often taken for granted by actors.

Immigrants make conscious and unconscious decisions regarding integration or the sustenance of an ethnic heritage in their everyday life. Largely middle-class East Asian immigrants who settle in Fort Lee, may be viewed as having the leverage to decide whether or not they assimilate and to what degree: assimilation is not necessarily imposed exogenously. If assimilation (linguistic mastery, for example) is construed as a means to achieve upward mobility among immigrants, a strategy will be employed in their practice to that end. Once the immigrant's economic aspirations are fulfilled, assimilation may no longer be their goal. Assimilation, accordingly, may be considered as an engagement that is being structured, shaped, and redefined constantly. On the other hand, members of the host society are engaged within the process of social change. Native white reactions to and relations with nonwhite immigrants are structured through practice, at once creating a sense of intergroup difference but also a channel for integration. Rather than being passive, immigrant actors are capable of reproducing and transforming social relations.

The consideration of practice and structuration--structure not as a fixed state but as a process, enacted by social actors through their practice--problematizes the stability implicit in Gordon's notion of "structural assimilation." If structure is premised on the ever changing dialectic of itself and social actors, it follows that assimilation takes different forms according to structure. A conceptual framework in which structure and human action are considered malleable and dialectically related may help explain how

assimilation and ethnic retention are being negotiated by recent East Asian immigrants in Fort Lee.

3. Need for the Study

Although New Jersey has been one of the five, major immigrant-receiving states in the United States (after California, New York, Florida, and Texas) it has not received much attention from immigration scholars (Espenshade 1997). The state has been an important destination for Asian immigrant groups and now has the fourth largest Asian population after California, New York, and Texas (U.S. Bureau of the Census 2007).¹⁸ During the decade of the 1990s, the number of Asians in New Jersey grew by 77.4 percent: from 270,839 in 1990 to 480,376 as of 2000 (U.S. Bureau of the Census 2000). In Bergen County, which has attracted several waves of Asian immigration over the last forty years, Fort Lee has been in the vanguard of greater ethnic diversity, more so than any other borough of the county--a product of its historical development, ethnic mixture, and geographically advantageous position.

Social conditions in Fort Lee offer several strands of theoretical and empirical interest for contemporary understanding of the ethnic suburb. First, the demographic concentration of East Asian groups--Chinese, Japanese, and Korean. The census of 1970 registered ninety-four percent of the population in Fort Lee as ethnically white. Today East Asians constitute over thirty percent of the borough's population of nearly 36,000. The initial East Asian influx, beginning in the early 1970s, was predominantly corporate

¹⁸ The largest Asian group being Asian Indian (169,180), followed by Chinese (94,476), Filipinos (85,245), and Korean (65,349).

Japanese, temporarily residing in the United States. Fort Lee has been home to the greatest number of Japanese in New Jersey ever since. Currently, Koreans form the largest minority group, approximately 6,000--a figure which doubled between 1990 and 2000. Fort Lee also has the largest number of Chinese residents in Bergen County, a population which grew rapidly during the 1990s.¹⁹ The dissertation presents a comparative analysis of these groups in order to highlight their differences and similarities as immigrants and racial minorities. The study emphasizes the need to disaggregate separate ethnic groups from the single racial category. The tendency to treat Asian subgroups as a monolithic entity has obscured significant political, economic, historical, and cultural differences. Fort Lee offers a case where three different national Asian groups co-reside, a pattern which may modify the notion of the ethnoburb based largely on the settlement patterns of one immigrant group.

The characteristics of the Asian influx into Fort Lee differ in certain respects from those of Asian residents on which the theorization of the ethnoburb model was developed. In the San Gabriel Valley and Monterey Park, the Asian ethnic minority is the numerical majority. At the time of Saito's study (1998) Monterey Park was the only city in the United States, except Hawaii, with a majority Asian population (57 percent). As of 2000, the proportion of Asians was 59.4 percent in Monterey Park and 46.8 percent in the San Gabriel Valley. Chinese were the overwhelming majority among Asians in these locations (U.S. Bureau of the Census 2000). In Fort Lee, the proportion of Asians is lower and the majority of the three East Asian groups are first generation, unlike Monterey Park where many long-time, native-born Asian Americans reside. By contrast,

¹⁹ See further demographic discussion in chapter 1, *infra*.

in 2000, 69.2 percent of Chinese, 80.4 percent of Japanese, and 80.9 percent of Korean populations in Fort Lee were foreign-born.²⁰

Second, the case of Fort Lee presents a relative absence of ethnic tension or conflict vis-à-vis established residents.²¹ Studies of Monterey Park, California, and of Long Island, New York, have found marked anti-immigrant sentiment and a prevailing climate of restriction and intolerance toward foreigners (Horton 1995; Mahler 1995). The present study incorporates native white perceptions and reactions to the East Asian influx. Although the study of immigration frequently focuses on the immigrant group, understanding the process of immigrant community formation requires consideration of the reception of native residents. In this respect, the present investigation concurs with demands for studies that move beyond the traditional focus on immigrant characteristics to a consideration of their interaction in society and the conditions that both newcomers and established residents face (see Horton 1995). If the dominant group contributes to the definition and reproduction of the categories of “immigrants” or “Asians” it is important to consider the dominant group’s notions regarding East Asian groups. The spatial dispersion of immigrants increases contact with native residents who have not formerly co-resided with immigrants and this affects the outcomes of assimilation

²⁰ “Census 2000 Demographic Profile Highlights: Selected Population Group,” American FactFinder, Fact Sheet, Fort Lee borough, New Jersey (<http://factfinder.census.gov>). The figures are based on “Chinese alone (including Taiwanese),” “Japanese alone,” and “Korean alone” group categories.

²¹ See further, chapter 4, *infra*. Espenshade (1997) notes the relatively smooth integration of immigrants in New Jersey compared to the national experience--largely attributed to the fact that immigrants in New Jersey tend to have a higher level of educational attainment, a lower proportion of illegal immigrants, and a more diverse immigrant population than the nation as a whole.

(Waters and Jiménez 2005). Greater contact with native-born Americans may facilitate assimilation or increase resistance.

4. Research Methods, Data, Analysis

i. Methods and Data

Multiple methods were employed for the present study: in-depth interviews, ethnographic fieldwork, analysis of census data, and document analysis. The primary method was semi-structured, in-depth interviews with local residents, workers, business owners, and community leaders. Informants were recruited through direct contact or snowball sampling. Fifty-five interviews were conducted with three East Asian immigrant group members and native-born whites. The breakdown for each group was: Chinese (10: 4 men, 6 women); Japanese (14: 5 men, 9 women); Korean (14: 6 men, 8 women); native whites (17: 8 men, 9 women). Interviews were held at the informants' residences, in workplaces, or cafés and typically lasted from sixty to ninety minutes. The majority of the interviews were held in Fort Lee; other interviews were held in Englewood, Englewood Cliffs, Jersey City, Leonia, New York City, Palisades Park, Paramus, and Ridgefield. In five cases (2 Chinese, 2 Japanese, 1 white) interviews were conducted by telephone according to the preference of the informants. With a few exceptions, all interviews were tape-recorded and later transcribed verbatim for analysis. When tape recording was not possible, the content of the interview was immediately written down with as much detail as possible in fieldnotes.

Interview questions concerned the informant's immigration history, the reasons for choosing Fort Lee and the range of everyday life and experience in Fort Lee--their

neighborhood, everyday activities, friendship, political involvement, views and experiences concerning interracial and interethnic relationships, ethnic practices, and their views on Fort Lee. Since the majority of the informants were long-time residents, I asked them to discuss the changes they have observed during their residency. As for community leaders, specific questions varied according to their position; all were questioned about their organizational activities, goals, and perspectives on Asian immigration. Interviews were conducted in English, but for Japanese-speaking informants the interviews were conducted in Japanese (with one exception for a Japanese informant of mixed origin who was more fluent in English).

Field observation was conducted at a number of local institutions and community events: institutions included the Jack Alter Fort Lee Community Center, Fort Lee Museum, Fort Lee Public Library, the Recreation Center, the Richard A. Nest Senior Citizens' Center and various parks. I observed local events such as music concerts, arts and cultural festivals, plays, film screenings, Independence Day firework displays, reenactments (commemoration of George Washington's retreat during the War of Independence)--these events are held both in and outdoors, for example, at the Community Center, school premises, parks, and on the street. I also observed political meetings and school-sponsored events such as International Night and the Halloween parade. I also participated in ethnic events, including the Feast of Saint Rocco, the Chinese Golden Moon Festival, *Chuseok* Festivals (Korean harvest festival), and International Children's Day Parade. In addition, I volunteered and taught English classes at the Japanese American Society of New Jersey from May 2008 through December 2008, which allowed some opportunity for observation. Field observation

extended beyond the boundaries of Fort Lee and included Edgewater, Englewood, Hackensack, Leonia, Palisades Park, Paramus, and Ridgefield. I observed businesses, cultural events, religious services, and ethnic organizations (e.g. Chinese schools) at the latter locations.

Although I did not live in Fort Lee, I frequented and utilized a number of local businesses. Throughout the course of fieldwork, informal conversations and interviews were conducted. Such interviews were neither scheduled nor planned ahead of time, but occurred spontaneously. Whenever the time and place seemed appropriate, I engaged people in conversation and then asked questions relevant to the study. None of the informal interviews were taped but they were integrated into the fieldnotes. The primary data collection activities (making contact, interviews, and fieldwork) were conducted from November 2007 through November 2008; additional interviews and fieldwork were continued with decreased frequency over the period April 2009 through May 2010.

To supplement the interview data, an analysis of media accounts was undertaken. Newspapers were consulted for coverage of East Asian immigration in Fort Lee and Bergen County. *The New York Times* was consulted from 1972, when the first coverage on the Japanese in Fort Lee appeared. The local daily, *The Record* was consulted from 1984 (the earliest date available in the Fort Lee Public Library database). The local weeklies, *Bergen News* and *Fort Lee Suburbanite*, were consulted from 2007 and 2008, respectively.

Published census data for the period 1970 to 2009 (and, where pertinent, since 1950) were consulted. The 1970s marked the beginning of East Asian immigration to Fort Lee and was thus assumed as an appropriate beginning point from which to trace the

history of East Asian immigration there. A descriptive analysis of census data was undertaken to trace demographic changes, particularly in regard to the East Asian immigrant populations and to provide an overview of population characteristics of Fort Lee. Five-percent Public Use Microdata Sample (PUMS) from the census data (2000) was also consulted in order to identify certain characteristics by East Asian subgroup, that were not readily available in the published census.²² This analysis complemented the qualitative data, providing a wider-scale and historical view of community transformations.

The findings of this study should be considered in the light of its limitations, which include reliance on self-reported data, a non-random selection of informants, and a small sample size. The fieldwork and data are, inevitably, selective. Recruitment of informants through the snowball sampling method precludes representativeness of the sample. Chinese and Korean informants were limited to those who were able to communicate in English. Despite these limitations, the study illuminates the varying experiences of assimilation and ethnic retention among East Asian groups representative of diverse cultures, immigration histories, and a multitude of experiences. It is to be hoped that the employment of multiple kinds of data and methods focusing on a single

²² Results presented in this work using PUMS data are based on weighted data. Given the interest of the present study in Fort Lee, the smallest geographical area was selected from PUMS sub-sets, specifically, Public Use Microdata Area (PUMA code 00303). This PUMA includes boroughs of Cliffside Park, Edgewater, Fairview, Fort Lee, Leonia, Palisades Park, Ridgefield, and Ridgefield Park village. Although this PUMA is not Fort Lee alone, it represents the general East Asian concentration in the vicinity. Those who identified themselves as Chinese or Taiwanese ($n=3,137$, combined), Japanese ($n=3,692$), and Korean ($n=17,381$) in the 2000 census were included in the analysis. I thank Dr. Joseph Pereira, Director, CUNY Data Service of the Center for Urban Research, Graduate Center, City University of New York, for advice on utilization of the PUMS data.

problem, so called “theoretical triangulation” (census data analysis, document analysis, ethnography, in-depth interviews) will offer some basis of validity for this study within the growing research on immigrant assimilation, ethnic retention, and the ethnic suburbs.

ii. Sample Characteristics

All the informants interviewed for the present study have connections with Fort Lee and the surrounding area through residency or work. Thirty-seven of the informants currently reside or have resided in Fort Lee, twenty-seven work there. Many work in New York or other boroughs of Bergen County including Hackensack, Woodland Park, and central New Jersey beyond Bergen. Those informants who do not live in Fort Lee but work there commute from other boroughs in Bergen County as well as from New York City and Queens. Informants included those who live and work outside Fort Lee but who are nevertheless familiar with the borough--for example, residents of Edgewater, Leonia, and Palisades Park. One informant (Korean American) was from Jersey City, but had experience of outreach to Asian communities in the Fort Lee area through work. Despite the varieties of residence and place of work, all informants were well-aware of the growth and presence of the Asian population in the Fort Lee area.

Chinese informants included those of various national origins: mainland China, Hong Kong, Malaysia, and Taiwan, as well as U.S.-born. The age of Chinese informants ranged from the early twenties to fifties and they were naturalized citizens, if not U.S. born. All Chinese informants had received post-secondary education both abroad and in the United States. The majority of Japanese informants were permanent residents or U.S. citizens, along with several expatriates. Except for one, third-generation Japanese

American, all the Japanese informants were foreign-born, first-generation immigrants. The level of education varied from high school graduate to graduate study (master's degree). The ages of informants ranged from the early thirties to seventies. The Korean informants were a mix of foreign-born and U.S. born. While a few Korean informants were permanent residents, the majority were naturalized U.S. citizens. Their age ranged from the early twenties to fifties. Korean informants were typically university-educated, whether in Korea or in the United States, with a few having an advanced degree. The majority of white informants were natives of Fort Lee or adjoining boroughs and/or established residents. The ages of the white informants ranged from early forties to the early eighties. The levels of education ranged from high school to the doctorate, the majority having bachelor's degrees.

iii. Epistemic Notes on Data and Method

It has been stated that researchers should, “study their own research--and themselves--as a regular part of their research” (Gans 1999, 169). It is necessary for researchers to understand that they are an intrinsic part of their own studies and are conditioned by their “culturally and biographically mediated way of seeing--one's distance from one's informants and the inevitable prejudices forming one's baggage of cultural assumptions” (Kondo 1986, 74). The researcher needs to be self-aware, for example, of being an “insider” or an “outsider” to the group and should have an understanding of how being “inside” or “outside” has an impact on the research outcome (Gans 1999). The researcher needs to know how their own trajectory enters into the

interpretation. This is especially true with ethnographic fieldwork and, in the present case, where the researcher is working both “inside” and “outside” her own culture.

There can be no understanding free of value or presuppositions. The present analysis and interpretation--not only the interviews and field work, but also the written materials--are influenced by my position as a Japanese-born, female researcher. The limitations of the data necessarily inform my interpretations and conclusions. Fully conscious of my position of being “other” in the eyes of my informants (perhaps less so with the Japanese subjects, but still the variables of gender, age, and different immigrant status enter into the equation) and of the potential bias in my data, nevertheless, I have endeavored to be self-aware of the conditions under which my research was produced during data collection, analysis, and writing.

Brubaker (2004) cautions against the uncritical adoption of “categories of social and political practice” as “categories of social analysis,” reminding us of the need to distinguish “evidence” gained through field observation and “sociological” knowledge. The aim throughout this dissertation is to produce sociological knowledge by examining preconceptions, by self-inquiry into how methods and processes of analysis translate the results and transform the object of study and, ultimately, by keeping in mind that rather than being “collected,” data are *produced*. The goal in the present research was to maintain a balance between gaining understanding about human groups and social relations while striving to practice scientific reflexivity.

5. Outline of the Chapters

The order of the dissertation is as follows. Chapter 1 lays out the topographical, socio-historical, and demographic context of Fort Lee in which the East Asian influx has occurred over the last forty years. Chapter 2 discusses how the multiethnic suburb has developed there, analyzing factors that have led to the formation, and different paths and experiences of migration and settlement of the three East Asian groups. In light of the present findings from Fort Lee, spatial assimilation and ethnoburb models are assessed in this chapter. The focus of chapter 3 is immigrant engagement in assimilation and ethnic retention through everyday practice. The empirical data show how these processes are dialectically related. Chapter 4 turns to native white perceptions and reactions to East Asian immigration. In analyzing varied native responses, the chapter further considers factors for the relative absence of tension in immigrant-native relationships. Chapter 5 analyzes the meaning of “Asianness” for members of East Asian groups in Fort Lee through examination of processes of negotiation of ethnoracial identity. Chapter 6 develops a theoretical analysis of the dialectic of spatial assimilation and ethnic retention. The work concludes with a discussion of ethnicity, suburbanization, and the consequences of assimilation and ethnic retention.

6. A Note on Terminology

Throughout this dissertation the term “East Asian” is used to refer to people of Chinese, Japanese, and Korean descent. Chinese include those originally from Hong Kong, Taiwan, and also Southeast Asia; whenever relevant, the country of origin is specified. The terms “Asian” and “East Asian” are used interchangeably. When referring to people of South Asian or Southeast Asian origin, they are specified as such.

Terms using the conjoined usage--such as “Korean American,” or “Chinese American,” are largely used for members of the 1.5-generation or U.S.-born second generation. “Chinese,” “Japanese,” “Korean” are generally used to refer to first-generation members of each East Asian group, rather than “Chinese American” or “Korean American,” since the majority of my first-generation informants identified themselves in terms of their national origin. The term “white” is used to refer to native-born white ethnics. Their ancestral origin varied, including Italian, Irish, Jewish, and a mix of multiple white ethnics.

Chapter 1

Grounds for a Multiethnic Space:

Topography, Demography, History

This has always been a town of immigrants. We've always valued its multicultural quality (Jack Alter, former mayor of Fort Lee, *The Record*, 1996).

During a typical, weekday-evening rush hour, many East Asian passengers are noticeable in the cars of the uptown "A" train of New York City's subway system. From their formal business attire, the majority appear to be on their way home from work in the offices of Manhattan. As the train arrives at the 175th Street station/George Washington Bridge Bus Terminal, they jostle with the crowds and make towards the exit. Through the dimly lit passageway, the commuters hurry silently to the buses that will take them to New Jersey. One cannot be certain of the ethno-national origin of Asian commuters by their appearance and they are typically alone. Yet occasional signs of ethnic belonging are suggested by the paraphernalia of their belongings: a translucent red plastic shopping bag with Chinese characters in black; Korean-language newspapers; Japanese paperbacks, thinner and smaller in size than those of America, protected by a paper cover. The bus passengers are racially and ethnically diverse; East Asians are a conspicuous part of this everyday scene of commuting between Manhattan and northern New Jersey.

Crossing the George Washington Bridge offers spectacular views of the bluffs of the Palisades on the west bank of the Hudson River and the Manhattan skyline to the east. On a fine day the Statue of Liberty can be seen far on the horizon, at the southern tip of

Manhattan. The Palisades flank the massive steel structure of the bridge as one approaches Fort Lee. Within five-minutes, the bus is on the New Jersey side, making its first stop at Bridge Plaza, the main disembarkation point for many Asian passengers. Today's racial and ethnic diversity makes it hard to believe that only forty years ago Fort Lee's population was, almost entirely, ethnically white.

This chapter outlines the context of the East Asian influx into Fort Lee. History and social background are important not only for a consideration of contemporary East Asian migration, but also for the development of the borough of Fort Lee as a whole. Pre-existing ethnic and cultural diversity in Fort Lee has been a source of attraction for more recent Asian immigrants. Diversity was a by-product of the George Washington Bridge, which established a direct link with New York from the 1930s. The bridge prompted various ethnic groups to move from New York. Bergen County today is becoming increasingly diverse, but residents in the vicinity still view Fort Lee as the epitome of diversity. The cultural context and socio-spatial disposition of Fort Lee--particularly its geographic relationship with New York City--are essential in understanding how and why East Asians made Fort Lee their suburban home.

1. Topography

The borough of Fort Lee covers 2.5 square miles. There were an estimated 36,235 residents in 2009. (Table 1). Ten miles from midtown Manhattan, Fort Lee is situated on the Palisades overlooking the Hudson River. (Figure 1). Mazur (1981) notes that Fort Lee's history has been tied to the cliffs on which it stands and to the river at its feet where, "the Hudson narrows slightly and the cliffs are closest to the river's edge"

(34). The prominent headlands on both sides of the river led to the choice of Fort Lee as the western terminus of the George Washington Bridge (ibid. 37). [Figure 2] The Bridge joins the site of one Revolutionary-era fort to another, on the Manhattan side, Fort Washington.

The entry point into Fort Lee from the Manhattan side is George Washington Bridge Plaza, where several major highways intersect. “Cars, trucks, and buses, in a seemingly endless stream, carry people and goods through Fort Lee,” connecting northern New Jersey to Manhattan and providing access to the state and beyond for New York (Spehr in Koszarski 2004, 2). The bridge carries Interstate 95, the main artery connecting Maine to Florida and one of America’s busiest highways. Its fourteen lanes receive 300,000 vehicles per day, 2.1 million per week (Rockland 2008, 16). The scale of this ceaseless highway circulation is the first thing that impresses the first-time visitor. For inhabitants of Fort Lee, the George Washington Bridge is both a cherished symbol and the root cause of a perennial problem--traffic. The bridge, as one informant put it, “is both a blessing and nemesis.”

Modern office complexes, visible from Bridge Plaza against a background of high-rise apartment buildings, give a highly urbanized impression. (Figure 3). To the south lies Main Street, Fort Lee’s political and commercial center, running east-west, originally a colonial road (Mazur 1981). Business districts have grown along older arterial road systems in many suburban communities. The borough’s municipal institutions are grouped closely together on Main--the Post Office, Borough Hall, the Senior Center, and Public Library. Next to the library is the Church of the Madonna

(established in 1858), the oldest Catholic church in Bergen County.¹ Lemoine Avenue, running north-south across Main Street, has also developed business and commercial areas. Most of Fort Lee's stores have grown in a linear manner along Main and Lemoine. Businesses in the central commercial areas are within walking distance. Retail stores, restaurants, real estate agencies, banks, travel agencies, insurance agencies, doctors' and dentists' offices stand close together.

Main Street, with its rows of small businesses, has remained structurally the same for the past forty years.² A white male in his fifties, a native of Fort Lee and a local real estate agent, told me that the types of local business on Main Street and Lemoine Avenue before Asian immigration (in the 1970s) included food (delis, grocery stores, restaurants, bakeries, luncheonettes, etc.), clothing stores, dry cleaners, repair stores, services such as barbers, beauty parlors, and insurance and real estate agents. These exist today, to a certain extent, but have frequently been replaced by Korean businesses. Established businesses in hardware, the cigar store, the pizzeria, and bagel store--which might be classified as "American" businesses--are interspersed with Korean stores on Main Street. Some of the "fixtures" (long-time establishments) have been replaced by new businesses--for example, Callahan's, a hotdog restaurant, replaced by the Bank of New Jersey in 2007.³ The Fort Lee Diner, in business for several decades, is now a Korean restaurant.

¹ "FL's Madonna Church Marks 150 Years," *Bergen News*, October 29, 2008, p. 1.

² Confirmed by a comparison of historic photographs and current views of Fort Lee's downtown, October 2009. See also Bertram 2004, 62, 70.

³ "Bank of NJ Opens New Headquarters," *Bergen News*, July 4, 2007, p. 18.

The impact of Asian immigration is visible throughout Fort Lee's downtown. Korean stores and restaurants add an ethnic character to the appearance of the streets. On all the major streets in downtown Fort Lee there are numerous signs for businesses and stores in *Hangul* (Korean) with a few in Japanese and Chinese. In 2006, a local press reported on an "Asian-American entrepreneurial explosion" in the United States, with New Jersey in the forefront of the trend (Verdon 2006). Bergen County had the largest number of Asian-owned firms in New Jersey in 2002. The spread of Asian-owned businesses was especially evident in downtown business districts in Fort Lee, Palisades Park, and Leonia, where store signs in Chinese, Japanese, and Korean are common (ibid.). An interesting recent trend is the appearance of bilingual signs in Japanese and Korean as well as in English.⁴ (Figure 4). Once past the commercial areas, the businesses along the streets become sparse. Nevertheless, those at a distance from Main Street frequently have bilingual signs in English and *Hangul*, advertising medical offices, accounting and law firms, SAT and TOEFL preparatory schools, restaurants, dry cleaners, and hair salons--indicative of the prevalence of Korean businesses.

Fort Lee's center has a couple of small-scale shopping malls that comprise a variety of American and Asian businesses--for example, Chinese restaurants, drug stores, delicatessens, Asian-style bakeries, a Taekwondo school. A few malls have bilingual signs in English and Korean, indicating that the tenants of the entire building are Korean-owned businesses. Asian-style bakeries are popular among residents of varied

⁴ Help wanted ads placed by Korean doctors in Fort Lee seeking Japanese-speaking assistants have appeared in free Japanese papers (in circulation in the metropolitan New York area)--suggestive of an increase in Japanese patients or an attempt to reach out to a Japanese clientele.

ethnicities; there are at least five in Fort Lee. Some bakeries represent a pan-Asian enterprise. One such bakery, originally Japanese, is also franchised in Taiwan. At the time of the field observation, the owner of this bakery was Chinese and the store manager Korean. One Japanese informant told me the owner used to be Japanese. Pastries at these bakeries are influenced by Europe but produced with Asian-style--a curious fusion of West and East.

Main Street does not generally appear to be bustling with business, although the roads are almost always busy with traffic. In the commercial area, the majority of pedestrians are Asians--generally younger age groups, including children. Senior citizens tend to be white--often seen in cafés and bakeries. On weekdays young and middle-aged Korean men and women in business suits and formal office attire are a common sight in commercial areas--evidence of the numerous Korean white-collar businesses in Fort Lee: sometimes people are speaking Korean, sometimes English. Pedestrian traffic is limited, especially on the weekend. One reason for these quiet downtown streets may be the prevalence of banks and business offices. By 10:00 p.m. apart from a few restaurants, all the businesses on Main Street are closed. There are a few exceptions--coffee shops such as Starbucks and Borders bookstore café are usually filled with Asian customers. Some Korean restaurants and food stores appear to be thriving. Since late 2009, some Korean retail stores have disappeared due to the impact of recession; yet newly opening businesses were generally Korean-owned.

Young people in particular commented that Fort Lee's offerings for consumers are inadequate: they have to go to other boroughs to shop or for movies (e.g. Edgewater, Hackensack). But, in general, informants did not seem particularly frustrated; it is easy

for them to find alternatives elsewhere by car--without traffic, one can get “anywhere” within five to ten minutes--a convenience frequently noted as one advantage of living in Fort Lee. Adult residents also commented on the lack of shopping facilities--the President of the Greater Fort Lee Chamber of Commerce remarked that the biggest complaint he hears from residents is the lack of variety in Main Street business (Rossi 2008). Such consumer frustrations relate to large-scale redevelopment plans that resurfaced in 2009 (discussed below).

Fort Lee’s topography is varied, despite its small size. Since the latter half of the nineteenth century until well into the postwar period, Fort Lee was divided into four sections--Coytesville, Fort Lee proper, West Fort Lee, and Palisade. These sections were separated by extensive wooded tracts in the 1930s (Mazur 1981). The area was gradually filled in by the construction of residential apartments after the war. During this process, the sectional divides diminished. Defined by ethnic group, religious affiliation, and social class, each section was previously distinct in physical appearance. Vestiges of the legacy are still discernible in Fort Lee today. The northern part of the town, Coytesville, was a predominantly working-class Irish settlement, where the house and lot sizes were small--it was also home to a number of film studios in the early decades of the twentieth century. Today, newer, bigger, single-family houses and duplexes have replaced the older wooden houses from the previous era: these new houses line the streets immediately next to each other, since the lot size remains small. By contrast, to the south (formerly “Palisade”) there were professional, upper-middle class, primarily German and Jewish residents. Today, grander houses and mansions, conveying the wealth of the residents, remain visible in this area. The central part of town, near Main Street and other

commercial areas, was once predominantly Italian. There are still signs of an Italian concentration--plaster statuettes of the Virgin Mary are found in many of the gardens of the single-family houses; the latter generally look small and relatively old.

High-rise apartments are a dominating presence but low-rise apartments, mostly built prior to the high-rises in the 1950s, are also prevalent. Many of the high-rises were built along the Palisades. Because high-rise zoning was extended to the center of town (Mazur 1981) single-family houses adjacent to towering blocks are now a common sight in most parts of Fort Lee. (Figure 5). By contrast with the prevalence of luxury high-rises, there are several examples of low-rent and rent-subsidized housing. Compared with neighboring boroughs such as Englewood Cliffs (north) or Leonia (west), which are largely residential without high-rises, Fort Lee seems more built-up, more diverse in age and type of buildings. The old and the new co-exist in the architecture of Fort Lee.

A few minutes drive from the central commercial district there are tranquil residential areas of single-family houses--typically two-storied, well maintained, with gardens and garages--although not "typical" suburban homes with a "white picket fence," as one white male informant put it. During field observations there were almost always new residential schemes under construction in some part of town. Unlike Main Street and the business and commercial district, people are rarely seen on the sidewalks in residential areas. Driving through the streets does not always provide information regarding the ethnic composition of the neighborhood. Occasionally, one might observe East Asian residents who happen to be outside--sitting on the terrace on a summer evening, or active during garage sales. The one and one-half hour long procession of Saint Rocco, a predominantly Italian-Catholic event (August 2008) offered an

opportunity to observe the ethnic composition of neighborhoods in the center of the town. People followed the procession at street level and from high-rise apartment windows. The bystanders were racially and ethnically mixed--whites, Hispanics, and South Asians. In the high-rises, the onlookers from windows and verandahs high above appeared to be largely East Asian.

Several areas of Asian residential density were mentioned by informants: near the Fort Lee Community Center, for example, there is a Korean concentration. Here, several Korean-run businesses comprise a small strip mall across the street from the Center--a bakery, restaurant, barber, dry cleaner, and supermarket. Due to the proximity of a Japanese school in Englewood Cliffs and an abundance of rental duplexes, many Japanese corporate families (temporary residents) are found in the northern section. At the same time, informant accounts also indicated patterns of Asian residential dispersion--a large portion of Asian informants characterized their neighbors as white and from various ethnic groups.

Religious organizations are dispersed: some are located in quiet residential areas, although most are built along major thoroughfares, Main Street, Anderson, Center, Lemoine, and Palisade Avenues. There are a total of six public schools: four elementary schools (Numbers 1-4), one middle school (Lewis F. Cole Middle School), and one high school (Fort Lee High School). These are also dispersed throughout the town. Civic amenities are conveniently located for residents: the Recreation Center in William T. Birch Park to the west of Fort Lee, the Community Center on Anderson Avenue, a Youth Center on Lemoine Avenue. There are also several parks which are often used for open-

air community events. Some native white informants recalled there were once three movie theaters in Fort Lee, though none exist there today.

2. Three Historical Narratives

Collectively remembered history typically consists of eventful moments and periods interspersed with long stretches of seemingly empty time. The way the past is remembered and memorialized amplifies what appears to be momentous while compressing or ignoring what is considered uneventful--hence, some periods are “marked,” while others are essentially “unmarked” (Zerubavel 2003). History and meaning are inevitably partial (Lévi-Strauss 1966). History selects regions, periods, groups of people and individuals from these groups to make them stand out.

Three historical periods and events receive emphasis in the media or as community activities in contemporary Fort Lee: George Washington’s retreat during the American War of Independence in 1776; the early development of the film industry in the first decades of the twentieth century; and the opening of the George Washington Bridge in 1931. Apart from these, Fort Lee’s history remains largely undocumented. The parks and their monuments memorialize the War of Independence. Fort Lee Historic Park (part of the Palisades Interstate Park system, founded 1900) houses the Visitor Center. The Center provides information regarding the role of Fort Lee during the Revolutionary War. Monument Park is a few blocks away from Main Street, adjacent to Fort Lee Museum.⁵ To the west of Main lies Constitution Park.

⁵ The Museum was installed in the former residence of Judge Moore in 1999. Built in local bluestone in 1922, the building was on the verge of becoming a strip mall until the community banded together to save it (J. Kim 2009b). The museum is

The figure of George Washington and events related to the American Revolution comprise one of the most favored historical narratives in Fort Lee.⁶ Initially called Fort Constitution, the town was renamed after Charles Lee, one of Washington's generals. A fort to protect the North River was constructed on Washington's order and several streets were laid out. Washington and the Continental Army moved there in the summer of 1776. When Fort Mifflin on the opposite shore of the river was captured by the British, the army evacuated the fort and began the retreat across New Jersey on November 20, 1776 (Bertram 2004). Thomas Paine was stationed in Fort Lee as aide-de-camp to General Nathanael Greene and wrote *The American Crisis* during the retreat.⁷ Fort Lee, it is claimed, can be considered "the birthplace of *The American Crisis*" (Meyers 2007, 44).

The advent of the film industry in the early twentieth century made Fort Lee a boomtown. Motion-picture companies from New York City, in search of rural settings, discovered Fort Lee as a convenient location for outdoor shooting. Filmmakers began to arrive by at least 1908 and found the town filled with hotels, saloons, and livery stables--businesses which had been developed to serve the summer tourist trade (Koszarski 2004). During the second decade of the century, a dozen or so studios and film laboratories were

supported by donations and staffed by volunteers, often members of the Fort Lee Historical Society.

⁶ On George Washington (1732-1799) and the local history of the American Revolution see Adrian C[oulter] Leiby, *The Revolutionary War in the Hackensack Valley: The Jersey Dutch and the Neutral Ground, 1775-1783*, New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, (1962) 1992.

⁷ Thomas Paine (1737-1809) published sixteen papers of political and revolutionary commentary between 1776 and 1783, known collectively as *The American Crisis* (Meyers 2007).

built and many residents found employment in the industry--as extras or working in labs (Bertram 2004). The movie industry flourished for about a decade and so did local business. At the turn of the century, Fort Lee was described as,

the scene . . . of a continuous performance of extremely animated, open-air theatricals. . . . the native population has become accustomed to bands of Indians yelling and dashing about the roads and by-paths, to troops landing on the river bank, to dancing villagers, and every variety of battle, murder, and sudden death at their very doors.⁸

The boom was short-lived. By the 1920s, the majority of studios and businesses were leaving for California. Problems of transportation from New York, harsh weather, lack of natural light during winter (prohibitive for outdoor shooting) and a wartime shortage of coal, drew producers to Hollywood for its temperate climate, low taxes, sunlight, and access to outdoor sites (Koszarski 2004).⁹ By 1935, unable to recover from the loss, Fort Lee presented “a scene of ruin and desolation” (ibid., 20).¹⁰ The historic episode nevertheless offers justification for present local claims that Fort Lee is the “birthplace of the motion picture industry.”¹¹

⁸ “Woes of the Moving Picture Man: Scenes That Never Come Before the Public--An Open Air Performance,” *New York Times*, December 19, 1909.

⁹ Ferries and trolleys gave access to studios in Fort Lee from Manhattan, but increased traffic resulted in delays to filming schedules.

¹⁰ Edmund McCormick, *Bergen Evening Record*, July 12, 1935, quoted in Koszarski 2004.

¹¹ Fort Lee was also home to the Palisades Amusement Park (1897-1971) and a well-known nightclub, The Riviera. Initially built in Coytesville, the latter reopened in 1937 on the Palisades overlooking the Hudson. The panoramic view of the river, the George Washington Bridge, and the New York skyline attracted celebrities and bands for more than a decade and also gambling and crime. The club was condemned by the State of New Jersey in 1953 in order to make way for the Palisades Interstate Parkway (Bertram 2004).

The opening of the George Washington Bridge in 1931 was a decisive factor in Fort Lee's transformation from small rural town to a cosmopolitan suburb of New York City (Mazur 1981, 876). An architectural tour-de-force, the bridge was twice as long as any suspension bridge in the world (4,760 feet between anchorages).¹² The rapid rise of the automobile from the 1920s, the prospect of a crossing to Bergen County, and a new direct link to Manhattan led to real estate speculation of "unprecedented dimensions" in Bergen County and Fort Lee (Mazur 1981, 81-2). Completion of the bridge, however, coincided with the Great Depression.¹³ The anticipated building boom did not materialize, plunging Fort Lee into bankruptcy (Mazur 1981).

Although the full effects did not make themselves felt until after the war years, the bridge salvaged the economy that had collapsed when the movie industry left for the West Coast (Mazur 1981; Rockland 2008). Opening up Fort Lee and a sleepy Bergen County of truck farms, farming centers, and early railroad suburbs, the bridge remains the only one to directly connect Manhattan with New Jersey and the continent beyond. Reproduced widely in official publications and websites that reinforce its symbolic meanings for the borough, the George Washington Bridge has an aesthetic value in

¹² Construction began in May 1927 and the bridge was opened to traffic on October 25, 1931. The lower deck was added in 1962. Othmar Ammann (1879-1965), a Swiss engineer, was appointed master designer and chief engineer, with Cass Gilbert (1859-1934) as architect. Ammann's idea for the uptown Hudson crossing had been developed between 1923-25, and found support from newly-elected New Jersey governor George Silzer (1870-1940, term: 1923-26). See Port Authority of New York and New Jersey website (www.panynj.gov) and Rockland 2008.

¹³ The Depression directly affected the appearance of the Bridge: due to economic pressures, the original intention to finish the steel towers with concrete and granite was cancelled (Rockland 2008).

addition to its commercial and economic role.¹⁴ On a symbolic level, the bridge and its name provide a focus for collective memory.

The local history of the Revolutionary War is an important stake in contemporary narratives concerning aspects of identity in Fort Lee. The memory of the struggle for independence and the founding father is manifest today in nomenclature, monuments, exhibits, and various community-wide events. These include:

The Monument, *Soldiers of the American Revolution*. Bronze sculpture, dedicated in Monument Park in 1908¹⁵

Murals and paintings in public facilities including the Borough Hall and Post Office¹⁶

An annual reenactment of the retreat of the Continental army¹⁷

¹⁴ Le Corbusier's appreciation for the structure is often quoted: "The George Washington Bridge over the Hudson is the most beautiful bridge in the world . . . It is blessed. It is the only seat of grace in the disordered city." Le Corbusier (pseud. Charles-Édouard Jeanneret, 1887-1965) 1947, 75.

¹⁵ Monument Park marks the location of the Colonial fort. The sculpture by Carl E. Tefft (1874-1951) shows a Continental soldier and drummer boy scaling the Palisades. See "Unveil Monument to Fort Lee Heroes: Quiet Jersey Town Stirred by Marching Troops and Cannon Thundering in Salute. Marks Washington's Camp. Gov. Fort Recalls the Struggles of the Revolution and Tells of a Little-Known Battle at Fort Lee," *New York Times*, September 27, 1908, and Bertram 2004. The borough rededicated the monument for the 225th anniversary of the retreat in 2001 (Meyers 2007).

¹⁶ The murals in the Post Office were completed in 1941 by Henry Schnakenberg (1892-1970) for the Work Projects Administration. One of the murals depicts George Washington on the Palisades. Bertram (2004), author's observation.

¹⁷ The reenactment involves encampment in Monument Park, artillery demonstrations, drill and musket firing, and maneuvers in Fort Lee Historic Park. Orchestrated by the Brigade of the American Revolution, a non-profit, living history association (founded 1962). The Brigade consists of around 130 units across the United States: each unit recreates a specific military event during the War of Independence. In Fort Lee, the reenactment is held on the weekend that falls closest to November 20, and receives wide local press coverage. See www.brigade.org.

Visitor Center (opened 1976) in Fort Lee Historic Park, devoted to the history of Washington's retreat

Fort Lee Historic Park's programs for schools, which offer the experience of living in an eighteenth-century military camp.

In 2011, a statue of Thomas Paine is scheduled to be unveiled in Monument Park facing The Monument. In 2009, storytelling of the American Revolution in Korean began to be offered at the Public Library. Pride in the town's history is evident. Whether newcomers or old timers, residents often remarked, "this is where the American Revolution started."

That Fort Lee was once a center of the motion picture industry is also of increasing significance in the borough's collective consciousness. Current attention to the history of film--including the establishment of the Fort Lee Film Commission in 2000--is a product of the interest of local leaders and devotees of this history. Interest is reinforced by borough-sponsored events: for example, the annual Historic Jitney Tour in the autumn, offered free to the public, visiting historic sites of Fort Lee and film festivals screening both classic American and foreign films throughout the year.¹⁸ The Film Commission has incorporated the Asian constituency of the area--reaching out to Asian immigrant groups for film events. Such interest in the borough's film history and its reconstruction has fluctuated over time (Koszarski 2004).

These historical episodes render Fort Lee "unique" while drawing on wider issues of national identity and values--patriotism, the Revolution, American culture and film. In 2004, the centennial of the borough's incorporation, Koszarski's work on the motion

¹⁸ "Historic Jitney Tour: Ghosts of Fort Lee," *Calendar, Fort Lee Suburbanite*, October 16, 2009, p. 14; "Historic Jitney Tour and Night at the Museum," *Calendar, Fort Lee Suburbanite*, October 22, 2010, p. 12.

picture industry in Fort Lee was published. In a preparatory statement commending the publication, a former mayor concluded his open letter with the phrase, “Our story is America’s story” (reproduced in Koszarski 2004). This story is subject to interpretation and reinforcement by present-day actors, as comments by the executive director of Fort Lee Film Commission make clear:

Fort Lee has a great history . . . I don’t see a town in America with this rich history as Fort Lee across the board. Other towns would kill for our history in terms of history of the American Revolution. If it was just the American Revolution, that was it, no Bridge, no anything else, that would be a great history. My God, how many towns were founded by George Washington? Not only did he sleep here, he laid out our streets, and he successfully got out of town and saved the cause of the American Revolution . . . *The American Crisis* . . . Look at the first few paragraphs, he [Paine] writes about Fort Lee. Now, if that was it, wow, okay, I’m happy. Then we have the George Washington Bridge. Forget the American Revolution, if it was just the Bridge. We’ve got the prettiest bridge in the world next to the most vibrant city in the world. Structurally and aesthetically, there’s not a bridge that looks better than that. I love that Bridge. I love the Brooklyn Bridge and I walked across many times there, but that Bridge is special. So if it was just the George Washington Bridge, what a history we have. Forget about the Bridge, forget about the American Revolution. Now we have film. This is where the American film industry was born, Universal, Fox, everything started here. The whole Barrymore [clan] lived in Fort Lee. So now, just talk about film, we have a great history. Now put that together--the Revolution, the Bridge, and film. No town has a better history than that. No town.¹⁹

In addition, the collective memory of Fort Lee is perceived as having a universal aspect: by living in Fort Lee and thereby sharing its historical past, assimilation as an American is open to all:

It’s an amazing history, and it’s a history that appeals to any ethnic group that comes in a hundred years from now. A hundred years from now, people--I don’t care what their background is in Fort Lee--they’re going to be talking about what we’re talking about now. The history of film,

¹⁹ Personal interview: Executive Director, Fort Lee Film Commission, May 9, 2008.

they're going to talk about the history of the American Revolution and the George Washington Bridge. They are the things they'd be proud of as Americans who live in Fort Lee, regardless of their backgrounds. So I'm very confident because of our rich history, we appeal to any ethnic group that comes in. And that history and quid pro quo becomes their history. So all these kids who are in the school system, that's their history, they are as much American as I am. They have as much claim to the American Revolution as I do, that's their history. And that's going to be the kids' history.²⁰

Creating a local identity is on the agenda of community figures. The historical record is being reconsidered in a way that recalls the construction of symbolic life in other American communities, where “self-respect is still present and vital, and the knowledge of past greatness makes the modern city important to itself and to the whole society” (Warner 1959, 133).²¹

3. Postwar Suburban Growth: Since the 1950s

Mazur (1981) argues that Fort Lee has been committed to economic expansion since before World War Two. This commitment was linked to plans to increase municipal revenues in the face of mounting deficits and unpaid taxes, caused by failure in land speculation, premature subdivisions, and overdevelopment of the infrastructure connected with anticipated income from the opening of the George Washington Bridge. Bankrupt, the borough was placed under the supervision of the State Municipal Finance Commission. Fort Lee's activities were monitored from 1933 until early 1955, when state control over municipal finances was relinquished (Mazur 1981).

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ See the “Yankee City” series, especially on the symbolic life of a modern community in New England (Warner 1959).

As with the American suburb in general, home building in Fort Lee accelerated during the 1950s (Mazur 1981). Postwar housing shortages led to the conversion of single-family to two-family houses and the building of apartment projects (e.g. garden apartments) beginning in the late forties. Officials favored a virtually unlimited development: the borough imposed no restrictions on the building of high-rise apartments which seemed to be the ultimate answer to the question of growth (Mazur 1981). The first, luxury high-rise complex was built between 1964 and 1968--a total of six buildings on 32 acres--ushering in an era of upward mobility in Fort Lee. The municipality continued to adapt its zoning restrictions to accommodate such development, despite objections from certain residents. Fifteen high-rise apartments were built between 1965 and 1975 (Mazur 1981).

According to Mazur (1981), between 1950 and 1975 Fort Lee was rapidly converting from a suburban community of predominantly single-family homes into a heterogeneous, cosmopolitan mix dominated by high-rise apartments occupied by upper middle-income families. The population burgeoned during the 1950s--well before the influx of East Asian populations. Between 1950 and 1960, the population of Fort Lee increased at a rate of 87.3 percent (from 11,647 to 21,815)--approximately double that of Bergen County during the same period (44.7 percent). The population increase between 1960 and 1970 was 40.4 percent (U.S. Bureau of the Census 1973). The majority of those who moved to Fort Lee between 1950 and 1970 were Italian, followed by German and Irish. By 1970, those of Polish and Russian origin had increased also (U.S. Bureau of the Census 1952, 1962, 1973).

State-wide phenomena also help in understanding Fort Lee's development in the postwar period. Proximity to New York City and Philadelphia shaped New Jersey's economy and its population distribution--given an extensive highway system linking the city to suburb, and suburb with suburb (Friedman 1994). The decades following the end of the war witnessed growth in New Jersey associated with widespread ownership of automobiles and the rapid construction of superhighways. State Routes 4 and 17 began at the George Washington Bridge and ran through Bergen County. The perceived need for large-scale "through routes" expedited the construction of the Garden State Parkway (1946-1957) and the New Jersey Turnpike (1951) which have become the most densely utilized toll roads in the Northeast (Schwartz and Prosser 1977). Bergen County had, thus, two major periods of growth. The first was during the 1920s as the automobile began to make home ownership outside the city limits a reality for many. The second was during the suburban building boom of the postwar years, when home ownership fell within reach of most of the population (Mazur 1981).

By the 1970s, Fort Lee had gained a reputation as a high-rise bedroom community for New York City and as an affluent metropolitan suburban town (Daniels 1983). Fort Lee belongs to the waterfront area called the "New Jersey Gold Coast," along the Hudson, stretching between Bergen and Hudson Counties--the area that became a real estate boom in the 1980s, resulting in high land and property prices (Martin 2001). The image of luxury high-rise condominiums lining the Palisades, with Hudson River and Manhattan skyline views, is often used to represent the borough. The social characteristics of the community altered drastically. By 1975, Fort Lee had a large upper middle-class segment with many single and empty-nesters. During the 1970s, the

balance of power shifted from the older, predominantly Republican, homeowners to younger, overwhelmingly Democratic tenants (Mazur 1981, 475).

As the suburbs began to offer sites for employment as well as places to live, jobs became suburbanized. Fort Lee was a business center by the 1980s (Oser 1981). Today, Fort Lee is characterized as an “edge city”--a “new mix of urbanity,” containing all the functions of the traditional downtown of a major city: a place to live, work and shop, despite distance from the city. Garreau (1991) notes that in the late 1980s, “edge cities” in New Jersey, including Fort Lee, grew more rapidly and generated more jobs than the entire state of New York. In 2007, there were over 1,600 business establishments in Fort Lee.²² The town functions both as a residential and commercial center. Convenience for commuters to Manhattan, a good school system, and a safe environment have attracted New Yorkers and those from further afield.

Interestingly, despite wide acknowledgement of the convenience of travel to New York City, the residents interviewed rarely seem to visit the city, unless working in Manhattan. Everyday activities of residents for the most part seem limited to Bergen County without going beyond adjoining towns. The trend of increasingly weak ties between New York and the surrounding region was noted in press accounts some twenty years ago (Glaberson 1992). Such trends reflect the shift of retail business and employment into suburbia with a consequential loss of attraction of the city. Informants often remarked that I was coming to Fort Lee, “all the way from New York,” as though this were a great distance--a distance that is psychological and social, not actual.

²² See 2007 Zip Code Business Patterns (NAICS), County Business Patterns, U.S. Bureau of the Census, <http://censtats.census.gov/cgi-bin/zbpnaic/zbpsect.pl>, accessed June 11, 2010.

4. Characteristics of the Populations

East and South Asians became the fastest growing immigrant groups in New Jersey in the 1990s. During this decade, New Jersey's Asian populations grew by more than sixty percent--a rate higher than the national growth of forty percent. The number was even higher in northern New Jersey (Most and Kane 1999).

Bergen County began to attract Asian immigration in the 1970s. In 1970, Bergen already had the largest number of Japanese (1,177) and the second largest number of Chinese (1,372) among twenty-one counties in New Jersey (U.S. Bureau of the Census 1973). Over the last twenty years, Bergen County has become the largest- and fastest-growing suburban settlement of Korean immigrants in the New York metropolitan area (Oh 2007). Today, Asians make up almost half the population of some towns in Bergen County and have a presence in almost every municipality (*Record*, 2001).

The predominantly white population of Bergen County has declined markedly, largely because of small household sizes among whites. Meanwhile, a steady influx of immigrants, mostly Asian and Hispanic in Bergen County, has kept the overall population stable (Mumma 1997). Media reports indicate thriving immigrant businesses in the state breathing life into ailing downtowns. Bergen County's low crime rate, its cleanliness, its parks and open areas, easy access to the mountains and recreational areas to the north, and rich institutions and establishments serving the general public, have been sources of attraction for newcomers searching for a place of residence.

In this overall trend, Fort Lee has been the major settlement destination for East Asian immigrants over the past forty years--initially Japanese, followed by Koreans, and,

most recently, Chinese (Asian American Federation of New York 2004). (Figure 6). Between 1970 and 2009, the percentage of whites dropped in Fort Lee, from 94.4 to 51.6 percent.²³ (Table 1). At the same time, the percentage of East Asians increased from 1.7 to 29.7 percent. Italians constituted the majority of the white population in 1970--27.6 percent of the borough's population (U.S. Bureau of Census 1973). In 2000, Italians continued to make up the largest ethnic group, though at a decreased level compared to previous decades (11.4%), followed by Russians (7.8%) and Irish (4.8%) [U.S. Bureau of the Census 2000] Hispanics and Latinos rose from 2.9 to 11.2 between 1970 and 2009. The number of Filipinos and Asian Indians also increased, less so for Pacific Islanders. The number of blacks has remained virtually unchanged. Since 1970, the population growth rate in Fort Lee has not been as high as the preceding two decades (1950-1970). The decline of white inhabitants seems to have been offset by the increase of Asian immigrants. (Table 2).

Fort Lee is currently known for its Korean population--the second largest in Bergen County, after neighboring Palisades Park where Koreans constituted 35 percent (6,065 inhabitants) of the population in 2000. Fort Lee also has significant numbers of Chinese and Japanese residents. The borough has been home to the largest number of Japanese in New Jersey for a number of years and has the largest number of Chinese in Bergen County. Over the last forty years, the composition of the East Asian population has shifted: Japanese were the majority Asian group during the 1970s through the 1980s, and the first East Asian group to move into Fort Lee in significant numbers. A Korean influx followed the Japanese; the Korean population doubled between 1990 and 2000.

²³ 2009 estimate based on the 2005-2009 American Community Survey.

As the Korean community grew, the Japanese diminished. (Table 3). The decline in the late 1990s was due to economic stagnation in Japan and reduced business activity of Japanese firms in the U.S. While there has been a small proportion of longtime Chinese residents since the 1970s, the significant Chinese influx seems to have begun in more recent years.²⁴

The proportion of foreign-born residents has increased over the years in Fort Lee; in recent years the majority have been East Asians. (Table 4). In 2000, among the foreign-born (44.7 percent) about one-half were naturalized citizens. 23.6 percent of all residents were not U.S. citizens. Further, in 2000, 17,275 out of 33,629 residents (51.4 percent) had lived in the same house in 1995. This means that about half the population has lived in their present residence for a maximum of five years--indicative of the transience of the population. Among those who lived in a different house in 1995, 11.7 percent (3,938 inhabitants) were living abroad.²⁵ This means that about twelve percent of the population may be considered recent arrivals from abroad and this population has been living in Fort Lee for a maximum of the preceding five years, in 2000. These statistics suggest a large proportion of newcomers in Fort Lee.

The surge of high-rise apartment houses, noted above, brought a change in the social characteristics of the population. (Table 5). In 1950, the census indicates about forty percent of Fort Lee resident occupations as blue-collar. Over time, the most commonly held occupations have shifted from blue- to white-collar (administrative,

²⁴ Scholarly work is lacking but mass media accounts are suggestive of this trend. See Kim (2003) and Hsu (2007).

²⁵ Social Explorer Demographic Reports (www.socialexplorer.com). U.S. Bureau of the Census, Summary Files 1 and 3, 2000.

managerial, and professional). The census data agree with the account of a retired white schoolteacher who taught in the Fort Lee school system for fifty years--she reminisced that Fort Lee was a "blue-collar community" consisting mainly of Italians when she first arrived there. The same informant's statement, that white-collar, upper-middle class people now live in Fort Lee, appears true on the whole; but the overall growth patterns may be more varied. The rise to middle-class suburb seems to have occurred in the 1970s and continued well into the 1980s. While the role of Korean business in the revitalization of Fort Lee's economy is acknowledged, the current mayor believes, "Fort Lee has gotten old and tired" in recent years--losing economic ground to neighboring boroughs such as Edgewater (south) or Englewood (north), where redevelopment has successfully regenerated the local economy.²⁶

The abundance of rental property has led to a relatively large number of renters in Fort Lee. (Table 6). In 2000, Fort Lee's owner-occupied housing units numbered 9,301, or 53.3 percent, while renter-occupied housing units numbered 7,243, or 41.5 percent. By comparison, the proportion of owner-occupied housing units in Bergen County as a whole was 65.4 percent, whereas renter-occupied housing units were 31.9 percent in the same year.²⁷ Table 6 shows an increase in the renter-occupied housing during the 1960s and 1970s and in the owner-occupied housing between 1980 and 1990. According to

²⁶ This view contrasts with those of East Asian informants, especially Koreans who tended to give a positive assessment regarding the growth of the borough. See chapter 5, *infra*.

²⁷ "DP-1. Profile of General Demographic Characteristics: 2000. Census 2000 Summary File 1 (SF 1) 100-Percent Data," Bergen County and Fort Lee, New Jersey. American FactFinder (www.census.gov). The percentage of vacant housing units for Bergen County was 2.6. The percentages computed here include vacant units.

one, local real estate agency owner, the majority of Fort Lee's apartments were built during the 1960s and the 1970s as rental properties whose rent included utilities. Having properties as rentals became unaffordable for many property owners due to the unprecedented level of inflation during the 1980s. Subsequently most rental properties were converted to cooperatives, some into condominiums, during this decade.

The populations of Fort Lee are mixed in terms of socioeconomic status, even though the borough may be considered a largely middle-class community. Household income distribution by racial and ethnic group shows the presence of both low-income and high-income groups. (Figure 7). The median household income in 1999 for the borough was 58,161 dollars.²⁸ By racial group, the "some other race alone householder" had the highest median household income of 63,859 dollars, followed by Hispanic householders (62,104 dollars), Asian alone householders (61,037 dollars), non-Hispanic white householders (58,005 dollars), and African American alone householders (46,000 dollars).²⁹ The relatively high income level among Hispanic residents may in part have to do with the presence of affluent Hispanics, especially Cubans, in Bergen County (Mumma 1997). Household incomes varied by East Asian subgroup: the median household income in 1999 for Chinese was 62,344 dollars, 75,865 dollars for Japanese,

²⁸ Social Explorer Demographic Reports (<http://www.socialexplorer.com>). U.S. Bureau of the Census, Summary File 1, 2000.

²⁹ "Some other race" includes all other responses not included in the "White," "Black or African American," "American Indian and Alaska Native," "Asian" and "Native Hawaiian and Other Pacific Islander" race categories. Respondents providing write-in entries such as multiracial, mixed, or a Hispanic/Latino group (e.g. Mexican, Puerto Rican, or Cuban) in the "some other race" category are also included. See, http://quickfacts.census.gov/qfd/meta/long_68178.htm.

and 56,354 dollars for Koreans.³⁰ In 2000, in terms of education, Asians were the best educated: 80.5 percent of Asians had attained post-secondary education, 57.8 percent Hispanic, 72.4 percent of non-Hispanic blacks, and 65.2 percent of whites. (Table 7). Asians had the highest percentage of university graduates (42.3 percent) and graduate or professional degree recipients (19.6 percent) among the four racial groups.³¹

5. Redevelopment Area 5: Long-Standing Commitment to Growth

Sixteen acres of wasteland, just off the approach to the George Washington Bridge, have remained unused for nearly forty years--dormant since the time of their initial leveling in 1972. The site is the last vacant tract of land in Fort Lee. Formerly the site of an Italian American community--with residences, retail stores, and a movie theater--the land has been designated for large-scale redevelopment, but none of the proposed projects have been realized.³² A local developer originally purchased the land in the seventies, but due to financial need turned to the Investors Funding Corporation for financing. In 1975 the latter was convicted of authorizing bribery of municipal officials to gain support for their plans for a shopping center on the site (Collins 1980). In the

³⁰ "Fort Lee Borough, New Jersey, Census 2000 Demographic Profile Highlights: Selected Population Group." U.S. Census Bureau, American FactFinder (<http://factfinder.census.gov>). The household income figures cited here are based on Chinese only, Japanese only, and Korean only.

³¹ Social Explorer Demographic Reports (<http://www.socialexplorer.com>). U.S. Bureau of the Census, Summary File 3, 2000.

³² The demolished community was referred to as an "Italian" community by my informants, rather than "Italian American." It is a noticeable characteristic of white residents in Fort Lee to refer to their ethnic origin--instead of "hyphenated American usage."

early 1980s, another developer bought the property but eventually sold the land in the late 1990s.³³

Town and Country Developers purchased the property in 2003. The site plan was approved in April 2005 by the borough and ground was broken the following October. In 2007, the plan, known locally as the “Centuria” project, was ready to be launched (Martin 2007). It was reported that the multi-million dollar project would be “the biggest in Fort Lee history” (ibid.)--a large-scale, high-profile, multi-use complex of retail stores, office space, over 800 luxury condominiums, a first-class hotel, and a conference center.³⁴

The euphoria did not last. In May 2008, Fort Lee Borough Council declared the developer in default of its agreement (Rossi 2008b, 2008c). Despite the extensive plan, only site preparation work had been completed by that time. Town and Country owed the borough 750,000 dollars in back taxes and a contribution for the relocation of utilities at the site. The developer did not pay back the debt by the date set forth by the Borough. In June 2008, the Borough Council terminated the agreement with the developer. In September, it was reported that the project remained “stagnant,” with nothing further on the horizon. Centuria was often tagged as “ill-fated” in the press, when describing the stalled project.³⁵ This undeveloped space has remained an abandoned patch of broken concrete, rubble, and weeds during the course of the present study.

³³ The second developer to purchase the property was The Helmsley, the largest real-estate developer in New York. See Firschein, 2009a.

³⁴ Figures cited in the media varied from 700 million to one billion dollars.

³⁵ “Higher Taxes, Centuria ‘Stagnant’,” *Bergen News*, September 17, 2008, p. 1.

In late 2009, the local press reported excitedly on a new mega-, mixed-use redevelopment plan (Martin 2009). In the midst of the economic crisis, four developers competed in response to a Request for Proposal (REP) issued by the Mayor and Council.³⁶ The project was renamed “Redevelopment Area 5.” Four public-hearing sessions were held in early December 2009, one for each proposal. The two-hour sessions included a presentation by the developer and an audience question-and-answer period.³⁷ About 250 residents packed the meeting room of the Community Center for each session, with standing room only. The sessions often overran the scheduled two hours, running for nearly three hours. The audience was largely comprised of business people, community leaders, and concerned residents and families. There was a significant presence of Korean women and men but few blacks or Hispanics in the audience. During the question and answer period, several Koreans--with leadership roles in the community--raised questions along with white residents. The questions included the traffic flow, the impact of the projects on existing retail business, and the project’s likely impact on the school system and community as a whole. The Korean residents seemed comfortably integrated into these public forums.³⁸

³⁶ See “Fort Lee Seeks Proposals for Centuria Development,” *Bergen News*, February 18, 2009, p. 1; Firschein 2009a.

³⁷ One of the proposals represented a joint venture of local and Korean developers. Their project was entitled “Amerea” (portmanteau word joining “America” with “Korea.”). One presenter explained that the president of Cheongwon America, the Korean developer, had personally interviewed business owners, gaining insight into local needs and expectations.

³⁸ The mayor made efforts to invite the leaders of major ethnic and civic organizations in Fort Lee for participation in the meetings--to gain a “good selection of our community representation.” Support from all groups, the mayor stated, is crucial for

Enthusiasm in the town was running high--the venture was announced as the biggest project in Fort Lee since the construction of the George Washington Bridge and a much desired source of increased municipal revenue. In addition, some of the proposals include an arts/cultural component--a film museum and a movie theater. The completion of the imminent redevelopment project was felt to be decisive in transforming Fort Lee into a thriving urban community. Once the “envy of Bergen County,” Fort Lee now needs Redevelopment Area 5 for its “renaissance” and “retail and residential revival”--the return to a lost status.³⁹

6. Conclusion: The Production of a Multiethnic Space

Fort Lee embodies several dualities--urban and suburban, cosmopolitan and local, transient and rooted. The contraries can be an attraction for some residents--while remaining accessible and offering urban amenities, Fort Lee maintains a “small town feel.” On the one hand, a large segment of Fort Lee lives in high-rise apartments and condominiums--an affluent, transient population, for whom Fort Lee is mainly a bedroom community. Within twenty years, Fort Lee has become “semi-urban,” a “mini-Manhattan,” a “mega-city”--the suburban character having been permanently lost, according to many established residents.⁴⁰ Yet despite a large transient population and

a diverse community. Mayor Mark Sokolich, Mayor’s Office, Borough Hall, Fort Lee: Personal interview, December 3, 2009.

³⁹ Variousy stated by Mayor Sokolich. Quoted in Almenas 2008b; personal interview with Mayor Sokolich, December 3, 2009.

⁴⁰ Several residents remarked that Fort Lee had remained a quiet town until the late 1980s, suggestive of perceptions of large-scale and rapid development as a relatively recent phenomenon.

urbanization, Fort Lee retains a core of community and a strong native white constituency. Cultural institutions such as the Fort Lee Museum offer a site where established residents can organize events and gather together, maintaining tightly-knit relations. The heterogeneity of the population, however, is seen by some as contributing to the general lack of neighborly contact and a sense of “division” among its populations.

The diversity of Fort Lee is not limited to ethnic minorities. The white population is also ethnically diverse. Rapid East Asian immigration has been inextricably linked with Fort Lee’s transition from suburban to urban, from homogeneity to heterogeneity. As an “edge city” the borough is also a “work in progress” (Garreau 1991). The construction of place reflects a complex of attitudes and values. A political climate that is “exceptionally receptive to change and economic development” (Mazur 1981, 89) may have played a role in the influx of East Asian capital (see chap. 2). Unraveling the social mechanisms that have placed Fort Lee in the vanguard of multicultural development in northern New Jersey may help understand wider issues of multiethnic community and the patterns and consequences of migration.

The following chapters undertake an inquiry into these transformations. Specifically, they seek to explore the factors, forms, and organization of ethnic/immigrant communities that have emerged over the last forty years. What does Fort Lee teach us regarding questions of immigrant assimilation and race and ethnicity?

Chapter 2

Community and Communities:

The Formation of a Multiethnic Suburb

Fort Lee is surely America, but it's not really America, either (Japanese male, Fort Lee resident, expatriate, forty-four years old).

I think this [Fort Lee] is more . . . Asian place to me (Chinese female, Fort Lee resident, first-generation forty-two years old).

People want to be where they are comfortable . . . it's a very comfortable place for many of the Korean Americans to live (Korean female, 1.5-generation, business owner and community leader).

Korean residents in this town, I think, actually brought back vitality to this town. And that is evidenced by all the Korean restaurants that have been opened up and all the newer businesses that are opening up. If you go to schools, thirty percent of the student population is Korean American . . . I'm not saying that that would be the only reason why this town is so vital as it is now. But they certainly played a major role in that . . . this town is constantly evolving (Korean male, Fort Lee resident, 1.5-generation thirty-three years old).

This chapter examines the sociohistorical formation of East Asian immigrant communities in Fort Lee. The discussion follows a chronological sequence--beginning with the Japanese, followed by the Korean and Chinese immigrations. Factors and conditions contributing to the formation of the immigrant communities, the characteristics of each community, and the manifestations of immigrant influence in local life are discussed. In light of these characteristics the chapter further considers spatial

assimilation and the ethnoburb model with reference to the convergence of East Asian immigration in Fort Lee.

1. Japanese Immigration

i. Before Fort Lee: Japanese Immigration and Economic Growth in the 1960s

Large-scale Japanese immigration into the New York area began in the 1960s.

The migration to the U.S. was based on an outwardly-dependent economic policy in Japan, which obliged Japanese companies to develop export markets for industrial products, above all in hard-currency countries such as the United States. Japanese exports of manufactured goods proved highly successful (Trevor 1991) and were a factor in Japan's changing status as the fastest-growing economy in the world during the late 1960s and early 1970s. Japanese banks and trading companies had already begun to venture overseas in the 1950s, followed by manufacturing companies in the 1970s. From the 1970s, with the acceleration of Japan's direct investment in the United States in manufacturing, finance, and wholesale trade (Fang 1996), corporate job assignments abroad were a crucial aspect of strategy for mainstream Japanese companies. The majority of Japanese immigrants to the United States in the early postwar period consisted of male "*chūzaiin*" (business expatriates) without accompanying family.¹ Expatriates--more "sojourners" than immigrants--have been theorized as a non-

Note. Translations from the Japanese interviews are by the author, unless otherwise specified.

¹ Expatriates are defined as temporary migrants, often from industrial countries, who reside abroad for purposes such as business, religious mission, teaching, or leisure (Cohen 1977).

integrative component in the host society, who form a small yet often highly visible and functionally important group (Bonacich 1973; Cohen 1977; Mizukami 2007; Siu 1952).

For convenience of the commute to New York City and cheaper real estate, the Japanese first concentrated in the New York borough of Queens, mainly in Flushing and Fresh Meadows. Press reports note that the concentration in Flushing began in 1964 and 1965 (Shepard 1972; see also Kusumoto and Murray 1989). Although these expatriates were often described as “business elite” by my informants and in the press, they faced economic challenges in the United States. Limitations on funds taken outside Japan and the considerably weaker yen (fixed exchange rate of 360 yen to the dollar, until 1971) left expatriate Japanese with reduced incomes barely sufficient for survival. In northeast Queens, Japanese expatriates found property they could afford for both business and residential purposes, frequently using their apartments as office space.

A trend toward suburbanization of the Japanese began in the 1970s. With the improvement of their financial situation, the Japanese began to look for “better” places to live beyond Queens. By the 1970s, Bergen County, New Jersey, was attracting Japanese manufacturing firms as the county grew into one of the thriving business and industrial regions of the New York area. The transformation of the marine transport system (containerization) in the 1960s rendered the New York ports obsolete and made the area around Newark and Elizabeth a new center for international trade.² For Japanese manufacturers it made good business sense to locate their U.S. headquarters in New

² By 1970, Newark and Elizabeth, New Jersey represented the “world’s largest container complex” (Levinson 2006, 235). Newark offered an ideal hub; its waterfront offered space to marshal trucks, access to nearby rail lines, and easy connections to the New Jersey Turnpike (opened 1951). Levinson 2006.

Jersey since they customarily transported assembled items to the United States by container. In 1981, the *New York Times* counted approximately seventy Japanese corporations in northern New Jersey (Geist 1981). Today these include multinational corporations such as Panasonic (Secaucus), Sanyo (Little Ferry, Allendale), Sharp (Mahwah), Sony (Park Ridge), Toshiba (Wayne). Bergen County shared in the general economic upsurge in the suburbs, following corporate relocations to Essex, Morris, Passaic, and Union counties, as well as to the suburbs of Westchester and Connecticut (Ferretti 1972). Bergen was also an important site for Japanese manufacturers, given the proximity to the Japanese banks of New York City.

By 1990, the Japanese were among the most suburbanized minorities in the greater New York area (Alba, Denton, Leung, and Logan 1995). Kawai's doctoral thesis (2000) documents that Japanese expatriate families gradually dispersed, settling primarily in three, tri-state suburbs: Bergen County (New Jersey), Fairfield County (Connecticut), and Westchester County (New York). Japanese residence in Bergen County was related to the increased presence of Japanese companies there.

ii. The First Wave of East Asian Immigration

Japanese were the first nonwhite ethnic minority of significant proportion to settle in Fort Lee in the 1970s. Today's residents, regardless of ethnicity or nationality, frequently remark that, "it was all Japanese before." The earliest media report on the Japanese in Fort Lee dates to 1972, and concerns a Japanese grocery store opened in 1969, thought to be the only one in Bergen at the time (Shavick 1972).

How did the Japanese discover Fort Lee and make the move from Queens?

Previous research (Flory 1989; Kawai 2000; Shinkai 1994) does not examine this question, nor did the informants for the present research seem to know exactly how it had occurred. Generally, Japanese informants guessed that Fort Lee was considered simply as the first town after Manhattan on the New Jersey side of the Hudson River, across the George Washington Bridge. The commute to midtown Manhattan was not much different, in length or difficulty, than that from Queens and is shorter than that from Long Island or the Westchester suburbs. Safety and the lower population density, compared to Queens, also attracted the Japanese and the cost of living and real estate in Fort Lee were not too high. The availability of rental properties in Fort Lee was decisive since the majority of Japanese were temporary residents. Today, Japanese residents in Fort Lee and Edgewater tend to be junior management, researchers at Columbia University, or diplomats.³

Part of the reason for the Japanese influx was the existence of a Japanese real estate agency, opened for business in Fort Lee in 1974. This was the first Japanese (and also first nonwhite) real estate agency and is now one of the oldest realtors in Fort Lee. The president of the agency, a Japanese-speaking, third-generation Japanese American, served as a bridge for expatriates. When the president began his business, his clients were ninety-nine percent white. As a large number of Japanese companies began to move to New Jersey, his business prospered due to the growing number of Japanese

³ My Japanese informants explained that expatriates reside in areas of Japanese concentration in the New York metropolitan area depending on their rank in the company and in relation to real estate prices. Top executives are usually required to live in Manhattan close to their workplace; senior management tends to live in the more expensive Westchester suburbs.

clients in the Fort Lee area. The majority of the agency's clients are now Japanese expatriates, especially those seeking rental properties. The agency also works with Chinese, Italian, Jewish, and Korean landlords, who prefer to rent properties to Japanese. In this case, the real estate agency seems to have played a role in the growth of the Japanese population. On the other hand, the growth of Korean real estate business was often seen by my informants today (both Korean and non-Korean) as a response to the increase in the Korean population.

The principal of a private Japanese school in Englewood Cliffs (north of Fort Lee) gave a further reason for the Japanese influx into Fort Lee. His decision to relocate his school from Manhattan to New Jersey in 1989 indicates that the Japanese consciously chose a place that was not hostile. He cited the case of a full-time Japanese school, subsidized by the Japanese government. This school was originally located in Flushing from 1976 to 1992, in a largely blue-collar neighborhood where anti-Japanese sentiment was overt.⁴ When the school sought new premises in Fairfield County, Connecticut, the tension continued, despite efforts to blend in with the local community, made up largely of white-collar residents. Avoidance of possible class-based hostility and social tension against Japanese, signaled by the case of the government-subsidized Japanese school, played a role in his relocation to Englewood Cliffs. The principal had been informed of the expanding Japanese community in Fort Lee, which was "neither blue-collar nor white-collar"--and offered a comfortable setting for the Japanese.

⁴ After 1992, the school was divided and relocated to Greenwich, Connecticut and Oakland, New Jersey.

The reputation of Fort Lee's racial and ethnic tolerance seemed to have played a role in Japanese decisions. A few Japanese informants also mentioned that Fort Lee was already ethnically-mixed prior to Japanese immigration, and explained that Fort Lee's history as a film-making center had been conducive to an environment receptive toward different ethnic groups and cultures. One Japanese female informant emphasized the relative receptiveness of Fort Lee toward foreigners, compared to upper middle-class suburbs elsewhere in the New York area, including northern Bergen and Westchester, where Japanese, despite their relatively comfortable means, felt unwelcome. Such rejection was said to be based on the fear that Japanese children, whose first language was not English, would lower test scores in the public school system. The inference from the statements of Japanese informants was that earlier Japanese newcomers did not experience such strong resentment in Fort Lee.

A white, bilingual teacher of Japanese at one of the Fort Lee public schools, reported having heard that the town was welcoming toward Japanese when she first took the position in 1985. She was told this was the reason for the Japanese influx to Fort Lee. The same teacher remembered that some Jewish leaders of the community explained they were inviting Japanese to Fort Lee because the Japanese felt comfortable there. She assumed that some leaders of the Japanese community had communicated with these community leaders, eventually spreading the word. The same informant confirmed previous research (Shinkai 1994) on the important role of a former schools superintendent in the incorporation of Japanese students into the public school system. The presence of co-ethnics was not explicitly mentioned as a primary reason for moving to Fort Lee among my Japanese informants--although this was no doubt a factor. A

combination of various factors and considerations thus promoted the influx of the first nonwhite group into Fort Lee.

iii. Characteristics of the Japanese in Fort Lee: Sojourners and Settlers

In the forty year history of Japanese immigration into Fort Lee, the majority of Japanese have typically consisted of corporate employees with families, on temporary visas, posted overseas by companies for three to five years. It is estimated that between eighty and eighty-five percent are such expatriates: the remaining fifteen to twenty percent are U.S. citizens or permanent residents.⁵ The majority of expatriate families arrive in Fort Lee directly from Japan (Kawai 2000). Fort Lee appears to provide a “foothold” for newcomers because of its convenience and the availability of ethnic services. In more recent years, an increasing number of Japanese companies have moved their offices to Fort Lee from Manhattan in search of less expensive rents, according to one Japanese female working for a Japanese corporate headquarters in Fort Lee.

Japanese expatriates in Fort Lee tend to be homogeneous in terms of socioeconomic status. Reflecting the changing economic climate in Japan, expatriates are now younger than in the past, as companies have cut down on expatriation costs, which were especially high for executives (see Flory 1989; Shinkai 1994). The Japanese in the earlier phase of immigration into Fort Lee were typically male executives in their fifties, “business elites,” with established positions within their firms. At that time, because their children tended to be high-school age, who had to prepare for college

⁵ Estimates based on membership of the Japanese-American Society of New Jersey (to be discussed in chapter 3, *infra*) and the characteristics of Japanese clientele given by a Japanese realtor in Fort Lee.

entrance, expatriates tended to come to the U.S. on their own, or just with their wife, leaving their children in Japan. In the 1970s, overseas assignments signified honor, since the number of opportunities were limited and premium wages were paid for overseas work. The Japanese population in Fort Lee in the 1970s represented a select group with high prestige. Overseas assignments are now viewed differently in Japan and are not so prestigious--to the extent that they have become an integral part of mainstream middle-class experience (Kurotani 2005). They may sidetrack a corporate career or create problems of readjustment into Japanese life, including education for children (O'Reilly 1988; Tung 1984). The majority of expatriate families return to Japan on completion of the temporary corporate assignment. Some expatriates, however, continuously assume overseas assignments and lead highly transnational lives. They arrive in Fort Lee from another foreign location or from other cities in the United States.

Expatriates in Fort Lee today, in their thirties and forties and increasingly in their twenties, tend to come to the United States as couples, sometimes with very young children. An increasing number have a child while residing in America. Due to the relatively young age of these parents, a significant number of pupils in the elementary schools of Fort Lee have been Japanese, although the proportion began to decline from the late 1990s. The fact that people in Fort Lee characterize earlier Japanese expatriates as "elite" does not necessarily mean contemporary counterparts are not. Today's expatriate families seem to be equally well-educated and middle-class. Unlike earlier decades, expatriates today do not necessarily work solely in New York; many work in northern New Jersey, reflecting the general trend of job relocation to suburbia. (Table 8).

Meanwhile, although expatriates are declining in number in the Fort Lee area, the proportion of Japanese immigrants--permanent residents or naturalized citizens--has been increasing in recent years. The latter have moved to Fort Lee from Manhattan or elsewhere, mainly for the purpose of raising children. The permanent Japanese immigrants I interviewed tended to be former expatriates who had left their company and had settled down in America, finding jobs in American or Japanese firms, or engaging in small businesses (e.g. restaurants). Many tended to be intermarried with Americans.

iv. The Formation and Decline of a “Japanese Village”

A report by the *New York Times* in 1976 indicated Japanese were aware of a compatriot presence in Fort Lee and that this knowledge was stimulating further Japanese influx (Maitland 1976). In the 1970s, the Japanese population was growing faster in Fort Lee than in any other town in the greater New York area (Muto 1985). Between 1970 and 1990, the Japanese in Fort Lee represented one of the largest expatriate concentrations in the tri-state area. By 1982, eighty percent of all Japanese in New Jersey were recorded as living in Fort Lee (Lynwander 1982). Written sources note that the Japanese population exceeded 4,000 in 1982 and 5,000 in 1986 (Lynwander 1982; Howe 1986). During the 1970s and the 1980s, some Japanese considered there were, “too many Japanese” in Fort Lee--a situation considered inhibiting of exposure to American life and culture (Muto 1985; Shinkai 1994). Fort Lee came to be known among Japanese residents throughout the New York Area as the “Japanese Village.”

The Japanese influx was felt most strongly in the school system. In 1982, one quarter of Fort Lee’s public school children were Japanese (Lynwander 1982). An

expatriate wife, who has lived in Fort Lee and Tenafly for over twenty years, recounted scenes in 1986, from School Number One, where her fourth-grade son was enrolled, following her arrival in Fort Lee:

When I took a look at my child's class, there were three Americans, and the rest were Koreans and Japanese . . . and the cafeteria, they eat lunch there, you know. All of those sitting there were Japanese. "Gosh," it was like, "Is this a school in Japan?" [laughter]

Two Japanese weekend schools were formerly located in Fort Lee in rented public school buildings sponsored by the Fort Lee Board of Education. Nine hundred Japanese students were enrolled in these weekend schools, half of whom were from Fort Lee (Lynwander 1982). These schools are no longer in operation due to the decrease in Japanese students.

At the time of Flory's study (1989), from the mid- to late 1980s, the economic boom in Fort Lee was largely the result of an increased Japanese presence. The relatively homogeneous socioeconomic status of the sojourners, and similar needs in terms of lifestyle and consumption patterns, led to the opening of new stores and businesses by co-ethnic town workers who were immigrants (Hosler 1998; Shinkai 1994). Ethnic businesses functioned as an environmental bubble, the "village," where it was possible to live in an almost exclusively Japanese environment.

Japanese businesses never became predominant in Fort Lee. Even though there were more Japanese businesses in the 1980s than today, the stores on the main commercial streets remained largely "American"--i.e. white. Some informants commented that the Japanese have never formed ethnic enclaves, such as "Chinatown" or "Koreatown." Shinkai (1994) similarly observed that Japanese and American businesses in downtown were well integrated during her research (1987-1991). It remains true,

nevertheless, that the Japanese can live in Fort Lee today as though they are in Japan. Despite the decline in number over time, Japanese ethnic services and businesses continue to provide indispensable services: realtors, doctors and dentists, bakeries, restaurants, hair salons, and a shopping mall complex in Edgewater, a short car ride. According to one expatriate wife, who has been living in Fort Lee for four years, her life in the United States is possible because she is able to communicate in Japanese in this area. For this reason, she explained, Fort Lee may not present the ideal place for those expatriate families who want to learn English and American culture. Today, many of the previous Japanese stores and businesses have been replaced by other, often Korean, businesses.

When the Japanese were the largest minority in Fort Lee, there were areas of Japanese residential concentration, but this does not seem to have been the result of segregation. One explanation is that Japanese real estate agents tended to refer Japanese sojourners to the same properties. Sometimes, apartments did not return to the rental-market, since word-of-mouth referrals allowed a transferred family to move in when another had left. A first-generation Japanese male real estate agent recalled there was once an area informally known among Japanese after the name of a major Japanese corporation, Nisshō Iwai, since many expatriates living there worked for that company. One expatriate wife told me that her Greek American landlord has rented only to Japanese expatriate tenants over the years; as a consequence her neighbors in the duplex are another Japanese expatriate family.

Owing to the decrease in the Japanese population, residential concentration is now less marked than in the past. By 2009, there was an estimated Japanese population of less

than 2,000 in Fort Lee, down from 5,000 in 1986. (Table 1). Moreover, a general tendency among Japanese is not to choose residency based on ethnic ties--expatriates do not see the necessity for a geographically-based enclave, even though they may use ethnic institutions for support.⁶ According to the principal of a Japanese school in Englewood Cliffs:

The American media come around and ask me where the Japanese are-- they assume that there is something like Chinatown. But what is meant by Japanese concentration in this area is just that there is one Japanese family per block. It's not like everyone on the block is Japanese. By habit, Japanese would not occupy an entire apartment building and things like that--they try to have some distance between themselves, even though it is said that there are so many Japanese around here.

The absence of ethnic enclave formation no doubt owes to the fact that the majority of Japanese do not stay permanently in the United States. Linguistic challenges in English and transience have nevertheless resulted in the formation of an insulated Japanese community in Fort Lee: a subculture that has been reproduced by new, temporary co-ethnic immigrants.

Today, individuals familiar with the recent history of Fort Lee, regardless of their ethnicity, frequently remark, "There are no longer any Japanese in Fort Lee." "Where did they go?" Despite the fact that Fort Lee still has the largest Japanese population in New Jersey, the rapid decrease has led to the conclusion by residents that there are "no Japanese in Fort Lee." The primary reason for the decrease of Japanese expatriates was the collapse of the bubble economy in Japan, which marked a decade-long economic downturn beginning around 1993. Many companies cut back on costly overseas

⁶ A similar pattern is noted in a survey of Japanese expatriates living in the suburbs of Melbourne, Australia (Mizukami 2007). Mizukami investigates the settlement of expatriate Japanese and conceptualizes this as a new type of ethnic community, contingent on globalization and different from other types of labor migration.

assignments and expatriates were ordered to return to Japan. The terrorist attacks in September 2001 exacerbated the recession in Japan and hastened the decline of expatriates, according to several Japanese informants.

2. Korean Immigration

i. Koreans: Post-1965 Immigration

Prior to 1967, the Korean community in the New York metropolitan area consisted of some two thousand settlers who had entered the United States between 1903 and 1965. They were concentrated on the Upper West Side of Manhattan near Columbia University (Kim 1981). Major Korean immigration followed passage of the Immigration Act of 1965, and peaked in 1987 (Min 1996). As of 1980, about half a million Koreans resided in the United States, most of whom entered the U.S. since the Act of 1965, and of whom some eighty thousand settled in the New York metropolitan region--New York, New Jersey, and Connecticut (Kim 1981). Min (1996) documents a Korean population increase of 125 percent in the New York-New Jersey area in the decade between 1980 and 1990, with 200 percent growth in New Jersey. Newly arriving Koreans initially moved into several areas in Queens, including Flushing, Jackson Heights, and Elmhurst. Flushing became an "overseas Seoul" from the late 1980s (ibid.).

The reasons for the sudden contemporary Korean influx are manifold and contingent on a variety of social, economic, and political factors in Korea and in the United States. A population explosion and overcrowding in South Korea emerged as an urgent problem in the 1960s which served as one of the push factors (Kim 1981). The dictatorship in the postcolonial period in Korea prompted some, especially from the

professional middle-class, to leave the country for the United States in the 1970s through the 1980s. Fierce competition in education--and for good jobs among the well-educated--is another reason for coming to the United States (Yoon 1997). In describing her parents' decision to immigrate to the United States, one high school student remarked that even with a bachelor's degree one "cannot get a job as a janitor" in Korea. The reasons most frequently cited by Korean informants for immigration were "better living" and "better education." Recently, Koreans have chosen to emigrate to English-speaking countries including the United States for educational opportunities and because of the increasing importance of English fluency at home in South Korea (Sudol 2009).

The suburbanization of Koreans began in the 1980s, as their economic conditions improved; Koreans in Queens began to move to New Jersey and other, suburban tri-state areas (Min 1996). For many economically successful Asian immigrant families, Flushing is seen as the first stopping place en route to suburban homes in Long Island, Connecticut, or New Jersey (Smith 1995). Korean informants who moved to Fort Lee in the late 1980s, recall there were not many Koreans then and that there were still many Japanese. They remembered that the major influx of Koreans began around 1990. This chronology is confirmed by press accounts: in the late 1980s, Koreans had difficulty finding a Korean market in Fort Lee (Fasbach 2001). According to Min (2001), the increase of the Korean population in New York's suburbs was based on three factors: 1) remigration of Korean immigrants initially settled in Flushing and other Korean enclaves in Queens; 2) increase in the number of 1.5- and second-generation Korean American families; 3) increase in the number of nonresident Koreans, including employees of overseas branches of Korean companies.

Earlier Korean immigrants to the United States (since the 1960s) tended to be urban middle-class. Since the late 1980s, however, there have been more Korean immigrants from lower socioeconomic backgrounds (Kim 1981; Min 1996; Yoon 1993). The change has been attributed to the improved economy and changed political climate in South Korea (Min 1996). From the 1980s and especially during the 1990s, a “new” urban middle class began to flourish in Korea (Ch’oe, Lee, and de Bary 2000; Lett 1998). Members of this stratum did not find migration as rewarding as previously because of their high socioeconomic status. Instead, an increasing number of lower-class Koreans have migrated to the United States on the basis of the perceived comparative disadvantages of remaining in Korea (Yoon 1993).

ii. Characteristics of Koreans in Fort Lee

Unlike Japanese, Koreans in Fort Lee consist largely of first-generation immigrants (permanently residing) and subsequent generations (1.5- and second-generation). In the Fort Lee area, in 2000, 58.8 percent of the Korean residents were not citizens of the U.S., while 41.2 percent were citizens by birth or naturalization. (Table 8).

According to a *New York Times* article in 2001, many Koreans who moved to Fort Lee during the 1990s were not new arrivals to the United States but professionals in their twenties, thirties, and forties who considered themselves part of the “1.5 generation”-- born in Korea but raised in the United States, hence fluent in English and sharing both Asian and Western values (Fasbach 2001). A 1.5-generation Korean female estimated that approximately half of Koreans moving to Fort Lee are 1.5- and second generations moving from other states, to raise children and for proximity to New York City where

they work. Informants at the Senior Center told me that Korean immigrants bring parents (seniors by the time they arrive in Fort Lee); this had been noted from the increase of Korean tenants in senior housing in Fort Lee.

Koreans in Fort Lee represent a highly-educated middle-class group. All my Korean informants were at least university-educated (whether in Korea or the United States); the majority had white-collar occupations and were homeowners--the latter being an "important sign of achieving success, especially for new immigrants" (Li 1998, 490). A Korean leader who works in an adjoining borough of Fort Lee and is resident in Flushing, observed that the difference between Koreans in Flushing and those in the Fort Lee area is that the latter tend to be white-collar whereas the former tend to be more, "daily-based, hard workers" in small businesses, including grocers and dry cleaners. Korean-owned small business exists in Fort Lee, including dry cleaners, restaurants, and store owners. Compared to Chinese and Japanese, Koreans had a higher proportion of those engaged in self-employment in the Fort Lee area in 2000. (Table 8). An increasing number of Koreans who own such businesses live in other boroughs in northern Bergen County and commute to Fort Lee. Many Koreans also own small businesses in New York City while living in Fort Lee.

Korean informants did not explicitly mention class disparity when asked about the characteristics of Korean residents in Fort Lee. The presence of increasingly affluent Koreans appears more noticeable from popular perceptions. Such observations came from non-Korean informants--one recurring anecdote concerned Koreans who arrive at the senior center by Rolls-Royce. The mythic potential of the automobile, used to

indicate the relatively affluent class status of residents, occurs in frequent metaphors.⁷

The dreams of Korean immigrants were often reductively posed by non-Korean informants as the desire to attain, “a BMW and two houses.” One Chinese female resident observed that Koreans who live in Fort Lee, “always have a good car”, and, “are like more high-class people.” This informant commented on the wealth displayed among Fort Lee’s school children which she found led to “peer pressure”--the envious desire for brand clothing or electronic gadgets owned by students from affluent family backgrounds. At the same time, the census data from 2000 indicate a lower median household income in 1999 for Koreans than for Chinese or Japanese--lower, in fact, than the median household income for the Fort Lee population as a whole (see pages 63-4, supra, and Table 8)--suggestive of a greater income disparity among Koreans than among Chinese or Japanese.⁸

There is also an increasing segment of temporary Korean immigrants in Fort Lee due to overseas business assignments similar to those of Japanese expatriates. Expatriate Koreans are typically employees of Korean corporations and live in the Fort Lee area on business assignment for a couple of years; some are visiting professors at Columbia

⁷ One, second-generation, Chinese American male informant gave the following analysis, using automobiles as a measure of class status:

If you drive around Fort Lee, just look at the cars . . . Everybody drives like Mercedes or BMW. I used to compare a town like this, because I went to school in Michigan and in California. It’s just like cars are really nice here. In Michigan, they are all American cars, very cheap cars. But here, you see Ferraris, right? Or like really expensive cars, Lamborghinis, things like that. We are not like super rich but there are people that are rich enough to afford that kind of luxury.

⁸ It was informally suggested, however, that there may be a widespread underreporting of income.

University. Their residency in Fort Lee is transient, as for their Japanese counterparts. Although temporary Korean immigrants are much smaller in number compared with Koreans intent on permanent settlement, the proportion of expatriates has been increasing in recent years.

Recently, a new pattern has emerged whereby one parent comes to the United States for several years accompanied by children, long enough for the children to acquire ability in English. This trend has been identified by the media and researchers as largely determined by parental concerns regarding education. School-age children from Korea sent to English-speaking countries to better prepare them for college admission in English-speaking countries are known as “early study abroad students” in South Korea (Ly 2008). The increasing importance of English proficiency in the Korean job market has played a role in this development as has the growth of the middle class and an intensification of the already competitive education system (*ibid.*). According to a Korean teacher in one Fort Lee elementary school, a growing number of students from South Korea are enrolled in public schools having arrived in Fort Lee with only one parent--usually the mother. The other parent (typically the father) stays behind in South Korea and sends money for expenses to the United States (Ly 2008). Scholars note that this form of “transnational family” appeared in South Korea in the mid-1990s (Koo 2007). Such household arrangements are referred to as “*kirōgi* families.” Those *kirōgi* (wild geese) remaining in Korea periodically visit their families in the United States or elsewhere and are compared to migratory birds (Koo 2007; Lee and Koo 2006).⁹

⁹ For discussion of the consequences of such household arrangements for marital and family life, see Lee and Koo (2006) and Ly (2005).

Typically, mothers obtain a student visa through enrolment in a community college or language school. Based on this parental status, children are able to obtain dependent visa status relatively easily (Lee 2010; Ly 2005). Many Korean mothers in this situation have lived in the United States previously, during their husband's studies for an advanced degree.

Korean schoolteachers also mentioned other immigrant patterns observed among some Korean students. Some parents who are separated or divorced in Korea have come to the United States to start a new life: the consequence has been a rise in the number of single parents with children emigrating to the United States. According to one Korean teacher at one of the elementary schools, such an arrangement may cause behavioral rather than academic problems among children. This recent trend contrasts with traditional patterns of Korean immigration where the entire family came for the sake of the children's education and, ultimately, a better life.

iii. Why Koreans Have Chosen Fort Lee

Koreans who came to Bergen County first settled in Palisades Park, a neighboring town west of Fort Lee, starting in the mid-1960s (see Martin 2004).¹⁰ Palisades Park was on the verge of bankruptcy prior to the Korean influx in the 1980s. Residents reported that Koreans bought vacant properties one by one and ultimately revitalized the local economy (see also Hanley 1996). Palisades Park had the largest Korean population in

¹⁰ The rapid increase of the Korean population in Palisades Park began during the 1980s. In 1980, the number of Asian/Pacific Islanders in Palisades Park was 779, or 5.6 percent of the total population ($N=13,732$). In 1990, Asian/Pacific Islanders had increased to 2,910 (Koreans were 1,661)--i.e. twenty percent of the total population ($N=14,536$) [U.S. Bureau of the Census 1983,1992a]

Bergen County according to the census data of 2000, and has come to be known among residents in the area as “Koreatown.” Almost all businesses on Broad Avenue, Palisades Park’s main commercial and business sector, are Korean-owned--during the decade of the 1990s, the *New York Times* reported that Korean Americans had acquired 95 percent of the businesses in Palisades Park (Hanley 1999).

Koreans were initially drawn to Palisades Park due to the less expensive property values compared with those of Fort Lee. The influx of Koreans from Palisades Park into Fort Lee indicates increased economic power. Fort Lee is viewed as the next step for residency, once financial status is stabilized in the United States.¹¹ Even before moving to the United States, Korean immigrants are often well aware of Fort Lee and its vicinity through South Korean media coverage, which in turn influences their choice of Fort Lee and other towns in Bergen County.

Most informants, both Koreans and non-Koreans, considered that the reason for the influx into Fort Lee was the overflow from Palisades Park. Some Korean informants felt that Palisades Park is “too Korean” whereas Fort Lee represented a “nice mix” of Koreans and native white residents. While a co-ethnic presence is a consideration for comfortable living, an aversion to too many co-ethnics is also present among Korean informants; the latter tendency is based on the consideration of the necessity of exposure to American culture. Given overcrowding in Palisades Park and the affordability and

¹¹ The *New York Times* reported that those who can afford to buy better homes often move from Palisades Park to places such as Edgewater. Some bring extended families along while some move in “alone,” as the first Koreans in a building or block (Martin 2004).

convenience of Fort Lee in relation to New York City, Fort Lee was a “logical choice” for Koreans.¹²

My interviews and informal conversations with Korean residents indicate that for some, Fort Lee was the “first stop” in the United States--a “nice place to start out when you move to a new country” as one Korean female informant put it. But for the majority of my Korean informants it was not the first destination in the United States. About half were either born in New York City or Queens, or had lived there prior to Fort Lee. The remainder had lived in neighboring boroughs such as Palisades Park or Cliffside Park before moving. For a couple of informants, Los Angeles was their first destination. Hence, Fort Lee has a mix of Koreans from abroad and from other towns in the United States.

Although many of my Korean informants were aware of the earlier presence of Japanese in Fort Lee, they felt this had no bearing on subsequent Korean immigration. Korean informants disagreed with the view that the presence of Asians in Fort Lee made it more attractive for them to move there, even though the presence of fellow Koreans is considered a crucial factor for Koreans. To what extent, then, are prior social networks in the area crucial for Koreans in their decision to move to Fort Lee? Half of the informants had relatives living in the area, the rest did not. Based on informal conversations as well as interviews, it seems that not all Koreans chose Fort Lee because of pre-existing social

¹² Cf. Asian immigration into Flushing (Smith 1995). According to Smith, Asians were drawn to Flushing because of the small presence of Asians and proximity to Manhattan. Such findings are similar to those of the present research, although Smith’s study found that for Asians one of the advantages of Flushing was job availability, a factor never mentioned by my Korean informants in Fort Lee.

networks. Some informants were unaware why their parents chose Fort Lee, having been young children at the time of the move there.

iv. Transformations in the Public Sphere as a Consequence of Korean Immigration

The rapid influx of Koreans has had a marked influence on local life. This section explores some features of the Korean community in Fort Lee as it developed over time. In particular I examine the development of Korean ethnic business and the impact of Korean immigration on the cultural sphere--on religious and educational institutions.

a. Ethnic Businesses and Services

Korean-owned businesses in Fort Lee emerged about twenty years ago. Residents remember local businesses having been largely American until the early 1990s. Korean businesses rapidly expanded during the 1990s, resulting in the rapid transformation of the streetscape of the town. Approximately three hundred Korean retail stores were counted in the borough in 2001 (Fasbach 2001). According to a representative of the Korean American Association of Fort Lee (KAAFL) at the time of our interview in late 2008, more than fifty percent of local businesses were Korean-owned.¹³ The source published by the Chamber of Commerce in 2008, contains a member list of 258 businesses (Greater Fort Lee Chamber of Commerce 2008). According to one of the Korean board members of the Chamber, Korean members represent approximately thirty percent; their

¹³ The Korean American Association in Fort Lee is the major Korean ethnic organization in Fort Lee. See discussion in chapter 3.

membership has increased rapidly over the last decade, from just a few Korean members in 2000.

The main types of Korean business in Fort Lee are professional services. The largest concentration is real estate (almost 200 Korean real estate agents engage both in Korean and non-Korean real estate agencies).¹⁴ In 2009, there were twenty-six Korean accounting offices, thirty-three law offices (some are partnered with Americans), and twenty-three Korean agents in mortgage and financial services. Eight Korean banks were counted in 2009. Frequently, Korean-owned businesses with multiple locations in New York and New Jersey have branch offices in Fort Lee. These include not only companies and professional services such as accounting, banks, law, and medicine, but also cultural centers primarily targeting Koreans (e.g. real estate licensing, language classes in Chinese and Spanish, cultural classes such as flower arrangement).

Medical and health-related services are also prevalent: chiropractors, dentistry, oriental and herbal medicines, dermatology, optometry, spas, etc. Korean-owned retail and service businesses in Fort Lee represent over fifty different types of activity, including restaurants, supermarkets, bakeries, hair salons, dry cleaners, car service, and movers. By manual enumeration, there were close to 400 Korean businesses in Fort Lee (Korean Daily Business Directory 2009). This listing, however, appears incomplete; considering the estimate provided by KAAFL and the census (2007 Zip Code Business Patterns (NAICS), County Business Patterns, U.S. Bureau of the Census) there are likely

¹⁴ See Smith on Flushing (1995). When Taiwanese immigrants first began to settle in Flushing, they quickly established real estate businesses dealing in both commercial and residential property (ibid. 74).

more than 500 Korean businesses.¹⁵ Some local businesses originally owned by whites are now run by Korean merchants. New Korean businesses continue to open up. In fall 2009, H Mart (Han Ah Reum supermarket), a Korean supermarket chain, opened in Fort Lee in the former premises of an American supermarket. Another, California-based, Korean market was scheduled to open in Fort Lee at the end of September 2010 (J. Kim 2010).

Fort Lee is also an outpost for multinational Korean corporations. Several corporate headquarters, including those of Southpole and SK Telecom, are in Fort Lee. Media Korea (cable television company) relocated its headquarters to Fort Lee in 2007. A number of small- and mid-scale multinational companies also have branch offices there. The U.S. headquarters of major Korean multinational corporations, LG and Samsung, are located in neighboring boroughs, Englewood Cliffs and Ridgefield Park, respectively. Such operations reflect the trend of multinational business flow into the suburbs, postulated as one of the underlying factors in the formation of an ethnoburb (Li 1997). The increasing number of immigrant-owned and operated firms in manufacturing, international wholesale and retail trade, and producer and consumer service firms, which have moved to, or have been created in suburban areas of large metropolitan areas, reflect significant urban structural change (Li 2005).

The thriving private afterschool academies and tutoring institutions in and around Fort Lee are another aspect of local Korean business activity. According to Lew (2006) tuition-based afterschool academies and counseling services are often found in Korean ethnic enclaves. Nine such schools are currently located in Fort Lee, according to the

¹⁵ See chap. 1, n. 22, *supra*.

Korea Daily Business Directory (2009). Some are franchised, with schools across the United States and abroad. These institutions offer SAT, TOEFL, and other preparatory courses for college admission. Such developments reflect educational aspiration among Koreans (Ch'oe, Lee, and de Bary 2000). It has been argued that one reason for Korean parents' resolve to send children to English-speaking countries is to avoid the extreme competition in education in the home country (Lee and Koo 2006). Ironically, flourishing private educational businesses in areas with large Korean concentrations are in some measure replicating the competition found at home. Several private music academies and art schools also exist in Fort Lee, founded mainly by Koreans.

Previous scholarship on Korean small business has examined those in both low-income minority neighborhoods and middle-class white neighborhoods, but with a particular focus on the former (Lee 1998; Min 1996, 2001; Yoon 1997). The types of small business found in Fort Lee resemble those in the enclave of downtown Flushing where Korean businesses "cater exclusively to Korean customers with distinctive ethnic taste" and where businesses are in strong competition with one another (Min 2001, 179). A variety of Korean businesses appear to be prospering in the suburban environment with a predominantly Korean clientele. For professional businesses such as real estate and insurance agencies, the constituency is largely Korean (e.g. during my interview with a Korean realtor, he received several phone calls and responded in Korean to all). There are also stores where virtually all the customers are Koreans (e.g. Korean video stores). Certain Korean businesses do serve non-Korean customers: for example, Korean supermarkets and bakeries are patronized by Chinese, Japanese, and white customers. At Korean restaurants, although the majority of customers are Korean, non-Koreans are also

sometimes found. Korean restaurants are popular with Chinese, Japanese, and white Americans. I was told frequently that whites from New York state drive to Fort Lee specifically to dine at Korean restaurants.

Koreans open and run businesses in Fort Lee largely because of the presence of co-ethnics and perceived business opportunities. Korean business owners find other co-ethnic businesses important--they support each other and are helped by others, as one informant, the owner of an insurance business, told me. A second-generation Korean American businessman in mortgage financing told me of the popularity of the real estate business among Koreans and that quite a few acquire licenses on arrival in the United States and begin to work as real estate agents. New agencies keep opening, but some quickly close down due to lack of experience in the United States during times of economic difficulty.

Korean businesses have gone through periods of ebb and flow in terms of types of business conducted in Fort Lee. According to one 1.5-generation female business owner, there was a surge in the internet café business in the Fort Lee area beginning in the mid-1990s, reflecting the same popularity in South Korea. This type of business is no longer in operation due to the greater prevalence of computer ownership at home. A recent trend is the increase in food stores such as frozen yogurt stores, again reflecting current popularity in Korea. During field observation, several Korean-owned food stores were noted as newly-founded in the commercial area. The apparent link of local Korean businesses with developments in South Korea indicates the transnational character of these enterprises, whether direct or indirect. Korean contributions to the growing wealth

of Fort Lee and to the revitalization of the local economy were acknowledged by informants of varied ethnicities.

Although Korean businesses are prevalent in Fort Lee, a large proportion of Koreans also work outside what appears as the “ethnic economy” of Fort Lee and its vicinity. The census data show that in 2000, approximately forty percent of those in the workforce worked in New York State. (Table 8).

b. Religious Institutions

Research shows that ethnic churches are a key social institution in the United States, providing support and networks for co-ethnics (Chong 1998; Min 1992). Korean churches are the most important community centers for Korean immigrants and their offspring and have played a significant role in the preservation of traditional values, ethnic identity, and in-group solidarity (Kwon 2003; Min 2010). A number of Korean informants commented on the role of the church in providing social ties and networks; the church also provides an opportunity to engage in ethnic and cultural practices--such as the teaching of Korean language to U.S.-born children. According to one first-generation Korean female informant, a non church-goer: “If you don’t go to church, then you are kind of isolated.”

There were eight Korean churches in Fort Lee as of 2008; six provide Korean services and two provide services in English. The first Korean church emerged in Fort Lee about thirty years ago, eventually moving to Teaneck and becoming one of the largest Korean churches in Bergen County. Korean churches in the Fort Lee area have evolved over time: some have relocated to other boroughs to accommodate growing

members, some have recently moved to Fort Lee. The already congested property situation has forced some Korean congregations to rent space from other congregations.

Korean immigration has also had an impact on existing native white churches. The Church of the Madonna, the oldest Catholic Church in Bergen County (founded in 1858) has offered masses in Korean since November 2005. When the current Irish American pastor arrived at the Church in 2005, there were only a few Korean members. The pastor explained that Korean leaders urged that mass be held in Korean since Korean Catholics were converting (to Protestantism) due to the absence of Korean Catholic churches. A Korean pastor was assigned in June 2006 and the number of Korean members has grown dramatically ever since. Within three years, the Church of the Madonna had registered over three hundred Korean families. The number of masses offered in Korean, or in English and Korean, has increased to accommodate the growing need. In the bilingual masses, the white pastor celebrates mass in English and a Korean youth follows in Korean. The congregation for the bilingual mass sings hymns in Korean--the American pastor has the songs written out in transliterated Korean phonetically for his own use. His involvement in Korean masses aims to resist possible fracture of the church into ethnically separate parishes. In other boroughs in Bergen County, attempts to merge Korean and white congregations have been unsuccessful once an official separation has been instituted.¹⁶ The American pastor serves all the members of the Church and to this extent considers himself a part of the Korean community.

¹⁶ The pastor explained that a frequent problem for ethnic parishes throughout the United States concerns the departure of ethnic groups from their initial enclaves, which leaves the diocese without members.

Korean church membership is not confined to the geographical boundaries demarcating boroughs. Quite a few Korean informants, including members of the second-generation, told me that they attend or have attended churches beyond Fort Lee. For example, an American-born female Korean informant told me that she and her family formerly attended a Korean church in Flushing, their previous residence, even after they moved to Fort Lee. Her parents attended the Korean-speaking congregation in Flushing while she and her siblings attended the English-speaking congregation of the same church. One, U.S.-born, Korean American male in his forties attends a Korean church in Teaneck because of his close friendship with the pastor. He was probably the most detached in relation to Korean culture of all my Korean informants; he neither eats Korean food, nor celebrates Korean holidays, nor follows Korean media. He considers his church activities the most ethnically specific things he does. The Korean senior pastor in Fort Lee told me that rather than attend his own Korean-speaking congregation, his U.S.-born sons attend the English-speaking Korean church in Englewood, because they have friends there. The Church of the Madonna also has Korean members from Manhattan, since it is the closest Catholic Church for them.

The Korean senior pastor explained that the way Korean Christians in the Fort Lee area join churches reflects the “semi-urban” setting of Fort Lee. The majority of the members of his church are first-generation immigrants who are mostly “Korean yuppies”--in the words of the pastor. The pastor explained that even though word of mouth is the most effective way of recruiting members, half of his members joined simply after seeing the sign outside the building. This pattern offers a contrast with churches in more suburban areas where churches grow based on “friendship evangelism,”

by which members introduce their friends or relatives. The example of this Korean church suggests a limited dependency on social networks among members in choosing a church, when compared with Koreans in less urban suburbs.¹⁷

c. Schools

Mazur's observation (1981) that education has been a controversial subject during much of Fort Lee's history remains valid today. Issues of overcrowding, lack of space, and the ageing of school buildings were raised throughout my interviews and in the local press (Almenas 2008c; Firschein 2009b). In fact, overcrowding and the decay of school facilities date back to the postwar period, in tandem with the surge in population discussed earlier in chapter 1 (Mazur 1981). There was limited municipal investment in school facilities until the postwar change in the school population, increasing at a rate of ten percent a year by 1953. As newer, more cosmopolitan residents with children settled in the borough, they began to demand better educational facilities (ibid.). The referendums for building a new school to alleviate overcrowding and for improvement of ageing school facilities in 2010, met with strong opposition from Fort Lee residents and were voted down twice at the polls (Almenas 2010b, 2010c, 2010d).

Administrative instability, over many years, is considered the main reason for the decline in the quality of the schools by many residents.¹⁸ Several Chinese and Korean

¹⁷ This Korean church shares the same building with an American Church, led by a white pastor. There are Korean-speaking members attending the latter church, which is multiethnic, and whose services are conducted in English.

¹⁸ In the period 2000-2008, there were six superintendents of schools. See, Rossi 2008a. A former superintendant was implicated in a scandal in 2007, and subsequently resigned. See further, Firschein 2007b, 2007c; Rossi 2007.

informants in their twenties who attended Fort Lee High School about a decade ago commented that the high school was better when they were enrolled.

Nevertheless, signs of improvement have been seen in the last few years. Fort Lee High School was ranked 75th among 316 public high schools in New Jersey in 2008, a leap from 99th in 2006.¹⁹ The average SAT score was 1,545 in 2008. In 2009, 63.7 percent of the students enrolled in four-year college upon graduation, 29 percent moved on to two-year colleges.²⁰ Fort Lee High School also runs various programs: for example, an Academy of Performing Arts program (which offers training by professionals in the performing arts for those interested in majoring in the arts or as a career); an Academy of Finance (offering finance related courses or opportunities for internships); the International Baccalaureate diploma program since December 2008.²¹ In 2010, an article in the local press reported that the Fort Lee public schools earned a high performing status rating from the state's Department of Education (Almenas 2010a).

Education is a social and cultural domain deeply influenced by East Asian immigration. In Fort Lee's public schools, students of East Asian origin are prominent.

¹⁹ Biennial ranking of the state's public high schools from the New Jersey Monthly (http://njmonthly.com/articles/towns_and_schools/highschoolrankings/top-highschools08.html). Data for rankings were obtained from the State Department of Education's most recent New Jersey School Report Card. Accessed January 5, 2010.

²⁰ "Fort Lee High School Student Outcomes (2009)" Fort Lee High School, June 8, 2010. I thank Ms. Marcia Leon, Guidance Secretary at Fort Lee High School, for this information.

²¹ The International Baccalaureate (IB) is a two-year diploma program for high school juniors and seniors. Created for the children of diplomats, U.S. schools have become the main participants. The IB program fulfills regular high school graduation requirements, opening doors for college admission and providing an alternative to traditional advanced placement courses. See Schachter 2008.

That Asian newcomers tend to be younger than native white ethnics has resulted in a much higher representation of students of Asian descent in the schools in proportion to population size. (Table 9). Over thirty-five percent of the students in all of the four public elementary schools, approximately 28 percent of the students in middle school, and 26.5 percent in high school, speak either Korean, Japanese, Mandarin, or Cantonese at home as a first language.²² In School Number 3, the same is true for 42.5 percent of the students (State of New Jersey, Department of Education 2008). For each school, the Korean language is the majority minority language spoken at home: over twenty-five percent in each of four elementary schools, 17.6 percent at the middle school, and 19.8 percent at the high school.

Site visits to the school premises give an impression that greatly exceeds this proportion. There are many English-speaking Asian students who are not classified in the official school statistics. Students of Asian origin taken together probably comprise over half the school population, the majority being of Korean descent. High School teachers I interviewed told me that forty-five percent of the students of the high school were Asian.

The presence of Asian students has been important for the school district's reputation. This can be seen in repeated comments of educators quoted in the press and in personal interviews, concerning how immigrant students have enhanced the program-- by playing a role in establishing a positive ethos for education and behavior and also by providing an opportunity for American students to learn about global society (Kinney

²² There are also Arabic, Russian, and Spanish speaking students.

2000; Llorente 2000).²³ Verification of such claims, made by several white informants, appears in the many Asian names in the regular honor rolls published in the local newspaper--Korean, followed by Chinese and Japanese, during the period the paper was consulted--between 2006 and 2010. Teachers I interviewed felt that Asian students have raised standards in the high school. Art and music have provided a niche for Asian students, as artistic ability provides prestige and ways for Asian students to be accepted by American students. Asians are also predominant in cultural activities in the high school. Ninety percent of the high school band consists of Asians (when asked how the presence of Asian students has changed Fort Lee High School, one response from the teachers was, "our band got bigger"). In terms of theater, the technology staff behind the scenes at the high school is eighty-percent Asian. The present mayor, who used to coach children on numerous sports teams in the later 1990s, recalls that thirty to forty percent of the teams were Asian. Asian students are conspicuous in local press coverage of academic achievement, the arts, and sports.

While Fort Lee educators have been accommodating to Asian students, local white parents have not always welcomed the increase of students who were not fluent in English. An established Japanese business owner in Fort Lee remembered strong objections from American mothers when Japanese students began to enroll in Fort Lee schools in large numbers. Some white residents considered that the high property taxes were used for students who would return to Japan in several years, a source of resentment. Still other white mothers described how their children became isolated, because they

²³ A former mayor became a target of criticism from parents at one point for his "pro-Asian" stance (Layton 1991).

could not make friends with Korean students who were the majority in class. In general, however, informants' accounts suggested that resistance from native whites was stronger in the early years of the Asian influx (see further discussion in chapter 4).

The number of Korean students in Fort Lee public schools grew annually throughout the 1990s but has remained stable since around 2000, according to Korean teachers both at the elementary and high schools. In 2010, Korean students constituted thirty to forty percent of the student population for each school in Fort Lee. Altogether, 3,600 students are enrolled in Fort Lee's public schools, from kindergarten to high school; thus, at least 1,200 students are of Korean origin. At the Catholic School of the Church of the Madonna, fifty percent of the students are Korean.²⁴

The proportion of first-generation and U.S.-born Korean students at the elementary school level appears to be evenly distributed. For example, in one elementary school there were about 110 students whose first language at home is Korean. According to the Korean bilingual teacher at this school, about forty students in the bilingual class, out of a total of 110, are Korean.²⁵ A teacher at Fort Lee High School observed that the majority of Korean students in ESL classes have recently arrived from Korea. The almost even distribution of first-generation and second (and 1.5) generation Koreans in the school system may also contribute to division among Korean students, to be discussed in the next chapter.

²⁴ Pastor of the Church of the Madonna: interview, December 20, 2008.

²⁵ In 1986, out of 2,378 students in the Fort Lee school system, 280 students were Limited English Proficiency (LEP) students, of which 86 were Koreans enrolled in the bilingual program (Ha 1988).

3. Chinese Immigration

i. Patterns of Suburbanization of Chinese Immigrants

Although Chinese constitute one of the largest and oldest Asian immigrant groups in the United States, the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882 (in effect until 1942) resulted in a delay in the natural growth of the second generation (Lee 1960; Yung 1995). The number of Chinese, however, has grown rapidly since implementation of the Immigration Act of 1965. The influx has led to a more than tenfold growth in the Chinese American population in the U.S. Over seventy percent of all Chinese Americans in the U.S. were born abroad, with 76 percent of the immigrants arriving within the past twenty years (Yin 2007). In 2000, Chinese comprised the largest Asian group in the United States and in New York City (Asian American Federation of New York 2004b). They were the second largest Asian group after Asian Indians in New Jersey in the same year (Asian American Federation of New York 2004a).

Chinese immigration to the United States is characterized as “dual immigration” by McGlinn (2002). According to McGlinn, there are clear class differences among Chinese migrants. On one hand, there are the affluent, highly-educated professionals from Hong Kong, Taiwan, and the mainland; on the other hand, there are lower-class Chinese from the mainland with little education.

Although continuing to serve as a “port of entry” for many new immigrants, today’s Chinatowns in major metropolitan cities including New York and San Francisco, no longer house the majority of the Chinese population in the United States. The census of 2000 showed that the majority of counties with Asian populations more than twice the national average were concentrated in the suburbs of large metropolitan areas (Li 2005,

32). This trend of emerging suburban Chinese communities has been discussed in the recent literature (Fong 1994; Li 2005, 2009). Li (2005) has argued that these suburban Chinese communities are diverse in terms of immigrant socioeconomic status and occupation and may not necessarily be clustered in one area.

Over the last thirty-five years, first-generation immigrant and U.S.-born, second-generation Chinese have become dispersed throughout the New York metropolitan area, as far east as Long Island and as far southwest as central New Jersey (McGlinn 2002). The greatest relative growth in the Chinese population of metropolitan New York in the last two decades of the twentieth century has taken place in the suburbs. As for New Jersey, with less than 6,000 Chinese in 1970, the population in the northern part of the state grew to over 83,000 by 2000 (ibid. 115).

Scholars have referred to the emerging trend of suburban Chinese communities in the New York metropolitan area as one of “satellites of Chinatown.” This includes Sunset Park, Brooklyn and Flushing in Queens, along the subway lines that lead to Chinatown (Kwong [1987] 1996).²⁶ The trend toward suburbanization among Chinese is attributed to increased rents in Chinatown, which pushes poor Chinese into less expensive suburbs (Kwong and Mišćević2005). It has been argued, however, that places such as Flushing are generally more prosperous and include middle-class Chinese arrivals who bypass Chinatown entirely, as well as those who are upwardly-mobile, moving out from Chinatown (Lin 1998b). Lin (1998b) argues that the decision to move to suburbs

²⁶ A similar trend has emerged on the West Coast (Monterey Park, Cal.). See Kwong (1987) 1996.

such as Flushing and Richmond, San Francisco, during the 1980s, was based on a perceived racial tolerance in those neighborhoods.

Chinese immigrant professionals have tended to settle in affluent suburbs among diverse ethnic groups throughout the New York metropolitan area since their arrival in the United States, away from ethnic enclaves in the inner city. Compared to those living in “satellite Chinatowns,” with distinct ethnic business developments, those who move into suburbs with greater white concentration, where ethnic services cannot be found, are fewer in number. These Chinese tend to blend in with the local scene. Along with upwardly-mobile, second-generation Chinese Americans, such immigrant professionals have had, “a pattern of settlement in the United States distinctly different from that of the working-class non-English speakers” (Kwong and Mišćević 2005, 336). For American-born Chinese, settlement away from the urban core has signified, “making it” (ibid.). From white American perspectives, middle-class professional Chinese are considered “assimilated” or even “invisible.” According to Li (2005) “the so-called ‘Yacht’ Chinese were not perceived as a threat to Caucasian majorities in either life or work, as opposed to the ‘boat’ people of various backgrounds” (37). On the other hand, Kwong and Mišćević (2005) note these highly-educated, affluent Chinese immigrants drawn to desirable suburbs are not so concerned to favorably impress their white neighbors. As a result, white residents have sensed an unwillingness to assimilate. Kwong and Mišćević (2005) ascribe this tendency to social origin--coming from developed countries with high standards of living, such immigrants are “confident of their own values when encountering the outside world” (356).

Working-class Chinese have followed the professional classes to suburbia to provide the services demanded by the latter, including restaurants and supermarkets. As a consequence, a pattern of suburban stratification has emerged. Kwong refers to this as a “new class inequality” among the Chinese.²⁷ Kwong suggests that although the suburbanized Chinese are generally assimilated, multiculturalism promotes cultural retention. Immigrants no longer feel shame in learning Chinese: this has promoted thriving Chinese language schools and the creation of an ethnic environment conducive to the educational achievement of immigrant children (Kwong lecture 2007; Zhou and Li 2003).

Scholars have also noted a trend of spatial dispersal among middle-class suburbanized Chinese that contradicts the notion of the ethnoburb. In effect, these Chinese do not reach the critical mass necessary for the formation of an “ethnoburb.” Ethnic solidarity, among Chinese Americans who do not live in dense ethnic suburban communities, is sustained by what Ling (2009) calls “cultural community.” Such a community is defined by common cultural practices and beliefs of its members, not by geographical boundaries. The Chinese without geographical propinquity maintain their culture and identity through social networks and community events (Ling 2009; Zeng and Li 2009). In this type of ethnic community, members live throughout suburban municipalities where there are no substantial businesses and residential concentrations or clusters which might constitute a “suburban Chinatown” or an “ethnoburb.” Chinese cultural communities are constituted by the presence of language schools, churches,

²⁷ Peter Kwong, “Moving to the Suburbs,” Beyond Enclaves and Ethnoburbs: New Asian Immigrant Communities, New York Immigration Seminar Series Panel, lecture, Graduate Center, City University of New York, October 29, 2007.

community organizations and cultural agencies, Chinese American political coalitions, or ad hoc committees (Ling 2009). Whether dispersed or clustered, Li (2005) considers contemporary Chinese communities as a “new ethno-spectrum of multi-clustered settlement patterns and multifaceted community forms” (38).

ii. Characteristics of Chinese in Fort Lee

Several established Chinese residents told me that a small group of Chinese have lived in Fort Lee since the 1970s, from around the time of the Japanese influx, possibly earlier. At the same time, the number of Chinese immigrants, primarily from the mainland, has been increasing over the last few years, according to the president of the Chinese-American Family Coalition of New Jersey (CAFCNJ) who estimates that ninety percent of current Chinese immigrants into Fort Lee are Mandarin-speaking from northern China.²⁸ The remaining ten percent are from Taiwan and Hong Kong. The Chinese population in Fort Lee is internally diverse. Unlike other ethnic suburbs with high Chinese concentrations, such as Monterey Park (Cal.) and Flushing, the Chinese in Fort Lee do not form the largest ethnic minority group and comprise roughly the same number as the Japanese. According to one, second-generation Chinese male in his early twenties, a native of Fort Lee whose family is originally from Hong Kong, Chinese families from Hong Kong tend to be well-established residents and know each other very well, particularly given the small size of this group.

My Chinese informants, the majority of whom were first-generation immigrants, came to the United States for a variety of reasons: improved opportunities for children

²⁸ President, Chinese-American Family Coalition of New Jersey: telephone interview, November 4, 2008. On this organization, see further, chapter 3, *infra*.

when the informant was young, college education, marriage with an American spouse, but most frequently, “for better opportunities.” According to the president of the Chinese-American Family Coalition of New Jersey, many recent Chinese immigrants in Fort Lee are moving there from other states, mainly New York, rather than arriving directly from abroad.

The characteristics of my Chinese informants largely conform to those identified by previous researchers on suburban Chinese: they tend to be middle-class, well-educated, established professionals who work in mainstream American companies rather than the ethnic economy. The majority of my Chinese resident informants worked outside Fort Lee, either in other boroughs of New Jersey or in New York City. A few noted that they are the only Asian employee in their company. Yet the president of Huaxia Chinese School located in Paramus, Bergen County, when asked about the occupations of parents coming to the school, suggested that while they are largely “professionals,” there are also some who work in “restaurants.” My informants, mostly middle-class, indicated they did not know a great deal about the economically less successful segment of the Chinese--the former typically had relationships only with those of similar, middle-class backgrounds.

iii. Why Chinese Choose Fort Lee

The leading reason given by Chinese informants for choosing Fort Lee was convenience for work. Recurring comments indicated that many Chinese work in Manhattan, as well as other towns in New Jersey or in Westchester. Table 8 shows that 43 percent of the Chinese resident in the Fort Lee area work in New York. Others raised the importance of the school district, whether Fort Lee or elsewhere. For some the choice

of Fort Lee was based on social networks--for example, a spouse had been living there, a friend knew a vacant rental property, or there had been an introduction while looking for an affordable rental property. Many Chinese informants were aware of the presence of Japanese and Koreans but did not know of, or had not considered, the presence of other Chinese. Although no Chinese informant indicated choice of Fort Lee because of co-ethnic presence, several agreed that the presence of other "Asians" had played a role in their decision, with regard to the availability of ethnic services and shops. Others raised more pragmatic reasons--one informant was considering buying a condominium in Bergen County and Fort Lee presented good options for this type of property. Environmental factors were also suggested--despite its proximity to New York City, Fort Lee still connotes a suburb with greenery and was thus preferred for the sake of children.

The president of the Chinese-American Family Coalition of New Jersey indicated that Chinese learn about Fort Lee through friends and the Chinese-language press. Contrary to the general accounts offered by my Chinese informants, the president suggested that the Chinese who move to Fort Lee are aware of a Chinese presence beforehand, through information spread by social networks and the press. Though prior knowledge of the Chinese presence in Fort Lee was not mentioned by my informants, this knowledge often seems to have served as an underlying reason for moving there. Moreover, in Fort Lee, middle-class Chinese live along with Japanese and Koreans, rather than among co-ethnics. It seems that for this segment, middle class status plays a greater role than ethnicity in choice of residence. For the Chinese, being proximate to middle-class "Asians" may be of importance, but not necessarily co-ethnics.

iv. The Invisible Minority?

There are several volunteer-based associations for Chinese in Fort Lee. Chinese businesses seem scarce, apart from several real estate agencies, medical services, and restaurants. Unlike Koreans, Chinese have not “altered the local landscape” of this suburb, by establishing a relative concentration of ethnic residences and businesses--a feature of the ethnoburb (Li 1999, 23). There are a few branch offices of Chinese companies in Fort Lee and also Chinese private art schools which offer instruction in traditional Chinese arts. The practice of sending children to such schools to learn both Chinese and Western drawing was common among Chinese parents I interviewed. Flyers in Chinese, advertising such private art classes and lessons, are frequently found on bulletin boards in local ethnic supermarkets. One dance company based in Fort Lee, founded by a Taiwanese, occasionally advertises its performance schedules in the local press. As for the lack of Chinese supermarkets or restaurants in Fort Lee, the proximity to Flushing or Chinatown in New York City may hinder the development of such ethnic services: “Maybe it’s too close to Flushing . . . people would rather go to Flushing than stay here,” suggested one, first-generation Chinese female from Beijing.

The relative absence of Chinese companies in Bergen County precluded the type of immigration associated with the corporate-driven, transnational immigration of the Japanese or Koreans. Given the rapid economic development of mainland China, this may change in the future. One such sign is the sister city agreement of 2011 between Fort Lee and the city of Fushun in the northeast province of Liaoning, China (Almenas 2011). Delegates of the Foreign Affairs Office of Fushun hope to “create more ‘roads’

for Chinese businesses to open abroad through business projects” and consider the sister city arrangement to be “a bridge for businesses between America and China” (ibid.).

Although, currently, the number of Chinese is comparable to that of the Japanese, rarely did informants in any ethnic group mention the increase of Chinese, although a few were aware of their presence. Kim (2003) has previously reported on the influx of Chinese into Fort Lee, Palisades Park and Ridgefield--areas with a high concentration of Koreans. Fort Lee represents one of the towns in New Jersey associated with the Chinese influx, at a rate of approximately four percent increase annually. The same article included the comments of local Korean business, restaurant and supermarket owners, in regard to the increase of Chinese customers--indicating the knowledge of the influx among non-Chinese in Fort Lee (Kim 2003).

Surprisingly, many of my Chinese informants seemed unaware of a co-ethnic presence in Fort Lee. In some cases, this lack of awareness was ascribed to their general lack of contacts within Fort Lee, not just with co-ethnics. At the Golden Moon Festival in 2008 I spoke with one Taiwanese man, a resident of Fort Lee for three years. Seeing the large numbers of Chinese in the audience, he remarked that he had never guessed there were so many Chinese in Fort Lee. In some cases, an informant's impression was based on daily observation. For example, one Chinese female informant, whose child attends an elementary school in Fort Lee, did not feel the Chinese were increasing because she had not observed any growth in the number of Chinese parents making donations to the school in recent years. The local press has not reported on the Chinese population as widely as for Japanese and Koreans, except for coverage of ethnic festivals such as the Chinese New Year. Yet my non-Chinese informants indicate that the Chinese

are present in their congregations and in their neighborhoods. Often, after some probing, residents tended to say, “Oh, yes, there are also a few Chinese.”

The Chinese seem to be living with non-co-ethnic members of the community without attracting attention. This may be because they have not formed a visible ethnic presence in Fort Lee. First-generation Chinese informants have co-ethnic friends, but their co-ethnic relationships are not restricted to Fort Lee; many stated that their closest co-ethnic friends live outside Fort Lee. One Chinese woman and her Latino husband, who had resided in Fort Lee between 2002 and 2004, both belonged to a church in the Bronx. In addition, her parents lived in Manhattan. Due to these personal connections, the couple did not develop close relationships with their neighbors in Fort Lee. For another first-generation, Chinese female, originally from Hong Kong, the Chinese parents she meets at Fort Lee High School that her daughter attends are “acquaintances” with whom she does not socialize. She explained that her best friends (Chinese) are in New York City, and that she also has friends in her congregation in Englewood (where she is the only Asian member). These accounts suggest that while many first-generation Chinese tend to have co-ethnic friends, they may not necessarily live in proximity with each other.

While Chinese informants appreciate the Asian environment of Fort Lee, they also feel that too great a concentration of Asians is not necessarily desirable. As among the Japanese and Koreans, some Chinese think of moving to areas with better school systems than that of Fort Lee. One first-generation Chinese female, in her early forties, with two children in the public school system, described her plan for leaving Fort Lee:

I like some Asian activities for my children because I don't want them to forget where they came from. But I don't want to go somewhere where there are too many Asians as well, because, after all, this is America.

While middle-class suburban Chinese may not be inclined to shed their home country's values and identities, they are also intent on assimilation. Despite the absence of co-ethnic convergence, the Chinese in Fort Lee have not entirely shed their ethnicity. The resources of the professional suburban Chinese obviate the need for co-ethnic support. Middle-class Chinese in Fort Lee are examples of a "cultural community" (Ling 2009). Such communities are held together by cultural institutions--Chinese schools and religious and community institutions--which provide social opportunities for ethnic cohesion. Maintenance of ethnicity among the Chinese does not necessarily require geographic concentration. In addition, the Chinese in Fort Lee do not seem to resist the notion of integration into the mainstream.

4. Factors in the Formation of East Asian Communities in Fort Lee

Residential histories of East Asians in Fort Lee vary. For some Fort Lee is a first destination in the United States. Others have previously lived elsewhere in the U.S.

Informants of East Asian origin indicate the following reasons for choosing Fort Lee:

- i. convenience and proximity to New York City
- ii. school system
- iii. availability of ethnic services, or presence of co-ethnics, or, "Asian" services
- iv. safety.

Convenience for commuting to work, including Manhattan and various locations in New Jersey, was clearly important for my East Asian informants. Fort Lee is viewed as if it is "a borough of New York," an "extension of New York," or a "mini-Manhattan." From the multinational business point of view, Fort Lee is also conveniently located in terms of

access to three major airports (John F. Kennedy International Airport, LaGuardia Airport, Newark Liberty International Airport). The public transportation system and concentration of commercial businesses in downtown Fort Lee make it possible to do daily shopping and run errands, even without a car. Safety and low crime rates in Bergen, compared to New York City, have been cited as other important reasons for choosing Fort Lee. At the same time, as close as it is to New York City, Fort Lee offers a clean and safe suburban environment, which is a considerable attraction for middle-class immigrant families with children.

East Asians also choose Fort Lee for the quality of its public school system. School is a key consideration for the majority of Asian parents when deciding on residential location. A Korean bilingual teacher, who has been teaching in one of the public schools for twenty years, told me that prior to immigrating, Koreans got to know the reputation of the Fort Lee school system through word of mouth. She told me that her school sometimes receives phone inquiries directly from Korea. On occasion, Korean students enrolled in the school tell her, “we know so and so, who used to be in this school, and they told us that school ‘X’ was the best so we moved here.”

A noteworthy feature of the public school system in Fort Lee is the long tradition of bilingual teaching. New Jersey State law mandates the implementation of bilingual education programs in school districts with twenty or more Limited English Proficiency (LEP) students.²⁹ In Fort Lee, the proportion of Limited English Proficiency (LEP) students ranges between 4.8 percent (high school) and 19.5 percent (School Number 3)

²⁹ New Jersey Bilingual Education Act of 1975 and administrative code.

[State of New Jersey, Department of Education 2008]³⁰ The number of LEP students declines as the grades move up, as does the number of non-English speaking students. Further, school districts with ten or more LEP students, but no more than twenty from any single language group, are required to implement English as a Second Language (ESL) programs by the State Board of Education (Villegas and Young 1997). ESL and Japanese bilingual programs were initiated in 1976 in Fort Lee, the first of their kind in New Jersey. Awareness of the availability of bilingual teachers in Fort Lee public schools is widespread among Japanese and is of primary importance to expatriate families. The availability of bilingual service in School Number 3 (including bilingual teachers who can serve as interpreters for conferences with parents) has resulted in a Japanese concentration in the area surrounding this school.

My Chinese and Korean informants did not indicate that language programs were a crucial factor in their choice of Fort Lee--probably because their children tend to be fluent in English. Nevertheless, a Korean schoolteacher indicated that quite a few Korean students are enrolled in the bilingual programs. The co-ethnic network, which allows for communication of school information in the native language, is also important for foreign-born parents--an article from a local newspaper in 1999 reported that urgent information pertaining to school, such as cancellations due to snow, makes its way across language barriers via chains of Korean and Japanese parents who relay the word to one another (Geller 1999).

³⁰ LEP students at Fort Lee High School represent fifty different languages, according to a document created by the High School and communicated by one informant (n.p., n.d.).

5. Convergence and Separation

What is the topographical dispersion of East Asians in Fort Lee? How are the three East Asian groups mapped physically and symbolically in social space? The Japanese, both past and present, have preferred to live near their children's school, especially School Numbers 1 and 3. According to a Japanese female informant, who lived in Fort Lee in the late 1980s, there was once an area to the south of the town to which the Japanese flocked, near School Number 1. The only area of Japanese concentration today is around School Number 3, as noted above, where abundant duplex rentals, the most popular type of rental properties among Japanese, can be found.³¹ This area, located to the north of Fort Lee, is also a preferred choice for families due to the proximity of a private Japanese school in Englewood Cliffs. Apart from this area, the Japanese dwellings are evenly dispersed and located throughout the borough.

Koreans are a ubiquitous presence in Fort Lee and live in both ethnically-mixed neighborhoods and in largely Korean neighborhoods. A 1.5-generation, twenty-two year old Korean female, for example, told me that her apartment building is mainly occupied by Koreans--approximately seventy percent. Another Korean woman in her thirties told me that although she grew up in ethnically-mixed neighborhoods, the block on which she and her family currently reside is predominantly Asian. On the other hand, a number of Korean informants reside in neighborhoods where the majority of neighbors are old-time

³¹ Real estate agents and residents remarked that developers had demolished old houses and built duplexes because of the popularity of the latter among Japanese families. According to a local newspaper account, the construction of "numerous oversized, brick duplexes" took place from the early 1980s (Geller 1999) confirming the accounts of informants.

white residents. In fact, many of my non-Korean informants indicated that they have Korean neighbors.

The Chinese appear to be living in racially and ethnically-mixed neighborhoods--all of my Chinese informants were living in multiethnic neighborhoods. Except for a few cases, Chinese informants did not have co-ethnic neighbors, while many had Japanese or Korean neighbors.

Some Asians suggested that the absence of white Americans in their neighborhoods is an indication of the increasing number of ethnic minorities in Fort Lee. In 1999, a local paper reported on neighborhood changes in northern Fort Lee, noting that in the 1990s, Korean families joined the Japanese families who had moved to this part of town in the 1980s. By 1999, the same neighborhood was receiving more Chinese and a few Russian families (Geller 1999). The fact that the majority of informants mentioned non-co-ethnic neighbors suggests that East Asians are not living in an entirely insular, co-ethnic neighborhood. In this way, Fort Lee's ethnic communities are distinct from the traditional immigrant enclave.

East Asian informant evaluations with regard to neighborhood relations were strikingly similar--good, pleasant, but ultimately superficial and shallow. "Basically a 'hello' relationship," where even the pleasantries seem perfunctory, was how a few informants put it. A fifty-year old Japanese female, living in Fort Lee for twenty-seven years, remarked on the changes she had perceived over time, associated with the urbanization of Fort Lee:

I have a lot of friends who live in Fort Lee. They'll say "hello" to the neighbors, but that's it. It's not like years ago, you know, "you wanna have coffee over my house?" I don't think there's stuff like that. I think they are all just busy.

Given that the informants generally lived in racially and ethnically diverse neighborhoods, they implicitly referred to non-co-ethnic neighbors in describing their neighbor relationships. Such multiethnic neighborhood relationships appear generally detached. Another Japanese female, who used to live in Fort Lee as the wife of an expatriate, tried to blend in with Americans and resided in a place that was not part of the Japanese concentration. She had a good relationship with her white neighbors, sharing foods, but never invitations into each other's homes. A few Asians, nevertheless, told me that in the past they had Asian neighbors who were good friends (not necessarily co-ethnics) but no one mentioned having a white neighbor who became a close friend.

Detachment is associated with the semi-urban environment of Fort Lee, where residents tend to, "keep to themselves." A second-generation Chinese male in his early twenties remarked:

I think a lot of people that live in Fort Lee actually, they don't work in Fort Lee, they are not part of the community, they just live here, you know. Like most of them work in the city and they commute here. And that's it . . . they are not part of the community. That's one big problem I actually see. There is no sense of community in Fort Lee. You know, everybody is just here, living here, not to be part of the community.

Though posed in general terms, this view suggests there is little mixing of different ethnic groups. Young informants in their twenties and thirties, who work in Fort Lee and beyond, reported having little contact with neighbors, primarily because they are not at home most of the time. Lifestyle thus affects the character of neighborly relationships as well.

Dispersed throughout social space, the three East Asian groups in Fort Lee form distinct and separate communities. Especially for those without English fluency, the

ethnic environment easily allows group members to be sustained within a co-ethnic world. One 1.5-generation Korean American female, a museum staffer in Newark, was involved in outreach to Asian communities in Bergen County in the mid-2000s. After visits to various East Asian organizations, such as Korean churches, Japanese schools, and Chinese centers in Fort Lee and nearby boroughs, she felt that each group served co-ethnics and was “not looking at themselves as part of a bigger community.”

The boundaries that sustain ethnic distinction, however, are not immutable. Ethnic businesses and services that cater to non-co-ethnic clients are an example of this. In Fort Lee, ethnic businesses do not serve co-ethnics exclusively. A Korean American businessman in mortgage financing in his early thirties explained that even though local business is predominantly Korean it is a “very open business climate.” While acknowledging that for business owners and managers who do not speak English, it is inviting to have Korean-speaking customers, the informant continued:

It really is [an open climate] I can tell from a Korean American perspective, you know, we just like doing business, period. You know, whether it's with another Korean or whether it's with another American, whether it's with another Japanese, whether it's with anybody.

The local availability of ethnic food and ingredients seemed important to the majority of Asian informants. Members of each ethnic group prefer to use co-ethnic businesses (e.g. Chinese go to Chinatown in Flushing or New York, Japanese go to the Japanese supermarket, Koreans go to the Korean supermarket) but the ethnic supermarkets in the area are patronized by co-ethnics as well as by others in search of “Asian” ingredients. Asian informants enjoy the availability of Asian foods and restaurants in and around Fort Lee. Because of the availability of Asian ingredients, Chinese who live in northern Bergen County drive down to the Fort Lee area to shop.

Bulletin boards in the Japanese and Korean supermarkets typically placed on the walls near the entrance door, are filled with bilingual and multilingual flyers advertising apartment rentals, music and art classes, English conversation classes, summer camps, garage sales--in Chinese, Japanese, and Korean, as well as in English. (Figure 8).

Another commonality shared among the three East Asian groups in Fort Lee is their devotion to education for their children. The presence of Asian students in the school system was appreciated as a benefit to their children's education--because Asian students, in general, as one Chinese mother said, are seen as hardworking. The perceived benefit was not necessarily limited to co-ethnics, but through a more generalized notion of "Asian" as a whole. Devotion to education goes beyond the public school system. Though few in number, there are Japanese and Korean children attending the Chinese School to learn Chinese--based on parental belief in the advantages of knowing Chinese in the expanding global economy. There are Chinese and Korean students who attend the Japanese afterschool math and reading enrichment program. The instructor in this program explained that non-Japanese parents gain information about the school by word of mouth at public schools--they ask Japanese mothers how their children do well in math and learn about this afterschool program. These examples suggest that choice depends on the perceived overall benefits for children, and is not necessarily guided by whether the institution is co-ethnic or not. Given the Asian convergence on Fort Lee, there are possibilities for ethnic boundary crossing.³²

³² "Boundary crossing," according to Alba and Nee (2003), corresponds to the classic notion of individual-level assimilation: an individual moves from one group to another without any real change to the boundary itself (60). Here, the notion of "boundary-crossing" refers to the move across ethnic divides, between Asian groups.

6. Dispersal into Northern Bergen County

A common trend among the three East Asian groups residing in Fort Lee is the move further north in Bergen County once they become used to life in the United States. The school district is the major reason for this north-bound move. Because of better public high schools in Tenafly and Ridgewood, Japanese parents have chosen to move to those areas if they have children of high school age. When there was a large concentration of Japanese, avoidance of co-ethnics was one reason for leaving Fort Lee for other boroughs in Bergen County (Shinkai 1994). Recently, sizable concentrations have developed in these townships, with the emergence of Japanese grocery stores and a supplementary Japanese school to accommodate the increasing number. Additionally, my informants report that permanent residents tend to live in places that are more “suburban” and affluent than Fort Lee. Informants also reported increasing intermarriage between Japanese and U.S. citizens, and that intermarried couples often live in northern Bergen County--typically more “white” suburbs. One Japanese female informant, a U.S. citizen, said that she plans to move to another town, “probably in the north,” in the future, because Fort Lee has become too congested.

Koreans have similarly shifted their place of settlement to northern Bergen County (e.g. Sudol 2009). Korean informants also told me about the increasing number of Koreans moving into northern Bergen County--a preference based on the reputation of the school district (see Oh 2007). Better schools and avoidance of high costs of living and congestion were listed as factors for moving out of Fort Lee. Consequently, the Korean population has increased rapidly in townships such as Ridgewood and Tenafly.

South Korean media coverage, reporting Tenafly High School as one of the best schools in the United States, has resulted in a rapid increase of Korean students there (Sudol 2009). One Korean male commented on a new aspect of Korean settlement. Koreans used to move to Fort Lee and Palisades Park from Queens; today, Koreans arrive directly in Fort Lee or Palisades Park and run small businesses. Eventually they move to northern Bergen County, to towns such as Tenafly and Norwood and commute to Fort Lee or Palisades Park for work.

One schoolteacher attributed the plateau in the number of Korean students during the first decade of the twenty-first century to parental avoidance due to the large number of Korean students in the Fort Lee school district. Some parents choose school districts with fewer Koreans in order for their children to learn English more quickly.

Chinese and Taiwanese, from the accounts of Chinese informants and Chinese schools, are fairly dispersed throughout Bergen County. A sizable Taiwanese population in Fort Lee in earlier decades was indicated by a few informants, but these immigrants have moved to other towns in Bergen. My Chinese informants appeared to be the most ambivalent about Fort Lee among the three East Asian groups, although many considered it a convenient and nice place to live. While there are long-term Chinese residents comfortably settled in Fort Lee, many of my informants were in the process of moving or considering moving out of Fort Lee. This propensity may reflect uncertainty--at least they do not seem to have the depth of attachment found among Koreans, or the sense of Fort Lee being "our town." The reasons given for moving were varied: the desire for better schools, affordable yet adequate housing, or for personal reasons, such as advanced

studies, employment, or marriage. In this regard, my Chinese informants represented “transient suburbanites.”

East Asian dispersal to more affluent suburbs in northern Bergen County, already an established trend, suggests that patterns of immigrant suburban settlement are not static. First-generation immigrants are already leaving their initial suburban ethnic community for what they perceive to be “better” suburbs.

7. Assessment of Spatial Assimilation and the Ethnoburb

East Asian communities in Fort Lee offer support both for spatial assimilation and for the ethnoburb model, with some qualification. Recent trends in immigrant concentration in the suburbs have problematized certain premises of spatial assimilation but examination of the motives and decisions of immigrant actors suggests that spatial assimilation retains some of its pertinence. On the other hand, the concept of the ethnoburb as a new ethnic settlement type (Li 1998) does not account globally for the new and varied realities of the multiethnic suburb in Fort Lee.

In the case of Fort Lee, spatial assimilation holds true partially in the sense that suburbanization is a reflection of upward mobility for some Asian residents. For earlier Japanese and Korean immigrants, the move out of Flushing to Fort Lee for, “a better environment” was contingent on increased economic power. Similarly, Chinese residents of Fort Lee make a distinction between themselves and the Chinese in Flushing as one of “professionals” versus “immigrants”--suggestive of a sense of status distinction according to place of residence. For some East Asians, the move from Queens to Fort

Lee is associated with an awareness of occupational hierarchy, social class, and their own upward mobility.

From the spatial assimilation perspective, immigrant suburbanization is an indication of integration into the mainstream. Seen retrospectively, the Japanese experience in Fort Lee runs counter to this premise. Japanese suburban residence was based primarily on the possession of economic capital and perceived receptiveness by native whites of the “other,” not the willingness to assimilate. The Japanese did not move to Fort Lee because they were becoming integrated into American society; rather, their socioeconomic position allowed for suburban residence. Similarly, Korean immigrants who have moved to Fort Lee directly from abroad in more recent years do not fit the postulate of spatial assimilation. These groups possess the means to live in the suburb on arrival, without having assimilated into America. Spatial assimilation seems more plausible as an explanation of East Asian dispersion into northern Bergen County--to the extent that East Asians opt thereby to live in a prosperous white American milieu.

Japanese temporary immigration into Fort Lee supports one aspect of the “ethnoburb” model--the formation of an ethnic suburb as a global economic outpost. The formation of the Japanese suburban community has hinged on the international mobility of capital and human resources, in other words, on economic globalization. The initial settlement of the Japanese in Fort Lee was based largely on strategic business decisions by multinational corporations enacted through expatriate agents. In turn, the decline of the Japanese community in Fort Lee was directly connected with a weakening of the Japanese domestic economy.

Yet the ethnoburb model does not fully encapsulate the Japanese experience in Fort Lee. The transient character of Japanese immigration into the suburbs must be taken into consideration (cf. Mizukami 2007).³³ For the majority of expatriate Japanese temporarily living in Fort Lee, the notion of an eventual return to Japan shapes their attitudes and decisions regarding their life in America. Sojourners do not intend to settle down or assimilate. The “generalized other” in the home country is constantly at the back of Japanese expatriate minds. Mizukami (2007) argues that the defining characteristic of sojourners is their orientation towards a homeland, with a corollary “in-group solidarity.” Although their engagement in community life is not entirely absent, for the most part Japanese remain “guests.”³⁴ The expatriate community in Fort Lee has existed over a prolonged period of time, with a membership in constant flux (Cohen 1977). But the transience of individual expatriates does not mean that expatriate communities are necessarily transient. Increasing international interdependence leads to the perpetuation of such communities, which tend to become a permanent fixture of the social scene in the host society (ibid.). The expatriate community is distinct from the concept of “ethnoburb”—a Japanese ethnoburb in Fort Lee is precluded by the transience of the expatriates and the paucity of their number.

³³ Citing examples from Japanese expatriate communities in London and Düsseldorf, White (1998) argues that the Japanese form a highly segregated group despite their high socioeconomic status. White (1998) argues for consideration of the implications of a “non-racialized international migration group” for theories of urban ethnicity.

³⁴ With reference to expatriates, the notion of “guest” in the accounts both American and Japanese informants should be distinguished from the unrelated concept of “guest worker.”

Koreans have established an immigrant community oriented toward permanent settlement in Fort Lee. The Korean community fits the characteristics of the ethnoburb model--a suburban ethnic business and residential clustering. Korean ethnic business in Fort Lee is witness to a firmly established ethnic community--with sufficient financial resources to transform the host society. Additionally, the case of Koreans demonstrates several other characteristics of the ethnoburb--multiethnic, open (compared to urban ethnic enclaves or ghettos) and with a proliferation of professional enterprises (Li 1997).

The ethnoburb is described as a tightly-knit and relatively self-contained ethnic environment (Li 1998). Such attributes are comparable to the notion of Korean community being “institutionally complete”--that is, one in which networks of social organizations dominate the immigrant community because of the large number of such formal institutions within the community (Min 2001, 174). The Korean community in Fort Lee is certainly viewed both by Koreans and non-Koreans as close-knit, with a prevalence and growth of Korean businesses, churches, and other ethnic organizations that simultaneously compete with and support each other. The Korean concentration, according to the terms of the ethnoburb, has served to “resist complete assimilation”:

Ethnoburbs have become part of the reality in today’s urban areas. Ethnic suburbs offer ethnic minority people the opportunity to resist complete assimilation into the white cultural and social “norms” of the host society. More important, the ethnoburb model challenges the dominant view that assimilation is inevitable and the best solution for ethnic minorities (Li 2006, 16-7).

But these qualities do not preclude immigrant integration into the host society:

[k]eeping their identities and establishing distinctive communities, ethnoburban populations can nonetheless integrate into the host society through economic activities, political involvement, and community life (ibid., 17)

This second trait of the ethnoburb, the integration of the ethnoburb inhabitants into the mainstream, will be discussed in the following chapter. The Korean community in Fort Lee can be considered as an “ethnoburb” to the extent that the term conveys functions of both ethnic retention and integration into the local community. At the time of writing, the Korean community in Fort Lee represents a transformation in-process in a given multiethnic space. Yet while noting the possibility of complementary processes of assimilation and ethnicity in the ethnoburb (Li 2009), the model passes over the dual processes of assimilation and ethnic retention in detail--e.g. generational differences, social domains where assimilation is likely to occur, how assimilation and ethnic retention are negotiated, the degree of persistence of co-ethnic solidarity and ethnonational identities. These issues are considered in the following chapters.

The Chinese have never formed an “enclave” or “ethnoburb” in Fort Lee. The community is certainly different from those suburban Chinese communities analyzed in the literature according to the ethnoburb model--there is neither visible ethnic business nor residential clustering. My Chinese informants, typically middle-class professionals, do not work in co-ethnic businesses and are more likely to work for mainstream American firms with largely white American colleagues. Though considered “assimilated” in socioeconomic terms, the majority of Chinese informants nevertheless spoke of the importance of ethnic heritage--for example, the celebration of the Chinese New Year and retention of the Chinese language. As will be discussed in the following chapter, the vibrancy at the two Chinese schools in Bergen with hundreds of Chinese parents and children attests to this. The Chinese population in Fort Lee represents a “cultural community” that is “heterolocal,” whereby despite geographical dispersion, co-

ethnic solidarity is sustained (Ling 2009; Zelinski and Lee 1998). The fact that the Chinese in Fort Lee lack a physically-bounded enclave renders them “invisible” in many residents’ minds. As suggested earlier, the Chinese and Japanese in Fort Lee are roughly equal in number (approximately 2,000 respectively in 2000). Yet the Japanese tend to have close relationships with co-ethnics and consider Fort Lee a highly Japanese environment, while the Chinese tend to believe there are few Chinese in Fort Lee. Such perceptual gaps reflect differences in the functional density of co-ethnic networks.

From the findings of the present study, aspects of the conceptual framework subsumed by the term “ethnoburb” offer insight, especially for the case of the Koreans in Fort Lee. Fort Lee, however, presents a case that diverges from the ethnoburb model on several accounts. First, highly distinct and enduring East Asian communities have developed in the same locality of Fort Lee and although the Korean community represents the ethnoburb, neither Japanese nor Chinese communities aptly fit the model. Yet these separate communities are co-present in the same social space--their co-existence facilitates ethnic boundary-crossing in everyday life. Certain existing ethnic organizations and services (non-political) are utilized by non-co-ethnic members and in some cases foster a pan-Asian entity. The present case is suggestive of a potential fluidity and malleability of ethnic boundaries. Fort Lee thus raises further questions about the implications of a multiethnic suburb where different minorities co-reside and the necessity of considering the possibility of more fluid social and spatial relations.

Social space may be considered a convergence point for groups that are culturally similar yet ethnically distinct. The variety among the residential histories of Asians in Fort Lee reveals a distinction between suburban ethnic community and those of the urban

enclave--the former consisting of those with various trajectories, while the latter is home mainly to newcomers. Diversity, heterogeneity, and transience in Fort Lee reflect further aspects of the changing contemporary realities of suburbs surrounding major cities throughout the United States. The characteristics of the several communities within Fort Lee problematize assumptions of unidirectionality, whether of spatial assimilation or ethnic retention.

Chapter 3

Assimilation and Ethnic Retention:

Structuration of Ethnicity and Immigrant Assimilation in Everyday Life

Among East Asian groups in Fort Lee, tendencies of both spatial assimilation and ethnic suburban development are apparent. Under such circumstances, how do the processes of assimilation and ethnic retention coexist? Although generally assumed to be antonymic, their relations are complex. As discussed earlier, recent scholarship has begun to suggest the possible compatibility and coexistence of assimilation and ethnic retention (e.g. Alba 1995; Gans 1999). Such processes are not linear; they are at times concurrent and an unintended product of social interaction. In everyday life, one process presupposes the other--as for West Indian political leaders in New York City whereby ethnic appeal by immigrant groups is drawn from the host society's political culture--in this case, ethnic assertion may signify a mode of assimilation (Kasinitz 1992). Patterns of assimilation and ethnic retention hence suggest symbiosis. Central to this concept is the idea that assimilation and ethnic retention are shaped by social relationships both within and across groups.

One function of ethnic organizations is to "help the immigrant to 'adjust' to the conditions of life and cultural habits in the country of adoption" (Breton 1964, 197). Such organizations facilitate acculturation while promoting greater integration into the interpersonal networks of the co-ethnic group. Breton observed that ethnic institutions tend to help increase the cohesion of the ethnic group. Ethnic organizations in Fort Lee have primarily served co-ethnic members and largely conform to Breton's observation.

Three ethnic organizations exist in Fort Lee: the Japanese American Society of New Jersey (founded 1974); the Korean American Association of Fort Lee (founded 1999); the Chinese-American Family Coalition of New Jersey (founded 2006). Leaders of these organizations indicate that theirs is the only ethnic organization for each of the groups in Fort Lee and that there has been no pan-ethnic institutional affiliation among them to date.

Today, however, some organizations offer services to non-co-ethnics or make explicit an interest of integration into the mainstream; conversely, ethnic group members have begun to utilize institutions beyond their own group. Such trends suggest potential boundary crossing for individuals of different ethnic and racial backgrounds. Ethnic organizations may in fact facilitate immigrant incorporation, while solidifying ethnic ties. In Fort Lee, the presence of an organizational shift to extend services to non-co-ethnics is noticeable, particularly in the realm of culture.

The question regarding how assimilation and ethnic retention coexist may be analyzed through the employment of the concept of social practice. “Practice” refers to the routine actions produced and reproduced in social life by social actors.¹ Though habitualized and taken for granted as “practical knowledge,” practice is also spontaneous and creative. The concept is adapted here to patterns of immigrant assimilation and ethnic retention as a practice of actors followed routinely but also flexibly. The notion of practice has a parallel in the notion of “social boundaries” as a “social distinction that individuals make in their everyday lives that shapes their actions and mental orientations

¹ See Bourdieu 1990b; Giddens 1984. Giddens assumes reflexivity among social actors; this contributes to the recursive ordering of social practices. Bourdieu, on the other hand, conceptualizes practice as regulated, unified, and systematized by groups in social life, and followed unconsciously.

toward others” (Alba 2009, 40). The central idea in the concept of practice is the interdependence of actors and structure--in effect, structure is embodied within actors. The practice of social actors, while reproducing their dispositions and orientations, is also transformative of social structure. For this reason, the present chapter discusses and analyzes practices exemplifying propensities of assimilation and ethnic retention among groups and individuals. At the same time, the practice enacted by immigrant actors is conditioned by the social structure.

For the present study, the “practice” of immigrants and their children is considered as reproducing ethnicity as well as the schema (mental structure) of assimilation. The practice of retention allows immigrants to recreate what is familiar to them; while at the same time being a conscious, deliberate activity which seeks contact with the mainstream. The practice of assimilation can also be both conscious and unconscious--some immigrants are motivated to do so alongside the possibility of an “unintended consequence of myriad individual actions and choices” (Brubaker 2001, 542). Given the interdependencies of action and structure, the processes of assimilation and ethnic retention in turn bear on the transformations of the structure of host society. Immigrant action and practice influence host attitudes and perceptions which in turn transform host institutions. The following discussion considers the practice of immigrant actors and groups in order to address the following questions: How do immigrant actors in Fort Lee negotiate assimilation and ethnic retention? Are East Asian groups assimilating culturally and socially, as well as spatially? In what ways do East Asian groups maintain ethnic belonging? How do the Asian groups vary in this regard? Is there any invariant among the groups?

1. Japanese Ethnic Organizations

The Japanese American Society of New Jersey (JAS of NJ) established in 1974, is currently the only formal Japanese organization based in Fort Lee.² The organization was founded to provide services to Japanese residents in the Fort Lee area in response to their increased presence during the 1970s. According to the website, JAS of NJ is, “dedicated to promoting understanding between Japanese and American cultures.” JAS of NJ offers programs in culture and language, including classes in English, Japanese, the tea ceremony, *ikebana* (traditional Japanese flower arrangement), and Japanese arts and crafts. The English courses mainly target expatriates and their families--with companies often subsidizing the expense. The Society’s library holdings, comprising over 25,000 Japanese books, magazines, newspapers, comics, films and television programs are the largest in the tri-state area. The extensive collection and new publications added to the library are loaned free of charge, allowing members to remain informed of trends in Japan.

² Previous research (Shinkai 1994) has discussed several Japanese ethnic organizations which are no longer extant:

- i. Japanese Women’s Organization (JWO) founded 1975
- ii. Services to Parents of Exceptional Asian Children (SPEAC). Founded in 1984, for children with disabilities. SPEAC’s activities extended beyond Fort Lee.
- iii. Japanese Cultural Society of New Jersey (JCSN) established 1991.

In general, informants were not aware of these, with the exception of the public library director who had contact with the JWO. Research has revealed scant information on these organizations.

Currently, the majority of Japanese members of JAS of NJ are expatriate families (eighty percent) with a further twenty percent being permanent immigrant families. The membership dictates the programs and offerings to a large degree. English classes have been the central activity due to the needs of expatriates. During my fieldwork I observed the flow of visitors to the organization, attending classes, browsing magazines, borrowing books and DVDs, or chatting with each other. The office provides space for the exchange of information on various issues related to living abroad. Japanese are frequently seen, but there are also non-Japanese visitors, including Chinese, Koreans, and whites. In recent years, the non-Japanese membership--and the number of non-Japanese taking Japanese classes--have increased, although these members still constitute less than ten percent of the entire membership. The residence of members extends beyond Fort Lee and at the time of the research, late 2007, included Edgewater, Englewood, Englewood Cliffs, Norwood, Paramus, and Tenafly. The society comprised 300 to 350 families as of 2007. According to the president, the membership has fluctuated according to changes in the Japanese population in the surrounding area.

Though not in Fort Lee, there are several Japanese schools in the area. One government-subsidized, full-time Japanese school operates in Oakland. One private, full-time preschool and elementary school is in Englewood Cliffs (which also offers Saturday school for Japanese children attending local American schools). Many pupils from Fort Lee attend these schools, which offer a bus service and make stops at convenient locations within Fort Lee for easy pickup by mothers. There is also a private bilingual preschool in Closter (formerly in Palisades Park) along with a Saturday school in

Paramus. In addition, Fort Lee has several private *juku* (cram schools).³ All of these educational institutions, whether weekend supplementary or full-time, are aimed at making the process of reintegration of pupils into the Japanese educational system easier on return to Japan. Full-time Japanese schools offer ESL courses but follow the Japanese school calendar and curriculum. Japanese weekend school classes are organized as closely as possible to follow the format of schools in Japan (Shinkai 1994).⁴ At the same time, the Japanese schools offer opportunities to learn and maintain Japanese language skills for children whose first-generation Japanese parents are here to stay permanently because of marriage or employment. The latter group uses the Japanese school for language maintenance among their U.S.-born children. In this sense Japanese schools serve the demand of cultural retention among Japanese American youth.

2. Korean Ethnic Organizations

There are several Korean ethnic organizations, including alumni associations and cultural organizations, in Fort Lee. The Korean American Association of Fort Lee (KAAFL) is the most significant in terms of visibility and influence on the local community.⁵ KAAFL was established by a group of first-generation business owners in 1999 to represent the voice of Korean business in the local community. According to a

³ During the course of her research, Shinkai (1994) counted ten *juku* (Japanese cram schools) in Fort Lee alone.

⁴ Cf. the examples of Chinese or Korean schools, discussed later in the present chapter.

⁵ Other Korean organizations in surrounding municipalities of Fort Lee include: Korean-American Association of New Jersey (Bogota), Korean American Voters' Council (Hackensack), New Jersey Korean Chamber of Commerce (Palisades Park).

representative of KAAFL, first-generation business owners felt a sense of separation from the American mainstream and a consciousness that their views and interests were not well-represented. They felt a need for sources they could turn to for information and assistance in networking opportunities with other Korean American merchants. The fact that a large number of Korean residents in Fort Lee are business owners facilitated the development of such an organization.

Initiated primarily to promote Korean merchant interests, KAAFL has evolved into a community service organization during the last six years. While continuing to provide support for Korean business owners, the organization has become a source of information for all Koreans; for example, those who have recently moved to Fort Lee or those requiring information and assistance. A representative explained that the organization is widely known among Korean residents today. KAAFL is staffed by volunteers; as of late 2008, the active membership comprised approximately forty to fifty persons, mainly business owners.

KAAFL cooperates with other Korean organizations in ethnic events such as the celebration of “*Chuseok*” in Leonia, the Korean Day Parade in Manhattan, or any local event where support is needed.⁶ However, a representative from KAAFL noted that it is important not to “overstep other people’s boundaries” and to maintain focus within the town as the Korean American Association of Fort Lee. In other words, the organization specifically focuses on Fort Lee, with the Korean community as its constituency.

⁶ *Chuseok (Hangawi)* is one of Korea’s major holidays expressing appreciation for the year’s harvest and sharing of its abundance with family and friends. The spelling varies. I follow the usage of the Korea Tourism Organization (http://asiaenglish.visitkorea.or.kr/ena/SI/SI_EN_3_6.jsp?cid=613420).

KAAFL has collaborated with the Korean American Voters' Council (KAVC) at election time, encouraging Korean voters to participate. The latter organization was established in 2000 in Fort Lee, but relocated to Hackensack in December 2008. KAVC helps voters by offering translation services for forms and help with the naturalization process. It also conducts voter registration drives and undertakes community education and advocacy. Both KAAFL and KAVC actively participated in the 2010 Korean American Census Task Force, which campaigned to maximize Korean participation in the 2010 census (Choi 2009).

Donghwa Cultural Foundation, a non-profit cultural organization located in Englewood, was established in 2003. The foundation was begun by a local Korean man to foster "good leadership" for a better society, combining elements of East and West. The stated aim of the foundation is to promote "Korean heritage and culture to American society through education, including programs on most aspects of traditional Korean culture, arts, manners, food, etc."⁷ Donghwa's goal of promoting ethnic culture in America is similar to that of JAS of NJ.

Donghwa's current offerings include arts and educational programs such as calligraphy, traditional painting, music, dance, traditional knotting, pottery, *baduk* (Korean chess), cuisine, the tea ceremony, and Korean language. The foundation also sponsors cultural events. Currently, the membership is one third Korean, one third Koreans with American spouses, and one third American--but no Chinese or Japanese. Korean members include both first- and second-generations. There are Korean adoptees whose American parents utilize the center for their children to learn about their cultural

⁷ Donghwa Cultural Foundation, brochure, n.d.

roots. About fifty people regularly visit the foundation each week. The foundation is visited by local residents including those from Fort Lee, as well as those from Connecticut or upstate New York.

Korean language schools operating on the weekend are prevalent in the area and many Korean parents in Fort Lee send their children to these schools for purposes of language retention. One Korean parent who sends her children to such a school reported that the major Korean schools in Bergen County are located in Englewood, Saddle Brook, and Tenafly. They offer Korean language classes as well as extracurricular classes on Korean art and culture, including calligraphy, folk dance, and martial arts. Korean language schools emerged in the 1970s and have grown rapidly due to the surge in Korean immigration (Zhou and Kim 2006).⁸ Unlike their Chinese counterparts, Korean language schools are often affiliated with churches, offering both formal and informal schooling (ibid.). A 1.5-generation Korean female with children attending a local Korean school explained that the Korean language schools receive free textbooks from the South Korean government, designed to teach Korean language and culture to Koreans abroad. One second-generation Korean female in her twenties recalled learning a wide range of topics concerning Korea--including art, culture, history, in addition to the language, while attending the Korean school when she was younger.

3. Chinese Ethnic Organizations

⁸ On the causes and consequences of the system of supplementary education for Chinese and Korean communities, see Zhou and Kim (2006).

Originally begun as the Chinese Cultural Club of Fort Lee, the Chinese-American Family Coalition of New Jersey (CAFCNJ) was founded in 2006. Entirely staffed by volunteers, CAFCNJ consists of nine staff members and some high-school and middle-school students. The membership has grown over the years--beginning with about forty members, the number is currently over three hundred, with members from approximately one hundred Chinese families. CAFCNJ has been involved in the coordination and sponsorship of recreational and cultural activities that promote cultural heritage among Chinese American families in Fort Lee. The aims of the coalition are:

to improve the well being and the quality of life of Chinese-American individuals and families in New Jersey by providing advocacy and assess [sic] to immigrant assistance, social/recreational services, and resources toward the goal of facilitating family function and stability, economic self sufficiency and assimilation into the American mainstream.⁹

In this case, “assimilation into the mainstream” is explicitly stated as an organizational objective. The Japanese or Korean organizations, by comparison, tend to express their aims in terms of achieving “cultural understanding” between America and Japan/Korea.

The Chinese-American Family Coalition sponsors cultural and social/recreational activities for members including traditional Chinese dance classes, Tai Chi (the organization also helps support classes held at the Fort Lee Community Center), arts and crafts, Chinese singing, chess, moon festival celebrations, and karaoke parties. It offers help for newcomers with language problems. Other activities include fundraising for natural disasters such as the earthquake in Sichuan in 2008. CAFCNJ has also hosted the

⁹ Chinese-American Family Coalition of New Jersey (<http://www.chineseamericanfamily.org>). Accessed April 13, 2010.

Golden Moon Festival at the Fort Lee Community Center and Chinese New Year celebrations in Fort Lee schools.

Other ethnic organizations in the area include Chinese schools. Chinese language schools in the United States date back to the late 1880s (Zhou and Li 2003). Both parents and children viewed proficiency in Chinese a necessity; faced with discrimination from the mainstream, the Chinese felt that the future prospects of youth were limited to either returning to China or work in Chinatowns. After the repeal of the Chinese Exclusion Act in 1943, however, the Chinese American community “began to reorient itself from sojourning to putting down roots and reinforcing its commitment to socioeconomic integration” (ibid. 62). Though Chinese language schools declined between the Second World War and the 1960s, due to pressure to assimilate and skepticism regarding the education provided, they have been flourishing since the 1970s (ibid. 63).

As with Koreans, parental enthusiasm for language schools is high among suburban Chinese parents. Many Chinese families living in Fort Lee seem to use (or have used) one of the two Chinese schools in Bergen County: Bergen Chinese School in Hackensack and Huaxia Chinese School in Paramus. Both schools are held on Sundays in rented local school facilities.¹⁰ Teaching instruction at each school follows the homeland style--Bergen Chinese School, predominantly Taiwanese, teaches traditional Chinese; Huaxia Chinese School, primarily mainland Chinese, teaches simplified Chinese. Parents tend to choose the school based on their own place of origin.

¹⁰ The same school facility in Paramus is also used for the Japanese Saturday School.

Bergen Chinese School was established in 1972. The school is largely Taiwanese, but there are also some Hong Kongers and Chinese from Southeast Asian countries, where traditional Chinese is used. The school has been in Hackensack for the last ten years, but has relocated from time to time to various sites in different boroughs.¹¹ At the time of the field observation in 2009 there were 170 students enrolled, although the school used to have three hundred in the past. According to the school administrator, the number of students of Taiwanese origin has decreased due to a growing number of families moving to other states. Yet the relative stability of student registration at Bergen Chinese School is in part attributable to the increasing popularity of the Chinese as a foreign language: the school offers college preparation Chinese courses (Shih 2006).

The Bergen branch of Huaxia Chinese School, established due to parent demand, has been in operation for fifteen years and was originally located in Fort Lee. According to Zhou and Li (2003) Huaxia Chinese School was founded as a Saturday school by immigrant Chinese from the mainland in the early 1990s. Student enrollment is increasing annually. Over the last fifteen years, the school has branched out and there are now nearly twenty schools in Connecticut, New Jersey, New York, and Pennsylvania. The school website notes that it is the largest of its kind in the United States. Since its foundation, the number of students has increased from seventy to over 7,000. In 2010, approximately 500-600 students were enrolled at the Bergen branch of Huaxia Chinese School in Paramus. Huaxia in Paramus largely attracts mainland Chinese, along with Chinese from Hong Kong, Malaysia, Singapore, and Taiwanese.

¹¹ See Bergen Chinese School website (<http://www.bergenchineseschool.com>).

With the aim of promoting Chinese culture, both schools offer language training and a variety of cultural classes (e.g. calligraphy, chess, craft, folk dance, painting, poetry, songs). At Huaxia Chinese School, sport programs such as basketball, soccer, and tennis, are also offered. Sports and cultural classes developed in response to parental requests. Both schools rely on the voluntary efforts of parents who organize and lead classes and activities for the children.

Ethnic community institutions such as Chinese language schools provide an important site where immigrants socialize and rebuild social networks (Zhou and Li 2003). Such co-ethnic ties serve as a “bridge that connects immigrants to . . . the mainstream society by making their social life richer and more comfortable” (ibid. 68). At both Chinese schools in Bergen, the school cafeteria is used as a place for socializing by adults. While their children attend classes, adults fulfill administrative duties, pay fees, prepare for events, and socialize. The principal of Huaxia told me that typical concerns for parents are education, the economy, and jobs. Seniors are also visible in the cafeteria, quietly reading Chinese newspapers or playing games--grandparents accompanying their grandchildren, indicative of a three-generation milieu. At Huaxia, several vendors have created temporary storefronts, selling Chinese foods and books in the cafeteria. As with churches, Chinese language schools have been described as a “marketplace,” bringing together a wide range of Chinese families. As Jones-Correa (2008) notes, ethnic organizations such as churches and language schools fulfill a need for networks and connectedness. Immigrants of suburbia join at such “key organizational nodes” from which social networks “radiate outwards like spokes on a wheel” (38). This differs from Chinese immigrants of earlier generations, who established organizations within the

dense web of the urban ethnic neighborhood. The function of socializing with geographically dispersed co-ethnics may contribute to the continued growth of these schools, despite limited success in inculcating language skills.

4. Ethnic Organizations in Transition

Ethnic organizations in and around Fort Lee have been established for and have served co-ethnics. The examples discussed above demonstrate the organizational efforts of promotion and support of co-ethnics and ethnic practice. Some organizations, however, reach out to non-co-ethnics. This recent trend, across East Asian subgroups, relates to financial necessity for the organizations, but also reflects in part the ethos of multiculturalism, with less rigid boundaries demarcating ethnic groups.

Leaders of some ethnic organizations, especially those focusing on cultural activities, offered various reasons as to why their organizations aim to widen their appeal beyond one ethnic group. The Japanese American Society of New Jersey recognizes the necessity of greater involvement in the municipality. The president of the Society aims to offer more opportunities for sharing Japanese culture with Americans. Language exchange workshops represent one initiative, where Japanese learners (Americans, including those of Asian origin) and English learners (Japanese) gather to practice each other's language and exchange cultural knowledge. Another motive for incorporation of non-Japanese into JAS of NJ is the need for financial survival in the face of declining Japanese membership. The organization intends to broaden its target clients by offering classes such as SAT or TOEIC preparation courses (given by native English speakers) to non-Japanese, non-native English speakers, such as Koreans and Hispanics.

The director of the Donghwa Cultural Foundation spoke about the plan to transform her organization into a multicultural institution, while retaining Korean aspects. Although the founder was committed to the maintenance of Korean tradition and culture in the United States, the current director has begun to expand offerings and has made efforts to publicize as a resource for the community. The director emphasized that the foundation would like to be better known among Americans and that the group considers itself to be a part of the local community and not exclusive. To this end, the foundation actively works on outreach to non-Korean organizations. The director noted the difficulty of attracting sufficient attention from residents in a suburban location--here again, the issue is one of membership, for sustenance of the organization.

The president of the Chinese-American Family Coalition of New Jersey, whom I interviewed following the Golden Moon Festival in October 2008, mentioned the financial challenge of organizing such events as the Festival. Originally from Hong Kong and a resident of Fort Lee for over twenty years, she has seen the shifts of East Asian immigration over time and remarked that the Coalition's event for the coming year would be an "Asian" rather than Chinese festival. She explained this was due to the budgetary demands of a large-scale event but also because she believes, "Fort Lee is an Asian town." She indicated during our interview, that she was contacting Korean leaders although to date the event has not materialized.

Some ethnic schools demonstrate the trend towards wider admission. The Chinese schools discussed above are not strictly limited to co-ethnics. The bylaws of Huaxia Chinese School stipulate that admission is open to any student, regardless of race, gender, or religion--in other words, the school is theoretically not limited to those of

Chinese origin (see Zhou and Li 2003). This principle of open acceptance was equally true at Bergen Chinese School. To be sure, they mainly target Chinese Americans whose first language is English but they are also looking further afield. At Bergen Chinese School, children of non-Chinese origin were noticeable--accompanied by black, Hispanic, and white parents. I was informed that there are also Japanese and Korean students learning Chinese there. Bohua Chinese School, another language school held on Saturdays in Hackensack, actively recruits "non-Chinese speaking families" and offers "Chinese as a Second Language" classes for adults.

For-profit schools, run by Asians, are also undergoing changes that lead beyond their co-ethnic members. The JBC Language Center located in Fort Lee since 2007 (formerly in Edgewater) was founded in 1989 and run by a Japanese, initially as a school to teach Japanese to non-Japanese speakers. The director, a former bilingual teacher in Fort Lee schools, decided to turn the school into an ESL school to cater to non-native English speakers. The JBC Language Center has enrolled Japanese students (school children, expatriates) since its inception: by 2008, however, Korean students constituted ninety percent of the students, in part owing to the presence of Japanese staff who speak Korean. The school's website had pages in three languages in 2008: English, Japanese, and Korean. Six months later, pages had been added including Chinese and Spanish. This development reflects the school's aim of becoming more "international."

Kumon Learning Center in Fort Lee is a franchised Japanese afterschool program, opened in 1987. The Fort Lee branch is jointly owned by a Japanese and a Korean. While eighty percent of the students are of Japanese origin--with an increasing proportion of mixed race children, the remaining twenty percent are Chinese, Hispanic, Indian, and

Korean students. The Japanese owner told me that awareness of Kumon among Korean parents in the area was due to her Korean partner. These examples indicate that the social, economic, and cultural institutions initiated by a particular ethnic group do not necessarily serve co-ethnics alone but are open to wider constituencies. The utilization of non-co-ethnic organizations or recruitment of non-co-ethnic members are often based on pragmatic needs. Through such practice ethnic organizations undergo transformations in function and meaning for both co-ethnic and non-co-ethnic members.

5. Japanese Community Involvement: Guest Status and Reciprocity

As discussed in chapter 2, Japanese informants generally felt that native attitudes toward Asians are favorable in Fort Lee. Shinkai's pilot study of 1980 of Japanese expatriate wives in Fort Lee reveals different perceptions. Shinkai (1994) showed that a typical fear among Japanese women was of being "disliked by Fort Lee citizens because too many of us live in the town." By 1990, she noted this feeling was less pronounced, despite the increase in the number of Japanese. Shinkai's informants indicated that, "Fort Lee people have rather neutral feelings toward us" and thought local residents had the attitude, "they can do what they want to do" (ibid. 49-50).

Shinkai's respondents' feelings about local reactions at the time of the 1980 survey were confirmed by several of my informants, who recalled initial resistance to the Japanese. One white female informant who has been working in Fort Lee for over twenty five years told me that, "a lot of people who were originally from Fort Lee did not appreciate Japanese people coming here." The same informant continued that people

have changed over the years: “I’ve heard people saying, they kind of look back, and say, ‘Oh, weren’t Japanese people nice?’ [laughs]”

What factors helped reduce hostility to Japanese? The status of the Japanese as “guests” may have played a role. As temporary residents, Japanese expatriate families never felt a sense of “rootedness” in Fort Lee and instead had a strong sense of “giving back to the community” that had provided them with a place to live. Fundraising for local public institutions offered one channel for Japanese participation in the American suburban community.

The Japanese Women’s Organization (JWO) played a significant role in promoting grassroots interaction.¹² Founded in 1975, by a Japanese woman married to an American, the group’s members were mostly expatriate wives. The organization once counted as many as 120 members, but by 1997 this had dwindled to fifteen (Fine 1997). The organization provided help to Japanese wives in a foreign land. But although the JWO can be considered an ethnic organization, its activities were targeted at the local American community, rather than at Japanese. The organization’s primary goal, according to the founder, was “to contribute to the community”: accordingly, the group’s main activities concerned fundraising (Fine 1997). Members organized a program called “Japan Open House” at the Fort Lee Public Library in the mid-1970s, which continued into the 1980s. Japanese women demonstrated aspects of Japanese culture, including food, crafts, the *kimono*, *ikebana*, *koto* (stringed musical instrument) concerts, and calligraphy. The director of the Fort Lee Public Library recalls that the events were successful with many established American residents and Japanese attending. Proceeds

¹² See n. 2, *supra*.

were donated to the library. JWO also sponsored “Boys’ Day” and “Girls’ Day” as annual events at the library and also donated a large number of Japanese books (Flory 1989). As a result, Fort Lee Public Library became the only library in Bergen County with a considerable collection of Japanese books (Flory 1989). JWO made further donations to the ambulance corps and the high school as well as underwriting a scholarship “only for Americans” in gratitude to the host country (Fine 1997). These grassroots events helped promote cultural understanding with local residents while allowing Japanese to have contact with Americans.

Fundraising events seem to have been common for towns in Bergen County with Japanese concentrations. A Japanese female who has lived in both Fort Lee and Tenafly for over twenty years remarked that the bazaars organized by Japanese residents in Tenafly were so successful that attendees formed lines to get in. She recalls they raised 7,000-8,000 dollars at each bazaar, including corporate donations. The resulting funds were donated to public institutions in Tenafly.

Japanese businesspeople were supportive of the Fort Lee community, according to the library director. She remembered the CEO of Minolta, then a Fort Lee resident, playing a significant role in fundraising efforts for the Public Library’s extension project:

I remember we had a reception at one point. And he [the CEO of Minolta] invited all his contacts from the Japanese Chamber of Commerce and so forth and they all came. And he gave a talk in English and Japanese. And in English, he more or less said, “this town and this country, but especially the town of Fort Lee, have been very good to you. They have welcomed you into their midst and they’ve done a lot for you. Now it’s time for you to give back.” And everyone, all Japanese businessmen, you know, they were all signing their checks [laughter] . . . having him on the fundraising board was, it was just magnificent, it was just wonderful.

Shinkai (1994) noted that the activities of the Japanese Women's Organization, including Japanese events and donations for local institutions, were perceived as hospitable gestures worthy of reciprocation, thereby easing tensions between Japanese and native residents. Still, the question remains how widespread positive feelings toward the Japanese actually were. Public institutions may have fostered supportive relations with the Japanese, but there is no direct evidence that Fort Lee residents felt positively toward the Japanese. The act of "giving back" appears, in fact, to have helped reinforce the view of Japanese as "guests,"--that is, ultimately, those who do not belong.

Since most Japanese grass-roots organizations have been dissolved, Japanese involvement in the local community has diminished. But the tradition of volunteerism, though small-scale, continues and remains the primary venue for Japanese participation in the community. Such participation is gendered, mostly involving expatriate wives. One expatriate wife, a resident of Fort Lee, spoke of a Japanese volunteer group to which she belongs, consisting largely of Japanese expatriate wives, located in Cresskill. The group raises money for American organizations such as orphanages or for victims of natural disasters. A choral group consisting of Japanese expatriate wives from Fort Lee was founded in 1987, and has performed in nursing homes, churches, and elementary schools (Siegel 1993). Members of this group, "Harmony Basket," felt that their activities provided a bridge from Japan to America in the local area (ibid.).¹³ Though not voluntary activities, garage sales by expatriate families are highly popular among

¹³ See the recent illustrated article in a local weekly, reporting on a performance at a local adult day care center. "Valentine's Day Celebrated at Gallen," *Bergen News*, February 24, 2010.

residents regardless of ethnicity in the Fort Lee area; one Chinese female told me that on the morning of Japanese garage sales people are “waiting in line.”

On the other hand, the Japanese do not seem to be involved generally in the civic life of Fort Lee. Lack of American citizenship precludes participation in local politics. The Japanese tend not to become involved in community activities even when they do not require citizenship; nor are they seen at many of the public events in the borough. One first-generation Japanese male in his early seventies, active in volunteer activities in multiple local institutions including the senior center, told me that Japanese are generally non-participatory. Japanese volunteer activities are conducted with co-ethnics “for America,” but are not undertaken at American institutions with Americans. This tendency of detachment from local life is likely influenced by their transience, reducing the readiness and opportunity for adaptation and integration into the host environment. Japanese expatriates are “largely cut off from the social reality of the country of their sojourn, and often oblivious to it” (Cohen 1977, 69).

In addition to grassroots organizational outreach to the community, local acceptance of the Japanese in Fort Lee was also largely contingent on expatriate status--which signified “privilege” and “transience” in the middle-class suburban setting (Cohen 1977). The social relationships between Japanese and native residents have been ultimately conditioned by the general characteristics of expatriates--orientation to the home country and concrete plans of returning. In turn, Japanese self-perceptions of themselves as “guests” reinforce the notion of “giving back” to the community. Japanese have tended to view residence and access to services such as the school system not as entitlements, but as an obligation to reciprocate. Impermanency and the white-collar

corporate culture that expatriates brought to Fort Lee may have also served to reduce host hostility to them, insofar as they are not perceived by natives as a long-term threat.

6. Political and Civic Involvement among Koreans: “Bridging” the Korean and White Communities

Previous scholarship suggests that Korean immigrants in the United States belong to tightly-knit communities that have maintained stronger ethnic attachments and solidarity than other Asian groups (Min 2006). In Fort Lee, many Koreans continue to maintain a distance from the mainstream in their private and sometimes their public lives. The director of the public library quoted a former Korean librarian who described Koreans as a “highly closed community”; her efforts toward Korean involvement in library activities had been in vain. One first-generation Korean male identified this tendency as “cultural conservatism,” prevalent among adults.

Yet my interviews and observations indicate that Koreans in Fort Lee have increasingly come to participate in broader community activities. For example, KAAFL no longer serves just the Korean business community but plays a highly active role in the entire Fort Lee community--a transformation that has been developing gradually since around 2006. With community leaders actively involved in local life and consciously making efforts to communicate with white civic leaders, KAAFL appears to have contributed to the development of constructive relationships with the white community. One 1.5-generation Korean female emphasized that the activities of KAAFL have made Fort Lee different from other boroughs in Bergen County with high Korean concentrations but which lack a similar organization.

KAAFL is increasingly visible in the borough's public sphere. Involvement with the local community includes funding and voluntary support for various events and institutions. For example, the association provides support for the activities of the Fort Lee Senior Center. It is also involved with the Fort Lee Education Foundation, a scholarship fund that supports public schools in Fort Lee, especially in the fields of art and culture. When the Fort Lee Education Foundation runs the annual "bikathon" ("Tour de Fort Lee") for fundraising purposes, KAAFL participates in the event and contributes to the cause of the foundation. When the local Veterans of Foreign Wars mounts events for Memorial or Independence Day, KAAFL volunteers to help. Such rapport with the Korean community is widely acknowledged by white residents involved in local politics and public services. KAAFL is also active in local elections. An article from the local daily, *The Record*, reported in 2001 that a major focus of KAAFL was, "to build political power for Koreans with the goal of one day having representation on the Borough Council and school board" (Fasbach 2001). A Korean school board member elected in 2009 attributed the success of his campaign to the organizational skills of KAAFL (Almenas 2009b). KAAFL is the only Asian organizational sponsor of the multiethnic annual "Brotherhood Luncheon"--an event supported by a number of ethnic and local organizations including B'nai B'rith, the Hellenic Society, and Unico International.¹⁴

Such involvements are the result of conscious efforts among Korean leaders to create a bridge with the native white community, rather than remaining isolated as a

¹⁴ The annual "Brotherhood Luncheon" has been held in Fort Lee since 1984 (*Greater Fort Lee Chamber of Commerce Business News*, March 2004). KAAFL's participation as a sponsoring organization began around 2001, according to one civic leader involved in the event.

separate minority. “Bridge” was the metaphor frequently used among bilingual Korean leaders to describe their role. In 2008, a Korean civic leader of Fort Lee was made “Person of the Year” by the Greater Fort Lee Chamber of Commerce, in recognition of extensive community service. The importance of “bridging the gap between the Korean and Fort Lee communities” was also emphasized by the honoree:

The Korean community should try not to be separate but rather mingle with the rest of the community by getting more involved in functions and issues related to the borough’s government and chamber . . . everyone needs to come together to work hard as one community.¹⁵

Many Koreans in public positions concurred with such views. According to another Korean community leader, in contrast to earlier Korean immigrants who “did not know how to integrate,” Koreans in Fort Lee and Bergen County, “are trying to assimilate and integrate.” That is, the Korean community is trying to offer services to the “bigger community” beyond the Korean community. Officials of the KAAFL stated in 2011 their role is not to create “new Seoul,” but to promote and improve community values for both Korean and non-Korean residents--testimony of Korean willingness to integrate and to achieve cultural openness.¹⁶ Paradoxical though it may seem, the Korean ethnic organization may promote assimilation of the Korean community while continuing to support Koreans and Korean Americans.

One way of giving service to the local community is through involvement in administration. As of 2002, when Korean students reached nearly one quarter of Fort

¹⁵Almenas 2008b. The article reports that the Korean leader had worked for ten years to bring the borough’s various ethnic communities together.

¹⁶ Kyung Lee, “KAAFL Promotes Diversity and Community, Not ‘New Seoul’,” June 17, 2011, *Fort Lee Patch* (<http://fortlee.patch.com/articles/kaaf-promotes-diversity-and-community-not-new-seoul?n>). Accessed June 22, 2011.

Lee's student population, voters had not yet elected a member of the Korean community to the school board, although Koreans had previously run for office (Fasbach 2002). For Lee's thriving Korean community and the academic success of Korean students were considered the reason for political complacency. The local media quoted one Korean leader who remarked that because of their success and contentment, Koreans "do not believe they have to change the status quo"--the community was, in effect, "a victim of its own success" (ibid.).

Such a "complacent" attitude has changed in recent years. During the period of my research, increasing Korean representation in public office was manifest. The breakthrough was the first election of a Korean American to the Board of Education in 2007, considered a major accomplishment by many informants. Another Korean American member was elected to the Board of Education in 2008, and another in the following year. As of 2009, three members of Korean origin made up the board of nine members. It was suggested by one Korean American female that the victory of the third board member was owed to votes not only from Koreans, but also from non-Koreans who recognized the Korean candidate's credentials. Given the large presence of Korean students in the school system, education is viewed as a domain where Koreans felt an adequate representation was needed.

The entry of Koreans into the realm of local education led to what has been perceived as a racially motivated incident. During the Board of Education election in 2007, a former white board member lost his seat after the counting of absentee ballots. The majority of the absentee ballots were cast by voters with Korean names. The losing candidate asserted that these ballots were invalid, on the alleged grounds that the Korean

absentee voters were neither Fort Lee residents nor U.S. citizens, or had filed false applications. The candidate filed a lawsuit requesting a new election; those named in the legal action were served with subpoenas. The action was stopped, however, by a state Appellate Division court and the lawsuit was eventually withdrawn by the plaintiff (Firschein 2007d). The experience nevertheless “intimidated” Korean voters, some of whom were first-time voters (Firschein 2008a). Despite the ultimate outcome, this incident was interpreted by some as indicative of a pervasive resistance of local white political power towards Korean involvement. In making progress in the public sphere of Fort Lee, the process has not been entirely smooth.

The Korean presence has come to be felt elsewhere in Fort Lee--witness the first political representation of an Asian group in the history of the borough. Both the Planning Board and the Board of Adjustment elected one member of Korean origin during 2006-2007. Korean representation has subsequently increased year by year. As of 2009, several municipal boards and committees have members of Korean origin, including the boards for Adjustment, Health, Library, Planning, Beautification, Historic Site, Structure, Cultural and Landmark, and Sign/Façade Review Committees.¹⁷ Fort Lee’s police department has appointed Korean-speaking officers since 1998 (Nieves 1998a, 1998b, 1999). The new, stricter ordinance concerning requirements for shop signs, building façades and sidewalks went into effect in 2008. The Signs and Façade Review Committee has two Korean members who discussed the new regulations with Korean

¹⁷ Typically, these boards and committees have five to thirteen members and include one or two members of Korean origin; in some cases, the same person sits on multiple committees. There were fifteen municipal boards and committees in 2009; Koreans were represented on seven. The Boards and Committees Master List dated January 2009, available on the borough website. See http://www.fortleenj.net/clerk/board_and_committee_2009.pdf. Accessed in May 2009.

merchants (Firschein 2008c). As of 2010, however, no Koreans have attained a position as Borough Council member.¹⁸ The local press report that the Korean American community seeks greater influence in being “fairly represented”--Korean leaders consider the current proportion of representation inadequate (Moeller 2011). Registered Korean voters, now numbering several thousands, have become a significant voice in general elections. Although Asians were previously viewed as non-participatory, the political mobilization of the Korean community in recent years has led to the solicitation of Korean support by elected officials.

The Koreans, unlike the Japanese, actively participate as volunteers at local institutions. Informants mentioned a Korean volunteer presence in the ambulance corps. Koreans are also members of the Greater Fort Lee Chamber of Commerce. There were five Koreans among a total of twenty board members as of 2009. Koreans are active volunteers at the time of local elections. One local white leader told me that Koreans help in typing up letters in Korean and with mailings to members of the Democratic Party. Some younger Koreans actively participate in the civic life of Fort Lee through volunteer activities. One Korean male gave the example of Korean youths who help at the Korean American Voters' Council New Jersey office, soliciting voters at election time. Such voluntary activities among Korean youth contribute to a feeling of optimism among Korean residents in terms of greater social integration in the future.

At the leadership level, especially over the last couple of years, the distance between the Korean and local community appears to have narrowed. This can be seen in the evaluation given both by Korean and native white informants that their relationships

¹⁸Borough of Fort Lee website (<http://www.fortleenj.org/>).

are improving. A sense of optimism among Korean leaders stems from the fact that change and transition, related to their participation in the community, are accepted on both the American and Korean sides:

You actually see the changing of the guard, so to speak. It's tough, that transitional period is tough. I think we are in that transitional period right now. Because before, although we were in this town, we weren't really in this town. And that means that we weren't really participating in the community events. We weren't active in many aspects of what was going on in this town. But I think the Korean community has evolved, and it's grown to the level that they look around and reach out, and explore other cultures and other people. Actually we have reached the point where we can work together and listen to each other. There was that growing pain in the last year and a half.¹⁹

A 1.5 generation, female business owner and civic leader remarked that the Korean community today is in the process of assimilation through greater community participation:

As we have more people that are involved in the community, I think it would be just natural for the community to assimilate, just like Italians and Greeks. When they first came here, it was the same way. I think the Koreans are probably the new kid on the block.

Korean "community" consciousness is exemplified by a strong and organized leadership. According to Gans (1999) ethnic group leaders may lead public lives in the ethnic community while devoting part of their private life to assimilatory activities. Because ethnic leadership requires association with those from other dominant groups, ethnic leaders "may even be participating in some on-the-job assimilation, voluntary and involuntary, if only in order to be able to work with leaders of the dominant group" (Gans 1999, 165). Korean leaders recognize that their interests--the growth and stability of the Korean community--are better served by joining the mainstream white community. This

¹⁹ KAAFL representative: interview, November 1, 2008.

goal is aligned with the town's efforts to reinforce a distinct identity for Fort Lee through such programs as town beautification, improvement of the school district, and promotion of the borough's culture and history. Korean leaders expressed the need to move forward with other ethnic minority groups (not necessarily Asians) in the preservation and development of the Fort Lee community.

7. Retention of Culture, Diffusion of Pluralism

Not only at organizational and collective levels, but also at individual levels, immigrants engage in practices of ethnic retention in everyday life. The remaining chapter focuses on individual-level practices that pertain to patterns of assimilation and ethnic retention. In the suburban context practice is made manifest largely in the realm of culture--specifically, language retention, the consumption of ethnic food, and festivals. While the use of the ancestral language and ethnic food in everyday life is an attempt to retain ethnicity, festivals provide a site which offers a channel for integration while asserting ethnicity.

i. Language and Food

A major concern among first-generation East Asian parents is the retention of native languages by their children. Informants told me that due to the fear of loss of the native language, some parents deliberately avoid speaking English with their children. Although this tendency was identified in all East Asian groups, it was most often associated with Korean mothers in the school context. To counteract rapid loss of the parental language, as children acquire English at school, the immigrant home becomes a

place for children to speak their mother language--thus encouraging bilingual ability.²⁰

The majority of Asian parents with elementary school age children that I spoke with indicated they try to maintain their native language in the domestic environment. Few foreign-born parent informants encouraged their U.S. born children to converse in English with them, although many Chinese informants said they had to resort to speaking English with their children because the children do not understand or refuse to speak Chinese. This bilingual milieu may also be confirmed by the census data in 2000, which shows a tendency to speak the ancestral language at home even though the majority of each East Asian group reported they speak English “well” and “very well.” (Table 8).

Asian parents with children who did not grow up bilingual, express admiration for those parents who have succeeded in raising their children to be so. Loss of the ancestral language was considered a “failure” on the parents’ part--they have “mistakenly” shown their English ability in front of their children. Parental efforts at linguistic retention are, however, an obstacle to pan-Asian friendships. A couple of Chinese mothers with elementary school age children remarked they cannot make friends with Korean mothers they meet at the school, because the latter avoid speaking English in front of their children.

Scholars have argued that language retention among immigrants is not necessarily a rejection of acculturation or assimilation but is related to the maintenance of familial relations and the need to communicate with grandparents and relatives in the home country who do not know or are not fluent in English (Gans 1999). Among my

²⁰ For views and experiences concerning language retention among second generation youth, see Kasinitz, Mollenkopf, Waters, and Holdaway (2008).

informants, parental efforts towards bilingualism seemed to be based on such practical needs and also on changing social perceptions. Among Chinese informants in particular, the growing importance of China in the global economy was also a motive to teach Chinese. In this sense, “developments in Hong Kong, Taiwan, and the People’s Republic of China are providing an incentive to maintain strong ties to Asia” (Holdaway 2007, 367).

According to one 1.5-generation Korean mother, parental enthusiasm for Korean language schools is related to the awareness that parental emphasis on English is passé. As Koreans reside in the United States longer, they have come to realize that English acquisition is not a problem for children, but losing Korean is. Korean parents have come to realize that being bilingual is an advantage for college admission and employment for their children--hence their active encouragement of learning and speaking Korean. The acquisition of English by the second-generation is viewed as a “natural” occurrence rather than requiring conscious effort. Immigrant parents accept their children’s quick absorption of English and believe this can be concurrent with maintenance of the native language.

Maintenance of the mother language is of less concern for expatriate Japanese parents--even when their children attend public schools their Japanese ability does not seem to diminish. The concern is to ensure that their children learn some rudiments of English, which serve as an advantage in school entrance exams after returning to Japan. A small number of permanent residents, intermarried with Americans, send their children to Japanese school, with the aim of language maintenance, similar to Chinese and Korean parents.

Extracurricular activities beyond the learning of the ancestral language are much in evidence among children of East Asian origin in Fort Lee. They are frequently involved in both American and ethnically-specific activities at the same time. Asian mothers reported having their children participate in a wide range of programs, including arts, music, dance, and sports that are considered “American,” while making sure that children also are engaged in “ethnic” activities—including traditional musical instruments, dance, painting and drawing. As for Japanese children of expatriate families, they usually take English classes along with other arts and cultural lessons, or attend cram schools on a daily basis after their regular school work is over. In this way, children are exposed to both American and ethnic cultural traditions in everyday life.

Ethnic food and cuisine are common symbols of ethnic identity. In immigrant communities, ethnic cuisine, and a fondness for it, become markers of cultural continuity and difference. The importance of ethnic food, especially for the first generation, was suggested by my informants, who shop at Asian supermarkets and eat ethnic food at home regularly. One 1.5-generation Korean woman in her early twenties indicated a desire to raise her own family in Fort Lee in the future: “I feel like a little bit of Korea is here” because, “there’s so many Korean things, like Korean supermarkets, which is important, ’cause it’s what you eat.” U.S.-born immigrant children may identify themselves as “American,” but parents find relief in their children’s continued preference for Asian foods over American. Many second-generation members told me they grew up eating ethnic food at home. One second-generation Chinese American male told me that his mother only cooks Chinese food at home because his father would never eat “hamburgers and stuff.” Food helps preserve Asian identity and serves as a way of

signaling a chosen identity: the choice of where and what to eat communicates that choice to others (Nash 2009, 8).

A continued preference for ethnic food among Asian immigrants is related to the growth of ethnic grocery stores and supermarkets in Fort Lee and the surrounding area. Extensive coverage of such supermarkets in the local press indicates the degree of local curiosity and recognition (Kalogerakis, 1990; Myerson 1992; Kinney 2002; *The Record*, 2008). Mitsuwa Marketplace, formerly Yaohan Plaza, is a major shopping complex located in Edgewater, an adjacent borough, to the south of Fort Lee. Mitsuwa is situated on the Hudson River, directly opposite Riverside Church in New York (121st Street). Today, this mall contains over twenty Japanese stores and restaurants--including a bookstore, cosmetic stores, stationers, video stores, hair salons, a dry cleaner, a dentist, a travel agent, and a real estate agency. First opened in 1988, Yaohan was the largest Japanese supermarket complex on the East Coast, providing Japanese food and culture for Japanese and Asian communities in the metropolitan New York area, and from Boston to Washington D.C. Bankrupt in 1997, the complex was taken over by a new owner and renamed. From the early 1990s, the press reported an average of 35,000 customers per week; forty percent Japanese, thirty percent other Asians, and thirty percent whites (Kalogerakis 1990; Myerson 1992). Korean supermarket chains are now emerging and are more widely spread than Mitsuwa. In 2009, a Korean supermarket, Han Ah Reum Mart (H Mart) expanded to Fort Lee and Little Ferry, in addition to the store previously established in Ridgefield. Advertisements for Mitsuwa and H Mart appear in local weeklies on a regular basis, appealing to a wide public, including non-co-

ethnic customers.²¹ Both supermarkets played a role in reaching out to the respective ethnic communities for participation in the 2010 census, in response to the request from the Census Bureau. The U.S. Census Department and a Japanese organization placed three volunteers at Mitsuwa for two weekends; H Mart also played a role in raising awareness among Koreans about the importance of the decennial census count--inside the supermarket, television monitors and posters promoted the 2010 census (Kinney 2010; Llorent 2010).

Even if initially designed to provide services to co-ethnics, ethnic supermarkets are increasingly receiving non-co-ethnic clients. A Mitsuwa employee told me that in the last three years or so, thirty percent of the customers have been Japanese, forty percent other Asians--slightly more Chinese, but about the same proportion of Chinese and Koreans. The remaining thirty percent are native whites (mostly local residents and youths), Hispanics, and Russians. The growth in the number of Korean and Chinese customers at Mitsuwa was confirmed by my informants and during my observations. Inside the supermarket, half the conversations I overheard were in Chinese or Korean. In the "food court," where customers can try a wide range of Japanese foods, there are Chinese, Koreans, and non-Asians, along with Japanese enjoying relatively cheap meals.

Mitsuwa has grown from a place offering food and groceries for Japanese into a multiethnic site, a place where different ethnic group members interact. One Japanese male informant in his sixties commented, "Mitsuwa has become all mixed up"--indicating that the store used to be more Japanese in the past. The staff is made up of Koreans and Hispanics, as well as Japanese. The shopping center is widely known

²¹ *Bergen News* (Palisades Park, N.J. 2010); *Fort Lee Suburbanite* (Hackensack, N.J., North Jersey Media Group, Inc., 2009, 2010).

among non-Asian Americans. A member of the Greater Fort Lee Chamber of Commerce told me:

I get phone calls from people that live in upstate New York. They call me and say, "I understand Fort Lee has a very big Japanese population and you have a Japanese supermarket there." I have to explain, "We don't have a big Japanese population anymore, but we have, in a neighboring town, this Japanese market." And many people come.

Some of my white informants told me they regularly shop at Mitsuwa. Similarly, the staff at H Mart in Ridgefield told me they receive non-Korean customers, including Chinese, Hispanics, and Russians. My Chinese and Japanese informants patronize H Mart in Fort Lee and Ridgefield. The staff at H Mart are largely Korean with some Hispanic employees. Ethnic supermarkets in this metropolitan suburb are open to non-co-ethnics which allow for interaction among multiethnic actors, rather than serving co-ethnics alone.

ii. Ethnic Festivals: Spaces for Ethnic Retention and Integration

According to Zeng and Li (2009), the concept of festival joins both ideational and material elements of culture. The expressive components--e.g. rituals, food, art, music--are used to revitalize ethnic culture. Ethnic festivals function to bring group members together, temporarily constructing a "symbolic community," creating cohesion and a sense of solidarity for co-ethnic participants (Cohen 1985). At the same time, the symbolic material provides "compelling imagery" for non-co-ethnic observers. "Exotic" and "foreign" elements are emphasized--for instance, traditional music and dance with performers in traditional costumes (Nagel 1996; Zeng and Li 2009, 156). Regardless of commercial and economic motives and a possible reinforcement of racial stereotypes, the

cultural forms and practices of immigrants are revived and restored through ethnic festivals (Zeng and Li 2009).

Festivals periodically organized by Chinese, Japanese, and Koreans add an ethnic flavor to the local scene in the Fort Lee area. Since 2002, *Chuseok*, an annual Korean festival usually held in September or October (the date follows the lunar calendar), has been celebrated in Overpeck County Park in Leonia and is now one of the largest ethnic festivals in the Fort Lee area.²² Attendance is increasing year by year. In its first year, the festival drew an estimated 25,000 people from New York and New Jersey. Six years later, the number of participants was estimated at 100,000; since 2009 the festival has been a three-day long event (J. Kim 2009a). The festival receives wide coverage in the local press (e.g. front-page display images of the event in the *Fort Lee Suburbanite*) as well as in the Korean press.²³ In spacious grass meadows, close by the New Jersey Turnpike, participants set up food stands and corporate and vendor booths for local Korean businesses--including health insurance, cable TV companies, the fur store, men's and women's clothing, foodstuff, etc. The pungent aromas of Korean barbecue drift through the air. The event is open to the public but the overwhelming majority of participants are Korean.

During my observations in 2009, the outdoor stage performances included traditional Korean folk dance, music, drums, taekwondo, and contemporary popular

²² The festival is sponsored by the Korean American Association of New Jersey. In 2002, the festival was held in Palisades Park.

²³ Although an important holiday for Koreans, not all Koreans attend such local events nor even know the precise date in the context of American life (the holiday follows the lunar calendar). Media "ethnicization" may suppress such variations, in emphasizing ethnic specificity.

cultural performance such as hip-hop dance. Each performance was introduced in Korean by a female host in traditional costume. Approximately 200 folding chairs set up in front of the stage were occupied by the largely Korean audience. Many in the audience were standing. A noticeable portion of the attendees was made up of Korean teenagers, socializing with friends. The hip-hop performance by a group of young Korean males was intently observed by these teenagers. The local press reported that taekwondo has “strong cross-cultural appeal,” as it includes both Korean and non-Korean practitioners and that one of the festival’s goals is to “acclimatize New Jersey” to the Korean (Beckeman 2008).

Speeches by local politicians followed the performances. The forty-three dignitaries included the governor of New Jersey, one U.S. Senator, congressmen, state senators, assemblymen and assemblywomen, freeholders, mayors of boroughs in Bergen, including Fort Lee, the Korean consul general, local Korean council members, and the presidents of several Korean companies.²⁴ The American elected officials began with “hello” in Korean and a few included the Korean words for “thank you.” Speakers offered thanks for invitation to the event, congratulated the organizers on its success, praised the beauty of Korean culture, and emphasized the similarities of American and Korean culture--the values of family and hard work, for example. Speeches placed stress on the fact that Korean culture is part of a diverse American culture and that, “you are American.” Politicians articulated their appreciation of the Korean presence in the area. One white male local officer remarked that Korean immigrants in Fort Lee, Leonia, and

²⁴ “2009 New Jersey Chusok Festival 8th Korean American Thanksgiving Festival,” Korean American Association of New Jersey, n.d. (<http://www.yoo-media.com/img/Chusok-NJ.pdf>).

Palisades Park were making America a richer place: “Will you make me part of your family?” he appealed enthusiastically. The audience responded with resounding applause. Within the context of the festivity, the emphasis was on co-existence--a sense of “your culture,” that is different from “ours” yet constitutive of the American fabric. The incorporation of local politicians indicated the balance of ethnic preservation and integration signified by the event.

The Chinese-American Family Coalition of New Jersey has hosted the annual Golden Moon festival in October at the Fort Lee Community Center since 2008. Among the events and activities were fundraising sales of Chinese books, DVDs, drawings, tea, and food, as well as a demonstration of puppet shows and Tai chi. Calligraphic works by children were displayed in the auditorium. The main attractions were the outdoor performances, lasting for four hours, including the lion dance, traditional Chinese music, folk songs and dances, and Peking Opera. Performers included children from Fort Lee elementary schools along with professionals. Each performance was accompanied by an introduction in Chinese and English. Of the three hundred or so audience members, about eighty percent seemed to be Chinese, while the rest were largely white (very few blacks and Hispanics). When the Chinese American hostess asked the audience how many were from Fort Lee, more than half raised their hands, indicating that the event had drawn crowds from other nearby boroughs as well. By comparison with *Chuseok*, whites were a more noticeable presence, including some white parents with their Chinese adopted children. The mayor of Fort Lee gave a speech in praise of the beauty and richness of the ethnic culture of Fort Lee, in attendance were a few other council members of Fort Lee.

Ethnic schools also sponsor seasonal celebrations, thereby contributing to the continuation of cultural practices. The Chinese New Year is an important annual event for the Chinese schools; the event is open to the public and attracts not only Chinese but also non-Chinese attendees. I observed the Chinese New Year celebration held in Bergen Chinese School in Hackensack in February 2009.²⁵ The event lasted for five hours on a Sunday afternoon and featured a Chinese food fair, an exhibit of student works, and stage performances by students and parents from participating Chinese Schools. The event attracted a large crowd, mostly Chinese but also other ethnic and racial groups. The school auditorium (approximately 500-600 seats) was fully packed, with standing room only. A variety of performances included student linguistic demonstrations (e.g. skit, tongue twisters in Chinese), traditional dances (e.g. lion dance, feather dance, long sleeves dance) and songs in Chinese by students involved in dance theater or singing groups.²⁶ The students on stage included non-Chinese--such as African Americans and whites (I could not judge whether these children were of mixed origin with a Chinese parent). The hallways were decorated with student works--small cards and notes in Chinese written by students. The event provided an opportunity to demonstrate ability in Chinese learned at the school, as well as competence in the traditional arts.

International Children's Day celebration, held in Fort Lee since 1983, was initiated by a local native resident in memory of her son's friendship with the son of a Japanese expatriate family from her neighborhood. The event was inspired by Children's Day, a Japanese holiday, on which colorful carp streamers are displayed as a symbol of

²⁵ Hosted by the Chinese Service Center USA, Bergen Chinese School, Bo-Hua Chinese School, and Columbia Chinese School.

²⁶ *Fort Lee Suburbanite*, February 6, 2009, advertisement for the event.

healthy growth. The resident had asked the mayor of Fort Lee whether it might be possible to display the carp streamers using the flag poles of the borough hall: the mayor agreed. Every year, a small event with about fifty participants is held quietly one Sunday in May. The event begins with the raising of carp streamers and performance of a Japanese song, “Flying Carp,” translated for English-speaking children to sing along. After this ceremony, the children and parents parade to Monument Park, where various Japanese outdoor games, American dances for children, and a karate demonstration by children from the local karate school, are performed. The term “international” was added because the Japanese organizers wanted to be more inclusive and to celebrate the ethnic diversity of the area. The majority of participants nevertheless appeared to be Japanese when I observed the event in 2009. Others included Chinese, Hispanics, Koreans, and Russians. A Filipino mother, intermarried with a Korean, told me that she participated in the event because her daughter wanted to dress in an ethnic costume, which the organizers encourage. The Japanese festival is thus being “reinvented” in the multiethnic American context: ethnic tradition is combined with an ideology of diversity (see Gans 1999).

This seemingly paradoxical relationship between ethnic assertion and assimilation has been previously suggested in research on various ethnic groups (e.g. Kasinitz 1992; Bakalian and Bozorgmehr 2009). Kasinitz (1992) argues that New York-based, West Indian political activists attempt to promote the idea of their community by drawing on an understanding of the host country’s political culture. In other words, ethnic assertion does not occur independent of the context of the host culture, but in relation to the milieu

in which ethnic assertion takes place. In this context, the immigrant promotion of ethnic culture may be understood as a mode of assimilation.

8. Negotiating Assimilation and Ethnic Retention

The examples discussed above indicate that processes of assimilation and ethnic retention can occur concurrently (see Gans 1999). Both processes are inherently social, that is, contingent on relations with social actors within a specific time-space context. In what ways do these processes become manifest in behavior, perceptions, relations with others, and in self-definition? Below, I draw on specific examples suggestive of the intertwining of assimilation and ethnic retention in individual everyday experience.

i. The Trend toward Ethnic Retention as a Result of Assimilation

The propensity towards ethnic retention may result from rejection by the mainstream further to an ethnic minority's attempt to assimilate. The experience of marginalization prompts some immigrant children to return to their cultural and ethnic heritage. For example, some second-generation Korean Americans encourage children (the third-generation) to learn about their cultural roots--a knowledge they themselves lacked. This trend was discussed by the director of Donghwa Cultural Foundation in Englewood:

People of Korean descent, I think, have started to recognize . . . they are the ones who really didn't have an opportunity to learn about Korean culture or arts, because their parents were so busy making money. The way they thought was to do your study the best so that you can go to a good school, and that kind of secures your future. But that kind of thinking really got changed because they realized that once you get into companies or wherever they end up working at, they [the mainstream] still see you as Asian. Right? Once they see you're Asian there's a limit. You

can't be promoted or get yourself into the position you want. So in that case, people will say, "okay, how come you look Asian you don't know about anything [Asia]?" I think they [second generation] realize that, so, it's a bit too late for them, but they don't want it happen to their own children. That's why they bring their children [to the foundation]

In this view, the need to sustain ethnicity and heritage responds to impediments against recognition within mainstream society (e.g. Tuan 1998). Unable to be fully assimilated as Americans, Asian Americans have to socially construct their ethnicity and culture to adapt to their restrictive environment (Tuan 1998).²⁷ Nagel ([1996] 1997) suggests that bringing up and socializing children for an ethnic parent represents a kind of "reverse cultural transmission," as he or she is motivated to reconnect with an ethnic ancestral identity during the process; as a result, the individual may develop a new ethnic self-awareness (11). Such individuals reinforce this new identity through seeking out others from the same ethnic group, joining ethnic organizations, and participating in ethnic community activities (ibid.).

Although the immigrant enclave has been traditionally considered a transitory place for newly-arrived immigrants pending incorporation into the host society, the desirability of ethnic community residence was expressed by some 1.5- or second-generation Koreans. Korean informants, in their twenties and thirties, currently living in rental property, often indicated a preference for owning a house in Fort Lee or the vicinity in the future, rather than in the suburbs with a higher proportion of native whites or the city. A Korean male in his thirties, working in Fort Lee and living in Palisades Park, said that once he had planned to pursue an advanced degree in the Midwest but felt

²⁷ A comparable example is offered by the case of Muslim Americans whose "Americanization" experience prompts them to immerse themselves in the study of their religious traditions and ancestral faith. See Bakalian and Bozorgmehr 2009.

it was not the place for him because “there was no Korean” there, in a place lacking in ethnic food or services.

A second-generation Korean female in her late twenties, a resident of Palisades Park for four years, demonstrates a similar preference. She appears as an assimilated second generation Korean American--having grown up in a predominantly white suburb in the tri-state area and currently working for a mainstream financial firm in New York City. Outside of work, however, she mostly spends time with Koreans--U.S.-born Korean roommates from university, Korean neighbors and relatives living nearby, and helping out in a Manhattan grocery owned by relatives on Sunday. Despite her ease in dealing with Americans, she remarked that one reason she feels comfortable in Palisades Park is a sense of being at home:

If you are pretty much a Korean family, you know this area . . . It kind of gives you a sense of home, like, when I cook my food, I know a lot of people feel uncomfortable interacting with [non-co-ethnic] neighbors--it's a very . . . pungent kind of, very distinct kind of smell that our food makes. So when I have one of those moments where I want to make a home cooked meal I can make it. If I don't know, I can go downstairs, there's actually a [Korean] family that just moved in. They can help me out and give me what the recipes are, ingredients as well.

Palisades Park is “very comfortable” for this informant where she feels as though, “English is the second language” (although she is more fluent in English than Korean). Her statement that the distinct flavor of ethnic food may meet disapproval from mainstream non-Korean American neighbors--and that there is no need to worry what neighbors think in a co-ethnic environment--suggests a desire to avoid potential disapproval. The desire for long-term residence in the ethnic community may develop because actors have attained a degree of assimilation in American society but feel a sense

of alienation or separation. Processes of assimilation and ethnic cohesion may thus mutually and continuously influence each other.

In general, Koreans articulated more clearly than Chinese or Japanese the desirability and importance of the proximity of co-ethnics. Contrary to the trend of relocation to more white suburbs in Bergen County among Asians in Fort Lee, discussed in chapter 2, there is evidence that some socially, culturally, and economically assimilated Korean Americans consciously choose a co-ethnic neighborhood as a place of residence. Responses regarding co-ethnic residential environment were mixed among Koreans. Those who do not live in co-ethnic areas consider that they are “different” from those who live in a highly co-ethnic environment such as Palisades Park and Fort Lee: the former consider that their English fluency obviates the necessity of living with co-ethnics, or feel that they should have contact with Americans, since they live in America. Those who expressed this view are not necessarily more economically and occupationally successful than those in the enclave situation--in other words, this perceptual difference is not necessarily to do with socioeconomic status. At the same time, while some acculturated and integrated second-generation Korean Americans prefer living in a co-ethnic environment, this preference does not amount to resistance to assimilation.

ii. Tensions in Being “Ethnic” and/or “American”

Each East Asian group demonstrates internal divisions, whether by immigrant status or generation. Perceived differences among co-ethnic members lead, on occasion, to in-group tensions. The dualism of being ethnic and being American may coexist but not without some process of negotiation by actors. Traditionally, the concepts of

assimilation and retention signify tension between mainstream America and an ethnic minority; but an equivalent dichotomy exists within the ethnic group itself.

The perception of division develops in the process of growing up in the U.S. In early childhood youngsters mix with friends from different ethnic groups and with the U.S.-born. Parents frequently remarked that their elementary school children's friends are from "all over the world." However, a sense of distinction between immigrant and second-generation children becomes noticeable among higher graders in elementary school. A first-generation Korean male with two U.S.-born sons observed the increasing amount of separation among children with age: "when the children enter middle school, segregation begins. Then high school, more segregation."

The divide between the immigrant and U.S.-born Koreans at Fort Lee schools was frequently mentioned by Korean informants, by those who went through Fort Lee's public school system, or by parents who have children in the school system. A Korean bilingual teacher at Fort Lee High School expressed her concern regarding first-generation unwillingness to integrate into the mainstream and a tendency to stick to their own group:

I realize my students from Korea or Japan, I mean, from anywhere, they are, like, all Americanized. It doesn't matter where, what part of the world they live, because Western culture, I think, is dominant, especially in Korea. They are very familiar with American culture. So when they come here, I don't think it takes a big adjustment to American culture itself. My concern is more, the other way, because they don't try to integrate. They try to get together only with Korean students. That's my bigger concern, because they don't make friends with the other students, like Caucasian students . . . They always hang out with their Korean friends. So, it also is a big obstacle for them to learn English, because they never get to speak English to each other. They always hang out with each other and they take the same classes all day. They hang out after school together. I wish they were more aggressive in making friends with people from other countries . . . they have their excuses, always. They say

they don't speak English, and they say, like, white students don't wanna talk to them. But I don't think that's true.

Such tendencies relate to a clearly defined boundary between first-generation (recent immigrants) and second (and 1.5) generation Koreans, especially in high school.²⁸

A U.S.-born Korean female in her early thirties, who has lived in Fort Lee for twenty-four years, commented that when she was in high school, she was viewed by first-generation Korean students as, “not Korean enough”--that is, someone who did not speak Korean and who had friendships with non-Koreans. Another Korean female student at Fort Lee High School spoke of divisions among Korean students:

There are like divisions between the Koreans too, like the Koreans who really don't want to be Americanized and then there are Koreans who are like trying to get somewhere here, like trying to work hard and, you know, “I should learn English” and do that kind of stuff. And the ones who don't wanna be Americanized, they form little own group, they act like they live in Korea, they eat just like living in Korea, it's kind of stupid.

This student described the Korean population in Fort Lee as follows: “Fort Lee has a good ratio of FOBs and Twinkies.” In the words of the same student, “FOBs” are, “fresh off the boat, it's usually for kids who just came to this country and don't speak much English. They all stick together.” On the other hand, there are “Twinkies”--that is, “yellow, and if you break it, it's white inside. It's like a whitewashed Asian.” A polarity exists between recent immigrants and more culturally acclimated students. If a segment of Korean youth opts to stick with Korean-speaking friends, and if this trend continues with the ongoing flow of immigrants from Korea, it would be important to consider the

²⁸ Several informants considered the tendency of forming “cliques” as a teenage phenomenon and not necessarily ethnically specific.

consequences for youth beyond high school, in their adult friendships and work experiences.

A similar divide--mostly unspoken--exists between expatriate Japanese and immigrant Japanese. One white informant, married to a Japanese husband, said that expatriate Japanese tend to look down on immigrant Japanese, because the former are generally better educated and have occupations with greater prestige and higher income than immigrants, who tend to be engaged in services and small businesses such as restaurants. For the most part, immigrant Japanese see expatriates as less open to American life and culture, isolated from the mainstream, and certainly different from them. In the words of one Japanese female (permanent resident), "expatriates are like tourists"--temporary immigrants take advantage of living in America and opportunities for travel at every holiday. According to the same informant, Japanese expatriate families rarely spend time with Americans to get to know American culture. A couple of real estate agents (permanent residents and U.S. citizens) complained of the demanding attitude of expatriates toward co-ethnics: they are highly selective ("the property has to be new") and file complaints about their housing with the Japanese realtor rather than their non-Japanese landlords. Informal conversation with permanent immigrants suggests that they often maintain distance from the "Japanese community"--meaning, "expatriate community."

Some Chinese informants mentioned generational tensions. Those with elementary school age children often remarked how their children resist the idea of "Chinese." Three first-generation Chinese mothers I interviewed, with elementary school age children had sent their children to Chinese School, but their children resisted learning

Chinese and eventually quit. The children think they are “American,” in denial of their Chinese heritage. One Chinese mother explained that despite her daughter’s excellence in public school, she was not interested in studying Chinese at the Chinese School:

I don’t know why, the Chinese thing, she’s so against. I have no idea why she’s like, “No, I’m American.” I say, “No, you were born here. Your look, your face, you are Chinese, your mom, your parents, are Chinese, you cannot change yourself.” You know, she doesn’t understand. But hopefully one day she’ll understand that. She doesn’t know, [she says] “I speak English.”

One generational tension then concerns the tension between “ethnic” and “American” cultures. Anecdotes of parents forcing their children to attend the language school on Sunday are common. Language retention may be “involuntary” for the majority of Chinese children whose first language is English because the decision is made by parents (see Gans 1999). The bilingual environment that surrounds immigrant children nevertheless remains a part of their socialization. Chinese parents felt that their children might perhaps come to appreciate their heritage and be willing to learn Chinese when they are adults. Internal divisions and tensions within different ethnic groups indicate that such features are widespread and reproduced alongside the polarity of assimilation/acculturation and ethnic maintenance. This polarity is a lived experience whereby actors position themselves in relation to others in the social world. Actors gain a means of self-definition and develop a sense of difference. Defining one’s position is possible only in relation to others. East Asian members define themselves not only in relation to mainstream Americans but also to co-ethnics.

iii. Unintended Acculturation

Assimilation has different meanings for temporary immigrants who go through the process of repatriation, as opposed to immigrants who intend to settle in the host society. Although Japanese expatriates do not follow the socialization pattern found among Chinese or Korean immigrants and their children in adaptation to the life in the U.S., some expressed concern that being away from Japan may lead to maladjustment when they return. In Kawai's analysis (2000), the average length of expatriate service of three to five years in a foreign land is considered insufficient to fully adapt to the host culture, yet long enough to lose the sense of being Japanese. Despite their relative insularity, expatriates and their families observe American lifestyles and become used to living as Americans do. On being asked whether she would prefer to return to Japan or remain in the U.S., an expatriate wife in her forties (living in the U.S. for over thirteen years) responded:

Now it's very complicated. If I were asked that question five years ago, I think I would have answered, "I would definitely want to go back to Japan." I was ready to return the following day. But now, when I think about returning, I feel very mixed. Not just because I am psychologically unprepared, but also--because I have been away from Japan for such a long time--I feel I won't be able to adjust so quickly. My child attends Japanese school here, and I feel they care about children much better than the schools in Japan do. Teachers are very caring. So I'm hoping we could extend our stay little by little.

Comparing their experiences in America with Japan, expatriate families feel life is more relaxed in the United States and value what they perceive to be a more family-oriented lifestyle in America--once back in Japan, family life will have to be sacrificed not only for the husband's job, but also for other numerous family and social obligations (e.g. nursing care for ageing parents).

For a variety of reasons, some expatriates opt to stay in the United States. Some find life in America more desirable than in Japan. Some who came to the United States to study have stayed, without initially planning to do so. Some who came as expatriates have since left their companies and settled down in America. One expatriate male in his forties felt the latter tendency is more common among those in their forties rather than younger expatriates, who still count on opportunities for career shifts back in Japan, if necessary. A sense of urgency about limited options for career change prompts some older expatriates to remain in the United States.

For others, the problems of maladjustment facing expatriate families in Japan are a factor in their return to America and settlement here (e.g. Tung 1984; White 1988). Some quit their companies and return for permanent settlement in the U.S., though this appears rare. In Fort Lee, I heard a few accounts of Japanese who decided to return to America for permanent residency for the sake of their children, who could not adapt to the Japanese educational system. Such a change of life course reflects the degree to which expatriate Japanese become acculturated in the United States, to the extent that, in some cases, readjustment to Japan is considered insurmountable (see Kurotani 2005).

9. Conclusion

The practice of immigrants and their children both at institutional and individual levels, produces and reproduces ethnic continuity in the quotidian and the expressive (e.g. foods, festivals) as well as in ideological and structural forms (e.g. language, ethnic organizations). Immigrant practices that are ethnically specific--celebration of holidays, foods, mixing with co-ethnic friends, for example--channel and reinforce ethnicity.

Ethnicity, however, is also a vehicle of social involvement. While ethnic festivals and celebrations reinforce group distinctiveness, such public manifestations provide an arena for connection with the local community and the introduction of immigrant culture to the host society. In other words, some form of integration may be achieved through ethnic specificity when working through a cultural apparatus. In this case, ethnic and cultural specificity is a form of capital--a form of power--to achieve group goals of creating a space in the local community for ethnic minorities. Ethnic retention does not merely concern the preservation of an old identity; the ethnic group has been a “central agent of assimilation” where the new rules and behaviors necessary for the immigrants to fulfill their aspirations are transmitted (Gerber 2011). It should also be noted that the ethnic groups in question are not internally homogeneous--the internal divisions analyzed in this chapter suggest possible varied outcomes of assimilation and ethnic retention.

Assimilation and ethnic retention among the East Asian groups in Fort Lee occur concurrently. To follow Alba’s conceptualization of “blurred boundaries,” assimilation into the mainstream is eased “insofar as the individuals undergoing it do not sense a rupture between participation in mainstream institutions and familiar social and cultural practices and identities” and when they “do not feel forced to choose between the mainstream and their group of origin” (Alba 2009, 43). Examples discussed in this chapter indicate that assimilation and ethnic retention are not dichotomous, but relational processes which are nonlinear.

This compatibility of assimilation and ethnic retention can be usefully considered according to the concept of “practice,” which draws attention to countless everyday decisions and actions, allowing us to consider assimilation and retention as concrete

phenomena that exist within social relations. Changes in structure occur through an agent's practice but practice is also shaped by social conditions. No informant suggested either resistance of acquisition of English or participation in the mainstream for the purposes of ethnic retention. Rather, the emphasis on bilingualism, among Asian parents, reflects a wider social ethos of pluralism. In this sense, immigrant action and subjectivity are related to structure and structural constraints, modulated by mutual interaction. Assimilation and retention are determined by an opposition of forces--in processes that exist through mutual connection and union.

Admittedly there are Asians who spend a large portion of their life only with co-ethnics and perhaps resist assimilation in Fort Lee. My research is limited in that I was likely to reflect views of actors who tended to be integrated--the perspectives of those who do not speak English were not included. With this in mind, the findings nevertheless suggest that through cultural, economic, and political apparatuses, East Asians in Fort Lee have generally followed a trend of social and cultural integration while maintaining ethnicity (with the exception of Japanese expatriates who tend to remain insular, although indications of acculturation are evident among them). In particular Koreans have become a visible and recognized part of the larger Fort Lee community.

In Fort Lee, the patterns of assimilation have been domain-specific (cf. Brubaker 2001)--largely in the realm of culture, and the economy, in the case of Koreans. This raises a question as to whether domain-specific assimilation facilitates acceptance of Asians among native whites. Immigrant practice influences the native white community and their perceptions and understanding. Native residents in Fort Lee have become used to Asians and their cultures over time. Such transformations exemplify the dynamics of

how immigrants may contribute to change in a receiving society. Immigrant assimilation depends in part on host reception and acceptance, since native whites also engage in practices which structure social relationships between immigrants and themselves in a suburban community. The following chapter turns to this dimension.

Chapter 4

Alienation and Integration:

Native White Responses

The Japanese were more of the global economy thing, before anybody talked about the global economy in the 70s. They would come here for business purposes. I think the Japanese brought the dynamic to the town. I think they got Fort Lee's feet wet, so to speak. (Forty seven-year-old white male, Fort Lee resident).

The way the Korean population has been dealing with stores and businesses has been a mistake. It's not welcoming. It's very divisive. (Sixty-year-old white female, Fort Lee resident).

Just as a resident I've seen that change. I guess, over time, they say, "Okay, you're in the neighborhood, one of us. It doesn't matter whether you're Korean any more." All these things, I guess, soften with time. (Forty seven-year-old white female, Leonia resident, working in Fort Lee).

Previous research into the social relationships between immigrants and native residents, defined as racially and ethnically distinct, has demonstrated the dynamics of conflict, segregation, cooperation, and accommodation (Foner and Frederickson 2004; Horton 1995; Smith 1995). Everyday social relations in communities, neighborhoods, organizations, and families play a role in altering the boundaries between ethnoracial groups and the way in which groups are defined and conceived. People establish relations through work, worship, or play, and through living together when they make their homes in the same locality (Elias and Scotson 1994). Such relationships are

modulated by the way race and ethnicity are constructed at specific times and in specific places.

New spatial patterns of immigration into American suburbs--the “new gateways” or “new destinations”--have drawn attention to the importance of the characteristics of immigrant receiving areas: immigrants are changed by the suburban context while they themselves are changing the suburb (Jones-Correa 2008; Singer, Hardwick, and Brettell 2008). The settlement of Asian and Latino immigrants into traditionally white suburbs raises questions regarding the possibility of differing modes of immigrant incorporation. Research into Monterey Park, California, which has experienced a rapid influx of Asian immigrants, reveals conflict and tensions between established residents and immigrants with accompanying, widespread anti-Asian feeling among native residents (Horton 1995; Saito 1998). Yet native reactions in suburbia vary according to locale (Brettell 2008). My interviews and press accounts suggest that immigrant-native relationships have been relatively free of open conflict in Fort Lee.

The coverage of East Asian immigration in Fort Lee and Bergen County in the local press over the last fifteen years has documented the immense impact of this social trend for local communities. The local daily, *The Record*, has reported on immigration with regard to education, ethnic business, demographic change, immigrant cultures, and transnational ties. A distinct emphasis on peaceful coexistence can be discerned in such coverage and in repeated statements on the role of immigrants in the revitalization of the local economy and school systems (e.g. Llorente 1999, 2000). Articles on the introduction of Korean foods and the opening of new Korean restaurants and stores have appeared in recent years (e.g. Ervilino 2010). On the other hand, *The Fort Lee*

Suburbanite, a fully-illustrated local weekly, contains no coverage of “immigration issues” during the period 2008-2010. *The Suburbanite* features local ethnic events, typically running photographs of participants with their names in the captions, emphasizing diversity by celebrating the varied ethnic heritages of the area.

To be sure, tensions have been reported--such as divisiveness within schools in Old Tappan (Yoo 1999) or between Korean merchants and local officials in Palisades Park. Press articles document embittered relationships between town officials and Korean merchants since the mid-1990s, especially with regard to ordinances on the closing of Korean-owned karaoke lounges or the banning of foreign signage (Chen 1996; Hanley 1996, 1999). In Fort Lee, an incident of the burning of a Korean flag at the borough’s Korean War Memorial shortly after its dedication was reported in the local press (*Record* 2004) although none of my informants mentioned this incident. *The Bergen News*, another local weekly, carried just one article concerning legal issues of immigration in the period June 2007 to the present--on the necessity of compliance with laws and burgeoning legal problems for the immigrant population of New Jersey.¹ Yet immigration as an “issue” does not seem to have arisen publicly in Fort Lee--by contrast with the open demonstration of anti-Asian sentiments in Monterey Park. Themes of diversity and a resulting cultural richness have largely influenced discussion of the immigrant influx in the media.

¹ “Immigration Concerns Discussed,” *Bergen News*, August 8, 2007, p. 1. Panel of the Regional Conference on U.S. Immigration Law held in the Palisades Park Public Library. Although no particular immigrant group is specified in the article, the panel was likely intended for Korean immigrants. Two of the four panelists were Koreans--an attorney and the executive director of the New Jersey State Law Enforcement Asian American Association, the latter serving as moderator for the panel.

It may be tenable to view Fort Lee as more or less harmonious. The situation, however, should not be oversimplified. Immigrant integration has not been free of problems. Absence of open ethnic conflict does not necessarily indicate the absence of native resentment against Asian newcomers. The ways in which the host perceives and defines immigrants have a bearing on the mode of immigrant incorporation and intergroup relations in new multiethnic suburbia. While being mindful that racial and ethnic identities and categories are social “constructs,” this chapter examines patterns of native white responses and the principles of differentiation and incorporation that native whites deploy. In what ways have cognitive and social boundaries within the host been transformed as a result of East Asian immigration into Fort Lee? How have native white residents responded to the East Asian influx and the changes brought by immigration? What sort of contextual backgrounds account for the relative absence of overt intergroup conflict in Fort Lee? In what ways do host reactions affect the likelihood of immigrant assimilation or ethnic retention? These questions form the substance of the following chapter.

1. Perceived Difference among Asian Immigrants

The ways in which social actors define each other are a manner of drawing and sustaining boundaries and thus making groups. Native white informants in Fort Lee consistently referred to East Asians as “them”--implying that East Asians are “different.” This view of the “other,” the sustenance of social “difference” is pervasive among native whites. At the same time, native white residents generally recognize subgroup differences and differentiate between Chinese, Japanese, and Koreans, rather than

generalizing individuals as “Asians.” White informants tended to specify ethno-national groups (“There used to be many Japanese but now it’s all Korean”). They considered that Japanese and Koreans differ greatly in attitudes--e.g. the ways in which Koreans and Japanese relate to the local community. In the native view, these differences stem from consciousness of settlement. The commitment to put down roots in Fort Lee among Koreans leads to greater involvement in the community. A former mayor of Fort Lee observed that Koreans are, “more into the community” than the Japanese, who tend to be more “inhibited” than Koreans. The former mayor attributed lack of involvement in community life and lack of interest in gaining citizenship among Japanese to their transience. The Japanese would never come to council meetings, he explained, whereas Koreans did--a difference he felt was contingent on their “different purposes.” Compared to Japanese and Koreans, Chinese were rarely mentioned by native white residents although some were aware of the growing number of Chinese immigrants into the area. Due to the absence of visible ethnic concentration, the Chinese have not drawn significant attention from native whites.

Native sensitivity toward group differences may reflect a considerable level of contact with Asian groups, for example, through school and work relations. Travel to Asia has also helped promote a deeper understanding of Asian cultures by white Americans. White informants were often well informed about the modern history of East Asia and of lingering antagonisms, including a lack of alliance between Japanese and Koreans in Fort Lee--attributed to this historical legacy. One white female informant who has worked for both Korean and Japanese companies in the area recounted her personal experience of national rivalries among her employers:

When I left [the Korean company] I understood it was very insulting for the comptroller: “We hired you, we brought you in, we offered you travel opportunities, we trained you, and you betray us. Not only by leaving, but by going to a Japanese company!?! Oh!” You know, because I know that there is no love lost between the Koreans and the Japanese. On the other hand, when I came to the Japanese company, the manager who hired me would say periodically, “Well, I bet we compare very favorably with your last employer, don’t we?” with a matter of pride, you know.

That the majority of East Asian immigrants are middle-class professionals, with advanced degrees, is also widely recognized by white residents. Frequently, high academic standards among Asian students were related to their privileged backgrounds. In 1976, the *New York Times* quoted the Fort Lee assistant superintendent of schools on Japanese students:

Socioeconomically, they come from a select group of parents with an especially high regard for education . . . they are the sons and daughters of the cream of the Japanese corporate structure. They are not run-of-the-mill immigrants (Maitland 1976).

Conversely, some white residents--teachers and religious leaders, having greater contact with Asian groups than average residents--noticed disparities, remarking on the subtle class differences between Asians. Koreans, the largest minority group, are viewed as more diverse in class background than either the Chinese or Japanese. Remarks on class differences among Chinese were based on the observations of local students--some are from privileged families, others receive free lunch in school.

The distinctions among East Asian subgroups by native whites pertain to aspects of immigrant-native relationships. The sense of “alienation” felt among white residents, for example, was not always connected with the general category of “Asians,” but specifically with Koreans. Koreans, the largest minority of Fort Lee at present, were often singled out as a source of feelings of alienation or resentment. Yet, at the same

time, whites consider that Koreans, not Japanese, are becoming part of the wider community and, more broadly, “American.”

2. Alienation and Threat

Native whites expressed different but related feelings with regard to East Asian immigration--alienation and the sense of threat. In their case study of a small suburban community in the United Kingdom, Elias and Scotson (1994) found that old-time residents establish, “a common mode of living and a set of norms,” which they both observe and are proud of (xxii). Such “emotional barriers” among established residents arise when faced by any outsider groups (ibid.)

The influx of newcomers is experienced as a threat to the old-timers’ established way of life. As mentioned above, white residents are conscious of the privileged class backgrounds of Asians. Perceived privilege may play a role in some residents’ feelings of being threatened. One white male in his forties voiced this sense of threat:

What I find to be fascinating, examining the Asian influx, is that for the first time, in what I know of, in our history, we had an immigrant group come in that can compete for white-collar jobs. And I think that intimidated a lot of people. People come with educations with, you know, computer backgrounds. They weren’t coming here to drive cabs. They weren’t coming over to pick up garbage. They weren’t coming over to do the jobs that maybe other groups did. These people were coming over to start businesses.²

In her theorization of the “middleman minority,” Bonacich (1973) has argued that middleman minorities develop great economic power in a community towards which they

² See further Newman (1993). Newman’s study of an unspecified suburban community in Northern New Jersey (1988-1990) documents open demonstration of white resident resentment against “privileged” ‘Oriental’ newcomers.

feel fundamentally alien. The economic power of middlemen minorities appears devastating to host members, who believe their space is being “taken over” by an alien group. The idea of being “taken over” is frequently used as a cause for the felt alienation of established residents who feel that Fort Lee is their town. The changing appearance of Main Street and emergence of flourishing immigrant business has resulted in a sense of alienation among some white residents. One white female informant put it this way:

There was a lot of alienation in the town from the white residents against the Koreans. Not against the Japanese, not against the Chinese, but against the Koreans. 'Cause they were so much more visible, I guess.

The term “alienation,” used frequently among white residents in reference to their relations with the Korean presence, connotes a psychological state characterized by estrangement from what was formerly familiar.³

A number of informants commented that “change” in Fort Lee from immigration is felt as a greater problem for senior citizens and that the ideas of being “taken over” and “Asian invasion” are most prevalent among them. Discriminatory remarks are rarely heard in the town, but outright hostility from white residents at the Senior Center is not uncommon. White seniors say, “all the time,” according to the director, that “Koreans are taking over.” One white female informant in her forties told me that seniors in their seventies, including her grandmother, openly speak about how the “Koreans have invaded” them. The signs in Korean in many storefronts on Main Street create discomfort among established senior citizens--they no longer recognize the Fort Lee they

³ The usage connotes a vague psycho-social fear, a sense of separation and displacement and should be distinguished from the Marxian concept of alienation, which essentially refers to self-alienation or dehumanization in capitalist society--i.e. the alienation of man/woman (of one's self) from him/herself (through one's own activity).

once used to know. The sense of being “taken over” is, however, not limited to the predominance of Korean businesses but refers to a generalized perception about “Asians” as a whole. One white female informant related the following episode:

I’ve heard things like, “Oh, they’re taking over.” I remember once, in the elevator . . . I was teaching [English to] somebody in that [apartment] building. And there was this little old grandmotherly type on the elevator, and some Japanese or Asian kid got on, and she was “Hi, dear.” As soon as they got off, she said to somebody, “They are taking over.”

Reaction to the presence of East Asians varied by age and length of residence of the native resident. People who have moved to Fort Lee recently have done so with full knowledge of the Asian presence there, primarily for reasons of convenience and the desirable suburban environment. My informants suggested that recent white residents--often transient--“welcome the diversity.” Those in younger, working-age groups do not spend much time in town during the weekday and probably care less about the appearance of Main Street or the town in general. Fort Lee is their bedroom community, rather than the basis of their identity. Such segments of the population do not feel that “outsiders”--Asians--are trespassing their space (Cohen 1985). Those who moved to Fort Lee recently only know the town as it is now and lack the sentimental attachments felt by some senior and established residents. Perceptions are thus related to length of residence in the community and to the stage in the life course.

3. Resentment

Transformations in municipal life not only had to do with the immigrant influx and subsequent demographic shifts but also with the general growth and gentrification of Fort Lee. Some white residents emphasized that change had led to the demise of a small,

“beautiful,” and “nurturing” community.⁴ In describing changes in Fort Lee, over the years, established white residents often conveyed a nostalgic sense that Fort Lee used to be a “better” place. Frequently, this was expressed in reference to the change of businesses on Main Street and more broadly to changes associated with town development. Some established white residents recounted how there were “American-type” stores, including “mom-and-pop” stores or “five and ten-cent stores,” now long gone. Increases in the number of immigrants have coincided with other dramatic economic and social changes.⁵ Resentment about deterioration of the environment, due to urbanization and congestion, may at times be used as a euphemism for resentment about the increase of immigrants.

A recurring comment I heard during interviews with established white residents was, “there are only banks and nail salons in Fort Lee.” One cannot fail to notice the prevalence of banks. Fort Lee has an unusually large number for its size. As of September 2008, there were forty-four banks in Fort Lee, eight of which were Korean.⁶ One white female informant remarked, “My son always used to kibbitz when he was a child, ‘The only thing we have here in Fort Lee are banks and nail salons’--[laughter]--If you look on every corner, there is a bank.” One disadvantage of the presence of many

⁴ A gender difference was evident among responses to growth in Fort Lee. Men tended to support the trend; women tended to be critical, showing resentment against the building of, “bigger houses that take up space,” for example.

⁵ See Fennelly (2008) for a parallel example in the Midwest regarding the native belief that demographic changes due to immigration of culturally different groups are a primary cause of the demise of “pristine” rural areas.

⁶ Planning Board meeting, September 22, 2008. One informant (Korean American male) pointed out to me that by his count there are nineteen banks within fifteen minutes walking distance in the commercial area of Fort Lee.

banks for local leaders is the reduced possibility of revenue: banks become dead space in the evening, whereas restaurants, bars, or cafes bring in revenue. For some residents, it seems, “there is nothing in Fort Lee.”

The types of business that have replaced the old stores are viewed disapprovingly by some white residents. A white, female, established resident recalled there used to be a variety of stores on Main Street and that she could buy everything in Fort Lee, but this is no longer true:

There’s nothing anymore. Nail salons and banks. I mean, banks, how many banks do you need? I mean, if you walk down Main Street, there are two nail salons, and one street over, there are two more . . . I mean, I frequent one of the nail places, but there are so many. There’s no reason to walk on Main Street.

Similarly, a white female in her fifties living in Leonia observed:

Even talking about me and my little town Leonia, which is very tiny, we have a little tiny Main Street. You should see how many Korean businesses are even here. And a large appliance store, maybe the largest store in this little town, closed. Everybody said, “Oh, god, it’s going to be another nail salon.” Even among us [in Leonia]

The weight of Korean business in the area has produced a level of resentment and negative reactions from whites. But such resentment has not necessarily led to conflict or confrontation: such feelings are mainly held privately. Several white informants remarked that native feelings are not openly demonstrated but that people hold them, “under their breath.” Despite the general politeness, however, there is an “undercurrent.” Lack of public conflict, therefore, may not be an accurate indicator of inner feelings of resentment among native residents.⁷ The local resistance, especially from established

⁷ Silence does not mean that Asians do not sense some hostility. According to a second-generation, Chinese American male in his twenties, native of Fort Lee,

Fort Lee residents against East Asian newcomers, has been received by town officials in statements such as “What are you going to do with all these foreigners?”

Although, in interviews, many white residents did not voice resentment against the Chinese or Japanese today, some remarked on resentment during the time of the Japanese influx. A couple of white informants attributed this to the memory of the Second World War among residents. The Japanese were viewed as “pushing up prices” in housing, also given as a cause for resentment against their presence.

At the Senior Center, resentment against Asian newcomers is openly expressed. The Center’s membership reflects the demographic composition of Fort Lee--twenty-five to thirty percent Asian, of whom the overwhelming majority are Koreans but which also include some Chinese, and a very few Japanese. The Korean elderly usually immigrated to the United States as seniors to join adult children who own businesses in Fort Lee.⁸ A first-generation Japanese male who volunteers at the Senior Center told me that, unlike the Japanese, Koreans actively participate in the Center’s programs, attending classes, doing exercises, and making crafts, along with white seniors. Quite a few seniors--white and Asian--can be found in the dining room, talking with friends over coffee or reading newspapers, even before lunch is served. The quality meals that the Center provides for a

My neighbors are very old and they are all white people. They never said anything. But I know they are thinking something . . . they’ve been here for so long and seen such a shift. I’m just guessing. They never actually said anything to me but, my educated guess would be that they might be a little pissed off, like, we are taking over their houses, or what not.

⁸ The director of the Richard A. Nest Senior Citizens’ Center told me that due to the disproportionately high percentage of Korean residents in senior housing in Fort Lee over the last few years, investigation into possible impropriety was ongoing. The issue is a cause of friction between Korean and white seniors.

small fee have been highly popular, bringing in more than 100 seniors during lunchtime--the waiting list for the program runs to eighty names.⁹ Around lunch, the dining room quickly becomes full. People are seated at tables with friends of the same ethnic group. Rarely do seniors from the white and Asian groups communicate. Korean participation or presence in a mainstream local institution (as opposed to co-ethnic institutions such as Korean churches) indicates that they are not entirely isolated in the co-ethnic sphere, although in mainstream institutions they may largely keep to themselves. Public spaces may be marked by ethnic divisions when they attract members of different ethnic groups.

Resentment toward Asians may not always be associated with older age. A white male cab driver in his mid-forties related the following episode:

I had a woman say to me one time . . . this was interesting. She had a few drinks and I don't think she was all there. I was taking her across the Bridge. And she was trying to make it sound like, I've got a bum deal or, we've got a bum deal, because, you know, like, "Oh, look, you are driving a cab and this guy, this Asian guy, is driving a BMW." I said, "Because, well, it's a free country" . . . you might hear it once in a while. It's almost like there is maybe a level of resentment.

Other informants told me about the "white flight" that had occurred due to the growing Asian presence and increased property values, the latter case implying that some residents were forced to leave. White residents I interviewed generally accepted the change in Fort Lee--that Fort Lee now comprises people of diverse backgrounds and this cannot be altered.

4. On Signage: Contested Multiethnic Space

⁹ Director, Richard A. Nest Senior Citizens' Center, Fort Lee: interview, April 23, 2009.

One factor in established resident feelings of “alienation” relates to the prevalent use of commercial and business signage in Korean. Korean storefronts and changes on Main Street, where they are manifest, are interpreted differently by different groups. For non-Koreans, *Hangul* signs are a source of alienation: for Koreans they are an expression of the mother tongue that constitutes the immigrant habitus. Lefebvre (1991) argues that space can be marked both physically and abstractly: physically, by the “use of visual or auditory indicators” (141), abstractly, “by means of discourse, by means of signs” (ibid.). Signs have the effect of marking territory, thereby giving space symbolic value.¹⁰ This urban marking amounts to spatial possession. Lin (1998) has noted how central urban economies and cultural spaces in the U.S. are repossessed by ethnic actors. Although Lin has in mind urban “immigrant gateway cities,” the concept equally applies to the case of a suburbia which has become profoundly “multiethnic.”

Foreign signage in downtown Fort Lee was a cause of heated debate in the 1990s (Cowen 1996; Goodnight 1999). Several towns in Bergen County, including Fort Lee, required the display of shop signs in English alongside non-English signs during the period. The ordinances were, in effect, aimed at Korean business. A federal court ruling in California, however, struck down a similar law as unconstitutional and led to a reconsideration of the New Jersey boroughs’ ordinances (Cowen 1996). In Ridgefield Park, a Korean American businessman filed a lawsuit against such ordinances on the grounds of violation of freedom of speech.

¹⁰ Following Lefebvre (1991) symbols imply an “emotional investment, an affective charge,” such as fear or attraction (141).

The ordinances could be interpreted as xenophobic or racist; after all, there had been signs in the borough in Greek, Hebrew, and Italian, prior to the English-translation requirement. Thus, the former mayor explained, “when this law came along, Korean merchants felt it was directed at them” (Cowen 1996). Subsequently Fort Lee introduced revised ordinances. In Monterey Park, California, on the other hand, Chinese business signage was vehemently opposed and was connected with the growth control movement and English-only resolutions in the late 1980s through the early 1990s (Saito and Horton 1994).¹¹ Anti-Asian expression is far less vocal in the case of Fort Lee.

Rather than mandate bilingualism, Fort Lee has promoted the concept of “beautification” of the town--with the stated aim of “one, unified, homogeneous approach,” according to the current mayor. In 2008, the borough adopted a revised, comprehensive ordinance concerning signs and façades.¹² This stipulates the size and style of letters to be used. A business sign must be reviewed by the Sign and Façade Review Committee to ensure the sign is aesthetically pleasing and that there is uniformity in the building. The committee, which includes two Korean members appointed by the mayor, has recommended that at least fifty percent of the sign or awnings be in English, although this is not law. The language recommendation is justified for safety, to ensure

¹¹ In Monterey Park, the city council passed resolution 9004 in 1986 (since rescinded and reinstated as a state constitutional amendment) declaring English the city’s official language. Business signs in Chinese characters were cited as, “evidence that the immigrants do not want to become a part of the United States” (Saito and Horton 1994, 240).

¹² “An Ordinance to Amend and Supplement Chapter 410, ‘Zoning,’ of the Revised General Ordinances of the Borough of Fort Lee Concerning Article XII, Signage And Facades,” Ordinance #2008-42, adopted September 25, 2008, effective September 30, 2008.

that police, fire, and ambulance services will recognize the name of the store (Rossi 2008d). In general, the mayor considers, “folks are cooperating” with the policy.¹³

Signs for the majority of storefronts have indeed begun to look more unified and discreet, whether in *Hangul* or English, especially for new stores or new awnings. (Figures 9, 10). The mayor believes the ordinance has made a great difference in the appearance of the streetscape. He also noted that such requirements are not about, “Caucasian versus Korean American.” Nevertheless, the mayor indicated that, “with folks of Asian descent, the culture dictates that each storefront be very busy with multiple signs”--which might therefore appear “inappropriate” in light of the goal of beautification.¹⁴ The regulation concerning signage--whose stated motive is to achieve an “aesthetically pleasing” appearance--is complex and delicate. There is a possibility of raising a perceived divide between Korean business and non-Korean consumers (a sentiment of exclusion expressed as, “The [Korean] culture does not invite everybody from our town to come and patronize these businesses”).

My informants, Korean and non-Korean, generally did not mention signage in commercial downtown Fort Lee as a problem today. Many recalled the controversy over commercial signage, when asked about it--but they seemed to consider this a thing of the past; after all, stores now generally put up signs in English, along with signs in *Hangul*. Although the majority of informants did not seem to mind the current appearance of Main

¹³ Mayor Sokolich, personal interview, December 3, 2009.

¹⁴ The chairman of the “Sign and Façade” review committee, a former councilman, is quoted as saying, “I’ve lived in Fort Lee all my life . . . When I walk through town, I’ve been disgusted. There are signs covering every inch of the windows” (Rossi 2008d).

Street, some felt that the Korean signage continues to be a source of division within the Fort Lee community--as long as the native resident feelings of alienation persist and the non-Korean population, “doesn’t feel comfortable even walking in.” For many people that I spoke with, ethnic business appears more acceptable if the store name is a recognizable English word, with no foreign typography outside the store. Resistance against foreign signage may not be linguistic but rather symbolic--a sense of territorial space and the ethnoracial boundaries connected with space.

5. Altering Social Boundaries: Towards the Process of Incorporation

Social integration is not unidirectional. Native white residents who live closely with increasing numbers of East Asian immigrants have responded to change both on institutional and individual levels. The following section discusses examples of responses among local institutions towards East Asian immigration since the 1970s and how the white community has dealt with changes in social life. Local and immigrant forces work dialectically--the more institutions become accommodating, the more immigrants are attracted to the locale. Greater tolerance and the embrace of ethnic and cultural diversity are indicative of the impact of immigration on the host and shifts in social boundaries. The altering of boundaries is a key element of ethnic suburban formation.

i. The School System

Since the early decades of Japanese immigration, Fort Lee schools have made concerted efforts to accommodate newcomers. While bilingual programs are mandated

by law in New Jersey, the implementation of various programs to accommodate newcomers owes much to a former superintendent who strongly supported the bilingual program and Japanese immigration to Fort Lee. Initiatives for bilingual programs were motivated by the aim of a “more comprehensive care of ethnic differences, a healthier juxtaposition between Asian students and the total student population” (Shinkai 1994, 81). The presence of bilingual students in the school district is also beneficial to schools in attracting federal funding that can be used for any aspect of the school.

Efforts of accommodation included sensitivity training for teachers, in which teachers were placed in a Japanese class and spoken to only in Japanese, so that they could understand how the students felt. Another program to promote mutual understanding was the annual “study tour” to Japan and Korea. Begun in 1989, with other educators in the New York metropolitan area, the expressed aim was to deepen the understanding of Japanese and Korean education (Shinkai 1994, 82). The superintendent’s initiatives also included research on bilingual students and how to make them feel comfortable in Fort Lee.¹⁵ In 2011, the local press reported on a visit to South Korea by the school superintendent of Fort Lee to solicit partnership with educators in Korea for Fort Lee’s school system. Korean English teachers are invited to Fort Lee for

¹⁵ Former superintendent, Dr. Alan Sugarman, is often cited as an exceptional leader--in both the present author’s interviews with schoolteachers and in previous research (Shinkai 1994). Fort Lee schools enrolled among the largest number of sojourning Japanese students in the world in the late 1980s; Sugarman believed that Fort Lee schools could establish themselves as models for the new, special kind of education (Shinkai 1994, 81). Toward this goal, Sugarman organized a committee in 1987 to edit a resource booklet which contained fundamental knowledge about Japanese, Korean, and Chinese culture and encouraged inclusion of this knowledge into the curriculum for all grades.

several months to co-teach with American teachers, to learn about each other's pedagogical methods and educational systems (Firschein 2010).

Schools have also organized "International Tea" and "International Dinner" days: on such occasions, students of different ethnic groups are invited to talk about their culture or parents bring home-made food that represents their culture. End of semester luncheons are held during which mothers bring food from their own culture for the teachers. Schools have also provided channels for foreign-born parents to become more involved in school affairs. For example, working with PTA volunteers, ESL lessons for foreign-born parents have been arranged, sometimes at volunteers' houses, "to make parents feel comfortable" and to provide an opportunity to get together. The increasing number of immigrants, especially from Asia, prompted the former superintendent to establish the bilingual Parent Advisory Council (PAC) in the late 1980s (Shinkai 1994). Many Asian parents were not participating in school activities, especially PTA activities, due to the language barrier. To encourage parental involvement, the Parent Advisory Council was created to provide opportunities for non-English speaking parents to get together with other members of their group. Originally there were four PACs--Chinese, Japanese, Korean, and Spanish. According to the current president of the Korean Parent Advisory Council (KPAC), theirs and the Spanish PAC are the only remaining PACs today. The Chinese PAC disappeared because support in English became unnecessary for the majority of Chinese. The Japanese PAC faded away because of the decline in the number of Japanese students. The KPAC functions as a support group for the PTAs; their major involvement is with volunteer activities requested by the PTAs as well as fundraising for scholarships for high school students and cultural events.

In 2006, bilingual schooling was proposed in Fort Lee (Hsu 2006a, 2006b). The program is known as “dual-language immersion,” where English-speaking and minority language-speaking students are taught in both languages. In Fort Lee, Korean was the target language--allowing Korean students with limited English ability to attain greater facility in English, while native English-speaking students learn Korean. Press accounts report resistance from non-Korean parents for a variety of reasons: English is already hard enough to learn for children; the utility of the Korean language outside the Fort Lee area will be limited (Hsu 2006b; Shih 2006). A Korean bilingual teacher informed me that the program was not implemented and has been postponed.

These school initiatives have not necessarily led to wholehearted community approval, as the last example suggests. Not all white informants considered that hosting events such as International Day foster a genuine appreciation of diversity in the community. It has been noted that the demonstration of ethnic culture may become an “obligatory” representation of diversity in public settings (Horton 1992). The examples from Fort Lee are nevertheless indicative of official willingness towards accommodation in the schools.

The schools consider Asian students a benefit to the improvement of Fort Lee’s academic community. From the perspectives of educators, Asian students have proved to be an asset. A former schoolteacher, who taught in the Fort Lee school system for forty years, recalls:

After World War II, after the Korean War, there was a period of peace and prosperity. Everybody was just happy, happy, happy . . . and it wasn’t until, I guess, the late 1950s when the Russians put up Sputnik, that all of a sudden, everybody said, “Hey, we have to educate our children better.” And so, more emphasis was put on math and science. And of course when the Japanese students came, they were so far ahead of us in terms of their

[math and science] . . . first of all, you have to understand that all the children that came were children from privileged families that had great emphasis on education. So they really revitalized everybody's ideas about education.

According to white educators I interviewed, Japanese children who came to Fort Lee were welcomed because, in the words of a current schoolteacher, "they pulled Fort Lee up by the bootstraps and made it a better academic community." Today, the academic achievements of Asian students--now mainly Korean--are regarded positively by white parents. One white male informant told me that he is glad his two children have Asian friends at school:

We like the fact that most Asian cultures value education and expect their kids to do well at their studies. And that becomes a good environment for my children to grow up in, for my children to pursue academic excellence as well.

Integrating Asian students into the local school system, however, has not always been smooth. Problems in the past were related by informants--e.g. community-level opposition against Japanese enrolment in public schools on the basis of claims that Japanese lack of English fluency lowered the school district's test scores.¹⁶ The cost of educating one Japanese child far exceeded the amount of property tax paid by each Japanese family; there were times when the school budgets for ESL programs became a target of attack from local residents: "Why do they have to use taxes for those who are to return to their country in a few years?" (Shinkai 1994, 80). Disapproval continues today with regard to the Asian student presence--one local politician said that there is a need to educate the seniors since they tend to misunderstand that immigrants are taking

¹⁶ According to Kawai (2000), natives allegedly do not welcome foreign students into local schools because they may lower averages for annual achievement examinations, which would adversely affect school reputations, and subsequently, real estate values (87).

advantage of American services such as the schools. Asian parents are aware that many decisions regarding the schools are rejected by native residents. Furthermore, lack of citizenship inhibits participation by Asians with school-age children in the necessary decision-making processes.

The numerical dominance of Asian students has produced a situation where white students are placed in a minority position. Lynwander (1982) quoted an Italian American resident commenting that she appreciated having Japanese neighbors but one drawback was the prejudice her daughter suffered at nursery school where she was the only non-Japanese pupil in a class of thirteen. Nobody played with her until she learned to say some things in Japanese. A white mother in her late forties recalled how her daughter in kindergarten had made efforts to become “Korean”—in order to be accepted by fellow Korean pupils. Being the numerical minority in class, the experience of exclusion by white pupils is not an isolated experience in Fort Lee.

Moreover, the schools’ appreciation of Asian students may not necessarily be shared by white American parents. A white female in her late forties recalled from about a decade ago that when her child was in elementary school the presence of Asian students changed the nature of Christmas school events. Rather than students singing together, the performance turned into a series of concert solos:

The Christmas show used to be just everybody singing. And now, because Korean kids are so into the music and they are very good musicians, it’s sort of just become violin solos, where it’s not American-style Christmas show anymore. It’s more like a show-off session, according to how Americans feel. . . . We just wanna hear our kids singing some happy winter songs or whatever, but it becomes this solo, or one kid playing for twenty minutes, solo. . . . I could remember complaining about that, saying, “I take off time to come, I wanna hear my daughter sing, not just one song and then all these individual solos.” I don’t wanna see that. No offense, but, I don’t want to see that.

This informant felt this arrangement was based on the school's interest in appropriating student excellence to raise its reputation when, in fact, "it's coming from this kid's hours of private lessons." In this case, solo performances were connected not only with the privileged background of immigrant families but also with the interest of the school in reaping benefit from this privilege.

ii. Local Business

The business community in Fort Lee has responded to the Asian influx and in particular to the growing number of Korean businesses. The Chinese or Japanese businesses currently in operation are so small in number that they have not become a focus of attention for the local white business community. With the expansion of Korean businesses, however, a separation between Korean and native white business emerged. One white board member of the Chamber of Commerce told me of his efforts to encourage Korean business owners to work together with other local businesses:

They don't hire any English speaking people. What they call "white people" don't feel comfortable going in the stores or restaurants. They never made it feel comfortable. So they're kind of divided. There was a big division, there still is. I told them, "You got to change, you need to hire people who speak English." And both ways. American businesses need to hire Korean-speaking people . . . I said that, "You know, you need to work with the community you are in." So I tried. I put them on the board of the Chamber. I always felt it was important. If we worked together--'cause there are so many Korean businesses--so that when there are issues that come up, I'm sure they have the same problems we have. If we did it together, we would get around it or make it work. That hasn't worked out as well as I expected, but we are making headway.

The Greater Fort Lee Chamber of Commerce's annual award, Person of the Year, is given to "those who have distinguished themselves through service benefiting both the

business and civil communities in the greater Fort Lee area” (Greater Fort Lee Chamber of Commerce, December 3, 2008). In 2000, the Chamber of Commerce, along with the State of New Jersey Senate, honored a Japanese American realtor and his wife with the award for their community service and contributions.¹⁷ This was the first recorded nonwhite business owner to receive such recognition in Fort Lee. A Korean realtor received the award in 2008, along with the Fort Lee police chief. In 2009, Chinese realtors were named Persons of the Year. Numerous display advertisements/felicitations from local businesses for those who received the Person of the Year in the Chamber’s annual directory signify recognition as a legitimate, honored member within the Fort Lee community.

As discussed in chapter 3, the increased native white collaboration with Korean business community leaders owes to the active involvement by the latter as well. Asian-owned businesses are increasingly becoming more mainstream American than Asian-oriented (Verdon 2006). Press reports indicate a shifting desire among Korean businesses--banks, retail businesses--to serve both a Korean and non-Korean customer base.¹⁸ The white business community recognizes that Korean businesses are an important and integral part of the local economy--rather than considering them simply as competitors. During my fieldwork, in 2008-2009, it was noticeable that more and more American businesses were employing bilingual Korean staff.

¹⁷ As discussed in chapter 2.

¹⁸ Kyung Lee, “KAAFL Promotes Diversity and Community, Not ‘New Seoul’,” *Fort Lee Patch*, June 17, 2011 (<http://fortlee.patch.com/articles/kaafl-promotes-diversity-and-community-not-new-seoul?n>). Accessed June 22, 2011; Kyung Lee, “New Name, Mission: Noah Bank,” *Fort Lee Patch*, July 1, 2011 (<http://fortlee.patch.com/articles/noah-bank-strives-for-more-diverse-customer-base-with-new-name-mission>). Accessed July 15, 2011.

iii. Everyday Life

Jones-Correa's study (2008) on suburbs in metropolitan Washington D.C. found that local responses to immigration varied by type of public agency. Service agencies whose mission is to serve local clientele, such as the public library, are more adaptive to demographic change: libraries keep track of population shift, actively seek foreign-language speaking staff, and increase holdings in foreign languages and media. Conversely, regulatory agencies whose mission is to conduct even-handed administration and enforcement of rules, such as the zoning department, are characterized by the absence of an institutional response to the changes.

That service agencies attempt to adapt and accommodate holds true for Fort Lee also. The Fort Lee Public Library has developed a significant foreign language book collection. The library had the largest Japanese language book collection in Bergen County for a number of years. The largest foreign language collection of the library is currently Korean. Library brochures are now printed in Korean and Chinese, alongside English. The library has begun to post a multilingual flyer on the bulletin board in Chinese and in Korean, advertising library holdings in each language, a trend unobserved prior to 2009. The library has also added an increasing number of foreign language periodicals including Chinese, Japanese, Korean, Russian, and Spanish titles. Foreign films are regularly screened at the facility, including Asian films.

Other municipal agencies also demonstrate comparable efforts of accommodation. The municipal website of Fort Lee developed a multilingual site in 2010. The Senior Center offers English classes where a bilingual Korean instructor teaches a group of

several seniors. The Fort Lee Community Center has continued to increase in significance, from its opening in 2004, as a venue for various community events. Since the beginning of my field observation, the internal decoration of the Center has undergone certain transformations. Scroll banners with colored images that speak to Fort Lee's civic priorities now hang from the high ceilings of the Center. One shows Korean children in folk costume performing traditional drum ceremonies (*Jangu* and *Buk*). At the head of the banner is inscribed the word "diversity"--equating Korean culture with notions of pluralism (Williamson [1978] 2000). Cultural events organized by ethnic organizations are often held at the Community Center. The Center has, for example, offered itself as a venue for the annual Chinese Golden Moon Festival. Invited local white politicians attend such ethnic events, including the mayor who addresses the wealth of Fort Lee's ethnic diversity. The Community Center thus serves as an important venue for the intermixing of different cultures. White attendees are always visible at such ethnic events--these events offer native residents opportunities for exposure to ethnic culture.

Individual practices among native whites have not remained untouched by the Asian influx. The growth of interracial relationships between Asians and whites was noted by many white informants as one of the major changes in the town. Whites use medical services offered by Asian doctors ("If anything, Asian doctors study harder and go to better schools so I would prefer an Asian doctor," said one white female). Whites dine at Japanese or Korean restaurants, not to mention Chinese restaurants. They shop at a local Korean supermarket or at the Japanese supermarket in Edgewater. One 1.5-generation Korean female related an episode to illustrate how the mainstream is changing

as a result of the presence of Korean culture. Her father runs a karaoke restaurant in Palisades Park which is frequented by various age groups from high school students to those in their forties and fifties. Although the majority of clients are Korean, the restaurant has begun to attract white customers as well. One day, schoolteachers from Palisades Park came to the restaurant--they explained that they wanted to see, "what this place is that the kids are talking about." The long-term presence of Koreans in the area has unquestionably affected the perceptions of local white residents.

Neighborhoodly contact between native whites and Asians nevertheless seems shallow. Few white residents indicated close contact with their Asian neighbors. But living together does inform native whites of aspects of the culture of their Asian neighbors. Many white informants--both those who live in Fort Lee and those who live in neighboring towns--mentioned their Asian neighbors in passing. Several white informants identified different cultural practices and customs among Asians, some of which appear to them desirable, others as unacceptable. Korean support for the school system and family solidarity (e.g. children helping in parent-owned stores) are considered desirable values for the local community. On the other hand, white residents have observed cultural practices that seem unacceptable in the United States--e.g. children being left unattended, latchkey kids. Troubles with white neighbors, caused by leaving children at home on their own for a few hours to do some errands, have been reported for Japanese expatriate mothers (see also Kurotani 2005; Muto 1985). Informants remarked with a sense of indignation on seeing an Asian child left alone in a car or Korean children returning home on their own with a key around their neck--since their parents were absent when they returned home. Strictness over education among Korean parents was

also noted disapprovingly by several white informants--e.g. protests by Korean students against teachers regarding the grades they received in class, or parental disciplinary treatment when children did not earn desired test scores.

Even seemingly banal things such as the pronunciation of foreign names, have changed, according to one white female who recalls the time of the Japanese influx. Her first encounter with the Japanese was at YMCA swimming lessons for children, in a neighboring borough, to which she brought her son:

During the winter, he was like the only kid in the class 'cause American kids wouldn't go when it's cold weather. And suddenly . . . let me see, it would be like '77, '78, somewhere in there. There were all these Japanese kids coming. And they came, they didn't care whether the weather was cold. And the swimming teachers would read the roll call and "A . . . ke . . . chi . . . KOU!" They couldn't read the names. And then, after a couple of years, Akiko, Akihito, and it was no problem. But at first they stumbled over these names because Japanese names were totally unusual to us. I mean, you go to Fort Lee High School, Japanese names are no problem for any of the teachers because they're used to having Japanese people around. But at that time, it was all very, very new.

Even at the everyday level--such as getting used to foreign names--accommodation on the part of the host society has taken place. These examples demonstrate that mundane practice is the nexus where gradual yet decisive changes take place.

iv. Appreciation of Diversity

While the fear of "takeover" may persist, especially among older white residents, it seems equally true that there are residents who appreciate the new ethnic mix and being part of a multiethnic community. When asked what they like about Fort Lee, many white informants said "ethnic diversity" and those who said so appeared comfortable with the

multiethnic milieu¹⁹ They were also conscious of the increasing number of non-Asian immigrant and racial groups--the increase of African Americans, Arabs, Hispanics, and Russians. The racial and ethnic diversity of Fort Lee is also a result of the temporary residence in Fort Lee of diplomatic personnel. One high school teacher told me that there are at least seventy different nationalities in the school system. In the foreign language office of her school, "You open up the cabinet and look at all the different dictionaries we have for testing, you can see how many different languages we get"--testimony that Fort Lee is "like the U.N." and, "a microcosm of America." Such diversity was generally viewed positively by white informants.

Potential benefits of an ethnically-mixed environment for children were frequently mentioned by white parents. One white female, who works in Fort Lee and lives in Leonia, commented on the degree of racial and ethnic diversity of her neighborhood and its benefits for her children's development: her children would grow up without experiencing residential segregation since growing up in a multiethnic neighborhood would be normal for them. For parents with racially-mixed children Fort Lee's ethnically diverse environment is viewed as an essential part of socialization. Growing up in a diverse suburb, among people of varied backgrounds, produces values that are not superficially "multicultural" but which genuinely transcend racial and ethnic boundaries. Observing that her children's dating partners have consistently been of different ethnic origins, one white female, resident of Fort Lee over sixteen years,

¹⁹ White informants were mature adults, the youngest being in their forties. Informal conversations with white youth in their late teens or early twenties took place through fieldwork. Youth in Fort Lee seemed generally comfortable living in a highly multiethnic environment.

considered this an indication that a person's race or ethnicity does not matter to her children and their friends, and this is what growing up in Fort Lee has given her children.

Diversity can become "naturalized" through everyday life. The racial and ethnic diversity of Fort Lee has become normal to the extent that residents do not recognize it until they see a reference point for comparison. For example, one white mother commented that the racial and ethnic diversity of Fort Lee did not occur to her much until her daughter's track team in Fort Lee high school visited other communities with teams that offered a sharp contrast. Those white residents who are acclimated to the diverse environment of Fort Lee, expressed how they feel relaxed when they return from more homogeneously white regions of the United States. One white female in her fifties recalled: "I remember going down to Virginia to visit relatives and coming back. And I just went into a Korean store to get some groceries and I was just, 'pew . . . [laughs] I'm home'."

Social actors may try to find a common referent, in order to reach social understanding. A congresswoman, by citing the example of the *Chuseok* festival, suggested how such local ethnic events might help towards a better understanding of cultural similarities, rather than differences. The celebration of the *Chuseok* festival can convey to local residents that Koreans have a festival, "just like we have Thanksgiving." The universal thematic of this ethnic harvest festival is also emphasized by Korean institutions.²⁰ A cultural referent can be used by both sides, immigrant and native groups, with a view to achieving mutual understanding.

²⁰ Author's participation in the *Chuseok* Festival, Donghwa Cultural Foundation, Englewood, N.J., October 3, 2009.

v. The Utility of the Asian Constituency: The Role of Art and Immigrant Incorporation

“Diversity” has also been instrumental in accomplishing some other concrete goals of the community. Art has been instrumental in strategies of immigrant incorporation in Fort Lee. A perceived Asian tendency to value and appreciate art has coincided with initiatives to transform Fort Lee into a “cultural center” for Bergen County and beyond. Fort Lee’s historical identity as the “birthplace of the motion picture industry” offers significant symbolic and cultural capital (Fort Lee Film Commission 2006).²¹ The town aims to deploy such “resources” in reinventing itself as a cultural center.

The Fort Lee Film Commission and Office of Cultural Heritage Affairs host a number of local events, often in connection with the Community Center. These programs are highly active and include concerts, outdoor film screenings held in parks, the outdoor Shakespeare theatrical performances, and the Arts and Music Festival, to name a few examples. These events are organized with the view to “spur an arts community” in Fort Lee. The Film Commission actively brings in a program of classic, independent, or foreign films that would have difficulty being screened in regular movie theaters.

Asians are viewed as receptive and supportive of programs that enhance the arts. For example, the Korean American Association of Fort Lee (KAAFL) sponsors the Fort Lee Education Foundation, an institution which in turn sponsors the arts. According to the executive director of the Fort Lee Film Commission, Asians have brought “a new

²¹ As discussed in chapter 1.

vibrancy” and, “a chance to build an arts community.” There may have been a general lack of interest in aspects of arts and culture in Fort Lee previously, but, in the director’s words, “Asians offer Fort Lee the ability to do different things.”

Between 2003 and 2007, the Film Commission organized an Asian Film Festival in Bergen County. This event was made possible due to the presence of Asians in the area and with the help and support of some key Asian cultural figures. The event was well received, with attendance by a mixed Asian and non-Asian audience. The executive director of the Commission considers that showing Asian films as well as films made by Asian American filmmakers will not only help diversify the content of what they offer to the community but will also help diversify the audience--showing films by Asian American directors, for example, will help increase the interest of new immigrant groups in the community.

The Fort Lee Film Commission’s stance stems from the need to make their art and cultural initiatives financially sustainable. Not only is support from the municipality essential, outreach to the entire community is necessary. In this view the immigrant population, “once tapped correctly, would be very supportive of the arts, very supportive of the film programs” and, “would be open to new ideas”--in the view of the Film Commission. Although art is in general an effective tool for outreach, film is “the easiest way to bridge cultural gaps.” Outreach in turn provides a way for new immigrant groups to get involved in the town.

A recent film screening illustrates the role of film in integrating the Asian American population. One evening in June of 2009, toward the end of the school year, a documentary film made by fifth graders and entitled, *Fort Lee: A Walk Through Time*,

was premiered in the auditorium of Fort Lee High School. A local photographer/film director had tutored the students on the process of film production, from the use of the camera to editing processes. Some twenty students were involved in making the film: interviewing local leaders, filming the interviews, and editing. The interviews were featured in a thirty-minute film. Six of the eight pupils appearing in the film were of Asian origin--the majority Korean, with a few Japanese. All of them spoke in perfect English, indicating that they were either American-born or had arrived in the U.S. at a young age. The evening highlighted the conspicuous presence of Asian students in the Fort Lee school system--the students appeared on the stage, introducing the film, and giving "Oscar" awards to the adults who had helped them create the film. It was also noticeable that compared to other community-wide cultural events, there was a much higher percentage of Asian parents in the audience at this event.²²

During the course of this research, a community agenda for the creation of an "art district" has gradually materialized. Because of tax incentives an art district would attract potential actors in the art field--artists and gallery owners--"regardless of their background" and expand existing art shops on Main Street. In the past, borough help has been provided to art galleries in town, mainly Korean-owned. As Logan and Molitch ([1987] 2007) argue in discussing creativity, the "arts," have become a conscious strategy for growth by which city officials and developers attempt to generate rent and revenues. The promotion of culture and art is ultimately tied to the economic growth of Fort Lee.

²² The admission fees for this event were donated to the Thomas Paine statue project in which the town has been engaged over the last couple of years, as discussed in chapter 1. This project is another example of the contemporary reconsideration of the history of Fort Lee.

6. Factors in the Relative Absence of Open Interethnic Confrontation

The foregoing discussion demonstrates mixed reactions toward Asian immigration among white residents in Fort Lee. Resistance and hostility have never taken the form of collective anti-immigration action. Residents' frequent remarks that "people would never openly protest or demonstrate resentment" indicate an understanding that potential conflict can be placed under control. What accounts for the relative absence of open confrontation thus far?

Several factors should be considered. First, the relative lack of tension or open conflicts may be explained by the prevalence of "middle-class suburban civility." Middle-class metropolitan suburbs tend to lack social cohesion and residents tend to form fluid social relations with each other due to their heterogeneity, transience, fragmentation, and anonymity (Baumgartner 1988). These traits--a lack of social integration and relative indifference among people--foster avoidance of confrontation with neighbors and a preference for a "peaceable way of life" (ibid. 5). It is not difficult to imagine that such attitudes of middle-class suburbanites are especially pronounced when dealing with the "other." One white male informant in his forties stated that if a native white resident had an Asian neighbor there would definitely be "a level of civility," even if the white resident felt resentment.

Second, the socially-diverse environment and geographical and cultural proximity to New York place Fort Lee in a unique position, one that is receptive to difference. Fort Lee's diversity, as seen in chapter 1, goes back in history and is not limited to recent Asian immigration. According to one white male, a life-long resident in his forties, "The

whole point is that Fort Lee was always diverse. It's just the question of where people come from. Today it's Korean American, yesterday was Italian, tomorrow, who knows?"

Third, local acceptance of co-existence with East Asians has been contingent upon the largely middle-class status of immigrants--their material equality and autonomy. According to one white male, the lack of conflict in Fort Lee can be attributed to its being, "more of an affluent town"--although affluence is not always a premise for lack of open resentment. Japanese expatriate families, who signified transience and privilege, brought white-collar corporate culture to the local community. Any sense of threat toward their privilege was abated by local knowledge of expatriate transience. White residents realize that Chinese and Korean immigrants--the groups that are here to stay permanently--are generally middle-class. As suggested in a case study of Twin Rivers, East Windsor Township, the first planned unit development in New Jersey, perceived economic parity may be connected with the formation of a class affinity among residents that overrides race or ethnicity (Keller 2003). In Monterey Park, California, economic parity between newcomers and established residents was found to be a major precondition for accommodation, even though class was rarely mentioned in the popular discourse (Horton 1995). Thus, class may work as a condition for social acceptance.

White informants also perceive and recognize changes among both immigrants and the host--with the passage of time. Immigrants become "Americanized" and native residents come to accept the new diversity. Accordingly, native whites tended to believe that resistance and resentment can be overcome with time. One white female bilingual teacher told me that twenty years ago the integration of Japanese students was a challenge, until people got used to them. She explained that many Japanese students

suffered personal problems since they felt unwelcome in Fort Lee. Yet, in her opinion, “having Japanese here has changed the attitudes of people in town and they take on a much more global perspective.” Contact with immigrants through every practice--shopping, worshipping, school attendance, etc.--changes native views and understanding, although immigrant accommodation is a process that has to be learned. Residents often expressed the centrality of the notion of “time” in achieving integration--the foreignness of Asians and accompanying feelings of resentment on the part of the host society will “melt away” and “soften” with time.

Established residents recognize a change in attitudes among immigrants after decades of co-residence. The perceived change that happens to Asian neighbors seems to be an important element in the perspectives of native whites. An example of such a change can be seen in local Korean-owned stores, where adult whites regularly interact with Koreans. Decades ago, white customers found Korean merchants unwelcoming and felt they were not interested in serving non-Korean customers--a sentiment still heard among some native whites. Yet many others observe a tremendous change in attitudes over the years, seeing this as a result of immigrant acclimation to the United States: immigrant merchants now see the point of doing business with non-Koreans, not just fellow Koreans. Korean business owners have become more welcoming--even “over-friendly,”--at times. According to one white female informant living in Leonia:

There is a big difference from those who moved into Leonia thirteen years ago. You walked into a Korean business, they would turn their back on you. But today, “Happy to help you, how can I help you?” So I think . . . thirteen years ago, they were acting like any Korean would act, “I don’t know who you are, I don’t recognize your face, so I don’t want to talk to you.” But now, I think that they have become, a little bit more westernized, to say, “Why am I turning away money?” [laughs] It’s a silly

thing to do. So, it's a much more of a welcoming environment now if you do shop in Palisades Park.

Ultimately, white residents rationalize that Koreans, "have learned how things are here" through an accumulation of business experiences in America. Some white residents consider that Korean integration is happening much faster when compared with that of European immigrants in the early twentieth century. For example, it was remarked that it had taken Italians a long period of time to get involved in politics--and that the first Italian American mayor came to office only in the 1980s. By contrast, Koreans are already involved in the school board and other municipal committees.

Despite their transience, some locals consider the presence of expatriate Japanese immigrants in the area important in shaping attitudes to Asians and vice versa. One white female, an established resident of Leonia, "discovered the Japanese world across the street," in reference to an expatriate family living in a house across from hers. Trained in journalism, she ran a column on the Japanese who "come and go" for ten years, in *The Record*:

I contacted the newspaper once and they were not interested. And I said that these people are very important because they live here. They learn who we are. They take the best of what we are back to Japan with them. We are creating a different Japanese world with these people, which I really see beginning, as their kids grow up. Of course they are Japanese but they are very different, very special, you know, very open.

From her perspective, for the younger generation, even among the transient immigrants, assimilation occurs to a certain degree.

Along with the observed changes among the first generation, native whites consider that the second generation is the driving force of change. The second generation is regarded as the promise of an ethnically tolerant Fort Lee--that is, one in which there

will be a disappearance of resentment and self-segregation. Indeed, the ease of Asian youth with English and American and Western culture facilitates boundary crossing. At Fort Lee's community cultural outlets, including outdoor concerts, young Asian performers are ubiquitous. The performers in high school honor choirs, chamber and wind ensembles, and orchestras are almost entirely East Asian. The audience for this outdoor live music--American popular music and Western classical music--includes a large proportion of white seniors along with the Asian audience, which appears to be comprised mainly of students' families. White recognition regarding the change in the Asian populations toward Americanization seems to help reduce possible hostility against Asians.

7. Boundaries of Americanness

The preceding section saw that part of the native tolerance towards East Asians stems from the observation of behavioral changes among immigrants and their children. Along with changes in first-generation immigrants and the emergence of the second generation, native whites tended to see Asians becoming "American" as defined by the mainstream. To them, the boundaries of Americanness are defined according to certain conditions--for many, the conditions do not include race. White adults see a greater possibility of Asian integration, as the younger generation becomes "American." For example, they observe the increasing intermixing of Asian and white youth as an indication of assimilation. Many white informants repeated the idea that immigrant familiarity with America, the acquisition of English fluency, and participation in the American educational system, etc. are prerequisites for acceptance as an "American." In

this regard, there is a tacit understanding of “mainstream” among white ethnics and the necessity for immigrants and their children to become part of the mainstream, in order to be considered “us.”

A few informants stated, “They [Koreans] are Americans”--that, “they are us” is an expression never used to describe the Japanese. Japanese immigrants in Fort Lee were seen as “Japanese” and not as “Japanese Americans.” Such comments indicate that white ethnics have assumptions about who are Americans and who are not. How is the notion of “American” considered by white residents? How and when does the notion of “them” become “us”? A white female resident of Leonia remarked:

There are more Koreans getting into the local government, so that it’s changing. It’s changing from that side. Are they Korean? No, they are Korean American. I had some printing done by the [Korean] printer . . . I had new business cards made . . . When I went to them before, the person that I dealt with, she couldn’t speak any English and she always had to get the manager to talk to me. But now, the person I talk to on the phone is Korean American and she speaks perfectly to me. That’s who the Koreans are becoming. They’re just like the Italian Americans or Greek Americans in Fort Lee, who looked the same. Koreans continue to look like Koreans but they are not the same. You know, they are us. They are us. So by living here, we just get a chance to see what the world is turning into a little bit quicker.

At the same time, immigrants are expected to maintain their ethnicity and heritage to add to the new possibilities for the local community. Another white male in his forties, who was raised in Fort Lee, remarked how Americans have changed their notions about identity--that is, the maintenance of ethnic identity is encouraged while becoming American. The same informant considers the students of Korean or other ethnic origin high school today, “as much American as we were when we were in high school.”

White adults see the younger generation cope with difference better than their parents’ generation. A white female told me that while one of her white neighbors is

“angry” with the Asian influx, the child of this neighbor and the child of a Korean family in the neighborhood are nevertheless good friends--similar accounts of interethnic and interracial friendships were related to me by several white informants where parents may not be able to communicate well due to the Asian parents’ lack of English ability. The generational shift can be directly observed at work also. For example, a white female who used to work for a Korean company observed that U.S.-born Koreans employed by her company had a different set of expectations from those of first-generation Korean expatriates:

The expectations of the younger Korean managers were frequently less “Teutonic” or less intense than those of their older, more experienced entrepreneurs . . . I mean, I would have to tell the older Korean manager, “you can’t discipline the employee in a public place, you have to take them into private.” They didn’t understand--“Why not? They did something wrong,”--“Well, because we don’t do it that way in the United States, it’s humiliating” [laughs] “Oh, okay.” You know, kind of wondering why, but they would do that. But the younger ones, they got it, they understood it a lot better, I think.

One Chamber of Commerce board member remarked that working together with Korean merchants has become easier because:

We are dealing now with the second generation. First generation, they were tough. You know, they have their certain ways, they don’t speak English that well and all that. So they weren’t comfortable. But now, with the second generation, it’s getting better. We have a very good relationship.

Together these comments suggest that white residents consider attitudinal changes and shifts in relationships as a given with the rise of the new generation. Moreover, the U.S. born second-generation can also provide a vehicle for first-generation parents to integrate into America. As one white male remarked, “people become American through their kids,” who go through the American school system and befriend Americans. This

needs to be considered in a wider socio-cultural context, however. In fact, the second generation is in an advantageous position: American society itself has been transformed-- to the extent that cultural differences are now easier to maintain and overcome than in the past. The shift in the second generation occurs in a socio-historical context where, “ethnicity is not only tolerated, but often celebrated as cultural traditions collide, merge, and co-exist” (Kasinitz et al. 2008, 273).

Despite the rapid growth of the Korean population in Fort Lee today, some white residents predicted that this immigrant population may not necessarily grow in Fort Lee in the future due to the possibility of the departure of the younger generation. Established residents had experienced the “loss” of their children to other parts of the United States and saw that pattern projected onto the newer immigrant communities as well. The native considers the seeming “ethnic enclave” as transitory because immigrant children will behave in a similar manner as white children. Just as white ethnic groups have dwindled because their children left Fort Lee, the size of the Korean population would not increase because the younger generation would not remain there, with further speculation that there may be different ethnic groups who settle there in the future. Such perspectives indicate that while people may have left Fort Lee because of unaffordability, there are also generational shifts (“children don’t necessarily settle near their parents”)-- factors which function irrespective of ethnicity. In this perception, the idea of living as American transcends one’s race or ethnicity; it concerns adaptation to the same sort of life choices and outlooks as an American.

8. Conclusion

Native resident sentiments and attitudes toward East Asian immigration are ambivalent and often contradictory. Despite an undercurrent of antagonism among native white residents, an accommodation toward East Asians has developed--a shift toward collaboration and the incorporation of immigrants are unmistakable features of Fort Lee. Over time, a process of mutual accommodation occurs among all elements of society. During this process, ethnic diversity has proved useful for institutional ends, bringing growth and prosperity to the community. In Fort Lee, ethnic co-existence and social distance are maintained synchronously. If there is a contradiction inherent in the ideology of diversity, this contradiction is lived and experienced in people's everyday lives, and not necessarily experienced as antinomic.

The tendency among native whites to distinguish between East Asian groups is of interest in light of the general tendency to "lump" Asians together in the United States. At the same time, white informants tended to consistently use "we" to refer to native-born Americans, and "they" for Asian immigrants--apart from those they recognize as "Americans," such as U.S.-born Korean American youth.

The case of interracial relationships in Fort Lee also suggests the importance of a consideration of class and social status in immigrant suburbanization. The data indicate that the relative absence of interracial and interethnic conflict depends, in part, on the behavioral patterns of middle-class suburbanites in public space (Baumgartner 1988). The semi-urban feature of Fort Lee diffuses the possibility of open conflict, but this urban, middle-class character is connected with the view, shared among some native white residents, of an internal "division" or lack of a sense of "community." At the same time, such middle-class suburban civility presents difficulties of assessment with regard

to intergroup relationships. Does the absence of conflict indicate harmonious relationships because of shared class status, or is it simply a result of being, “good at hiding”? Issues of prejudice or hostility, in the context of a relatively well-educated, middle-class suburb, may thus remain ambivalent.

From the perspective of spatial assimilation, hostile native reactions against immigrant groups are beyond consideration since those who settle in suburbs are presumed acculturated and having achieved mobility. For this model, how the host may be changed by immigration is not a focus--since the basic premise is that newcomers assimilate into white suburbia socially and culturally. Contrary to these premises, the present study of Fort Lee demonstrates an interdependency between natives and immigrants in shaping the ways in which immigrants assimilate or remain ethnic. At the same time, the findings suggest how immigrant groups influence white cognition and local life. The ethnoburb model predicts increased “misunderstandings, distrust, and tensions between the new ethnic minorities and longtime residents of various ethnic groups” because the development of the ethnoburb alters the local residential landscape and business environment in the traditionally white American suburb (Li 2009, 44-45). At the same time, the emergence of an ethnoburb is “likely to reinforce the ethnicity for all groups and to reinforce existing division” (ibid. 45). In the case of Fort Lee, while native resentment and resistance against the Asian influx exist, the reception has not been unilaterally hostile.

The mode of immigrant integration should be considered in connection with the local context and with social actors’ perceptions and practices in everyday life. The present research is suggestive of the ways in which the transformation of a community

takes place, “unconsciously and on an incremental basis through compromise and accommodation in the pragmatic process of getting things done” (Horton 1995, 225). East Asian communities do not exist in isolation in Fort Lee, but in relation to the host community.

Chapter 5

Asianness in an American Suburb

Ethnic identity is contingent on relations with others--both co-ethnic and non-co-ethnic. Ethnicity presupposes an institutionalized relationship between distinct categories: it is fundamentally relational, involving the binary “us” and “them” categories (Bakalian and Bozorgmehr 2009; Fenton 2010). The formation of ethnic identity thus appears as dialectical--a negotiation between internal identification and external ascription, where identification may vary by situation (e.g. Barth 1969; Hall 1997; Nagel ([1996] 1997)).

For East Asians in Fort Lee, being “Asian” is inseparable from understandings of “American”--the latter perceived as an identity that is antithetical for East Asians, who are not racially white. National origin remains dominant in the ethnic identification of East Asians in Fort Lee, even those who may be considered “established” residents, living in the U.S. for many years. At the same time, in some cases, ethnonational identity and “Asian” identity can be compatible. The present chapter considers how immigrants and their offspring comprehend “Asianness” and the implications of increasing ethnic diversity for the meaning of “Asianness” in Fort Lee. The main questions examined are: How do East Asian immigrants and their offspring negotiate and construct the meaning of “Asian” in a multiethnic suburb? How does residence in a plural community affect ethnicity and ethnic solidarity? What does it mean to be “Asian” for middle-class East Asian immigrants and their children in Fort Lee? Has a pan-Asian identity and consciousness emerged in Fort Lee?

1. Adaptation and Negotiation of Ethnoracial Identities

“Asian” in the United States is a racial category that designates diverse national groups as a single entity. To follow Omi and Winant (1994) the category “Asian” is a social and ideological construct that has been “racialized” as identity in the U.S. On the other hand, “ethnicity,” for some scholars, is voluntary and deployed as necessary by ethnic minority members. For example, Nagel ([1996]1997) argues that through daily life, ethnic identities are, “shuffled in and out of prominence depending on the situation” by the individual or groups (21). Group members carry a “portfolio of ethnic identities,” selection from which depends on the restrictions imposed by various social settings and constituencies. Consequently, different identities are activated at different times.

Ethnoracial identification among the East Asian informants for the present study was varied and indicative of a differential layering of identities. The majority of the first generation identified themselves according to national origin--being “Chinese,” “Japanese,” “Korean” was an important part of their identity. Some informants were strongly opposed to being considered “Asian” whereas others readily accepted such identification. For the latter, ethnonational identity and “Asian” identity were compatible. A few dismissed ethnic labeling, remarking that ethnic identity is not important for them, or that other aspects, such as religious affiliation or parenthood provided their primary identity.

Generation also seems to play a role in the pattern of identification. Whereas immigrants tend to adhere to national origin, the notion of “Asian” appears to be used more by the U.S.-born second generation. More members of the 1.5- and second-

generation than those of the first generation chose the joint designation, “Chinese American,” “Japanese American,” or “Korean American.” “Asian American” was rarely used by my U.S.-born informants to define themselves. A second-generation male in his twenties who identified himself as “Taiwanese American” questioned the notion of “Asian American”:

I know that in America it’s like we are so small a population it’s detrimental to try to distinguish yourself from other Asian Americans, so let’s call us Asian American, because, otherwise, we don’t have pulling power, blah-blah-blah, whatever. I don’t know, it’s just I consider myself as more Taiwanese American than Asian American, because that’s where my loyalty lies, I guess.

This informant, along with others who do not consider themselves as “American” attributed their proclivity to their feeling that they do not behave as Americans, or they feel they are “different” from Americans. Here it is clear that the national identity as “American” is drawn from their contact with and observations of “Americans.”

During the present study, by comparison with widespread self-identification as “American” among the second-generation, first-generation East Asians had contrasting reactions. Few first-generation Asians identified themselves as such and many showed reluctance toward calling themselves American. One, first-generation Chinese female in her early forties, originally from Malaysia, previously married to a Chinese and engaged to a white American at the time of the interview, was firm on this point:

I consider myself as Chinese. Even though I’m naturalized, I never say I’m American. My fiancé, he always says, “You’re American.” . . . I always say, “I’m going home” [when traveling to Malaysia] He says, “Here is your home” [laughter] You see, until somebody’s telling you . . . like all these years, I’m here for thirteen years, [but] it’s like temporary . . . It seems like I treat myself here just temporary. . . . I’m a citizen and I never say, “I’m American.”

First-generation Korean informants more readily accepted the notion of “Korean American” and rarely considered themselves “Asian” or “Asian American.” One important consideration is a sense of entitlement in claiming Americanness. One Korean community leader and resident of Fort Lee was quoted in the local press: “We have to find our identity, not only as Koreans, but as Americans . . . We are Korean Americans” (Fasbach 2001). On the other hand, the Japanese--the majority of whom are temporary or first-generation immigrants--consider themselves neither “Japanese American” nor “American.”

Some first-generation immigrants consider themselves as nothing but “American.” By naturalization they consciously choose to be so. In the words of one 1.5-generation Korean American in his thirties: “this is the only country where you, as an individual, have a choice. You actually choose to become an American. In other countries, you can’t do that.” One first-generation, Korean male, civic leader emphasized that Koreans who immigrate to the United States should try to become “American.” American for this informant is synonymous with the “mainstream” and becoming American is a means to avoid social marginalization. Although no Korean person can change the fact that they are Korean, he remarked, they have to become American because that will be more beneficial to them both in living and in doing business. This remark implies the belief that socioeconomic success hinges on assimilation or acculturation.

“Asian” and/or “American” appeared antithetical in my Asian informants’ perceptions, although the opposition may be susceptible to synthesis for some. In this oscillation, the fundamental issue is “race” and the greatest hindrance to identifying as

“American” is physical appearance--a factor which continues to render Asians “foreign” or “the symbolic alien” (De Genova 2006; Tuan 1998). De Genova (2006) argues that Asian national origins come to be refashioned in the U.S. as racialized identity that is rendered “inimical to the ‘American’-ness of white supremacy” (11). In previous chapters, it has been indicated that for East Asians in Fort Lee, “American” largely means “white,” which agrees with other research findings where white appears as the frame of reference for Asians (e.g. Zhou 2004). My first-generation informants in general had a tacit understanding that those who are entitled to be “American” are “white.” Becoming American for foreign-born East Asians signifies possession of symbolic capital--the power to institute, name, or define who is what and, ultimately, to be perceived and recognized as legitimate--that is, to be recognized as part of the mainstream.

Racial and ethnic notions that shape identity are indicative of the degree of Americanization. The tendency of temporary Japanese immigrants to remain within their own group, without participation in civic life, precludes the development of racial or ethnic consciousness among them. Temporary Japanese immigrants, when asked, “How do you identify yourself?” were slow to understand the meaning of the question--they had not considered the issue since they never questioned their Japaneseness. But expatriates who work with American colleagues and permanent immigrants have recognized racial division in America and that they are classified as “Asian” by American society. Greater contact with and involvement in American life seems to promote a racialized identification even for temporary immigrants. On the other hand, Korean immigrants, having established contact with white Americans through business, political participation, schooling, and other communal institutions, develop notions about Koreanness, who they

are, and, to a certain extent, what they aspire to be. The “racialized notion of self” reflects acclimation into the racial discourse of the United States, a discourse which is largely absent among temporary Japanese immigrants who remain unaffected by such “socialization.” Growing up in the United States sensitizes racial or ethnic consciousness among some 1.5- and second generation Korean Americans even when they can be considered “integrated” in terms of linguistic fluency, cultural knowledge, and non-co-ethnic friendships. A Korean female in her forties (in the U.S. since high school) put it this way:

This is something that I’ve experienced growing up. I speak English and I may enjoy and do the things the other, let’s say, non-Asian people, maybe Caucasians or white Americans do. But I’ll always *look* different. And I think I went through a stage where I didn’t even want to speak Korean and you know, like, pretend that . . . right? But as I get older, it is fairly important, because no matter how fluent we speak the language, and no matter what kind of food we eat--I may only like hamburgers and French fries, and not the Korean food--we are always looked upon as, “You are Korean, right? Where are you from?” So I tell my children, “We are Korean first. And the United States is just built with people from all over the world. So it’s important that you feel good about yourself as Korean first.”

Note here that although the issue concerns “race,” the informant does not resort to the notion of “Asianness,” but centers her belief in ethnonational identity.

Being ethnic and American can be conflictual or contradictory, but not entirely irreconcilable. One first-generation Korean male in his fifties explained at length how he considers his identity to be made up of both Korean and American elements. His account suggests that such an identity is the outcome of a negotiation over time:

Some people think they are still Koreans. They are still Korean immigrants who live in the United States, but . . . with a strong ethnic identity as Korean. Also there’s another group who think they are Korean Americans. A long time ago, when my kids were growing up, they were little kids, I always told them--their names are I. and J.--“I. and J., you are

not Koreans, you are not Americans, you are Korean Americans.” I used to say that. But these days my mindset has changed. These days I don’t think they are Korean Americans. I think they are Americans . . . with Korean heritage. My kids are Americans because they were born here and they grew up here in the States. Their main language is English. And they are culturally Korean but still more American than Korean because they grew up here in the States. So I think they are Americans *with* Korean heritage. But even though I’m a first-generation Korean immigrant, I try to think I should be an American with Korean heritage. If I don’t think so, I will always live on the margin of the whole community, you know, American society. I do not really like it, yeah. I should go into the mainstream society. But still, I want to maintain my Korean ethnic background, you know, Korean culture and everything. But I try to learn American culture and society at the same time. So those kind of conceptual words are very important. I used to be a Korean American. I tried to be a Korean American. But right now, I don’t think I’m a Korean American or that I should be a Korean American. I should be an American with Korean heritage.

The same informant’s rationale regarding why he should consider himself American is suggestive of the social role of “race” in the definition of “American”:

Being an American does not mean being a white person . . . There are already many ethnic people in the States . . . As far as I remember, already one fourth of Americans are Latinos and Asian. It’s growing. African Americans are also growing, compared to Caucasian. So, this nation is not white American already. There are many ethnic groups, so, being American means that. Being American does not mean becoming white American.

Ethnic identity is also contingent on expediency. For example, it was suggested among some first-generation Chinese informants that whether they use “Chinese” or “Asian” depends on the social context and to whom they introduce themselves. Although many expressed strong attachment to their identity as Chinese, they also considered that they are at least in part American--through participation in politics and voting, for example. The ways of identification are therefore malleable among East Asian immigrants in Fort Lee.

A second-generation Korean American female in her twenties remarked that having several roles due to her multiple identities can help make life “less boring.” Attending a private school in a New York suburb, predominantly Irish and Italian, the informant experienced discrimination at school. Having met Korean friends at college, she currently lives with them in Palisades Park, while working for a mainstream American firm in New York City. This informant considers herself “unique” having “cultural roots” as a Korean, a uniqueness related to the facility she has developed through living in bicultural worlds--“When I’m at work I guess I could put on my white personality but then at the same time I can come home or visit my parents and do this, be the Korean daughter they want me to be.” This informant was comfortable with an “American” setting and finds herself capable of “switching” whenever she speaks with white friends or with her Korean friends and relatives, which comes “naturally.” Moreover, being a Korean American person for this informant is a “unique opportunity”:

It breaks stereotypes, I guess, because, people are saying that “Oh, Asians are great at math, great at school,” you know, “smart, quiet,” whatever. A lot of times, even now, actually, people, when they see me, maybe not New York City, when I go down to south Jersey . . . they automatically assume I don’t know English. So when I help out at my dad’s store sometimes, it’s not that they are not in a great neighborhood, but they try to take advantage of my parents because they can’t speak English, and they argue with them. But if I help out, they try to argue with me, they automatically assume I can’t speak English. So when they argue with me, they say something to me, I speak. And I have fairly good pronunciation, you know. They get shocked . . . I think it’s kind of like trying to break the stereotypes, kind of like an opportunity to prove people wrong.

Taken together, the accounts of East Asian informants suggest relative autonomy in the choice of ethnic identity, while racialization has imposed limits to the ways they conceive of themselves in terms of entitlement as American. The system of ethnic identification appears as multi-leveled and connected with socioeconomic status (Bean

and Stevens 2003; Brown and Bean 2006). According to the present study, the relatively high socioeconomic status of East Asian immigrants and their children provides greater options and leverage in their identification. “Symbolic” identification is considered most likely to occur among those of the highest class, who have achieved success. The members of this stratum have the greatest interest in their sociocultural heritage and the freedom to assume an ethnic identity without incurring discrimination. In “selective” identification, agents choose to be more ethnic on certain occasions than on others--a strategy related to the goals of economic achievement. In Fort Lee, the example of “symbolic identification” is suggested by the case of Chinese and Taiwanese professionals who are socioeconomically assimilated but at the same time attach significance to the maintenance of ethnic heritage. The second-generation Korean woman who consciously “switches” her identity, quoted above, may be considered a case of “selective” identification--being more “white” in the workplace, more “Korean” with her parents.

Immigrants and their children deal with the choices in identification that are available to them, but generational differences exist. The second generation more readily espouses their identity as “American”--as something they take for granted--than their immigrant parents. For the first-generation immigrants, identity as an American is based on a conscious decision. Frequently this decision seems to be based on the felt need to gain social legitimation in the United States for socioeconomic attainment and for a sense of belonging where they reside.

2. Patterns of Social Relationships

People act toward each other on the basis of shared understanding: the meanings and definition of self are conditioned by relations with others. Awareness as an “ethnic” actor, therefore, is gained through relationships with others, both co-ethnic and non-co-ethnic. Ethnic identities are sustained by the maintenance of “boundaries”--the lines marking off one group from another (Barth 1969). The types of social relationships Asian residents form in Fort Lee are examined here to help understand the ways in which identity and meaning are shaped through social relations. What forms of intra- and intergroup relationships are produced among East Asian actors? To what extent do racial and ethnic categories matter in the formation of social relationships for East Asians?

Generally, members of the three East Asian groups tended to have co-ethnics as best friends. The tendency to co-ethnic friendship is pronounced among the first generation and to a certain extent applies to the second generation. This is not necessarily based on an unwillingness to make non-co-ethnic friends.

An important factor in the propensity to form co-ethnic friendships is linguistic. Flory (1989) and Kawai (2000) report that the will to learn English and to make non-Japanese friends on arrival in the United States among Japanese expatriate wives was hindered due to the temporary character of their residency and the fact that they could get by without speaking English.¹ The president of the Japanese-American Society of New Jersey remarked there are many Japanese who say their English conversation classes provide the only opportunity to speak with a native English speaker--no matter how many

¹ Flory (1989) observed a widespread feeling among Americans that the Japanese were intentionally avoiding participation in the American community. This impression was often the opposite of what the Japanese would have wished to convey (Flory 1989).

years they have been resident. The tendency to have other Japanese as their closest friends also seems true among Japanese immigrants planning for permanent residency.

The formation of co-ethnic friendships among first-generation East Asians without apparent linguistic barriers also concerns a felt cultural gap between themselves and Americans. For example, some first-generation Chinese informants attributed the reason for not making non-co-ethnic friends to “cultural difference,” regardless of length of residence in the United States. The idea of difference between themselves and Americans was recurrent among first-generation Asians who are fluent in English and working in the mainstream labor market and often the only “Asian” in their company. Even if they mingle with various ethnic group members, these first-generation Chinese remarked that they cannot have deep relationships with Americans and that there are topics of conversation they can share only with Chinese. First-generation Japanese immigrants who were intermarried with an American spouse--an indicator of assimilation--similarly tended to have co-ethnic friends rather than non-co-ethnic American friends. Although the sense of difference contributes to the reinforcement of ethnic identity, this does not prevent contact with Americans.

On the other hand, U.S.-born Asians (Chinese and Koreans) tend to have both co-ethnic and non-co-ethnic friends. They are generally comfortable with both co-ethnic and non-co-ethnic worlds. Koreans who grew up and attended public schools in Fort Lee remembered friendships with white peers at school. One 1.5-generation Korean American female in her early twenties told me that when she was at Fort Lee High School she never “hung out” with Korean students: her first best friend was native white and all of her current best friends since high school are non-Korean and of different

ethnic origins. Some second-generation Chinese youth also indicated having multiracial and multiethnic friends, similar to their Korean counterparts.

And yet those Korean informants who have had non-co-ethnic friends considered themselves as an exception at high school, where the majority of Korean students had associated only with Koreans. Not only newcomers but also those who are U.S. born and fluent in English tend to mingle with co-ethnics alone. A first-generation Korean father of two sons observed that his American-born children had only Asian friends, mainly Korean, in school. A 1.5-generation Korean woman in her twenties has a U.S.-born younger brother who is more comfortable in English, but all his friends are Korean--who speak "Konglish" among themselves. The tendency to socialize with co-ethnics was observed during the present fieldwork--in the public library, in the streets after school, groups of East Asian students, typically made up of several members, are a common sight. The patterns of friendship in Fort Lee seem to conform Hong and Min's findings (1999) that the majority of friends among second-generation Korean youth tend to be co-ethnic. Bilingual Korean informants also suggested that their friendships are based on linguistic facility. They told me that their Korean-speaking friends do not overlap with their English-speaking friends and that they meet with linguistically-defined groups separately.

A sense of a boundary, distinguishing co-ethnic members from others prevails. Asian informants widely shared a sense of separateness according to group. Generally they tended to think that the different racial and ethnic groups remain separate from each other, even if they seem to get along on the surface. A first-generation Chinese female in her early forties suggested one disadvantage of making non-co-ethnic friends: co-ethnics

tend to treat their group members differently from those outside the group--in her view, a universal trend. She had noticed this trait among her Korean friends:

I have best friends, Korean, but you still see the difference. They treat their Korean friends and you, you can see the difference. If you call the company for . . . a Korean taxi, they give a special discount for Korean people only but they don't give it to you. Even if you go to the bank and then the Korean people, you see how they serve. There are Koreans working there. And you see how they treat them different than when you're not Korean. They do. You see that. I think everywhere in the world you see that.

Here co-ethnic solidarity overrides potential pan-Asian cohesion. Moreover, ethnic difference can be a factor of personal antagonism or of simply not getting along. A second-generation Chinese American male in his twenties who socialized only with Koreans in middle school, told me that he eventually fell out with his Korean friends because, "sometimes they were doing Korean things, they talked in Korean that I didn't understand." How do these social relations shape the notion of "Asianness"? The propensity to form co-ethnic relationships suggests that where ethnonational identity is reinforced, a sense of distinction among Asian groups might be deepened. Contact and friendship with co-ethnics seem to further reinforce ethnonational rather than "Asian" identity.

3. Panethnic Identity and Affinity

The concept of "panethnicity" addresses shifts in group identification--from smaller to larger level groupings, entailing transformation in the constitution of the ethnic group. Panethnicity is an emergent, situated identity that is mutable and serves as a political resource to mobilize members of internally diverse subgroups (Espiritu 1992).

The concept refers to "a politico-cultural collectivity made up of peoples of several,

hitherto distinct, tribal or national origins” (Espiritu 1992, 2). “Pan-Asianism” largely reflects a political ideology of U.S.-born, American-educated, middle-class Asians, rather than immigrants (Zhou 2004). The civil rights movement of the 1960s stimulated Asian American consciousness and sensitivity by collectively and publicly identifying racism toward Asian Americans (Wong 1972). The movement also heightened political consciousness among Asian Americans, who had previously tended to be politically apathetic, and inspired a struggle for self-determination among Asian Americans (ibid.). At the same time, Asian American panethnic identity is fluid and may be symbolic rather than political (Jeung 2002).

East Asian communities in Fort Lee have not developed visible pan-Asian institutions. The existing ethnic organizations discussed earlier are mainly run by first-generation immigrants rather than by second or later generations. The absence of interdependent links does not appear to be contingent solely on the comparatively low numbers of Chinese and Japanese. There was no pan-Asian organization even when there were roughly equal numbers of Japanese and Koreans in the 1990s--although this lack may be explained partly by the transience of Japanese immigrants. The absence of associative relationships suggest generally that formal alliances to protect minority interests as Asians are not perceived as necessary, or even diverge from perceived interests due to the distinct goals of each group. For example, although the KAAFL has contact with Korean organizations in other townships, the association has not developed connections with other East Asian organizations, neither in Fort Lee nor elsewhere. The lack of interaction with other East Asian organizations is attributable to the absence of specific causes on which to join and take a stand. According to this view, other Asian

organizations are more interested in cultural promotion, which diverges from the mission of KAAFL.²

Factors for the absence of panethnic organization in Fort Lee may be inferred from the account in Espiritu (1992) who identifies several conditions for the emergence of such affiliations:

- i. Reaction to anti-Asian violence, which is one of the most influential factors in forging pan-Asian affiliation. Anti-Asian racism cuts across the class lines that may internally divide Asian groups;
- ii. Generation of the constituencies. Second-, third- and fourth-generation citizens are the primary constituencies of panethnic groups, who feel alienated from traditional ethnic communities and the mainstream;
- iii. Political and economic conditions that favor or demand an inclusive identity (e.g. government social service funding based on panethnic grouping).

None of the above hold for Fort Lee. First, there has been no explicit external threat of anti-Asian violence. In addition, the overwhelming majority of East Asians are first- or second-generation and many among the first generation are noncitizens and, by and large, feel sufficiently supported by the co-ethnic community. The three East Asian groups have lacked a common political agenda that might promote panethnic affiliation. In chapter 3, we have seen how some Asian organizations have begun to reach out to non-co-ethnic members due to financial needs. The effort nevertheless has not involved mobilization to join at the organizational level. The economic self-subsistence of each Asian group has precluded the necessity for an encompassing Asian association.

In the religious sphere, the panethnic congregations based on Asian-American identity discussed in the literature (e.g. Jeung 2002), have not yet emerged in Fort Lee.

² On the Korean American Association of Fort Lee, see chapter 3, *supra*.

Jeung (2002) reports on the development of pan-Asian congregations in San Francisco, led by ministers of the second and later generations. A parallel trend was reported in the press regarding the New York area: for example, Korean ministers approaching Japanese with a view to worship in Japanese in the New York-New Jersey area (Ku 2009). Such congregations include bilingual services (Japanese and Korean, or Chinese and Korean, separately offered in the same building) but an “Asian American” church per se has not yet developed in Fort Lee and neighboring towns. Different religious groups and congregations may share the same building, but without contact. The lack of an Asian-American congregational movement, compared with that in San Francisco, may be due largely to the significant presence of first-generation Asians in Fort Lee, whose shared language is not English, and who are more concerned with co-ethnic solidarity than with collective Asian identity.

The history of Japanese colonialism and imperial aggression in China and Korea during the Second World War may also restrict development of pan-Asian affinity in Fort Lee. To what extent is the historical memory of oppression and domination an impediment to panethnic solidarity? When there were more Japanese in Fort Lee in the past, competitiveness between Japanese and Koreans was noted both in the research (e.g. Shinkai 1994) and also by my white informants. Shinkai (1994) observed animosity between Japanese and Korean children in the late 1980s. Educators in Fort Lee were aware of the division between Japanese and Korean students, as well as between Asian and non-Asian students. At the time of Shinkai’s research (1987-91) there were about the same number of Japanese and Koreans in elementary public schools. Despite the school’s attempt to discourage isolation among East Asians, Japanese children generally

created a “closed world” for themselves at the primary levels, tending to remain apart from other groups, including other Asian groups (Shinkai 1994, 88). Although incidents among children were rarely reported by my informants, some reported hostility based on the historical memory that still affects relationships among adults of East Asian origin. The director of the Donghwa Cultural Foundation suggested that while Japanese and Koreans may enjoy each other’s food and culture, they remain silent about historical issues, as if the subject were taboo.

Antagonism or avoidance, however, does not mean that supraethnic connections are entirely lacking. Examples of pan-Asian partnerships, or relationships on an individual level, are evident. Friendships across ethnic lines among young children, second-generation youth, as well as for first-generation immigrant adults were reported by my East Asian informants. I also met with intermarried couples in the area, e.g. Japanese and Taiwanese, or Japanese and Korean. Some indicated that in areas with fewer numbers of Asians in Bergen, pan-Asian friendships among adults are more likely to develop. Pan-Asian relationships exist and there is a potential for interest in other cultures in everyday life--e.g. interest in learning the Korean language among Japanese expatriate wives, coincidental with the “Korean Wave” in Japan, or interest in Japanese popular culture among Korean youth.³ There are also professional partnerships among East Asians, through business relations and employment--newly opened local businesses run jointly by Japanese and Koreans, or the expansion of existing Korean food business becoming more pan-Asian, for example. East Asians also form relationships as landlords

³ The “Korean Wave” refers to an upsurge of interest in Korean popular culture primarily in Asia beginning in the late 1990s: in Japan, the popularity peaked in the period 2003-2005 (Hanaki, Singhal, Han, Kim, and Chitis 2007).

and tenants. Cleanliness and consistency in rent payment by Japanese expatriate families have led Chinese and Korean landlords to prefer Japanese tenants over co-ethnics. More frequent cultural exchange and ease of access are producing greater contact among East Asians. Contradictory tendencies of self-segregation and supra-national affinity are therefore present in Fort Lee.

4. Race and Residence

Even though many of my first-generation East Asian informants did not readily identify themselves as “Asian,” this racialized notion has implicitly played a role in their decision regarding residential location. The discourse on multiethnic suburban residence fundamentally concerns how social space is racialized.⁴ The majority of my Asian informants saw Fort Lee as a “comfortable” place to live. This sense of comfort stems from perceived racial tolerance--Fort Lee as “Asian-friendly.” Such a feeling contrasts with the experience of feeling “uncomfortable” in other parts of the United States where there are smaller proportions of Asians. The uncomfortable experiences described by my informants were neither violent nor overtly discriminatory, but silently registered, e.g. attitudinal (being scowled at for no reason, curious gaze received), or the absence of knowledge of and bias against things “Asian.” These experiences provided the occasion for some Asians to recognize the importance of residential location with native residents who are expected to be familiar with Asians. One Japanese female (permanent immigrant) felt that Americans in the Fort Lee area are “open toward different cultures” and do not mind if she follows ethnic practices, and that this makes her feel comfortable.

⁴ See chapter 6, section 3, “Towards a Concept of Multiethnic Space,” *infra*.

Certain scholars have suggested the importance of local context for the study of immigrant outcomes (e.g. Foner 2005). The local milieu affects people's attitudes toward immigrants: hence the importance of Fort Lee being adjacent to New York, one of the most racially diverse cities in the U.S.

Location of residence was equally a concern for immigrant offspring, regardless of their relatively higher levels of education, fluency in English, and higher socioeconomic status. Throughout their socialization process in America, immigrant offspring were made conscious of their being and appearance as "Asian." One, second-generation Korean American female in her early thirties, intermarried with a white, said:

Fort Lee provides a good mix where I feel comfortable, you know, as an Asian person. Sometimes my husband is like, "oh, if you move all the way to the other side of New Jersey, near Pennsylvania, houses are bigger and cheaper." But I can't, it's too white [laughs] So for me, as an Asian person, even though I grew up in this country and everything else, I am aware of that.

The informant was considering moving out of Fort Lee for her children's schooling in the future. Although having too many Koreans around her makes her feel slightly uncomfortable, she still prefers to find somewhere that is similar to Fort Lee in terms of ethnic composition--definitely preferring a location where some Asians live. Feeling comfortable in Fort Lee is ultimately related to the issues of "race" that Asians have come to terms with in the United States.

At the same time, for many Koreans, the sense of "comfort" is primarily derived from the presence of co-ethnics--regardless of their immigrant status or age. A 1.5-generation Korean female remarked that her two children are American born but she felt it important for them to know they are not the only Koreans in school. A female high school student (whose family immigrated to Fort Lee directly from Korea) told me she

feels comfortable in Fort Lee since there are many Koreans and she does not feel as though she is in a foreign country. Another Korean female senior student at Fort Lee High School, who came to the United States when she was in seventh grade, explained:

I came to Fort Lee 'cause there are a lot of Koreans. I heard that there are a lot of Koreans, but not so much that, like, the whole school's like Korean. I wanted to learn English too, but then, as much as I want to learn English, I wanted to adapt easily and I thought that if there are some Koreans here they could help me do that. So I moved here.

The sense of comfort Fort Lee provides may be underscored by the wider spatial context, particularly in relation to Palisades Park where some of my Korean informants reported open prejudice against Koreans and ethnic tension. These tense immigrant-native relations in Palisades Park are also changing, however. A second-generation Korean woman in her twenties, a resident of Palisades Park for four years, did not recall any racially-based conflict. She assumed such incidents belonged to the past since, in her view, the town is now almost entirely Korean, hence less susceptible to ethnic tension (see also Pérez-Peña 2010).

The idea that co-ethnic presence helps make life comfortable and adjustment easier was recurrent among informants of Korean origin. This was true for the Japanese to a certain degree, but was never mentioned by the Chinese as a factor in their residential decision. At the same time, it was a common across East Asian groups to view the presence of too many co-ethnics as not necessarily desirable, since this reduces the opportunity for making contact with Americans. To this extent, East Asians demonstrate a will to integrate.

Several informants noted that "Asian" presence was a factor in choosing Fort Lee, in anticipation of a quality school system and a low crime rate. They mentioned the

importance of “feeling comfortable” in a place where many residents had similar physical features, even if they lacked personal association. Race is fictive, but a felt affinity based on physical features indicates the persistence of a latent racial ideology. A Korean male informant in his fifties in the real estate business hypothesized that Koreans choose Fort Lee because they see “Asian” faces there. A female Korean ESL teacher at one elementary school, referring to Asian students, remarked:

There is comfort in knowing somebody who looks like you, who is in a similar situation. Learning English at the same time . . . the Korean, the Japanese will interact better than, maybe, Russian students. They find comfort, that’s how I see, they find comfort in just having the same look, we are together, that kind of thing.

The career paths of Fort Lee High School graduates document trends among children of immigrants who either stay or leave the ethnic suburb--a possible indicator for long-term incorporation. According to data provided by Fort Lee High School, seventy percent of Asian graduates moved on to four-year college in 2009.⁵ Although the data do not provide a breakdown for Asian students, the majority of graduating Asian students are estimated to be Koreans (see State of New Jersey, Department of Education 2008). Fifty-two percent of them moved on to in-state public universities, and 38 percent moved on to out-of-state private universities. About 20 percent of graduating Asians in the same year moved on to two-year colleges, 95 percent of whom went to in-state public two-year colleges. It may be concluded that the majority of Asian students graduating from Fort Lee High School tend to remain in the New Jersey area for post-secondary education. Compared to the preceding two years (2007-08), the number of Asian students who

⁵ “Fort Lee High School Student Outcomes” (2007, 2008, 2009) Fort Lee High School, June 8, 2010.

moved on to out-of-state public universities dropped considerably in 2009 (from over 24 percent to 6 percent). Instead, the number of those attending in-state public universities rose from about thirty percent in 2007 to over fifty percent in 2009. One reason for this may be the changing national economic climate (e.g. an increase in community college enrollment among Fort Lee High School graduates was suggested by one teacher, as a consequence of the tight economic situation of student families). In general, those Asians who remained near home were equal in number to those who left Fort Lee for college in 2009 after graduation from high school.

A second-generation Taiwanese American male in his twenties, living in northern Bergen, related that his Taiwanese American friends, including college attendees, have remained in New Jersey. The economy offers a partial explanation, but it may also be speculated that Asian youths are not necessarily eager to leave the co-ethnic environment of the Fort Lee area. That some of my second-generation informants, especially Koreans, expressed their desire to stay in the area to raise a family, may offer support for this point. The given data alone are insufficient for conclusions regarding the preference for the co-ethnic environment among Asian youth. The fact remains, however, that many remain in the area where they grew up. Kasinitz et al. (2008) have observed a trend among the contemporary second generation in New York, indicating that they seem at ease about living between different worlds--their parents' and America. The children of immigrants today do not feel "undue pressure to reject the languages, beliefs, and behaviors of [their] immigrant forebears" (357) because of the ethos of multiculturalism and unprecedented diversity in New York. In a similar vein, East Asian youth in Fort Lee, even if they are socioculturally assimilated in America, may not find it necessary to reject residence in the

co-ethnic neighborhood. These immigrant children may not see their parents' foreignness as a problem; consequently, they are not overly concerned about shedding ethnic ties or losing ethnic distinctiveness.

Very few Asian informants reported direct or indirect experiences of ethnoracial tension or conflict in Fort Lee. Even established residents of East Asian origin over twenty years recalled no significant negative encounters with native white residents. Such accounts, however, should not necessarily be taken as proof of their absence. Japanese students with limited English ability at Fort Lee High School have been ridiculed and have suffered isolation, being unable to make American friends due to linguistic barriers (Shinkai 1994). A first-generation Japanese female recalled an incident at a local bank over twenty years ago--a senior white male customer, expressing his outrage toward an Asian woman having difficulty in communicating in English with the teller, by saying "Go back to your own country." Another story was conveyed by a first-generation Chinese woman in her early fifties, who experienced racially expressed anger from her white neighbor, after the terrorist attacks in 2001. Despite a previously friendly relationship, the white neighbor suddenly said to the informant, "you people don't say 'hello' to other people." They overcame this incident within a few months and began to talk when they met as before. My informant attributed her neighbor's attitude to American defensiveness and the rise of nativism at a time of national crisis--released anger and frustration against, "people who are immigrants or who look different."

The preceding chapter noted one native white reaction against the Asian influx as a fear of the threat of "invasion." Although hostility may not be openly expressed,

Asians are aware of the possibility that their presence may not be fully accepted by the local community. One, first-generation Korean leader expressed her concerns:

I really hope this area is the area that doesn't really mind about ethnics. Once we cross the bridge, especially around Fort Lee and Edgewater, a lot of Koreans and Japanese live there. I hope that the American community who live here, they don't feel like we as an Asian, invaded their territory . . . I think it might feel really bad with so much influence or effects from Asian culture on their daily life.

Lack of open conflict does not mean ignorance regarding native residents' feelings towards Asians or toward those deemed different. One female Chinese informant in her early forties related to me how her white American neighbors complain about the habits of their Korean neighbors--they do not recycle, they are dirty, they make noise. My informant felt her white neighbors complained to her about Koreans because they knew she was Chinese. This made her concerned about "what they say in front of others about me" because, "I'm also Asian." Established Asian residents, who said that they never experienced ethnic tension, prefaced their comments by saying that they might have been "lucky" or "ignorant" of the issue, or that the problems were "hidden" from them--indicating awareness of the possibility of racial antagonism.

On the other hand, Asian residents understood that whites are not entirely negative about their presence. One, first-generation Chinese female in her early forties, recounted her experience of senior residents:

You go to a park and sit with the older people. They say, "It used to be that this was an all white place and now all you Oriental people come, so many of you." They like to say that. But they say, "You guys are very nice people, you don't make a lot of crime here," they do say that to you. They say, "Your kids are doing very well in school, you send your kids to afterschool programs, like tutor, math, science, that's why you guys are so strong in education." But other than that, maybe there's something they don't tell me, but they always praise you, they like you.

Similar views and experiences were expressed by other Asian informants. They felt that regardless of those who might be unwelcoming, on balance white Americans in Fort Lee are racially tolerant. Although the convergence of East Asians is based on a perceived tolerance of host residents, covert fear of a wider racial antagonism continues to be a factor in ethnic concentration among Asians in Fort Lee.

5. Traditions Renewed: New Ethnic Pride

In her analysis of the resurgence of ethnic identity among native Americans, Nagel ([1996] 1997) defines “ethnic renewal” as “the process whereby new ethnic identities, communities, and cultures are built or rebuilt out of historical social and symbolic systems” (10). This occurs through “the social structures, narratives, myths, and cultures imported from immigrant homelands” (ibid.). Ethnicity is revitalized and constantly renewed, “through common identification, group formation and reformation, and cultural production and reproduction”(ibid). To the extent that ethnic boundaries refer to ethnic culture, immigrant/ethnic cultures are constructed as “ethnic and national symbolic repositories” (Nagel 1994, 163). Parallel to the concept of “invented” tradition, such “invented” cultures serve the purpose of establishing or symbolizing social cohesion or group membership (ibid.). According to Nagel (1994) the construction of tradition is a major task facing all ethnic groups, particularly those that are newly forming or resurgent. Tradition is a resource used by groups toward “the collective quest for meaning and community” (ibid.).

The resurgence of ethnonational identity is evident from the comment of a first-generation Korean resident: “as more Koreans assimilate in Fort Lee and elsewhere, there

is a need to remember their roots” (Fasbach 2001).⁶ East Asian propensity to return to tradition may be promoted by contact and the process of assimilation into America. Rather than shedding cultural traditions and becoming “American,” the desire for ethnic culture seems to be related to several factors: continued transnational ties with the home country and culture, ethnic pride, reaction against discrimination and designation as foreigners according to race. Particularly in the face of discrimination, tradition may be used as a vehicle for defense of the ethnic group.⁷

As discussed in preceding chapters, my Asian informants generally viewed the maintenance of ethnic heritage as necessary. The need appears to be associated with length of residence in America: the longer the duration of residence in the United States and the more assimilated one is, the greater the felt need for evoking ethnic heritage. Asianness in America--whether Chinese, Japanese, Korean--is, to a certain degree, a product of reinvention, a preference cultivated through life in America by immigrants. In the process of assimilation, the cultures of national origin transmute into something “foreign” and “exotic,” even to immigrants themselves.

The emphasis on national and cultural traditions may become even marked in the U.S. than in the country of origin. The Japanese American Society of New Jersey offers classes in traditional cultures including flower arrangements, the *kimono*, and the tea

⁶ See also Moore (1981) regarding the suburban experience recorded for middle-class, second-generation Jews in New York in the 1920s. For descendants of Jewish immigrants, Jewish identity developed through assimilation to America; contact with the mainstream promoted consciousness of ethnic belonging. Adaptation to American life (suburbanization and upward mobility) did not entail abandonment of Jewish identity.

⁷ For Wallerstein (1983) “tradition” is constructed using pre-existent historical and intellectual materials: the assertion of transhistorical links has played an important role in the cohesion of groups in political-economic struggles (ibid. 76).

ceremony. Although aimed at Americans interested in Japanese culture, the president of the organization identified an emerging trend of “re-learning” traditions among Japanese living in the United States:

I would like to create opportunities for people to remember good old things about Japan. I love things that existed in Japan for a long time-- traditions. I recently thought of offering classes in calligraphy. The reason is that because people use computers they forget Chinese characters and their handwriting becomes poor. An increasing number of adults these days say they'd like to learn calligraphy. They say they want to re-learn calligraphy. I didn't do any of these things, tea ceremony, flower arrangements, kimono, when I was living in Japan. My mother did, but I had no interest in them. I became interested in them for the first time after I came here . . . I want to do these things as an opportunity for the Japanese to retrieve the spirit of the Japanese.

An example that illustrates a similar trend can be seen in local Korean organizations. During the celebration of *Chuesok* in October 2009, at the Donghwa Cultural Foundation, the director led a demonstration of making “*songpyeon*” (Korean, crescent-shaped rice cakes) in which largely Korean attendees participated. The director later told me that Koreans living in Korea would not know how to make *songpyeon*, and would not go to the trouble of making them. Most Koreans living in Korea today would go to stores and purchase premade cakes. The director half-jokingly related how her mother, living in South Korea, teases her that Koreans living in the United States are more “old-fashioned” than in Korea. Being distant both in time and space works to reinforce the need to reinvent tradition.

Efforts to revitalize and increase language usage are often major cultural reconstruction projects (Nagel 1994). Chapter 3, above, discusses the language demonstrations in Chinese made by youth during performances at the Chinese New Year festival. Chinese--the ancestral language--is no longer taken for granted among

immigrants and their offspring but as something that requires special reinforcement. The mother language of immigrant group members becomes “foreign” with time, and hence must be learned through conscious effort by the second and subsequent generations. Chinese mothers I spoke to at the Chinese school said they sent their children to the school to learn to speak Chinese without an accent, “like we do.” The emphasis on speaking fluent Chinese signifies an understanding that ethnic linguistic tradition must be maintained through great efforts both at the individual and community levels.

Building a cultural basis for new communities is a way of revitalizing ethnic boundaries and a redefinition of the meaning of ethnicity (Nagel 1994, 164-5). A reinforced sense of ethnic tradition and heritage may be connected with the emergence of pride among ethnic group members. Ethnic pride is a product of the political and cultural consciousness of the civil rights era, which encouraged identification, pride, and activism (Nagel [1996] 1997). Contrarily, Lott (1976) suggested an alternative trend among Asian Americans to identify with the majority group at the expense of denying minority identity. According to Lott (1976), Asian Americans wanted to be known as American rather than Asian. Rejection of Asian American identity, choosing not to stand out, being accommodating and acceptable to the majority group became a form of survival. Thirty years later, Asians tend to feel less stigma about being Asian (Lew 2006).

In Fort Lee, many Asian informants, regardless of ethnonational origin, expressed pride in their roots--first generation parents pass on that pride to their children. My informants’ expression of pride relates largely to ethnonational pride, rather than pride in being “Asian.” Academic and socioeconomic success of co-ethnics relates to this

emergence of ethnic pride--the sense of which is essentially social and which is returned to the racialized category, offering a renewed meaning of "Asian."

A sense of pride in being "Asian" is made manifest in the recognition of the role Asians have played in the development of Fort Lee. Both Koreans and non-Koreans spoke about how Koreans have contributed to the economic growth of Fort Lee. One second-generation Korean American male in his forties who works for a mainstream American company remarked how local Korean merchants have contributed to overall town growth:

There's no question about it. I think, in that respect, Koreans are very cutting-edge . . . successful Koreans are so systematic and so methodical that they bring a new dimension to the creation of wealth, you know. It's a necessary ingredient. I think it bodes well for Koreans to come into Fort Lee. It's almost like new energy.

A pride in being Asian is also derived from the collateral contributions made by each East Asian group. One first-generation Chinese female in her thirties considered that the Asian presence has benefited Fort Lee's development:

They [Americans] get some advantage, you know. They can see different people and different cultures, and they can taste different kinds of foods, they can shop different stuff. If I were them, I would appreciate it. They should take advantage of this kind of whole different background . . . if there's no Asian population . . . I don't think Fort Lee will be the same town, right? It's gonna be a different town.

[Question] How do you think it would be without Asians?

They're probably gonna be a boring small town. With little stores here and there, like old stores. . . . I was driving the other day in a town . . . It's in west New Jersey. It's an old township . . . there's no Asian people. . . . It's just so different. It's so simple, old-fashioned town. So that's why I really think if Korean people, or Chinese people, or Japanese people are not here, the town will be completely different in Fort Lee. You can see on Main Street there's lots of business, shops, owned by Korean and Chinese, mainly Korean . . . they are building a different fashion, they have their own style, they have their own kind of business style. I think

it's really lovely, I mean, you can see all different kind of stuff. And that will bring competitors in to compete. That's how the town starts booming, right? If you don't have competition, who cares? I can sell bagels everyday, people come here and drop by and buy my bagels, because there's no other place to go. Here you have a Korean coffee shop, they have bread in the Japanese bakery, they have different bread, cakes, and that's competition, you know. And that's ideas. If there's no competition, people don't think about new ideas. So I think it's a good thing for the whole town.

As the meaning of Asianness becomes a factor in pride, co-ethnic association brings confidence to group members. Co-ethnic members are then less likely to avoid being close to co-ethnics. Remarks by Asians of different national origin indicated that being part of an ethnic community has brought confidence and a basis for their self-identity in America.

6. The Norm of Difference: Consequences of Ethnic Diversity

Social meaning is related to and shared with others. The meaning of ethnicity reflects a given social milieu. The conditions under which the meaning of Asianness develops in Fort Lee are not those of a white suburb, but of a multiethnic suburb. How does such a demographic configuration influence the construction of ethnicity and specifically "Asianness"?

In the view of East Asian residents, Fort Lee is diverse through and through. The ways diversity is handled at the community level is positively evaluated by East Asians. One Korean American male in his thirties remarked: "This town is actually mature enough race relations-wise, at this point. On the individual level, you never know. But on the community level, we understand that diversity is not a disadvantage." Although Koreans are by far the largest ethnic minority group in Fort Lee, "it's not just that it's all

Korean,” as one, second-generation, Chinese American male put it. East Asian residents were well aware of the increasing number of non-East Asian ethnic minorities in Fort Lee—including Hispanics, Middle Easterners, Russians, and South Asians.⁸ The ethnic and racial diversity of Fort Lee has produced a milieu that may be viewed as a “cosmopolitan canopy”—a “pluralistic space” promoting peaceful relations, where people feel at ease with those who are deemed “different” and gain from the experience of encounters with racial and ethnic others (Anderson 2011). For instance, customers who patronize Asian-owned bakeries are diverse—Asian, Hispanics, and white—having coffee, reading papers, chatting with friends, at tables next to each other, characterized by civility and urban indifference to “difference.”

School is the nexus where diversity is most salient. Currently, an overwhelming majority of the school population of Fort Lee is East Asian. *The Record*, a local daily, reports that nearly half of Bergen County’s children, aged five and younger, belonged to minorities in 2009 (Llorente and Sheingold 2010). One 1.5-generation Korean female, who belonged to a cheerleading squad in high school (1999-2003) remarked on the multicultural nature of her group—“we weren’t like typical blond-haired, blue-eyed cheerleaders.” A Chinese mother with a daughter in the high school relayed her daughter’s comment that, “you cannot find a white person at Fort Lee High School.” A Chinese father, whose child is enrolled in Fort Lee’s public school, remarked that he is happy with the diversity of Fort Lee, because his child “does not feel he’s a minority.”

⁸ East Asian informants typically identified “Russians” as an immigrant, non-mainstream group, regardless of the fact that Russians are racially white. A tendency to specify among white ethnics was noticeable among Asians—German American, Italian American, etc. rather than “American.” This echoes the manner in which white Americans frequently specify ethnonational origin for East Asians.

“Difference” as a premise within social space, helps ethnic minorities become legitimate members of the community. A Korean female informant in her fifties, whose daughter attends Fort Lee High School, related the following anecdote on diversity in Fort Lee:

We were talking one day, you know, so-and-so moved from Wyckoff and I said, the person is doing so well here than while that person was in Wyckoff. And she says, “Mom, in Fort Lee school you can have three eyes and nobody would care.” You know [laughter] So it doesn’t matter who you are, because they are so used to so many different ethnicities and different groups of people in and out . . . that’s how she put it, you could have three eyes and nobody will really care. They’ll accept you as you are. So, that’s Fort Lee.

While Asians generally find comfort in diversity, the latter has produced unintended consequences for some. At Fort Lee elementary schools, children pick up languages other than English from friends from diverse backgrounds. Although this may be viewed as an “unusual sense of chemistry” (Geller 1999) parents who are struggling to teach the native language at home feel challenged by such a trend. Several parents with elementary school age children commented on how their children come home and speak the Korean they have picked up from Korean friends at school. One Chinese mother expressed her dismay:

Sometimes my children would get confused. When they come home they speak Korean to me. They learn from Koreans [friends] Sometimes I would say, “Oh, I wish you spoke some Chinese.” And my son would say to me, “I’d rather die.” You know, I’m not happy about that.

Another, first-generation Chinese female mentioned a Korean teacher at her daughter’s elementary school who, it was claimed, gave preference to Korean students-- in a class where 75 to 80 percent of the students are Korean. In the morning, the teacher greets students in Korean as they do not yet speak English. According to the informant, the teacher is, “more on the side of the Korean kids” and this can be sensed by non-

Korean students. Group difference in everyday life reinforces group separateness based on national origin. Diversity is widely appreciated by East Asians but becomes a site of negotiation in regard to one's own identity and heritage.

In everyday life, when immigrant children do not encounter a white majority but, rather, co-ethnic or other ethnic minority groups, how might such conditions influence processes of identity formation? The study of second generation youth in New York by Kasinitz, Mollenkopf, and Waters (2002) found that immigrant children's self-formation cannot be fully explained by concepts of subordination to, or resistance against, the mainstream white majority. Second generation youth encounter ethnic and racial minorities, with limited encounters with native whites in the "majority minority" city. Parallel to the situation in New York City, the schools in Fort Lee offer a similar experience for Asian students--where race and ethnicity are shaped by majority minority youth, the cultures they bring and recreate. Immigrant children growing up in a multiethnic community develop their identity not only with the mainstream but also with ethnic minority members (Kasinitz et al. 2008). Integration of the second-generation is occurring in a contemporary environment where ethnic retention is nevertheless possible--under conditions that allows for diversity.

"Difference" presupposes a certain "standard," or the existence of "others" against whom those deemed to be different are measured. The logic of exclusion based on difference seems to prompt ethnic group members to choose a location of diversity as a point of convergence. While diversity by definition accepts difference, a principle of division is maintained among East Asian groups and this is the context in which their ethnic identity is formed.

7. Conclusion

The idea of “Asia”--in history, in traditions of thought, in imagery, and language--signifies and has produced a reality and presence in and for the West. While the meaning has undergone transformations and modifications, the term continues to signify “difference” and remains evocative of unequal power relations. In twentieth-century America, the term came to be adopted by Asians themselves, in the struggle to gain recognition in the mainstream.

But among many individuals of East Asian origin in Fort Lee, ethnonational identity seems to override any notion of “Asianness.” Among U.S.-born immigrant children, their choice of identity is often conjoined with American. The sense of ethnonational distinction remains important for the greater number of East Asians. This is notable in the absence of formal, pan-Asian American institutions and the infrequent use of the category “Asian American” among residents of East Asian origin. This is also a reflection of the large number of first-generation Asian immigrants in Fort Lee, who tend to be less inclined to view themselves either as “Asian” or “American.”

The notion of spatial assimilation--residential and social mobility--assumes that ethnic solidarity is undermined, but in Fort Lee, the move into the suburban location may have reinforced co-ethnic cohesion for East Asians. As proposed in the ethnoburb model, suburbanization by immigrants may not be accompanied by complete assimilation (Li 1997). Residential concentration of different immigrant groups in the suburb may reinforce ethnonational distinctions in Fort Lee. Rather than affinity, diversity can on occasion highlight ethnic separateness. This aspect supports one premise of the

“ethnoburb”--that of a highly self-contained site that is likely to reinforce the ethnicity and existing divisions (Li 2009).

The case of Fort Lee suggests that racial considerations have been a factor--even if covertly--in East Asians' choice of residence. East Asian residents, both consciously and unconsciously, have chosen the place of residence guided by the notion of race in the context of this study, expressed as “comfort” by my informants. Being in proximity to “Asians” is important for some, if not co-ethnics. Perceived host tolerance toward diversity has also been a factor. These two conditions seem to remain important in the decision by East Asians to live in Fort Lee.

Yet being “Asian” for some group members is now a source of pride and confidence, as opposed to connoting stigma or lack of power. Increased ethnic pride relates to the growing numerical dominance of Asians, especially in the school system in Fort Lee. The meaning of being Asian depends on the social meaning derived from the given milieu. The case of Fort Lee problematizes assumptions of “Asians” as a disadvantaged minority based on the “majority-minority paradigm.” As Sakamoto, Goyette, and Kim (2009) argue, East Asians with relative privilege cannot be encompassed in the category “disadvantaged minority” in relation to a white majority.⁹

Ethnoracial identity is continuously negotiated among East Asian groups and represents a dynamic process. East Asians are aware that the “mainstream” is not Asian in the United States; even though East Asians may be “socioeconomically assimilated,” they feel they are not fully accepted as Americans (Tuan 1998). In distinction to the

⁹ To be discussed further in the following chapter.

mainstream, the racialized notion of self remains. This manifests in the complex patterns of identification that East Asians in Fort Lee adopt and create.

Despite this constraint, East Asian informants in Fort Lee tended to choose identity relatively autonomously. Brown and Bean (2006) point out that the immigrant feeling of less constraint on their identification can be explained in part by the tolerance of the native-born population. In a similar vein, Horton (1995) observes that “flexibility in deciding when and to what degree one is ethnic is a suburban luxury” (229). Such latitude can be seen in Fort Lee and may be explained by the relatively high socioeconomic status of its East Asian populations. The middle-class status of the majority of my East Asian informants conditions their life experience and their ethnoracial identity; to this extent, middle-class identity and class experience give form to ethnicity. Ethnic identities, however, cannot be reduced solely to class experience (Fenton 2010; Hall 1986).

In Fort Lee, East Asians are at once assimilating in some ways (choosing identity as American, for example), being ethnic in some ways, and panethnic in some ways. Ethnoracial identity, particularly among the first generation, remains firm but this does not mean that actors do not change the way they identify themselves. Individuals choose from an array of identities depending on perceived strategic utility--in different settings and for different audiences (Espiritu 1992; Nagel 1994). The co-residence of three East Asian groups in Fort Lee is a factor in the production of intergroup connections and ethnonational boundaries. Identity is dialectical, formed and transformed, and structured in relation to others: social actors define themselves in relation to others and the way they do so in turn determines their actual social relations. Moreover, if ethnic identification is

situational and relational, it is necessary to pay attention to the social conditions in which ethnic identity develops and transforms. The findings of the present study suggest that in order to understand the meaning of “Asianness,” which is historically and culturally specific, it is of equal importance to consider the context of contemporary American suburbs--more diverse and pluralist than ever before.

Chapter 6

Beyond Spatial Assimilation and Ethnic Retention:

Conceptualizing Multiethnic Space

This chapter considers the theoretical significance of the present study. The models in place--spatial assimilation and ethnoburb--are partially supported but do not fully account for the reality of experience in Fort Lee.¹ In this suburb, the East Asian communities appear spatially assimilated while maintaining ethnic belonging and a strong ethnic identity. Spatial assimilation has not displaced ethnic identification--in some cases, the latter is reinforced by ethnic concentration. The apparent contradiction of a simultaneous presence of both trends in this suburban setting requires further explanation.

The premise of the spatial assimilation model, that upward mobility and acculturation lead to suburban residence, holds true for some East Asian immigrants in Fort Lee. Some middle-class East Asians are not only spatially but also socially and culturally assimilated--e.g. loss of parental language, immersion in American rather than ethnic culture (food consumption, use of media, etc.), participation in the mainstream labor market, and engagement in non-co-ethnic friendships. A correlation between upward mobility, acculturation, and suburban residence is therefore confirmed in Fort Lee. Spatial assimilation, however, fails to explain the arrival of new immigrants directly into the suburbs. In this case, the spatial integration of immigrants owes largely to the

¹ See Introduction and chapter 2, *supra*, for discussion of Massey (1985) and Li (1998, 2006, 2009).

incidence of a relatively high socioeconomic status without, necessarily, an accompanying social and cultural assimilation (e.g. fluency in English)--this is a characteristic nexus in Fort Lee.

On the other hand, although Fort Lee satisfies several criteria of the ethnoburb, findings from the empirical data contradict certain of its premises.² First, the premise proposed by the ethnoburb model--that ethnic convergence at a suburban location slows or produces resistance to assimilation--does not entirely hold. This suburban location is not always the first destination of settlement for many East Asians--many have previously lived in other locations in the United States, primarily in the New York area. Such relatively integrated immigrants and their offspring (e.g. fluent in English and engaged in the mainstream economy) do express a preference for residence in this suburban ethnic neighborhood due to the "comfort" derived from the co-ethnic environment. But examples of an increasing involvement by Koreans in local politics, the economy, and local events demonstrate an unwillingness to remain separate from the wider community. Second, while the ethnoburb model is based on analysis of one ethnic group, Fort Lee presents coterminous, multiple ethnic communities with distinctly different characteristics. Despite the ethnic clustering, each East Asian community in Fort Lee does not necessarily fulfill the conditions of an ethnoburb as defined in the model. The specific spatial configuration calls for consideration of possible alternatives of the multiethnic suburban space.

Developed some thirty years ago, the spatial assimilation model was based on the assumption of a predominantly white ethnicity. This is no longer globally reflective of

² See Chapter 2, *supra*.

metropolitan suburbs in the United States, which are increasingly home to nonwhite ethnic groups. Rather than dissolving ethnic closure, spatial dispersion--the route from central city enclaves to the suburbs--has accompanied the creation of new ethnic concentrations at suburban locations of immigrant choice. Direct arrivals of new immigrants add to this ethnic clustering, whose everyday experience is constructed from the possibilities inherent within what may appear as dual, even contradictory processes of assimilation and ethnic retention. Given that East Asian immigrants in Fort Lee are unidirectionally oriented neither to ethnic retention nor to resistance to assimilation, certain previous assumptions require qualification. Further, the foregoing discussion has suggested that the relational interdependence between ethnic communities and the host community--including host reception. In order to understand patterns of immigrant suburban settlement, it is necessary to consider the native community as part of the analysis. Rather than considering trends of assimilation and ethnic retention as antonymic, the question for the present research might be re-stated as follows: "Which conditions account for the contemporary co-existence of spatial assimilation and ethnic retention among immigrants and their offspring, given the data drawn from this specific ethnic suburb?"

To address this question, certain insights may be drawn from the theory of practice, where "practice" refers to the social actor's daily experience of the social world (Bourdieu 1977, 1990b; Giddens 1984). Notwithstanding several key differences, sociologists have emphasized the production and reproduction of practice as the outcome of the influence of social structure on social actors and vice versa. Such a framework offers the possibility of considering spatial assimilation and ethnic retention as a

“relational” process, rather than as separate and mutually exclusive polarities. Data discussed in the preceding chapters have shown how these processes presuppose each other in everyday life. This dialectic, ingrained in the daily practice of actors, leads to the transformation of the suburban space.

The proposed concept of “multiethnic space” accounts for the ways in which spatial assimilation and ethnic retention co-exist in a given suburban locale. It also conceptualizes how different ethnic communities may co-exist and how they may relate and influence each other. This view differs from the spatial assimilation model in that the latter focuses primarily on explanatory factors for the social trend concerned: multiethnic space focuses rather on how the “processes” are reproduced and sustained. In distinction to the ethnoburb, multiethnic space considers relations between different ethnic communities in the same, specific locality and the possible sociological consequences that may result from such social organization. Rather than focus on the formation of ethnic communities alone, the concept considers immigrant relations with the host community as a component in the formation of multiethnic space. This is pertinent to the case of Fort Lee and may help in understanding other formations and configurations of the contemporary ethnic suburb.

In the following discussion, the concepts of “structure” and “power” are considered in relation to the notion of practice. Spatial assimilation presupposes a stable structure into which actors assimilate. Structure is thus viewed as unchanging and more or less permanent rather than as transforming.³ The ethnoburb model registers how the

³ See Sewell (1992) on the conventional conceptualization of “structure” in sociology. Hard to define, the notion as used in sociology presents two major problems: i) the assumption of “far too rigid causal determinism in social life” (Sewell 1992, 2)

emergence of the ethnoburb transforms the host, but is silent regarding the interaction of the ethnoburb with the native community. Neither model considers how patterns of assimilation and ethnic retention are sustained, reproduced, or transformed by actors in everyday life. Research on spatial assimilation and the ethnoburb tends to base the explanation for immigrant settlement on structural contexts--i.e. macro-level contexts. From the present study it is argued that, in addition to macro-level forces, micro-level processes and interactions situate and profoundly influence the possibilities for articulation and formation of immigrant settlement patterns. The theory of practice allows a view of the fluidity of structure and its transformation by actors through their negotiations and interaction in social life. Furthermore, any consideration of "power" is largely neglected by the spatial assimilation and ethnoburb models. This concept is crucial, however, for the analysis of social relations. The relations of various immigrant and native groups together shape the structure and substance of the multiethnic suburb.

1. Practice in a Multiethnic Suburb: East Asian and Native White Residents

The theory of practice treats social actors and structures as dialectical forces that produce, reproduce, and transform the social world. "Practice" is contingent on shared understanding. Recurrent practice provides the spontaneous knowledge that is unconsciously taken for granted and which contributes to the entrenchment of the social structure, which in turn regulates human activities. Practices are learnt from others and

loses the efficacy of human action; ii) the implicit assumption of stability in the metaphor of structure makes consideration of "change" awkward.

are performed in reference to others. Practices are social, being based on negotiation between individuals.⁴

We have seen that East Asian immigrants and their children in Fort Lee engage in practices of both assimilation and ethnic retention (chapter 3). In light of the premises of the theory of practice, it follows that purposive immigrant decisions, conduct, and actions are part of a social practice that creates, sustains, and transforms social relationships and, accordingly, the structuring of suburban space. The practices of immigrant actors are contingent upon relationships within the given environment of the host society--including co-ethnic and non-co-ethnic relationships.

The influx and settlement by the Japanese, Koreans, and Chinese of Fort Lee have resulted in the formation of distinct ethnic suburban communities. The practice of immigrants--business, study, worship, making friends, volunteering for community activities--leads to the emergence of a community shaped by surrounding conditions. That is, the type and social organization of the ethnic community varies according to the immigrant groups and their orientations; expatriate communities, for example, differ from permanent immigrant communities, in terms of community involvement.

The geographical convergence of various East Asians in Fort Lee has been attributed to similar causes. The decision to settle in Fort Lee is frequently ascribed to material conditions (convenience for commute to work, affordability, the school system) as well as social considerations (avoidance of possible tension with Americans, proximity

⁴ Social relationships involve the social action of several persons who, according to a given context of meaning, direct themselves toward and orient themselves to each other. The social relationship thus, "consists entirely and exclusively in the existence of a probability that there will be a meaningful course of social action" (Weber [1968] 1978, 26-7).

to co-ethnic services). Socially shared perceptions of Fort Lee as “comfortable” because of its diversity, a sentiment frequently expressed by East Asians, implies the presupposition that living with non-co-ethnic or non-Asian groups may bring discomfort. East Asians, nevertheless, were not “relegated” to Fort Lee--they had a choice which was based on convenience and amenities. Residence in Fort Lee is thus a purposeful and pragmatic achievement for middle-class East Asian immigrants. Immigrant practice of choosing residence is repeatedly enacted, leading to the formation of multiethnic suburban communities.

Co-ethnic networks facilitate this achievement. Ethnic businesses and services have been established according to the practical needs of immigrants (e.g. real estate, ethnic schools). Ethnic organizations have been formed that help sustain ethnic heritage and offer co-ethnic support. Institutional entities, including ethnic schools and churches play a critical role in cultural transmission to younger generations, through language and cultural classes. Periodic ethnic events and festivals gain even greater importance for groups in the suburbs since ethnic festivals are “one of the most prominent ways local Asians promote their ethnic culture and maintain their ethnic identity, especially in educating their American-born younger generations” (Oberle and Li 2008, 98). Over time, through repeated enactment, institutional frameworks become embedded in everyday life and serve as a vehicle for ethnic retention.

Despite the importance of a purposive maintenance of ethnic practice, East Asian organizations and grassroots groups in Fort Lee have also communicated and interacted with native whites, rather than opting to remain insular. In particular, recent self-identification of the Korean community as part of the wider Fort Lee community, rather

than a “new Seoul,” and the practice of increasing community involvement among Koreans, is a manifestation of willingness for integration. Both Japanese and Koreans have volunteered and raised funds for the local community. Local ethnic festivals typically include participation by native whites and other non-co-ethnic groups. Although primarily aimed at ethnic sustenance, festivals offer a channel for communication with local whites through the promotion of ethnic culture. For example, fundraising events for the Fort Lee community by Japanese grassroots groups included demonstrations of Japanese culture. Chinese and Korean festivals attract native white constituencies. Emphasis on ethnicity thus provides interaction with the host--where the ethnic group can serve as an agent for assimilation. Such examples suggest, on the surface, an immigrant will to contact and desire for recognition by the local community. As modes of practice, they should, however, be considered in terms of the social conditions under which they occur. Japanese volunteerism has been related to transient residence in Fort Lee--contingent on a feeling of obligation to the local community and a desire to ease intergroup tension between Japanese and native whites. Cooperation and work with the white community among Koreans, on the other hand, is considered necessary for becoming part of the mainstream and also for increasing the likelihood of socioeconomic success in the United States.

The local economy, religious institutions, and the school system have been transformed by the influx of East Asians. Native white practice has been modulated by such demographic shifts. Encounters with East Asian immigrants in various domains of everyday life have produced varying attitudes of resistance, resentment, and acceptance. Local white leaders have shown a willingness to accommodate and work together with

immigrant communities, espousing the diversity brought by new populations.

Acceptance may be based on the perceived benefits that Asian immigrants bring; for example, improvement of the school district and economic growth through the influx and growth of Korean business capital. In the domain of culture, the borough has attempted to solicit support from immigrants in order to strengthen the possibility of one day becoming a “cultural center” for Bergen County.

On the other hand, East Asians have not always been fully accepted. The tendency among native whites to view East Asians as the “other” is based on a mental scheme of “difference,” which is created and recreated through daily practice. This process solidifies, through racialization, the notion of Asians as “them.” Native reactions to an Asian “takeover” or “invasion”--expressed in term of spatialized notions--are indicative of a sense of comfortable native territory being threatened. Such resistance towards the “other” is a means of protecting and maintaining *doxa*--the familiar world of the native resident--while affirming social and spatial boundaries. For example, the general lack of patronage of Korean retail business by white residents expresses resistance towards the “unfamiliar” and divides Fort Lee along ethnic boundaries.

But immigrant-native relationships are neither static nor unilateral. Changes in intergroup relationships--e.g. more interracial friendships (mainly Asian-white) among youth today--are widely recognized among established white residents. Adults observe a distinct generational difference in immigrant populations, where youth is becoming “American.” Moreover, behavioral and attitudinal changes among first generation immigrant members in the direction of “Americanization” are also recognized among white residents. Group division persists, but immigrant and native white relations have

undergone change over time in the direction of mutual dependence and greater integration. Conversely, perceived host tolerance and institutional accommodations toward immigrants have been a contributing factor in the development of ethnic communities in Fort Lee. The characteristics of the receiving community in this case play a role in the development of the multiethnic suburb. Rather than being entirely independent and separate, ethnic community in Fort Lee exists in specific relation to interaction with the native white community.

Practice is the product of processes which are neither wholly conscious nor wholly unconscious but which are rooted in an ongoing process of learning that begins in childhood (Bourdieu, 1990a). For the most part, practice is accomplished without conscious deliberation, but it is not without purpose. Actors have goals and interests in locating the source of their practice in their own experience of reality. Social situations are infinitely varied, never completely identical, and require a “strategy” by social actors—a “permanent capacity for invention” (ibid. 63). Assimilation and ethnic retention in Fort Lee may be considered as strategies.

Adjustment to a new environment involves a conscious strategy among first-generation immigrants for adaptation to, and gaining knowledge about, the social rules and behaviors of the host. This is accomplished through everyday routines. Through numerous adjustments, the culture and values of the host society gradually become the norm for newcomers who initially did not share them. Such aspects have a parallel with Alba and Nee’s observation (2003) that assimilation, “has advanced most effectively when it has resulted from the choices of the individuals undergoing it, as part of a strategy intended to improve their own life chances or those of their children” (281-2).

In Fort Lee, the immigrant use of English outside the home (e.g. school, stores) is a conscious enactment of a practice through which immigrants adapt to a new milieu and to new sets of social rules. Greater familiarity with the host society leads to a sense of security gained from regularized everyday life. Remarks by some first-generation Koreans regarding their preference for choosing an identity as American, so as to avoid social marginalization, relate to gaining comfort and a sense of security (being part of the mainstream) in their adopted country. The routinization of quotidian life--following the rules and values of the adopted country, including the use of English--serves to increase ontological security.⁵

With regard to immigrant children, East Asian parental strategies include their children's participation in extracurricular activities that are both American and ethnic. American activities include sports (basketball, ice skating, swimming, etc.), piano, ballet, ballroom dance. Some second generation informants (Chinese and Koreans) were involved in local community service and volunteer activities. Children were also involved in ethnically-specific cultural activities--calligraphy, traditional arts, dance, and music, and language. These activities provide youth the occasion to be exposed to American and co-ethnic peers and cultures. Assimilation and ethnic retention for children thus represent "strategies," in such a way that children will not forget the ancestral culture but which also ensure exposure to American culture.

On the one hand, immigrants attempt to organize daily life by reproducing what is predictable to them through practices that are "ethnic"--including the use of the mother

⁵ Giddens' concept of "ontological security" (1984) refers to a sense of continuity and predictability, purported to be the aim of practice, and allowing social actors to conduct everyday life, with a minimization of social anxiety.

language or consumption of ethnic food. The use of the mother language at home or when patronizing co-ethnic business reproduces a taken-for-granted practice of the country of origin, since the mother tongue is learned while at the same time being spoken. The social actor thinks *in* the mother language, rather than *with* it (Bourdieu 1990b). Use of the mother tongue is therefore unconscious--the actor does not know that he or she knows, because the actor already knows the mother tongue. The importance of ancestral language further resides in its role in sustaining cultural differentiation, since, "many aspects of ethnic culture are embedded in a linguistic matrix and are weakened or lost if the mother tongue is no longer used or even known" (Alba and Nee 2003, 219).

Although informants of East Asian origin who were fluent in English often felt a gap between whites and themselves, this did not preclude relations with native whites but stimulated actors to make adjustments.⁶ This is apparent from the remarks of a Korean American female who described how she changes her manner of speech and topics of conversation when speaking either with white Americans or with Koreans. Such everyday adjustments--the strategy employed for successful encounters and interaction with white Americans--represent "naturalized" conduct for the actor and are employed both consciously and unconsciously. These practices reinforce the entrenchment of the life-world for immigrants, where assimilation and ethnic retention are simultaneously taken for granted.

⁶ Such practice has been referred to the notion of having a "feel for the game"--the practical sense according to which actors adjust to the objective structure. This "feel" develops by participation in the "game" (social life) and acknowledgement of what is at stake and what the probable outcome might be. "Feel for the game" refers to a sense of one's relations with other individuals and what those individuals will regard as tolerable in the light of shared understandings (Bourdieu 1990b).

The general proclivity among East Asians to make clear ethnonational distinctions and the tendency to socialize among co-ethnics can be understood as the product of a routine of ethnic practice. Yet this does not inhibit immigrants from thinking of themselves as “American,” if they wish to. In Fort Lee, being “ethnic” is a practice that is constantly negotiated in relation to others, both among individuals and groups. Strong ethnonational identity among East Asians demonstrates that the presence of co-ethnics plays an enduring role in the formation and reinforcement of this aspect of identity. Assertion of heritage and pride in one’s ethnic and cultural roots are reinforced through daily practice--e.g. parental teaching of the importance of ethnic origin, the re-learning of traditional cultures and the mother language for U.S.-born children, frequent preparation and consumption of ethnic food. Ethnic pride can also be promoted by examples of co-ethnic socioeconomic success. These practices reinforce a sense of self and a sense of difference--one’s ethnoracial identity. Yet, the drawing and redrawing of ethnic boundaries is a practice constantly enacted--for East Asians in Fort Lee, being ethnic and/or American is a malleable process and not fixed.

At the same time, the presence of East Asian subgroups allows for the development of an “Asian” identity--that is, for a more inclusive, pan-ethnic identification. This recognition was expressed by some members of Asian groups that Fort Lee is an “Asian” town, rather than exclusively Korean. The convergence of multiple ethnoracial groups has led to new ethnic fusions. Although there has been no formal pan-Asian organization, business partnerships across ethnic groups do exist (e.g. Japanese-Korean restaurants, joint medical practices of Japanese and Korean doctors). Although business expansion from co-ethnic to panethnic may be based on a pragmatic

desire to increase clientele and profit, such transformations also indicate a shifting social environment. Ethnic boundaries are becoming more fluid and actors increasingly cross boundaries in the utilization of non-co-ethnic organizations or businesses. Such developments appear to be motivated in part by immigrant goals and purposes, for example, the patronage of private schools run by non-co-ethnics for the educational achievement of children. These examples are suggestive of the adaptive and contingent nature of social practice. Changes in the social environment, including demographic shifts (the increase and decrease of an immigrant group) also play a role in crossing ethnic boundaries--for example, the attempt of Chinese and Japanese organizations to reach out to non-co-ethnic group members. Social practice needs to be considered in connection with the wider context, in which actors transform structure while being structured by it.

Examples discussed in the present thesis demonstrate that everyday practice, which is aimed at the stability of immigrant existence, necessitates that immigrants and their offspring engage in both assimilation and ethnic retention synchronously. This suggests that high ethnic concentration does not necessarily "slow down" the process of assimilation. Processes of assimilation and ethnic retention--including the reinforcement of ethnic identity--are reproduced in everyday life in Fort Lee.

Practice is inherently social--it is undertaken in connection with others and based on shared understanding, whether co-ethnic or non-co-ethnic. Immigrant action, behaviors, and propensities are connected with economic and social position and are significantly conditioned by social class. Second, racial tolerance of native whites, whether perceived or real, and the absence of social pressure to conform--derived from a

dominant ethos of diversity--conditions practices of ethnic retention and patterns of ethnic identification.

Assimilation and ethnic retention are not entirely autonomous choices for immigrants, however, since the development of these patterns of practice is a consequence of adaptation to the social system, including race and ethnicity. That East Asians do not always readily choose their identity as an "American" suggests that the practice of identification is partly determined by social structure, in this case, racial structure in the U.S. which continues to distinguish Asians as the "other." Limitations understood by social actors produce adjustment and self-regulation of their perceptions and actions. The emergence of a multiethnic suburb is both a condition and consequence of immigrant assimilation and ethnic retention.

2. Power in the Multiethnic Suburb: A Relational View

Neither spatial assimilation nor the ethnoburb model confront the role of "power" in the social processes they consider. The concept of power, nevertheless, has been fundamental in the analysis and theorization of ethnoracial relations. That contemporary East Asian immigrants have transformed Fort Lee calls for a consideration of forces inherent in the relations of established residents and newcomers. What actually happens during the process by which newcomers become part of a local community and lay claim to entitlement to Fort Lee as residents and citizens?

Ethnic conflicts in the suburbs are often based on power struggles between natives and immigrants. Examples from Monterey Park, California (e.g. Horton 1995; Saito 1998) have shown that general shifts towards incorporation have been accompanied by

intergroup tension and conflict. By contrast, overt ethnic conflict has been seemingly absent in Fort Lee. This does not mean that power does not matter in Fort Lee; it does direct our attention to other ways of considering power in immigrant-native relationships.

Social scientists in the United States have generally used the terms “majority” and “minority” to refer to systems of structured social hierarchization in which racial and ethnic criteria play a critical role (Yetman 1999). The polarity has been accompanied by the assumption that minorities are the consequence of exclusion by majorities from the mainstream and that, once tolerated and accepted as equals, minorities will disappear.⁷ Such a “majority-minority paradigm” attributes the lower socioeconomic characteristics of racial and ethnic minorities to discrimination and classifies minorities as subordinate (Sakamoto, Goyette, and Kim 2009).

Certain scholars have argued that the terms “majority” and “minority” should be replaced by “dominant” and “subordinate” in order to represent differentials of power more accurately (Yetman 1999). According to this conception, minority groups are subordinate segments of the societies of which they are a part. Intergroup conflict may be viewed as a struggle to alter the relative power balance of the majority (the established) and the minority (the newcomers), where the subordinate group attempts to decrease inequalities in the system through a variety of means and where the dominant group resorts to a multiplicity of techniques to prevent such change (Yetman 1999).

Despite racism in the U.S., Sakamoto, Goyette, and Kim (2009) argue that Asian Americans problematize the “majority-minority paradigm.” Asian Americans generally

⁷ For the historical development of the term “minority” in the West see Yetman (1999).

have parity with native whites in terms of socioeconomic status and are, therefore, not necessarily subordinate. The case of Fort Lee similarly represents a seeming anomaly. On the one hand, from the native white perspective, East Asians are the “other”--a “minority” distinct from the white majority and subject to racialization. On the other hand, East Asians are not necessarily disadvantaged in Fort Lee. Members of the three East Asian groups generally come from privileged backgrounds and, on average, have higher levels of education and higher household incomes than non-Hispanic whites. Over half the local economy is currently owned by Korean business. Immigrant groups have the ability to realize goals even in the face of resistance, as seen by the seats gained on the Board of Education since 2007 (Almenas 2009a; Firschein 2007a, 2008a). How, then, are social relationships between the established majority and the immigrants (minority) shaped, where the nonwhite minority holds significant resources?

Rather than applying the notion of “dominant-subordinate,” it may be fruitful here to consider power as a function of social relations that are reciprocal (e.g. Elias [1970]1978; Foucault 1980, 1990; Giddens 1979). In the relational view, power is considered a structural characteristic that defines all human interaction and is an “integral element of all human relationships” (Elias [1970]1978). Power is not something that is, “acquired, seized or shared, something one holds on to or allows to slip away” (Foucault 1990, 94) but is conceived as a “multiple and mobile field of force relations, wherein far-reaching, but never completely stable, effects of domination are produced” (ibid. 102). Power is not associated with a particular institution but with practices, techniques, and procedures employed at all levels and through many dimensions. Moreover, no matter how wide the asymmetrical distribution of resources, all power relations manifest

autonomy and dependence “in both directions.” Power relations are neither monolithic nor unilateral but, rather, interactional, a two-way street (Giddens 1979).

In Fort Lee, rather than viewing the majority, native whites, as the sole focus, power resides in the relationships of immigrants and native whites. Through day-to-day interaction, native white and immigrant residents develop mutual dependencies. Volunteering or fundraising for the local community by Japanese and Koreans, for instance, indicate immigrant economic capital and self-sufficiency, examples of practice which shift relations of power. The economic capital of East Asians has “gentrified” Fort Lee. Local institutions, especially schools and service agencies, have transformed themselves to accommodate immigrant groups and to promote diversity. The extent to which East Asians in Fort Lee have relative leverage in the selection of cultural and ethnic maintenance and ethnoracial identity presupposes a degree of autonomy based on resources and relative privilege.⁸

Conceiving of power as relational does not overlook that relations of forces are unequal. Socioeconomic status is the primary rationale for consideration of the power balance between native and immigrant groups. Class status, which plays a “decisive role in social relations” (Aronowitz 2003) forms the basis of the relative autonomy of East Asian immigrants in Fort Lee.⁹ Dobriner (1963) argues that class, not location, plays a

⁸ Although intra-group variations exist (e.g. income disparity within Asian groups), the present study has focused on the majority, middle-class, immigrant groups in Fort Lee. For discussion of cultural and ethnic maintenance and ethnoracial identity see chapters 3 and 5, respectively, *supra*.

⁹ Power accrues to those who “construct the rules of inclusion and exclusion in institutional and social life,” and those who construct the discourse of past and present, and those who define the future (Aronowitz 2003, 53).

role in defining and shaping suburbia (83). It has been previously suggested that perceived economic parity between newcomers and established residents can be a major precondition for social accommodation by providing a class affinity among residents that overrides race or ethnicity (Horton 1995; Kelly 2003). Affluence or privileged class status may not always be a premise for assimilation but may work as a condition for inclusion.

Issues surrounding the ordinance on business and commercial signs and façades in Fort Lee, including the use of foreign signage, can be seen as an example of power in the exercise of relational forces.¹⁰ Despite the controversy over Korean signage, the local authority does not, or rather cannot, directly prohibit foreign signage or mandate bilingual signage, since such a law would be unconstitutional. The alternative resulted in an ordinance aimed at “town beautification”--which includes a recommendation for bilingual signage, along with prescriptions regarding the size and style of letters used in storefronts and awnings. Bilingual immigrant members were appointed to a special committee for review and approval of new business signs. The move allowed the local government to convey the message to immigrant merchants who now follow the bilingual signage “recommendation.” Possible division between native and immigrant groups was channeled into a discursive, political compromise, directed toward the common goal of suburban improvement. The increasing visibility of immigrants in the public sphere in a multiethnic suburb entails a search for legitimation, within a mainstream that is itself subject to transformation.

¹⁰ On the issue of signage in Fort Lee see discussion in chapter 4, *supra*.

3. Towards a Concept of Multiethnic Space

The social conjuncture of Fort Lee, the synchronous presence of multiple East Asian communities, the combination of the class status of immigrants, and a relatively autonomous practice of assimilation and ethnic retention has prompted consideration of the suburb's development in terms of "multiethnic space." This conceptualization aims to provide a framework for grasping how suburban space is formed and transformed through the dialectical influence of everyday practices of host and immigrant actors and communities. The notion of "social space" is theorized as subject to continued potential transformation by the practice of social actors; a composite of relations through which social actors develop interdependency.¹¹ Ethnic or immigrant groups and their relations with each other are not static but change over time. The concept, in short, attempts to account for the complexity and fluidity of social processes in a suburb with a significant influx of immigrants. Similarly, the multiethnic space of Fort Lee may be viewed as a complex of relationships--seen within the polarities of convergence and separation that exist through human practice.

The conceptualization of multiethnic space takes into account the malleability and relationality theorized in the concept of a social boundary, which, according to Alba and Nee (2003) is "a categorical distinction that members of a society recognize in their quotidian activities and that affects their mental orientations and actions toward one another" (59). The concept of "boundary" suggests a spatial repertoire of social relations. Boundaries can narrow between the white majority and nonwhite immigrants by mutual

¹¹ The proposition draws on discussion of the concept of "social space," used to signify a complex of social relationships and their structure (Bourdieu 1990a; Lefebvre [1991] 2003; Tonkiss 2005).

movement of the two; for example, by the latter's entry into the social context occupied by the majority group and the majority's acceptance of immigrant entry. Boundaries are also crossed when immigrant members are fully integrated into mainstream structures and organizations. A boundary can blur when the social and cultural distances separating different groups are reduced. Multiethnic space encompasses the fluidity noted in recent conceptualizations of assimilation, which acknowledge both intergroup contact and the maintenance of ethnic difference.

In multiethnic space, spatial assimilation and ethnic retention can be understood with reference to actors who are constantly moving and relating to others, as with the case of boundaries. Multiethnic space considers social relations where social actors are interwoven within multiple relationships. Structural processes result from the interdependence of the actions of a multitude of actors. The relational viewpoint may thus help account for the synchronous presence of dual processes that at first appear theoretically exclusive yet which remain compatible in the social world. Negotiation in social life is never unilateral. In Fort Lee, rather than following exclusive paths of spatial assimilation or ethnic retention, immigrant actors oscillate between the two, always in relation to others.

Social conditions predispose actors to do certain things or to view things in certain ways. This tends to "durable linkages and groupings, immediately perceptible social units, such as socially distinct regions or neighborhoods (with spatial segregation), or sets of agents endowed with entirely similar visible properties" (Bourdieu 1985, 730). Co-ethnic members tend to be located in similar positions in multiethnic space by virtue of a shared culture or language, distinct from non-co-ethnic group members: this

increases the likelihood of similar outcomes and expectations among co-ethnic group members. Actors who are close together in social space also tend to find themselves, by choice or by necessity, close to one another in geographic space (Bourdieu 1990a). In Fort Lee, East Asians converge in physical space, though their “community loci” may frequently be socially separate by ethnoracial grouping (for example, the ethnic church and ethnic school). In addition, varying reactions by native white actors to newcomers may be explained by the social distance between native whites and immigrants. Some native whites more readily cross the boundaries and appreciate diversity than others who remain distant from or resistant to immigrants.

Multiethnic space helps explain intergroup variations coexistent in a given locale. By virtue of the tendency of the co-ethnic group to be proximate with co-ethnic members, different groups tend to be located in different positions in social space--based on factors such as immigrant status (temporary or permanent), length of residence, place of birth (foreign-born or U.S.-born), culture from the home country, type and amounts of capital, and size of co-ethnic group. We have seen how respective East Asian groups form different types of communities in Fort Lee. The Chinese are the most dispersed yet maintain community through “heterolocalism”--ethnic cohesion without physical propinquity. The Japanese principally form a transient community continually refurnished with expatriates, whose number fluctuates according to the economic situation of the home country. Koreans have the community that most closely approximates to the “ethnoburb” model. Korean claims of “belonging” to Fort Lee, in distinction to the Chinese or Japanese, may be indicative of the fact that their rootedness is far greater than the other two Asian groups. Nevertheless, cultural proximity,

compared with the American host culture, positions East Asians in proximity in social space. One likely result may be ethnic fusion and a greater likelihood of the boundary crossing indicated above. East Asians occupy similar positions in terms of economic capital and tend to reproduce similar aspirations--such as quality education for children--which lead to comparable everyday practices across groups. Nee and Sanders (2001) note the importance of “human-cultural” capital that immigrants bring with them. Such capital can lead to employment opportunities in the mainstream and in the ethnic community--that is, the volume of capital may influence the trajectory of immigrants after arrival in the host society.

The concepts of race and ethnicity are frequently conveyed through metaphors of spatial form, as seen in terms such as ethnic enclave, multiethnic neighborhood, and ethnoracial boundary. Physical space can be marked in racial or ethnic terms. That is, the creation of space involves the creation of “difference.” This is confirmed by characterizations of Fort Lee among residents as “Asian,” or “diverse,” in contrast with other New Jersey suburbs that are perceived as “white.” Race and ethnicity are crucial in the social definition of space, as seen in perceptions of Fort Lee as “Korean” due to the prevalence of commercial and business signage in *Hangul*. This view, widespread among the majority of my informants regardless of their ethnicity, suggests how perceptions construct the social reality of multiethnic space. That is to say, ethnic groups are *made* by the cognitive schemes of social actors, positioned differently in social space (Bourdieu 1990a).

In distinction with the models of spatial assimilation and the ethnoburb, multiethnic space is proposed as:

- i. a relation between actors positioned in relation to others, including relations of ethnicity.
- ii. a social space (a field of forces) penetrated by a system of relations and alliances and also power.
- iii. constructed and transformed through the practice of immigrants and natives.
- iv. a social framework where spatial assimilation and ethnic retention are in dialectical relation.

According to the spatial assimilation model, structure is presupposed as stable and consistently patterned. Conceptualization of structure as something separate from human action does not lend itself to an explanation of how these patterns change over time (Sewell 1992). In conceptualizing the multiethnic suburb as a form of social space, the structure is considered as a fluid process, not a fixed state. The structure is multiple and contingent, a product of practice by both immigrant and native residents.

4. Conclusion. Social Conditions of Immigration and the Transformation of a Metropolitan Suburb

The present chapter has considered the theoretical significance of findings from this study of Fort Lee in an attempt to address the question, “Which conditions account for the co-existence of spatial assimilation and ethnic retention?” The chapter has analyzed the findings in the light of sociological concepts of practice, power, social space which are informed by the notion of “relations.” In Fort Lee, social change has been a product not only of immigration but also of the interlocking of myriad relationships, between immigrant co-ethnics, other ethnic groups, and native whites. The ethnic suburb is more than the outcome of immigrant assimilation or the result of co-ethnic clustering. Even in a highly ethnic environment, middle-class professional East Asian immigrants in

Fort Lee have not remained insular but have begun to work with the wider community. In turn, the institutional systems (e.g. schools) did not pressure new immigrants to assimilate or deny their heritage, but celebrated diversity. The multiethnic suburb has also developed in relation to receptions by the native community. The proposed concept of multiethnic space aims to account for structural and cognitive schemes that are interrelated and that influence the conditions for the formation and transformation of an ethnic suburb. Multiethnic space addresses the continuum in the spectrum of possibilities between spatial assimilation and ethnic retention.

The concept of multiethnic space considers race and ethnicity as a structure that has been and is being transformed as part of the historical and social context of contemporary America.¹² Different forms of ethnic community among East Asians raise the importance of the perceptual distinctions social actors make in terms of collective and individual identifications; they also reflect the different social conditions groups face and how these affect the ways in which immigrants create community.

Multiethnic space takes into account the fact that American suburbs in metropolitan areas are increasingly diverse, modifying previous assumptions of suburbs as ethnically white. Such diversity promotes immigration by providing a desirable environment to live, a milieu conducive to the maintenance of ethnic heritage, and a sense of comfort for ethnic group members. This does not assume that immigrants reject complete assimilation. Immigrants and their offspring do become “assimilated” through contact and interaction with the host culture and with other ethnoracial groups. But although a certain socioeconomic status is a precondition for residence in the middle-

¹² In regard to such transformation, see further the concept of “racial formation” in Omi and Winant (1994).

class suburb, the acculturation that previously served the desire for spatial assimilation is no longer a necessary precondition.

East Asian immigrants have become oriented to Fort Lee on the basis of possession of economic and social capital, the presence of co-ethnics and networks, and aspirations toward specific life goals connected with their middle class standing--such as quality education for children, running a business, finding a more desirable environment for residence. The majority of East Asians in Fort Lee arrived with resources--high educational levels, occupational skills, economic capital. In the case of relatively affluent Asians, economic achievement does not predicate a desire to assimilate. Rather, economic power allows for ethnic maintenance on the one hand and the possibility of rapid assimilation (advanced degree, exposure to American culture prior to immigration, skills required for white collar jobs, etc.). Yet being American while being ethnic is a necessary goal to avoid social marginalization. The multiethnic space of Fort Lee may thus be theorized as contingent on existing socioeconomic conditions and an articulation of changes in ethnoracial relations, while at the same time constructing them.

For the present study, multiethnic space allows for a nuanced understanding of the social complexities that bear on social actors with different dispositions, trajectories, and backgrounds, and interrelations with each other in Fort Lee. The concept helps account for the co-presence of varied groups within communities that intersect and interact. Different dispositions and conditions can co-exist in society as well as within the same individual. Assimilation and ethnic retention are simultaneous processes occurring in relation to other social actors. The duality of the two seemingly contradictory trends is thus postulated as relational and dialectical. Multiethnic space also provides for an

understanding of the role of power in social relations and emphasizes the fluidity of social structure, conceived as entailed in practice as well as regulating practice. These processes are not considered dichotomous and are viewed as having the potential for ethnic fusion. The emergence of pan-Asian enterprise in Fort Lee attests to such a trend. Alongside the formation of coterminous ethnically distinct communities, processes of boundary-crossing are retracing the links, territory, and culture formerly considered to belong to a given social group. Multiethnic space is being constructed and sustained through the innumerable series of practices of social actors in everyday life in Fort Lee.

Conclusion

The aims of the present thesis have been to explore and to analyze aspects of Fort Lee as a contemporary multiethnic suburb. Detailed studies on immigration to suburbia in New Jersey have hitherto been few. The present inquiry has necessitated consideration of: the attributes and processes of formation and transformation among immigrant communities; the negotiation of the processes of immigrant assimilation and ethnic retention; native reactions; the meanings of ethnicity in an increasingly diverse suburb. The examination of immigrant communities in Fort Lee reveals an interdependence of specific local social and economic situations and individual actions and cognitions that develop and are transformed within a specific socio-historical context.

The Chinese, Japanese, and Korean communities in Fort Lee are distinct from each other in form, organization, and structure. Different types of Asian communities, which remain socially separate but which also intersect, are synchronously co-present in a specific locale. Despite their differences, these three East Asian groups have converged in Fort Lee for reasons of convenience and amenities, largely reflective of their middle-class standing. Co-ethnic networks remain important for many residents of East Asian origin in Fort Lee. Some members of East Asian groups consider the presence of the wider category of “Asians” (i.e. not limited to co-ethnics) as significant to their choice of Fort Lee as a place of settlement. East Asian residents of varying immigrant status and immigration histories find “comfort” in Fort Lee. Regardless of relative absence of intergroup contact, “race” factors in for East Asian cognitions, along with a relative tolerance among native white residents. The notion of “race,” though frequently tacit,

continues to be an influential factor in Asian immigrant decisions regarding place of residence.

The formation of new ethnic settlements in the American suburbs is a consequence of larger social and economic transformations. These include global economic restructuring, the demand for highly skilled labor in the U.S. market, urban and suburban economic opportunity structures, and immigration policies, leading to the influx of new types of immigrant--affluent, middle-class professionals from Asia (Li 1998, 2006). In effect, Fort Lee has come to represent a transnational space that both “constitute[s] and convey[s] broader processes of economic and cultural globalization” (Ling 1998a, 313).

The present research has been guided by the conceptual frameworks proposed by spatial assimilation and the ethnoburb. The empirical data gathered from Fort Lee, while partially supporting both perspectives, does not replicate either model. The move of some East Asians from Queens to Fort Lee, for example, suggests upward mobility and status attainment. Many are also socially and culturally acculturated; in this regard, spatial assimilation is supported. On the other hand, the model does not hold for those arriving in the suburb directly from abroad. The ethnoburb model, which is based on the ethnic clustering of Chinese populations in the San Gabriel Valley, California, does not conform to the present case. While the Korean community may fit the model of the ethnoburb, the Chinese or the Japanese have also formed their own communities that do not follow the model. Multiple groups co-reside and develop distinctly different ethnic communities. For example, many members of Chinese and Japanese work outside Fort Lee, reducing the possibility of ethnic business development in a suburban location, one

characteristic of the ethnoburb (Li 2009). The present work has turned to the question of how this multiethnic suburb is sustained and transformed and how the specific context of Fort Lee affects both assimilation and ethnic retention.

East Asians in Fort Lee appear to be engaged in seemingly contradictory practices: on the one hand, they are immersed in American culture and the economy, including its language, educational system, work, and social relationships. On the other hand, these groups engage in ethnic practices that aim to sustain their cultural heritage. The latter do not “resist” complete assimilation, however. Assimilation and ethnic retention should be understood as contingent on the practices in which actors are engaged in everyday life. Ethnic retention, paradoxically, may function as a means of assimilation. The reinforcement of ethnic identity and traditional ethnic culture may hinge on a degree of immigrant integration into the host society, as in the case of ethnic festivals, where ethnic specificity can function as a means of attaining recognition within the mainstream. Such a coexistence of assimilation and ethnic retention does not necessarily slow down the process of assimilation, as described in the ethnoburb model (Li 2006, 78). These processes appear malleable and in Fort Lee do not predicate separateness from the wider community. On the contrary, a willingness for integration into the mainstream among Asian immigrant groups is documented by the present inquiry, which in turn suggests that trends of spatial assimilation and ethnic retention are relational.

The concept of “multiethnic space” has been proposed here to account for the conditions that allow the co-existence of both social processes. Immigrants enter into the relations of the host society that are defined by given structures and conditions. By paying attention to practice and to the relations among social actors, multiethnic space

allows for consideration of contingent reality and how complex processes of assimilation and ethnic retention are reproduced. In order to understand the meaning of social action, it is necessary to understand the social conditions that influence them.

The social class of both immigrants and host has been significant in determining relations between actors of various ethnic groups, including native whites. In Fort Lee, the patterns of suburbanization (as a form of status attainment), the practice of assimilation and ethnic retention, and the development of ethnoracial identity largely hinge on social class. Socioeconomic parities between established residents and the newcomers have worked as a condition for inclusion of the latter by the former. To the extent that immigrants have resources and bring economic benefits, their acceptance has been relatively smooth, and considered as a gain for the cultural and economic enrichment of Fort Lee. Possession of resources among the three East Asian groups allows greater autonomy with regard to practices of assimilation, ethnic retention, and the choice of ethnic identification.

Class factors can also be a source of hostility and resentment among some native residents. According to the present study, host attitudes remain ambivalent. Mixed reactions among native whites in Fort Lee are comparable to findings from other locales in the U.S. including Flushing (Smith 1995) and Monterey Park (Horton 1995). The presence of newcomers and associated tensions, however, has not led to serious confrontation in Fort Lee. The middle-class status of residents has led to the avoidance of open confrontation. For the most part, the preservation of apparent harmony is based on a tendency among residents to “keep to themselves” without interfering in other residents’ lives. The wider spread and deeper local investment by Koreans may meet

stronger opposition from the host than that shown to the more geographically dispersed Chinese or transient Japanese. Their visibility in local life is seen as an “Asian invasion” among some native whites and has caused some resentment. But even here, the former are ultimately viewed, in general, as becoming American by the host.

Factors such as the pre-existing diversity of Fort Lee and its highly urbanized character (as a directly adjacent bedroom community for New York City and the mobility and transience of the population in general) have also made this locale susceptible to the formation of multiple ethnic communities. Native receptiveness, informed by historically and geographically specific conditions, is an integral part of the formation of the immigrant suburban community and its incorporation. Proximity to New York City and the recognition, even where mythic, of racial tolerance in Fort Lee have been an important consideration for East Asians. Immigrant-native relationships in Fort Lee can be characterized as “relational,” where power does not reside in a specific group or individual but rather represents a multiplicity of exchanges within a field of forces. East Asians, in particular Koreans, are a part of local power relations, rather than outside them. Absence of social pressures to conform, an ethos of diversity, and relational power are social conditions that allow for both assimilation and ethnic retention. Immigrant propensity reflects them, and to this extent, the actors are constrained by social conditions.

The meaning of being “ethnic” and/or “American” is constantly negotiated and remains indeterminate for East Asians in Fort Lee. Ethnonational identity remains strong among East Asians who are mostly first or second generation. At the same time, the meaning of “Asianness” is undergoing transformation: East Asian immigrants and their offspring have developed a sense of pride in their roots--being Asian is no longer

necessarily associated with stigma in Fort Lee. Although formal pan-Asian affiliation has not emerged, this geographical convergence has produced informal, pan-Asian fusion--in friendship and business arrangements. Ethnoracial relations are social relations, modulated within the specific social space of Fort Lee. The relative autonomy in selecting identity, associated with their relatively privileged status, does not entirely preclude the possibility of racialization, however. Individuals of East Asian descent confront restrictions in identification of themselves as "American." Although the case of Fort Lee suggests a relation between ethnoracial identity and class status, neither race nor class alone can be privileged as the single and exclusively determining principle (Hall 1986). Privileged class status does not entirely override the continued significance of race--the latter being one major factor for East Asian convergence in Fort Lee. Middle-class East Asian immigrants and their children have autonomy and options, but they are not entirely free to choose what they wish.

The concept of multiethnic space allows that immigrant assimilation and ethnic retention are social processes, reflective of social conditions in which immigrant action occurs. By focusing attention on the everyday practice of social actors in a suburban community, the present study has also given consideration to the individual experience of immigrant adaptation, intergroup relations, and the assessment of the immigrant impact upon the host society and wider social and cultural processes. It is hoped that the present dissertation may contribute to further understanding of how recent immigrants are influencing suburban life while being influenced by it--in the process of both becoming American and maintaining ethnic identity. The comparison of East Asian groups has demonstrated some of the intergroup variations in the social organization of ethnic

communities, their commonalities as racial minority groups, and a possibility of the formation of panethnic affinity. Such a focus brings to light the complexities in the production of suburban ethnic space.

Multiethnic space has to be situated in time and space. The case of Fort Lee is reflective of the specific spatial and historical conditions of a New York metropolitan suburb. If the understanding of social processes is predicated on a constant modification of knowledge and changing social realities, it is important to recognize the present research as the analysis of but one case study, within the wider inquiry and elucidation of contemporary patterns of social organization.

Table 1

Racial and Ethnic Composition, Borough of Fort Lee, New Jersey, 1970-2009

Race/ethnicity	Number and Percentage of Borough Population									
	1970		1980		1990		2000		2005-9 (est.)	
	<i>N</i>	%	<i>N</i>	%	<i>N</i>	%	<i>N</i>	%	<i>N</i>	%
Chinese	115	0.4	285	0.9	844	2.6	1,988	5.6	1,632	4.5
Japanese	385	1.3	1,944	6.0	2,764	8.6	2,091	5.9	1,980	5.5
Korean	n/a	---	388	1.2	2,468	7.7	5,978	16.9	7,160	19.7
Hispanic or Latino	(901)	(2.9)	1,342	4.1	1,779	5.6	2,791	7.9	4,052	11.2
Non-Hispanic Black	202	0.7	519	1.6	383	1.2	555	1.6	516	1.4
Non-Hispanic White	29,827	97.3	27,494	84.7	23,361	73.0	20,350	57.3	18,686	51.6
Other	102	0.3	477	1.5	398	1.2	1,708	4.8	2,209	6.1
Total	30,631	100.0	32,449	100.0	31,997	100.0	35,461	100.0	36,235	100.0

Source: U.S. Bureau of the Census, 1973, 1982, 1992a, 2000, 2009.

Note. "Other" includes: American Indian and Alaska native, native Hawaiian and other Pacific Islander, Asian Indian, Southeast Asian (e.g. Filipinos, Vietnamese), other race, and two or more races: the categories included under "Other" vary by the census year. Koreans were not specified in the 1970 census for Fort Lee and may have been included in "Other" for that year. For 1970, the information concerning the race of people of "Spanish origin" (*N*=901) was unavailable. The numbers reported for "white," "black," and "other" in the census are reproduced in the table.

Table 2
 Population Growth, Selected
 Fort Lee, 1980-2009
 Percentage change from preceding decade

	1980	1990	2000	2005-9 (Est.)
Chinese	147.8	196.1	135.5	-17.9
Japanese	404.9	42.2	-24.3	-5.3
Korean*	--	536.1	142.2	19.8
Hispanic or Latino	48.9	32.6	56.9	45.2
White	-5.0	-15.0	-12.7	-8.2
Total Population	5.9	-1.4	10.8	2.2

Source: U.S. Bureau of the Census, 1973, 1982, 1992a, 2000, 2009.

* Koreans not specified in 1970 census.

Table 3
 Changing East Asian Populations
 Fort Lee, 1970-2000
 Groups as percentage of East Asian population

	1970	1980	1990	2000
Chinese	23.0	10.9	13.9	19.8
Japanese	77.0	74.3	45.5	20.8
Korean*	--	14.8	40.6	59.4
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0

Source: U.S. Bureau of the Census 1973, 1982, 1992a, 2000.

* Koreans not specified in 1970 census.

Table 4
 Foreign-Born Residents
 Fort Lee, 1970 to 2000

	1970		1980		1990		2000	
	<i>N</i>	%	<i>N</i>	%	<i>N</i>	%	<i>N</i>	%
Foreign-Born	5,939	19.4	8,594	26.5	11,230	35.1	15,864	44.7
Total Population	30,631		32,449		31,997		35,461	

Source: U.S. Bureau of the Census, 1972, 1982, 1992b, 2000.

Table 5
Occupations of Residents
Fort Lee, 1950-2000

	1950		1960		1970	
	<i>N</i>	%	<i>N</i>	%	<i>N</i>	%
Professional, Technical, Managerial, Officials, Proprietors*	1,315	26.6	3,061	30.9	6,022	38.3
Clerical, Sales	1,166	23.6	2,933	29.6	5,485	34.9
Service (incl. private household workers)	367	7.4	654	6.6	950	6.0
Craftsmen, Foremen, Laborers, Operatives	1,988	40.2	2,806	28.3	3,257	20.7
Not reported	104	2.1	455	4.6	--	--
Total Employed	4,940	100.0	9,909	100.0	15,714	100.0

* "Professional, Technical, Managerial, Administrators" (in 1970 census).

Table 5 (continued)

Occupations of Residents
Fort Lee, 1950-2000

	1980		1990		2000	
	<i>N</i>	%	<i>N</i>	%	<i>N</i>	%
Managerial, Professional	6,862	40.8	7,773	46.8	8,870	51.6
Technical, Sales, Administrative support**	6,221	37.0	6,088	36.7	5,324	30.9
Service	1,177	7.0	1,110	6.7	1,430	8.3
Farming, Fishing, Forestry	108	0.6	70	0.4	0	0
Precision Production, Craft, Repair	1,271	7.6	888	5.3	--	--
Construction, Extraction, and Maintenance (2000 only)	--	--	--	--	561	3.3
Operators, Fabricators, and Laborers ***	1,181	7.0	679	4.1	1,020	5.9
Total Employed	16,820	100.0	16,608	100.0	17,205	100.0

Source: U.S. Bureau of the Census, 1952, 1962, 1973, 1983, 1993, 2000.

** "Sales and Offices" (2000 census)

*** "Production, Transportation, and Material Moving" (2000 census).

Table 6
 Type of Housing Occupancy
 Fort Lee, 1950-2000
 By unit and percentage

	1950		1960		1970		1980		1990		2000	
	Actual	Percent	Actual	Percent	Actual	Percent	Actual	Percent	Actual	Percent	Actual	Percent
Owner Occupied	1,950	54.0	3,303	41.4	3,477	27.6	3,960	25.6	8,904	52.8	9,301	53.3
Renter Occupied	1,554	43.0	4,391	55.1	8,852	70.4	10,924	70.5	6,332	37.6	7,243	41.5
Vacant	106	3.0	277	3.5	255	2.0	601	3.9	1,611	9.6	902	5.2
Total Housing Units	3,610	100.0	7,971	100.0	12,584	100.0	15,485	100.0	16,847	100.0	17,446	100.0

Source: U.S. Bureau of the Census, 1953, 1962, 1972, 1982, 1992b, 2000.

Table 7
 Educational Attainment by Race/Ethnic Group
 Aged 25 and Above
 Fort Lee, 2000

	Asian		Hispanic or Latino		Non-Hispanic Black		Non-Hispanic White	
	<i>N</i>	%	<i>N</i>	%	<i>N</i>	%	<i>N</i>	%
Less than 9th grade	232	3.0	123	6.8	39	7.9	906	5.3
9th to 12th grade, no diploma	196	2.6	202	11.2	11	2.2	1,135	6.6
High school graduate (includes equivalency)	1,065	14.0	441	24.4	87	17.5	3,936	22.9
Some college, no degree	900	11.8	405	22.4	101	20.4	2,714	15.8
Associate degree	515	6.8	118	6.5	21	4.2	827	4.8
Bachelor's degree	3,223	42.3	298	16.5	168	33.9	4,423	25.7
Graduate or professional degree	1,491	19.6	224	12.4	69	13.9	3,246	18.9
Total	7,622	100.0	1,811	100.0	496	100.0	17,187	100.0

Source: U.S. Census of the Bureau, Summary File 3, 2000.

Note. "Asian" includes non-East Asian groups (Asian Indian, Filipinos, Vietnamese, and other Asians). American Indian and Alaska native, native Hawaiian and Pacific Islander, some other race, and two or more races are not included in the table.

Table 8
 Social and Economic Characteristics of East Asian Populations
 1) Fort Lee and 2) Public Use Microdata Area (PUMA) including Fort Lee,
 Bergen County, New Jersey
 2000^a

	Chinese	Japanese	Korean
1) Fort Lee			
Median Age	36	34	33
Median Household Income in 1999	\$62,344	\$75,865	\$56,354
Bachelor's Degree or Higher (%) [Age 25+]	58.6	67.9	58.3
Speak a Language other than English at Home (%) [Age 5+]	81.1 ^b	78.9	85.8
2) PUMA			
Place of Work (%)			
New Jersey	56.8	54.5	59.5
New York	43.2	43.1	39.4
Class of Workers (%) ^c			
Employee of private company	83.5	84.8	75.6
Employee of government	8.6	1.1	3.9
Self-employed	7.2	14.1	20.1 ^d
Citizenship status (%)			
U.S. born	26.6	15.5	18.8
Naturalized citizen	30.3	8.3	22.4
Not a citizen of the U.S.	42.1	76.2	58.8
English Ability ^e			
Speak English Very Well (%)	47.9	39.2	29.2
Speak English Well (%)	29.1	30.5	36.1
Speak English Not Well & Not At All (%)	23.0	30.3	34.7

Source: Summary File 2 and Summary File 4 (for Fort Lee data), Five-percent Public Use Microdata Sample (PUMS) file (for PUMA data), U.S. Bureau of the Census, 2000.

^a The PUMA in this case includes Cliffside Park, Edgewater, Fairview, Fort Lee, Leonia, Palisades Park, Ridgefield Park (PUMA code 00303).

^b Includes categories of Cantonese, Chinese, Mandarin, and Taiwanese.

^c Excludes those under age 16 and those who never worked since 1995.

^d Includes unpaid family worker.

^e Excludes those under age 5 and who speak English only.

Table 9
Age Groups
Asian and Non-Hispanic White Residents
Fort Lee, 2000

Age range (years)	Asian		Non-Hispanic White	
	<i>N</i>	%	<i>N</i>	%
Under 5	950	8.5	667	3.3
5-9	936	8.4	634	3.1
10-14	687	6.2	669	3.3
15-17	324	2.9	413	2.0
18-19	190	1.7	213	1.0
20-24	430	3.9	604	3.0
25-29	998	9.0	983	4.8
30-34	1,415	12.7	1,299	6.4
35-39	1,472	13.2	1,427	7.0
40-44	1,084	9.7	1,400	6.9
45-49	801	7.2	1,431	7.0
50-54	612	5.5	1,565	7.7
55-59	397	3.6	1,450	7.1
60-64	321	2.9	1,338	6.6
65-69	212	1.9	1,457	7.2
70-74	134	1.2	1,580	7.8
75-79	89	0.8	1,432	7.0
80-84	39	0.4	960	4.7
85 years and over	30	0.3	828	4.1
Total	11,121	100.0	20,350	100.0
Median Age	33.8		51.4	

Source: U.S. Bureau of the Census, Summary File 1, 2000.

Note. "Asian" includes non-East Asian groups (Asian Indian, Filipinos, Vietnamese, and other Asians). American Indian and Alaska native, native Hawaiian and Pacific Islander, some other race, and two or more races are not included in the table.

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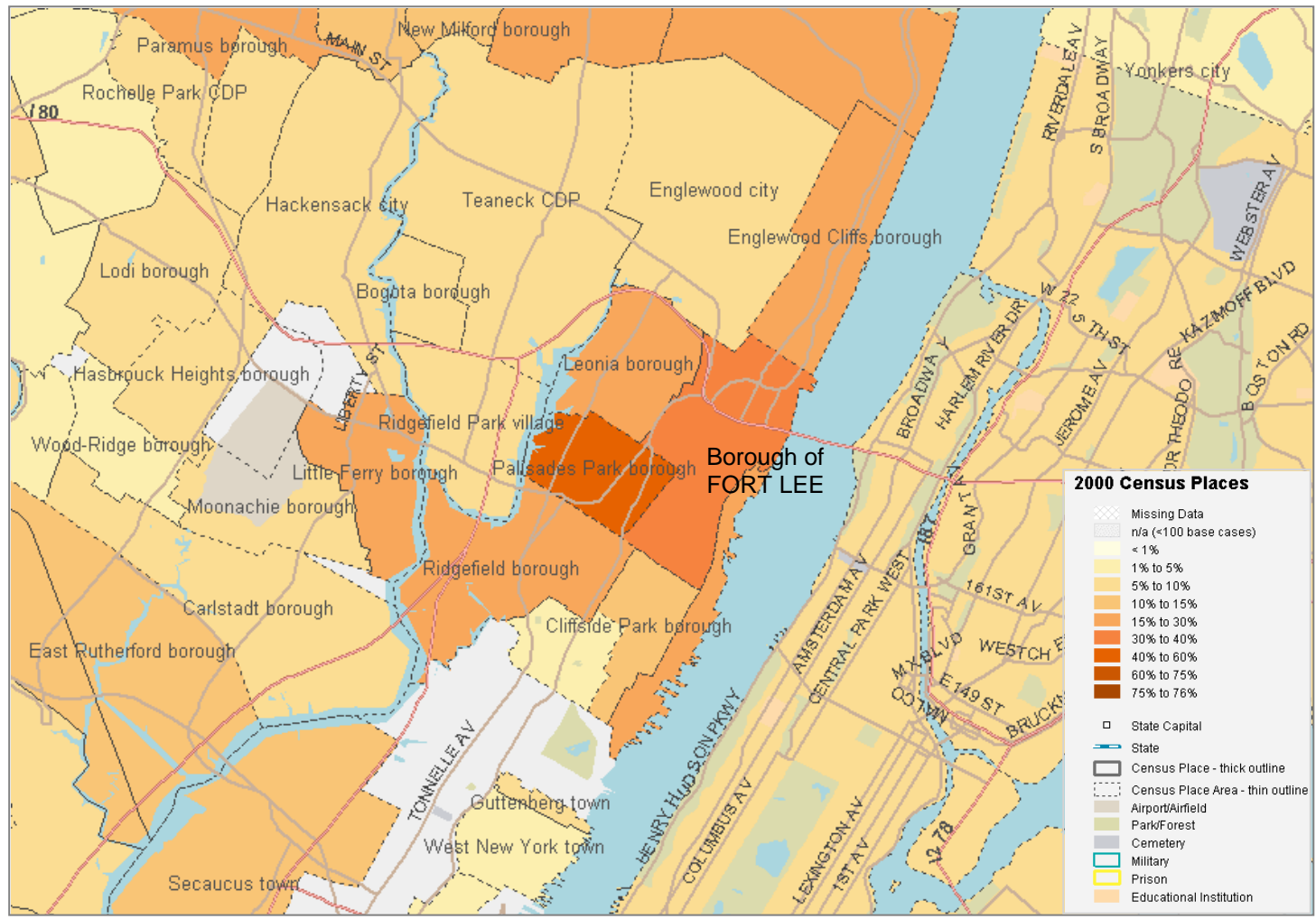


Figure 1. Fort Lee, New Jersey. Percentage Concentration of Asian Populations. Source: U.S. Bureau of the Census, 2000.



Figure 2. Hudson River and George Washington Bridge (Fort Lee in the Distance) Looking Southwest, from Northern Manhattan. July 19, 2009.



Figure 3. New Jersey Turnpike, Looking West from Bridge Plaza, Fort Lee. October 4, 2009.



Figure 4. Multilingual Signs of a Korean Dentist, Fort Lee. October 4, 2009. Sign reads, “We speak Japanese” (in Japanese) lower-right.



Figure 5. Federspiel Street from Main Street, Fort Lee, Looking South. October 4, 2009.

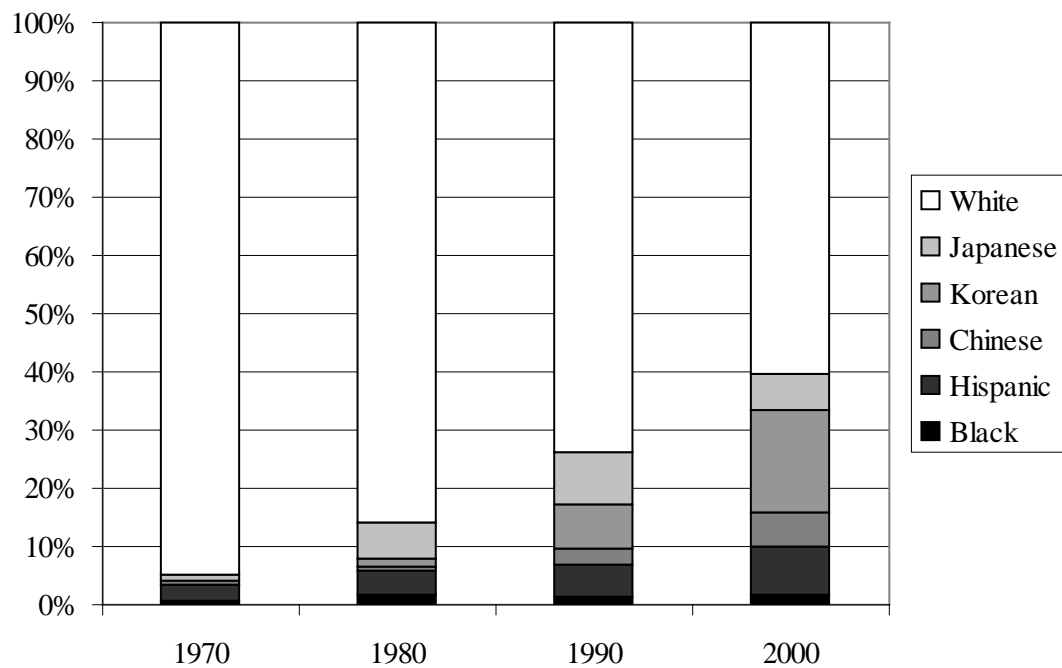


Figure 6. Change in Ethnic and Racial Composition in Fort Lee, 1970-2000.
Source: U.S. Bureau of the Census, 1973, 1982, 1992a, 2000.

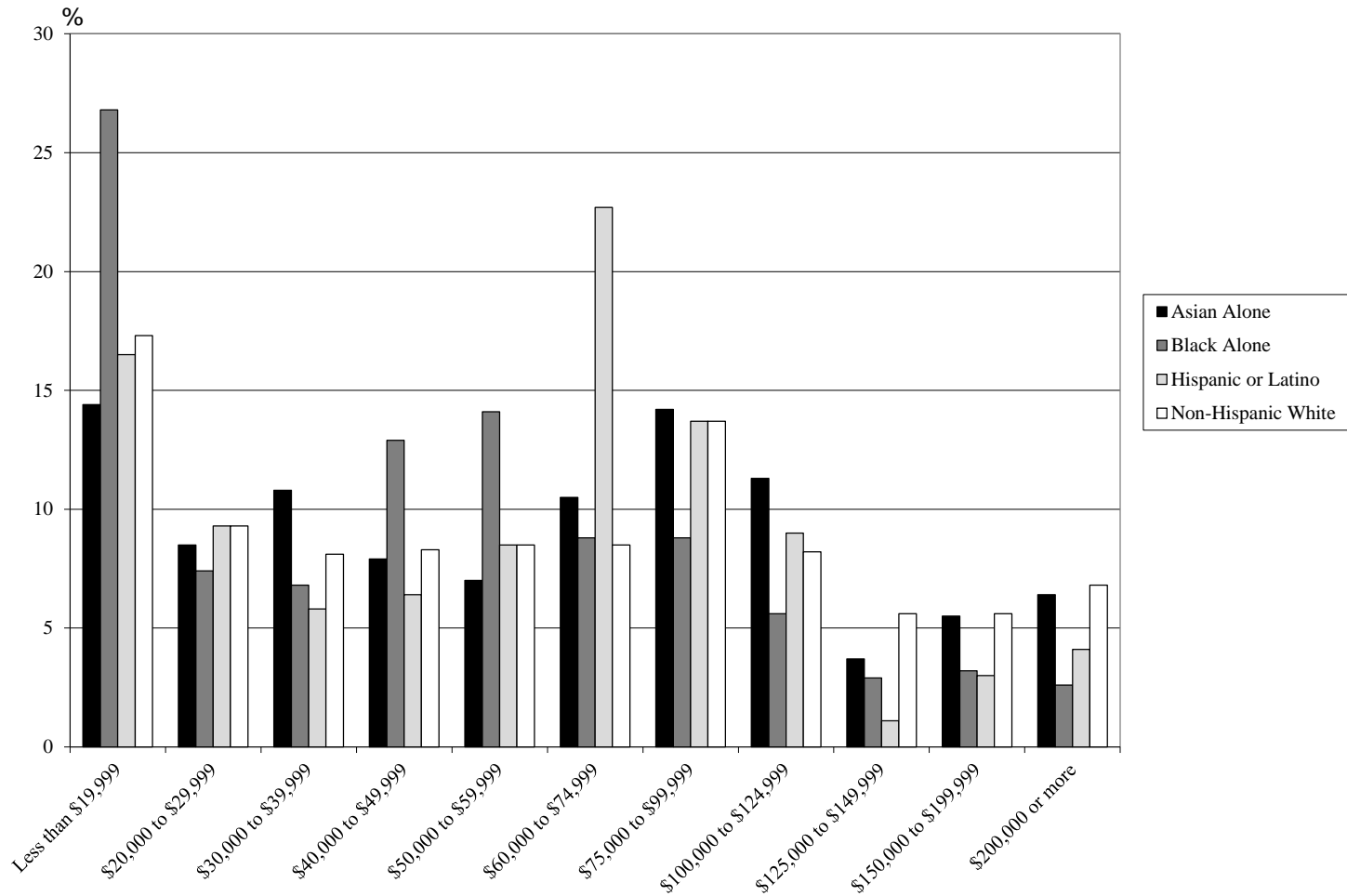


Figure 7. Household Income by Race (Percentage Distribution for Each Group) Fort Lee, 1999.
 Source: U.S. Bureau of the Census, Summary File 3, 2000.

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Please call or email today to arrange for lessons that will change your life.

* 영어 잘 가르쳐 줘요.
한번 전화해 보세요.

수준높은, 그러나 어렵지 않은 영어, 즐거운 영어를
배우고 싶은 분! 꼭 전화해보세요!!

教 我可以幫助你學好英語及矯正發音。我有很好的教學經歷,所有的學習課程以實用為主。同時我也幫助考 TOEFL 的學生提高考試的成績。

수준높은 영어를 배우고 싶은 분! 꼭 전화해보세요!!

Figure 8. *English Tutor, Conversation Partner*. Advertising flyer, Fort Lee. November 14, 2008. Printed text in English and Chinese, annotated comments in Japanese and Korean.



Figure 9. Main Street, Fort Lee, from the North. October 4, 2009.



Figure 10. Main Street, Fort Lee, from the South. October 20, 2009.