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**Social order and contest in meanings and power: Black  
boycotts against Korean shopkeepers in poor New York City  
neighborhoods**

**Yi, Jeongduk, Ph.D.**

**City University of New York, 1993**

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SOCIAL ORDER AND CONTEST IN MEANINGS AND POWER:  
BLACK BOYCOTTS AGAINST KOREAN SHOPKEEPERS  
IN POOR NEW YORK CITY NEIGHBORHOODS

by

JEONGDUK YI

A dissertation submitted to the Graduate Faculty in  
Anthropology in partial fulfillment of the requirements for  
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New York.

1993

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## Abstract

Social Order and Contest in Meanings and Power:  
Black Boycotts against Korean Shopkeepers  
in Poor Black New York City Neighborhoods

by

JEONGDUK YI

Advisor: Professor Gerald Sider

This dissertation aims to provide an analysis of the process of social reproduction revealed through the conflict between Korean shopkeepers and poor Black inner city residents in New York City. The major concepts, discussed in the introduction, include culture, power, domination, resistance, and conceptual orders.

The pervasive racism and capitalism in America provides the context where the two minority groups have been constituted and where opposing meanings are contested as the conflict between Korean shopkeepers and poor Blacks develops. State agents, Whites, and news media also join in the process of the conflict. They contest with various combinations of coercion, persuasion, protest, and argumentations for the maintenance or change of the existing social relationships.

With further theoretical discussion on the conflict, the multidimensionality of social orders, the relationship between conceptual orders and social reproduction, and the interconnection among meanings, power, and economic relationships are discussed in the conclusion.

Dedicated to  
My Parents and My Advisor  
Who Became  
Part of My Body and Mind.

...they taught me of the humanity, vision, and hope for a  
humane society.

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soundness of my argument, and shared his insights about the interaction among culture, status, and class with me. Professor Hansen's broad perspective on the development of capitalism was a great stimulation for me to rethink capitalist dynamics. He also stimulated me to think over hegemony and racial conceptions further. Professor Mullings' insights about class and race were also a great help for me in thinking about the racial dynamics in the U.S.A. Thanks to Professor Wolf, I thought and rethought about the relationship between culture and power and about the worldly interconnection among societies. Professor Greenbaum, my outside reader, urged me to rethink several points for the further development of my ideas.

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**PART ONE**

**INTRODUCTION**

## CHAPTER ONE

## INTRODUCTION

The anthropologists have shown us that cultural forms - as "determinate orderings" of things, behavior, and ideas - do play a demonstrable role in the management of human interaction. What will be required of us in the future is not to deny that role, but to understand more precisely how cultural forms work to mediate social relationships among particular populations. (Wolf 1982:19)

The core of culture is the form and manner in which people perceive, define, articulate, and express their mutual relations. (Sider 1986:120)

The word is the ideological phenomenon par excellence. (Volosinov 1986:13)

...the maintenance of categories upholds power, and power maintains the order of the world. (Wolf 1990:593)

Aims of the Research

This dissertation aims to illustrate processes of social reproduction as revealed through the conflict between two social groups in New York City. I use the concept of social reproduction as the reproduction or maintenance of social order despite challenges to it. Specifically, this dissertation will discuss how two groups in different economic positions came into opposition, how they conceptualize the conflict between them, and how they contest meanings and power in the context of wider society. The escalation of the conflict between Korean shopkeepers

and the poor Black inner city residents during 1988-1990 in New York City provides a good opportunity to examine how people challenge existing social relationships and how state agents such as politicians, public officials, law enforcers, and involved groups deploy their cultural and political efforts to change, compromise, and maintain existing social relationships.

However, because they contest in historically produced social conditions, it is important to understand how structural limitation of the playing fields for both poor Blacks and Korean shopkeepers have been constructed through history. In order to understand these historical and structural backgrounds of the conflict between two groups, I will also examine how a poor Black neighborhood was constructed in Harlem, how the Blacks in Harlem historically experienced the conflict with alien shopkeepers, why Koreans immigrated and settled in urban neighborhoods, and how they opened and expanded their business in poor Black neighborhoods. Because these processes have been closely related to American racism and capitalism, I will also consider the context of American racism and capitalism in discussing poor Black residents and Korean shopkeepers.

By discussing the historically constructed social conditions for social groups and the process of their conflict and its connection to wider social context, this dissertation aims to contribute to the theoretical

discussion of the process of the reproduction of social orders and to the discussion of American social dynamics, especially to the interconnection between racism and capitalism.

In order to achieve these aims, I will focus on two things in this introduction. In sections of the first half of this introduction, I will discuss general conceptual tools which are necessary for the theoretical conceptualizations of the process of social reproduction. In sections of the second half, I will specifically focus on the more concrete frameworks which are directly related to the understanding of the conflict between Korean shopkeepers and poor Blacks. Therefore, sections in the first half address the relationships between culture and power, between domination and resistance, and between social order and conceptual order. Sections in the second half shall consider the economic positions of Korean shopkeepers and poor Black residents, their racial conceptions before the conflict between the two groups, my motivations in selecting this topic and a field area for this dissertation, and the collection of my data.

### Culture and Power

Most anthropologists think about culture. What is culture? Culture which had meant in its early uses "the tending of... crops or animals" became a metaphor for the

cultivation of the mind (Williams 1976:76-82). In eighteenth-century Germany, Herder provided an anthropological turn for the conceptualization of culture. Herder used 'cultures' in the plural: the particular characteristics of different groups, nations, and periods. Thus, a culture was used for a culture of a specific nation or period. Tylor (1871) and Boas (1920; see also 1940) used cultures in this context, and the concept of culture as a particular way of life of a specific group has been well established in anthropology.

However, traditional conceptualizations of culture in anthropology are very limited in explaining cultural dynamics, because their conceptualizations of culture give insufficient attention to problems of power and social conflict (Wolf 1982:afterword). Even those who paid attention to power and social conflict in understanding culture limited their analytical understanding to equilibrium systems (e.g. Leach 1954; Gluckman 1955) or to individual interactions (Turner 1957; Barth 1959; Cohen 1974).

The equilibrium model does not explain historical change. The interactional understanding of power is very limited because this model ignores organizational and structural dimensions of power. According to Wolf(1990), four different modes of power can be ascertained: individual endowment in the play of power; imposition of one's will on

others in interpersonal relationships; controls within the setting (organizational power); and the ability to structure the settings themselves (structural power). If we primarily focus on individual interaction in understanding power, neither structural power which shapes the social field of action nor organizational power which sets up relationships among people through allocation and control of resources and rewards come into our view (Wolf 1990).

The various dimensions of power cannot be ignored when we understand culture, because, as Wolf (1990:593) suggests,

Power is implicated in meaning through its role in upholding one version of significance as true, fruitful, or beautiful, against other possibilities that may threaten truth, fruitfulness, or beauty. All cultures, however conceived, carve out significance and try to stabilize it against possible alternatives.

In another dimension, a problem for the traditional conceptualizations of culture is that the integration, boundedness, uniqueness, and to a lesser degree, independence from other social dimensions of each culture were assumed a priori. This conception of culture, in fact, came into existence when European nations contended for dominance or for separate identities and independence and "[t]he notion of separate and integral cultures responded to this political project" (Wolf 1982:387). The vestiges of this conceptualization of culture in the specific European political environment were carried over to anthropology. In order to overcome this problem and to reflect the social reality of "historically changing, imperfectly bounded,

multiple and branching social alignments," Wolf (1982:387) suggests us to replace "the concept of a fixed, unitary, and bounded culture" with "a sense of the fluidity and permeability of cultural sets."

The concepts of cultural sets or cultural forms provide conceptual tools free from the a priori assumptions of the concept of culture in anthropology. If we continue to use culture as an integrated totality, this concept of culture inherently limits the possibility to examine the diverse, contradictory, permeable, and inconsistent elements in culture because the paradigm of the traditional conception of culture will render those elements trivial and meaningless.

In order to avoid the limitation of traditional concepts of culture in anthropology, my dissertation will focus not on culture per se, but certain cultural sets, especially meanings, which can make us possible to approach the fluidity of cultural dynamics. These meanings are not to be considered as the precise and fixed meanings. They may be generated, assembled, ensembled, changed, modified, distorted, and discarded in the process of concrete social interactions (Wolf 1982:385-391). As Moreman (1988:97) mentions, "meaning is situated, not abstract; enacted, not embodied; negotiated, not decoded; consequential, not prior, to use; and not exclusively referential." This understanding of cultural sets is important for analyzing

the process of social reproduction, because this approach makes the dynamics process of cultural sets, in connection to the dynamics of other social dimensions, come into our view.

### Domination and Resistance

The turn toward power in understanding culture, or vice versa, which influences recent anthropologists came from Marxist traditions (e.g. Gramsci 1971; Thompson 1963; Williams 1977), especially for political-economic anthropologists, and from poststructuralism (e.g. Foucault 1978; 1979; 1980), especially for feminist and post-modernist anthropologists. Among them, Gramsci provides the most systemic -- but scattered and often inconsistent -- conceptual tools to approach the complex interlocking relationships between state and civil society, and between power and culture.

Gramsci distinguishes "rule" (dominio) from "hegemony." Rule is a direct political form while hegemony is "a more complex interlocking of political, social and cultural forces" (Williams 1977:108). Thus, the concept of hegemony relates culture to power. For Williams, hegemony is never total nor exclusive and forms of alternative or oppositional politics and culture exist in any society.<sup>1</sup> These

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<sup>1</sup> Foucault also states a similar view. "Where there is a power, there is resistance, and yet, or rather consequently, this resistance is never in a position of exteriority in

oppositional features are also indicative "of what the hegemonic process<sup>2</sup> has in practice had to work to control" (Williams 1977:113). This conceptualization of hegemony emphasizes the various processes producing consent from the dominated. In this sense, the hegemonic process is a good conceptual tool to analyze the process of making consent even in a society where the achieved moral leadership does not exist.

However, the concept of hegemony can overemphasize the possibility of consent<sup>3</sup> because the concept directs our concerns toward the possibility of achieving consent through

---

relation to power" (Foucault 1978:95-96).

<sup>2</sup> While Foucault would put power here instead of "hegemonic process," Bourdieu would put domination. It seems to me that Foucaultian conception of power already incorporates the hegemonic process in it. Thus, Foucault can discuss the hegemonic process without the concept of hegemony. However, because Foucault, in his conceptualization of power, ignores the role of the material conditions in constituting social relations, knowledge, and subjectivity, his conceptual framework is not adequate for understanding social reproduction. (For a concise explanation of the Foucaultian concept of power, see Digeser 1992.) In contrast, Bourdieu tries to connect culture, politics, and class. In his conceptualization of domination, Bourdieu (1977:183-197) argues that cultural forms are inherent elements of the reproduction of domination.

<sup>3</sup> At the time of Gramsci, 97% of the population in Italy was Catholic and even Gramsci's mother considered Gramsci as a poor atheist (Germino 1990). The tremendous impact of Catholicism in Italian social dynamics might have been the major subject which Gramsci wanted to wrestle through the concept of hegemony. Thus, in understanding the concept of hegemony, the peculiarity of the Italian society should be considered. His division between the East and the West does not solve the problem, because the variations among the East or the West also require further explanation.

various cultural mechanisms while the concept directs us possibly to belittle various faces of direct political (or dominating) mechanisms including explicit and implicit, as well as direct and indirect, use of force, coercion, pressure, constraint, and influence. As Abercrombie, Hill and Turner(1980) and Scott(1985; 1990) show, even though the process of manufacturing consent may exist in a society, the real consent may not be successfully produced. Moreover, the dominant classes do not necessarily need consent in ruling or directing a society.

I would argue that while the hegemony of the dominant may exist in certain sections of a society, it may not exist as strongly, or at all, in other sections. Even though hegemony is not necessarily achieved over certain social sections, the research on the hegemonic process will reveal how relations between particular groups are mediated through interlocking social, cultural, and political relationships. However, the attention to both the hegemonic process and direct political process should be balanced in order to avoid the possibility of misdirecting our concerns toward one aspect of social dynamics, and while ignoring the other.

Resistance provides a good window to examine the mechanism of power, which includes the hegemonic process and the direct political process. The dynamics of power become clearer during the acts of containing and defusing resistance through interlocking cultural and political

mechanisms. Resistance not only reveals the complex faces of power, but also alters the faces of power, because the dominant groups must deploy the new or adapted faces of power in order to contain or accommodate new phases of resistance. Thus studies on resistance can analyze the continuous shift of the faces of both power (Abu-Lughod 1990:41), and the resistance manifested both in culture and politics and through their interconnections.

The conceptual framework of domination/resistance, discussed above, directed this researcher to pay close attention to the various political and hegemonic processes not only in civil society but also in relation to state agents during the conflict between poor Blacks and Korean shopkeepers. Previous discussion of the conflict between poor Blacks and Korean shopkeepers ignored this complex political process by focusing on the different communication styles of the two groups (Stewart 1989), by presenting Blacks and Koreans as similar minorities (Chang 1990), or by focusing on the economic dimension of Korean shopkeepers (Light and Bonacich 1988).

#### Conceptual Orders and Social Contests

The web of meanings is a fundamental aspect of human life (Geertz 1973). The web of meanings provides people with "conceptions of the world" (Gramsci 1971), "a sense of the reality" (Williams 1977), or a "symbolic universe"

(Berger 1966) which guides people in how to live and how to interpret the world. As Peter Berger (1966) suggests, the phenomenon of actual reality is too complex to experience meaningfully without some guiding and filtering frameworks. Thus, classificatory systems and/or symbolic categories guide us to organize the myriad reality into a relatively orderly and meaningful reality.

However, these guiding and filtering frameworks should be considered as tools to grasp and organize reality rather than as a framework to arbitrarily structure the representation of reality. That is, frameworks are used in a continuous interaction with the reality and can be transformed, discarded, and replaced with other ones. However, in the process of grasping and organizing reality, the frameworks influence not only our cognition of reality but also our moral order of reality.

Douglas (1966) shows that classificatory systems are not only classifying myriad things and organizing them into an orderly reality but also putting them into a moral framework. Thus, the classification system is an organizing tool for reality and also for morality at the same time. According to her, what does not fit into existing rules or classificatory systems is described by a society as dirty, polluted, or dangerous. By eliminating or punishing the boundary transgression, the reality and rightness of original rules or classificatory systems are restored and

confirmed. While Douglas limits her focus to the boundary crisis, Bourdieu goes further and considers some classificatory systems themselves as a reproductive mechanism of class relations.

According to Bourdieu (1977a; 1977b; 1984; 1991), access to different kinds of cultural capital such as language, attitudes, education, consumption, and lifestyle is determined by one's class position, and differentiations in cultural capital reproduce these social inequalities. That is, cultural capital or symbolic differentiation justifies hierarchical exclusionary practices, and mutes the critique against existing social hierarchy. Classificatory systems of myriad symbolic acts, words, and objects are also the result of the active manipulation of symbols by the upper class. By emphasizing the distinction of the upper class and by the devaluing of the culture of other groups, the differential meanings of various lifestyles justify a social hierarchy (Bourdieu 1984).

But Bourdieu does not clearly explain how existing classificatory orders are internalized or rejected. He also ignores implicit and explicit resistance or disagreement over the classification among different classes (Joppke 1986). In order to explain the social struggle over signs, Volosinov (1986) proposes the concept of multiaccentuality where "differently oriented social interests" intersect. "By and large, it is thanks to this intersecting of accents

that a sign maintains its vitality and dynamism and the capacity for further development. A sign that has been withdrawn from pressures of the social struggle... inevitably loses force..."(Volosinov 1986:23). In other words, because accents in meanings of signs are challenged, contested, and disciplined, accents in meanings are in a state of constant tension. However, "differently oriented social interests" produce tension not only in accents of meanings but also in claims and assertions. This tension may be negotiated through compromise or heightened through antagonistic confrontations among differently oriented social groups.

This logic can also be applied to classificatory orders. Classificatory orders are under "pressures of the social struggle." Because "the creation of conceptual order is also, constitutively, the suppression of aspects of reality" (Valeri 1985:xi, quoted in Wolf 1990:593), power holders should assault or suppress rival categorical claims in order to maintain their conceptual order. That is, classificatory orders that justify an existing social hierarchy can be maintained only when rival conceptual orders or claims can be oppressed. Thus, signs and classificatory systems have to be seen as the sites where disciplinary acts for domination, and resistance toward dominant accents clash.

This conceptual framework for the relationship between

classificatory systems and domination/resistance has very important implications for the understanding of the conflict between poor Black residents and Korean shopkeepers because I found, through my preliminary research, that the hierarchial conceptualizations of racial order and individual virtues are the most important sites of struggles for the both groups. Loewen's The Mississippi Chinese (1971) clearly showed that the conceptualization of racial hierarchy was very important for the dynamics and change of the economic and social relationships among Blacks, Chinese, and Whites in the Mississippi Delta area. However, in studies about the conflict between Black residents and Korean shopkeepers (Chang 1990; I. Kim 1981; Light and Bonacich 1988; Stewart 1989), the role of the hierarchical conceptualizations of racial order and individual virtues was totally ignored.

The conceptual orders of racial hierarchy and individual virtues in certain groups develop within historical and social contexts. The historical and social contexts of the hierarchical conceptions of racial order between Blacks and Whites will be discussed in chapters 2, 6, and 7; I will briefly explain here the concepts of racial order Korean immigrants brought with them from Korea to America. This is important for understanding the context of their present conception of racial order which is one of the major sites of struggle between poor Blacks and Korean

shopkeepers. The present concepts of racial order of Korean shopkeepers in relation to Blacks will be discussed in chapter 6. However, in order to contextualize the political and cultural dimensions of the conflict between Korean shopkeepers and poor Blacks in American society, I will discuss their material conditions in America first. Their political and cultural conditions will be discussed in the subsequent chapters.

#### The Material Conditions of the Existence of Shopkeepers

The following abstract presentation of the social relationships of shopkeepers in this section is an effort to provide a conceptual framework with which I can approach more concrete socio-cultural relationships and dynamics in a definite social and historical moment. Since culture mediates social relationships, especially, the relationships of production and appropriation, the understanding of the relationships of production and appropriation is an important first step for analyzing the implications of various cultural sets or forms. Thus, this section should be understood not as a result of data analysis but as a conceptual construction to help the analysis of the data.

The human species has, "in the course of evolution, acquired the ability to transform nature to human use" (Wolf 1982:74). In the process of production and consumption, human beings organize themselves. In capitalist societies,

most products and even human labor are commodified and put into circulation. Commodities are distributed through wholesalers and retailers which include capitalist distributors such as Wal-Mart or Price Club and small retailers such as "mom and pop" stores. This distribution is for individual consumption through which individual households and individuals reproduce themselves.<sup>4</sup> Because individual and collective consumption reproduces labor power, this process is a critical moment of capitalist reproduction.

Exchanges of commodities for individual consumption are at the core of the economic relationship of shopkeepers. In capitalist societies, these exchanges are a part of the circulation of commodities in the process of realization of surplus value or profit. Their main social relationships can be diagrammed as below.




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<sup>4</sup> Collective consumption such as health care, education, transportation, and housing, often organized and produced by state systems, are also necessary for the reproduction of labor power. For the detailed discussion of individual and collective consumptions and their implication in social reproduction, see Dickinson and Russell (1986).

This diagram is an abstract model for the social relationships of shopkeepers. However, this diagram implies the stratification of the relationships. Those with capital are on top. Shopkeepers are in the middle. They have small capital and also work by themselves. On the bottom, workers, consumers, and shoplifters are located closely. The common character through them is that they all have labor to sell. The diagram also implies that consumers are usually workers and, shoplifters are usually consumers. However, in concrete reality, the social relationships of shopkeepers can vary.

In the U.S., the distribution system of commodities is dominated by capitalists who own department stores, discount stores, supermarket chains, and franchise stores. Many small store owners focus on the area where capitalists have problems in expanding their distribution systems. The areas include labor-intensive small business (labor control problem), businesses with small markets or demands (unprofitable for capitalists), and inner city areas (too high a crime rate for capitalists risk). Many Korean shopkeepers risk the high crime rate and move into inner city areas because of their limited choices and relatively strong resources for small business as a form of "dirty work" and "cheap labor" (Light and Bonacich 1988).

The major everyday interaction of shopkeepers is the interaction with consumers. Through the exchange of money

and commodities with consumers, shopkeepers earn their own profit and pay to wholesalers and landlords. When shopkeepers cannot sell enough for their profit, they simply close their stores. Because of their small amount of capital, the survival rate of small businessmen is low. Nearly half of all new small business ventures fail within five years. In order to avoid failure and to increase profit, small businesses rely on various strategies to secure their profits. They may work long hours themselves, use cheap labor, and exploit consumers.

The urban poor have problems in their reproduction because of their lack of income. During the 1970s and 1980s, the flight of American capital to foreign countries, the internal relocation of capital from the Northeastern area to the South, and the loss of competitiveness of many American industries pushed more people into low-wage service industries in Northeastern cities than before (Rodwin and Sazanami 1989). In the case of New York City, the number of manufacturing jobs dropped 35% during the 1970s alone (Sassen-Koob 1985:302). The reduction of welfare during the Reagan and Bush administration further deteriorated the life of the urban poor (New York Times, Jan. 27, 1991). The problems in everyday reproduction of the lives of the poor increased tension in their family relationships and other social relationships. During the same period, new immigrants to metropolitan areas provided cheap laborers and

kept many urban poor out of employment. Some other immigrants such as Korean immigrants rapidly expanded their small businesses in the inner-city areas during the same period. The transaction between poor Blacks and Korean shopkeepers is not only the place for an economic relationship between the two groups but also the place of the mediation of racial relationship.

### History of Racial Conceptions

Korea has been a country with one ethnic group for over a millennium.<sup>5</sup> Even though the majority of Koreans did not have direct experiences with other ethnic or racial groups before the turn of the century, they were aware of the other nations surrounding the Korean peninsula. They conceptualized those nations in a hierarchical order. The Chinese - from whom Koreans adopted various social and cultural elements - occupied the top of this racial hierarchy. Because Koreans believed themselves to be more civilized than any other nations except the Chinese, they considered Manchurians, Japanese, and other East Asian nations inferior to Koreans. Similarly, Koreans dismissed Whites as yangyi [Western barbarians] until the late 19th

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<sup>5</sup> Because Korea has been an one-nation state for almost two thousand years, they have not developed the concepts such as 'ethnicity.' Because of this situation, there is also no clear definition of race or ethnicity in Korean language. Inchong [race] often connotes not only race but also nation.

century.

But from the mid and late 19th century, Koreans were shocked by the military power of the supposedly inferior yangyi [Western barbarians] and waenom [Japs]. This disturbed the Korean conception of racial hierarchy. Because of Japan's brutal domination and occupation of Korean until 1945, Koreans developed and still maintain a great hostility toward the Japanese. The prestige of the Chinese in the Korean conception of racial order also declined because of the miserable humiliation of China by the Western power during the 19th century.

From the turn of the century, Whites clearly occupied a better position in the Korean conception of racial hierarchy because of their military power and civilization, which was eventually considered superior to the Chinese and Korean civilizations. Koreans also realized that Whites<sup>6</sup> controlled the world with superior economic and political power. Because Koreans who were educated in America have dominated South Korea since 1945, and because the Korean media and education system describe White civilization as superior, Koreans still consider Whites to be the most prestigious race.

The image of Blacks eventually came to occupy the

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<sup>6</sup> Whites include peoples in America and Europe. It does not come into view clearly to Koreans that many Blacks are also living in America and Europe. Because of the close relationship between America and Korea for the last 50 years, Whites are usually represented by American Whites.

bottom in Korean racial conception. Television networks in Korea broadcast American programs almost every week, and American movies dominate the Korean movie market. Certainly, Korean people notice from these programs that the dominant characters are mostly White, and that most Blacks are often depicted as a lower class or as violent criminals.

They also know from television news programs and newspapers that the most powerful people in America and in the world are typically Whites, while famines and "tribal" wars are frequent in Africa. Thus, they perceive Whites as coming from "civilized" countries superior to Korea, and view Blacks as coming from "tribal" or "primitive" African countries inferior to Korea. These images easily translate into a racial hierarchy.

The image of Blacks for Koreans remains vague but negative. Koreans do not cognitively separate the images of Blacks in America and in Africa.<sup>7</sup> The images of Whites in

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<sup>7</sup> Many Korean immigrants expressed that they did not know, when they came to America, that there are so many Blacks in America. Because they were accustomed only to the White image of America, the large size of Black population in America was a surprise for many Korean immigrants. However, because the increasing conflict between Korean shopkeepers and Black Americans are frequently reported in Korea, Koreans in Korea may now clearly aware of the presence of Blacks in America but may have more negative images of Blacks. (Korean newspapers in Korea depicted Black boycotters as "reverse racists" against new Korean immigrants.)

Europe, in America, and in Australia are also mixed.<sup>8</sup> Koreans are not accustomed to the cohabitation of several races or ethnic groups in the same country. Accordingly, Korean immigrants come to America with only a very vague notion of what a multi-ethnic country is. However, they bring from Korea conceptions of a racial hierarchy where Whites are "superior" and "developed" while Blacks are "inferior" and "primitive."

Before large number of Koreans entered poor Black neighborhoods, Blacks had similarly vague ideas about Koreans. First of all, the differences between Koreans, Chinese, and Japanese were and still are not clear to many of them; many Blacks simply consider all of them as Asians. The position of Asians in American racial conceptions yet is not clearly defined in American racial conceptions yet.

A considerable number of Black adults were directly exposed to Korea when they fought there during the Korean Civil War, 1950-1953. Poverty prevails the image of Korea because of the image of Korea during the Korean Civil War and on the T.V. program, "MASH." Even though many Blacks thought Korea of a poor country, they might not have had a clear negative image of Koreans. When Korean immigrants first appeared in Harlem in the late 1970s, some Blacks

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<sup>8</sup> Because of the White image of America (Whiteness also means wealth for many Koreans), the existence of many poor White Americans is also a surprise for many Korean immigrants.

considered Koreans to be a third world people just like Blacks. However, others believed Koreans to be inferior in racial status because Korea was a very poor and undeveloped country.

During the subsequent conflict, both poor Blacks and Korean shopkeepers concertized and reformulated their conceptions of racial order based on their historical beliefs and new experiences about each other in a White dominated American society.

#### Research Concerns and Methods

My research was a process of continual dialogue with myself about the social location of urban shopkeepers. Before I came to the United States to attend a doctoral program at CUNY in 1985, I had some interest in the ambiguous social position of urban petty producers. However, my main concern was the transformation of the labor process and organization and its implications for politics and culture.

When I worked in Korean stores as a part-timer in 1985 and 1986, I also gathered information about Korean shopkeepers. At the time, my question focused on how the Korean shopkeepers managed work processes in their stores, disciplined workers, and manipulated meanings in the relationship with their workers. When I took a course, "Anthropology and Marxism," with Professor Sider in the fall

of 1986, I wrote a paper for the class blending the theoretical constructs about the urban petty bourgeoisie, and my experiences. At the time, I tried to construct a mechanical class model of the urban petty bourgeoisie.

Through Professor Sider's comments and my reflection, I realized that I constructed an ideal model instead of analyzing real experiences and relationships. I also realized that I was not dealing with the urban petty bourgeoisie in general but Korean shopkeepers specifically. I also received comments from other professors for other papers reflecting my changing ideas. My desire to understand the petty bourgeoisie as a class eventually made me choose the example of Korean shopkeepers as my dissertation topic.

I chose their relationships to poor Black consumers as my main research topic in order to understand how two minority groups, not as passersby but as actors, participate in the process of social reproduction. I also expected that this process would clarify how specific class positions and ethnicity can intersect, particularly how class and ethnic conflicts are both organized, expressed, and mediated in the wider social context.

In order to achieve a more balanced understanding about the social relationships of shopkeepers, I also decided to collect some information about the relationship between Korean shopkeepers and White wholesalers. For this purpose,

I will add a short afterword explaining the relationship between them.

I chose Harlem as my main field research area. Harlem serves as a historical base for the conflict between Black residents and Korean shopkeepers. In addition, there was further historical documentation on earlier conflicts between Jewish shopkeepers and Black residents. Data on previous conflicts would help to interpret present conflicts. Furthermore, Harlem has become, for Blacks and others, the symbol of the Black inner city. The conflict between the two groups was not limited to local areas. Through the involvement of city-wide organizations, news media, and various levels of city and state agents, the conflict became a city-wide issue. Thus, I also researched the conflicts in other areas, city-wide organizations, news media, and various state agents. I also collected data from other areas and from city-wide discourse (e.g. newspapers).

My data collection methods were necessarily informal. Before I started my research, I worked in several Korean stores in New York City. For my pilot research, I worked in a clothing store in Harlem for six weeks in late 1988. As an employee, I could observe and actually participate in everyday transactions as a "Korean" salesclerk. Because I was a Korean, the Korean employer was relatively open with me. However, Black customers and I felt a certain distance between us. My Korean background helped me to obtain

information from Korean shopkeepers but was also a barrier to opening dialogue with Black residents.

I used only one formal questionnaire form in my research. With this, I collected data from twenty-eight Korean shopkeepers in the field area regarding their business establishments and relationships with White wholesalers and Black residents. Other information about the conflict between Korean shopkeepers and poor Black residents came mainly from three sources: my informal interviews, conversations with related people, and newspapers. Some other data was collected from radio and television news programs. Information from newspapers was critical to my understanding of Korean and Black organizations, their points of view, and the actions of various politicians. Without the information from newspapers, my description of the relationship between the Blacks and the Korean shopkeepers would have been very limited. As a Korean, I encountered difficulty in gathering the full co-operation of the Black population. Thus the information from newspapers was very critical to my understanding of Black experiences, views, and organizations.

However, I conducted informal interviews, with Black residents on the streets of Harlem and participated in their meetings. I observed Black boycotts and interviewed Black boycotters. My Black research assistant, Sabiyha Prince,

also conducted an interview with the organizer of the Black boycott against Korean shopkeepers in Harlem. I also conducted informal interviews with Korean shopkeepers in Harlem and in other areas. Initially, I had problems interviewing them, because they were reluctant to speak about their business practices and racial problems. Both are very sensitive issues for Korean shopkeepers. However, some of the Korean shopkeepers soon began pouring out information due to the fact that I was Korean. I also participated in the events and observed the meetings of several city-wide Korean organizations on a regular basis during the field research.

My formal fieldwork started June 1989 and finished in May 1990. However, I visited and worked in the field area before my formal fieldwork began, and I also visited the area after my formal fieldwork ended. Materials on the conflict between Jewish shopkeepers and Black residents in Harlem was collected from historical documents and texts.

#### Structure of This Dissertation

This dissertation is divided into four parts. The first part discusses the conceptual frameworks that guide my presentation and analysis of data. The second part deals with relevant historical issues on how Blacks and Koreans came to Harlem. This part also deals with questions regarding the construction of social conditions through

which they confront each other.

Specifically, chapter two in part two will show how the Blacks in New York City have been segregated and concentrated in Harlem, why Blacks could not develop their small businesses, and how the conflict between Black residents and Jewish shopkeepers developed. Chapter three will explain why certain Koreans came to America, and how they concentrated in the small business sector of inner-cities. Chapter three will also explain American immigration policy and its implication for American racial order. Chapter four focuses on how Koreans became shopkeepers, and how the social and family relationships of Koreans were geared toward making money. The information in this part will help us understand the social and historical contexts of the conflict between Korean shopkeepers and Black residents. This understanding will also help us clarify the context of deployed meanings and power contests during the conflict between the Black residents and Korean shopkeepers.

The third part deals with questions about the present conflicts between the two groups. What happened, why and how do Blacks and Koreans feel in everyday interactions, how do Blacks boycott Korean shopkeepers, how do they present their stories and organize their power, how do the White majority and 'White' media understand and present the conflict between the two minority groups, how do state

agents intervene in the conflicts, how do state power and capitalist relationships constitute the playing field of two groups, and how do Koreans try to avoid or diffuse problems with Black residents? Chapters five and six in part three will answer these questions.

Part four is a section for the discussion of the implications of the data presented in the parts two and three. In part four, I will discuss the theoretical implications of the data in the light of the conceptual framework presented in the first section. In this part, the social order, domination, resistance, and the interconnection among meanings, power, and economic relationships will be discussed with more concrete data presented in the parts two and three.

I add an afterword in order to explain the conflicting relationships between Korean shopkeepers and White wholesalers. This is a brief sketch to show the social relationships of Korean shopkeepers with the "higher" group, in terms of racial status and class position. Because this dissertation is imbalanced in the representation of Korean shopkeepers by focusing on only one side of Korean shopkeepers' social relationships, I want to provide a brief sketch of the other side. In the future, this section will be further developed to explain the "contradictory" social position of Korean shopkeepers.

**PART TWO**

**THE HISTORICAL CONSTRUCTION OF SOCIAL CONDITIONS FOR  
THE CONFLICT BETWEEN POOR BLACKS AND KOREAN SHOPKEEPERS**

## CHAPTER TWO

**"WE MEAN BUSINESS": BLACK HARLEM AND ALIEN SHOPKEEPERS**

Folks, I come up North  
 Cause they told me de North was fine.  
 I come up North  
 Cause they told me de North was fine.  
 Been up here six months-  
 I'm about to lose my mind.  
 ....

(from "Evenin' Air Blues" of Langston  
 Hughes, 1942:38)

From Native Land to Jewish-Dominated Harlem

On September 3rd, 1609, Henry Hudson with his ship dispatched by the East India Company of Holland and seeking a western route to 'golden' China, approached an 'unknown' river, later called the Hudson River, in North America. Natives viewed them with astonishment, and finally concluded that "it's nothing less than the wigwam of the great Manitto, or Supreme Being himself, who has evidently come to pay them a visit"(Riker 1904:110). Hudson's discovery of the area stimulated annual dispatches of vessels to 'New Netherland' for further discovery and the fur trade. For this purpose, the Dutch established trading posts. The Dutch eventually brought and built their settlement at the tip of Manhattan in 1623 (Riker 1904:109-118).

The Dutch bought Manhattan island for the sum of 24 dollars of beads and trinkets from the natives in 1626, and

started to call the upper part of the island "Haarlem," after a city name of the Dutch.<sup>1</sup> The first Dutch settlers in Haarlem, Johannes de la Montagne and his family, began living there in 1636. He obtained a grant of the land where he settled from Governor Kieft of New Amsterdam. The Mannhattans and Wickquaskeeks, the native tribes of the region, were not satisfied with this development. They attacked the Dutch settlements and ruined the farms. Gradually, the natives were driven out by the Dutch and the Haarlem land was given to the European settlers (Pierce 1903).

After the British gained control of New Amsterdam in 1664, they changed the city name to New York City. Eventually, one 'a' was deleted from Haarlem. Harlem remained a rural settlement distant from downtown Manhattan until the Civil War.

The economic expansion of the United States after the Civil War attracted massive immigrants from Europe and many of them settled in lower Manhattan. When upper- and middle class Whites such as Germans, Irish, German-Jews, and Italians migrated to Harlem to avoid congested downtown Manhattan,<sup>2</sup> Harlem was transformed into the first suburban

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<sup>1</sup> Haarlem is located on the westside of Amersterdam in the Netherlands.

<sup>2</sup> The population of Manhattan was 124,000 in 1820 and 516,000 in 1850. The number already passed 1,200,000 in 1880 (Scheiner 1965:222). Nearly one million people overcrowded lower Manhattan. While the poor immigrants

residential area of New York City. New railroad lines connected Harlem to downtown Manhattan. In the early 1880s, the residential construction boom rapidly transformed the landscape of East Harlem (Gurock 1979:15).

When the overhead trolley line was extended to Central Harlem in 1895, that area experienced a construction boom and accommodated new settlers from the downtown. New subway lines were constructed during the late 1890s. Lower and middle class Russian-Jews and Italians also migrated to Harlem. Until 1910, about 100,000 Russian-Jews migrated to Harlem and this made Jews the largest ethnic group in Harlem.<sup>3</sup> The construction boom of new houses and apartments rekindled from 1903, and most vacant places in Harlem were built over by 1906. Many Jewish shopkeepers and businessmen also heavily invested in the construction and renovation during the period (Gurock 1979:32-49).

#### Black Business before the Emergency of Black Harlem

Many Blacks in New York City worked as domestics and common laborers before the Civil War. The jobs which were

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overcrowded the area south of 14th Street, the middle and rich classes lived in the area between 14th and 42nd streets (Gurock 1979:5). In order to avoid the congestion and new immigrants, many escaped from downtown Manhattan to Harlem. One man recalled, "It was our way of avoiding contact with such uncouth citizens as might be found downtown..." (Osofsky 1971:26).

<sup>3</sup> Between 1901-1910, 976,000 Jews immigrated to the United States mostly from Russia and 696,000 of them to New York City (Joseph 1914:195).

considered distasteful for Whites were left for Blacks. When a great number of Irish immigrated to New York City during the mid-19th century, there was a serious competition for the menial jobs occupied by Blacks. The Irish, and later other immigrants from Europe gradually replaced Blacks in many menial jobs (Scheiner 1965:45-48). Thus, for example,

By 1850 there were more Irish servants than the entire Negro population of the city, whereas twenty years earlier Negro labor constituted a majority of the servant class. (Scheiner 1965:46)  
According to the Colored Mission in 1879, Negroes were "entirely excluded from the more lucrative branches of employment".... One year later, the Mission reported that "many of the various industries open to the foreigner" were closed "to the native colored man."  
(quoted in Scheiner 1965:53)<sup>4</sup>

In these conditions, Blacks were often hired as strike-breakers and as cheap laborers to reduce the wages of White workers.

A small number of Blacks specialized in certain businesses until the mid-19th century. Businesses in the catering, barbering, and whitewashing fields were known as "Negro Business" before the Civil War and were patronized largely by Whites. After the massive influx of millions of European immigrants after the mid-19th century, European

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<sup>4</sup> However, in terms of absolute number of workers, there was a steady increase in Black workers within New York City. This was the result of the steady increase of the Black population in New York City after the 1890s. While Handlin (1959) stated that there was considerable progress between 1870-1900 for Blacks in New York City, Bloch (1960) concluded that European immigrants replaced Blacks.

immigrants displaced the Black small businessmen from "Negro Business."<sup>5</sup> (Ottley and Weatherby 1967:229)

This process was very tumultuous and the tension between European immigrants and Blacks was very high through the 19th century. Many race riots were directed towards Blacks not only in New York City but also in many other northern cities. In July 1834, the anti-abolitionist riot continued for eight days, and many Blacks and their churches were attacked in lower Manhattan. Because of the strike-breaking role of some Black workers, European immigrant workers often attacked Black strike-breakers (Bernstein 1990:5).<sup>6</sup>

The Draft Riots were the worst race riot. In the middle of the Civil War, the Conscript Act of 1863 caused a wide-spread resentment from working-class immigrants who were the victim of the new law. The resentment was expressed in bloody attacks not only upon the wartime

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<sup>5</sup> Until the 1850s, barber shops, the catering business, the white washing trade, coachmen, and the boot-black business were primary business areas for Blacks. Many hotel dining rooms and restaurants hired Blacks. According to a news article, "[Black employment] has been receding ever since" the 1850s. (Harper's Weekly, Dec. 22, 1900)

<sup>6</sup> Because of the pervasive racism, it would be difficult for Blacks to attack European immigrants or Whites. If they did, they would be severely punished. Racism might also encourage the European (or White) immigrants to attack Blacks without the consequence of severe punishment from the White government.

authority and some established Republicans<sup>7</sup> but also on Blacks and their property. The rioters thought that the main reason for the Act and the war was Blacks. Many Blacks were slain and thousands of them fled town. Amid the confrontations, 105 or more people were killed (Berstein 1990:5). This riot and other riots caused a great loss of Black businesses in New York City and the loss of much White patronage to Black businesses. Eventually, the Blacks and their business were driven into strict segregation (Ottley and Weatherby 1967:229).

The first World War halted immigration from Europe. The expansion of the war economy and the shortage of labor made it easy for Blacks to obtain employment. As a result of the immigration halt and war expansion, the number of New York City Blacks in the manufacturing, mechanical, trade, and transportation fields more than doubled in the decade 1910-1920. The number of Black women in manufacturing and mechanical pursuits increased almost fourfold in the decade (Scheiner 1965:52). This period saw a massive influx of Blacks which dramatically transformed the color of Harlem.

The expansion of Black employment and the massive

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<sup>7</sup> At the time Republican Abraham Lincoln was the President. Local Republican leaders supported Lincoln's war efforts, while Democratic leaders had a more conciliatory attitude toward the seceding South. Republicans were stronger at that time than now in New York City. The state and city governments changed hands often at the time. There was also a very severe economic depression during 1860-61 in New York City.

influx of the Blacks from the South did not necessarily lead to the prosperity for Black businesses. Some Black leaders thought the lack of racial loyalty was one of the reasons. They subsequently urged Blacks to patronize Black owned stores. Fred Moore in 1904 declared that "Jews support Jews; Germans support Germans...and Negroes should begin to support Negroes." Booker T. Washington urged Blacks in New York City in 1914 to patronize Black businesses rather than White businesses, maintaining that economic success was a prerequisite for political and social advancement. Adam Clayton Powell Sr. also stated during the same period that "[a]s long as Negroes talk race loyalty and race rights and then spend their money with White business and professional men" there would be no change in the race problem. Powell also preached about the "double duty" dollar - buying from Black shopkeepers provided more jobs for Black workers (Scheiner 1965:70-71).

One of the successful forms of this nationalism was the Marcus Garvey Movement. Marcus Garvey formed the Universal Negro Improvement Association (UNIA) in 1914 in Jamaica. He arrived in New York in 1916 and established his headquarter in Harlem. He urged support of Black business and organized a chain of groceries, restaurants, laundries, and factories. He stressed African pride and history for Blacks. He called for the redemption of Africa. The movement raised a strong African consciousness among Blacks. However, the movement

was doomed after Marcus Garvey was deported to his native country, Jamaica. But this movement made a great impact upon Black people (Martin 1986).<sup>8</sup>

These appeals became more prevalent after the complete transformation of Harlem into a Black neighborhood and have continued through this century. These appeals were a reaction to the discrimination from the White dominated society. Since White patrons shunned Black stores and patronized the stores opened by new European immigrants after the massive influx of European immigrants during the late 19th century, Black customers were the only hope for Black businessmen.

#### The Transition of Harlem into a Black Neighborhood

In 1741, the Black population was 20% of the inhabitants of New York (Harper's Weekly, Dec. 22, 1900). By 1820, the Black population was the about 9% of the total population in Manhattan. The rate decreased to 2% in 1900 because of the massive immigration from Europe through the previous century.<sup>9</sup> During the 19th century, the main

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<sup>8</sup> "Buy Black" campaigns have frequently reappeared in Harlem. Black Boycotts against Korean shopkeepers often accompany the "Buy Black" campaign. The first boycott against Korean shopkeepers in Harlem was organized by the followers of Marcus Garvey Movement in 1981. Their main theme was "Buy Black."

<sup>9</sup> In 1741, among the ten thousand inhabitants in Manhattan, two thousand were Black slaves. In 1820, there were some 124,000 people and the number of Blacks was about 11,000. In 1860, there were 12,000 Blacks among 805,000 residents.

residential area for Blacks moved northward and remained separated from White residential areas.

The hostility of Whites<sup>10</sup> toward Blacks limited the Black residences to segregated areas.<sup>11</sup> The residential areas for Blacks moved from the present City Hall area to Greenwich Village, the Tenderloin district,<sup>12</sup> and San Huan Hill in the West Sixties. After the draft riots in 1863, many relatively affluent Blacks moved to Brooklyn out of fear of race riots, as well as for better housing. After

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While the total population of Manhattan in 1900 was 1,850,000, the number of Blacks was 36,000. (Harper's Weekly, Dec. 22, 1900; Scheiner 1965:221-222)

<sup>10</sup> The hostility from the Irish immigrants was especially harsh. Antagonism between Blacks and Irish existed since the massive influx of Irish immigrants during the mid-19th century. They competed for jobs and housing. The Irish and other Whites abused and attacked Blacks many times in the 19th century. The Blacks feared and distrusted the immigrants. (Scheiner 1965)

<sup>11</sup> For example, a Black sociologist said that Harlem was in 1927, "a solid Negro community... with as definite lines of demarcation as if cut by a knife." (quoted in Greenberg 1991:15) Residential segregation, to a lesser degree, still continues in New York City (Hacker 1992).

<sup>12</sup> The Tenderloin district did not have a clear boundary, since this name was folk-designated. It referred to the streets of the west Twenties and Thirties streets in mid-Manhattan in the late 1880s. "Captain Reilly, of a Tenderloin police precinct, remarked in 1889 that Negroes had 'taken up every street from Twenty-Fourth to Thirty-Third, between Sixth and Seventh avenues'" (Scheiner 1965:18). Soon the tenderloin extended to Forty-second street. A "New Tenderloin" extended north from 42nd street through the upper Fifties during the 1890s, this area also housed the red-light district (Osofsky 1966:12-14).

the Tenderloin Riot<sup>13</sup> of 1900 and another race riot in San Huan Hill in 1905, many Blacks moved out of the areas to Harlem and later to Bedford-Stuyvesant in Brooklyn (Scheiner 1965:15-24).

After 1900, the Black population in Manhattan rapidly increased in number. By 1910, there were 61,000 Blacks (Scheiner 1965:221). Because of the broken real estate market in 1904-1905 and the vacant spaces, some White landlords in Harlem who had not rented their houses to Blacks began to rent to them. These landlords charged higher rents to Blacks. Other landlords and White residents organized associations to stop Black settlement in their areas. But when Black families settled in an area successfully, many White families sold their houses and moved out. Thus Blacks were segregated and concentrated in certain blocks. However, there was a steady increase of Blacks in Harlem through the early decades of this century (Osofsky 1971:31-37). Around 1910, Blacks became a dominant racial group in the area above 130th Street, between Fifth and Seventh Avenues of Harlem (Gurock 1979:147). In and

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<sup>13</sup> On August 15, 1900, there was a general assault on Blacks in the Tenderloin district primarily by Irish men and the police after one Black killed a policeman on August 12. Many Blacks were brutally beaten by white mobs (Scheiner 1965:121-2). Policemen also beat Blacks rather than protecting them from the attacks. The policemen arrested Blacks instead of White attackers. "As policemen patrolled the Negro blocks they were showered with bricks, bottles and garbage from rooftops and tenement windows. They fired back with revolvers." (Osofsky 1966:48-50)

near the area, some 50,000 Blacks lived in 1914 (Osofsky 1966:105).

However, White landlords and resident associations continued to block the influx of Blacks into Harlem. The founder of the Harlem Property Owners' Improvement Corporation said in 1913, "It is the question of whether the white man will rule Harlem or the negro." He suggested to fight "the common enemy" by organizing the entire community. He also urged that "Whites who lived on streets bordering Negro blocks build twenty-four-foot fences to separate themselves from Negro neighbors" (quoted in Gurock 1979:107). But all of their efforts failed.

During the First World War, Harlem experienced a massive influx of Blacks. Harlem also experienced the physical deterioration of buildings without further investment. Landlords increased rent and families doubled up in the same space (Gurock 1971:139-141).

Soon new subway lines connected Brooklyn, Queens, and the Bronx to Manhattan within reasonable commutation time. Realizing the shortage of adequate housing after the First World War, New York City exempted almost all tax levies until 1932 for housing constructed during the 1920s. The construction boom continued through the 1920s in the outer boroughs as well as, to a lesser degree, in Manhattan. Better housing in the outer boroughs, rapid transit system, and increased income after the First World War sparked the

final mass migration of Whites, especially Jews, from Harlem to the outer boroughs. Jewish population in Harlem which reached 178,000 in 1920 declined to 25,000 in 1930 (Gurock 1971:142-146).<sup>14</sup>

This sudden departure was also a response to the massive migration of Blacks into Harlem during the 1920s. With severe racism, the poor living conditions for Blacks in the South, and the opening of job opportunities in the North for Blacks because of the First World War, massive numbers of poor Black farmers in the South migrated to northern industrial cities. Many Black immigrants also came from the West Indies. Between 1910 and 1930, the Black population in New York City increased from 92,000 to 328,000. In Harlem, 87,000 Blacks arrived between 1920 and 1930. By 1930, 165,000 Blacks, about 72% of Manhattan's Black population, lived in Harlem (Osofsky 1966:128-130). Whites such as Jews and Italians moved out to the Bronx and other outer boroughs. Thus during the 1920s, the predominantly Jewish Harlem became a predominantly Black Harlem.

After the Harlem Renaissance in the 1920s and the Depression, there was little investment in Harlem. With socially and economically discriminated Black residents, Harlem became a ghetto (Smith and Schaffer 1987:59). Because of the deprivation of Harlem and the discriminatory

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<sup>14</sup> The estimate of the Jewish population in Harlem varied from 25,000 to 5,000 in 1930 (Gurock 1971:146).

policies and practices of local governments, police, landlords, and businessmen, there has been continuous tension in Harlem. As a result, Harlem was one of the most active places of Black nationalist groups throughout the mid-20th century (Greenberg 1991; Naison 1984).

#### Alien Shopkeepers and Black Residents

Jewish shopkeepers came to Harlem's Third Avenue commercial district after the Civil War to open store. Because of the increasing number of Jews and others who moved to Harlem, Jewish businesses followed them and expanded through the whole Harlem area. After the migration of White residents to the outer boroughs during the 1910s and 1920s, many Jewish shopkeepers stayed while some others followed them. For example, H.C.F. Koch, who opened a large store in 1890 on 125th Street, reportedly treated Black customers discourteously and sold his store in 1930 rather than continued doing business among Blacks. But most shopkeepers stayed and Jews remained a prominent ethnic group in Harlem business. For example, L.M. Blumstein, a German-Jew, who opened a store in 1896 and opposed Black settlement in Harlem, remained as one of Black Harlem's most successful businessmen (Osofsky 1966:121).

As the Black population increased, there were more possibilities for Black businesses in Harlem. Some Black shopkeepers successfully established their own businesses

and served Black residents in the business areas where Black customers were discouraged by White store-owners. For example, many Blacks experienced subtle discrimination in White-owned restaurants although state laws prohibited discrimination in public places. White-owned funeral parlors also discouraged Black patronage. Black businessmen were successful in these areas. But in the area where Black shopkeepers competed with White shopkeepers for the same Black customers, the result was dismal for Black shopkeepers. In addition suffering the effects of discrimination by White wholesalers, bankers, and landlords, Black shopkeepers were beginners, had a lack of capital and credit, and could not provide a variety of goods, credits, and competitive prices to Black customers. "Buy Black" and "Double Duty Dollar" campaigns were not effective in drawing Black customers to Black stores. "Appeals to race loyalty fell on deaf ears when the offerings of the Negro merchant were inferior to those of this White competitor." (Scheiner 1965:78-80)

After the transformation of Harlem into a Black residential area during the 1920s, most residential and commercial buildings and businesses in the area were owned by Whites, especially Jews. One famous Black poet lamented, "Black Harlem really was in whiteface, economically speaking"(Hughes 1969a:63). In 1930, less than 20% of Harlem's stores were owned by Blacks (Naison 1984:147).

Even though most customers were Blacks, White store-owners usually refused to hire Blacks as salesmen, clerks and cashiers, not to mention managers. They usually employed Whites only. Blacks suffered open discrimination in all types of employment in New York City at the time (Naison 1984; Greenberg 1991). Moreover, the Depression hit Blacks the hardest. The rate of unemployment of potential labor force reached a staggering 66% in Harlem in 1934 (Grant 1986:215).

By the spring of 1931, Blacks organized a "Don't Buy Where You Can't Work" campaign. Ministers, politicians, and newspaper editors appealed to Black residents to follow the same campaign which, in Chicago, had opened up hundreds of jobs to Blacks. Many nationalist groups, the Harlem Business Men's Club, and the Garvey movement preached race loyalty as a first step toward winning control of Harlem's economy. But because of factional divisions in the Garvey movement and vast political differences between the street speakers, church leaders, and businessmen who supported the concept of a boycott, a well-organized boycott was not possible. Nevertheless the boycott, aimed at White stores with White employees, drew broad support from Black residents (Naison 1984:50-51).

Sufi Abdul Hamid, who was active in the Chicago boycott, came to Harlem in 1932. In 1933, he launched a boycott on 135th Street and won jobs for members of his

group, the Negro Industrial and Clerical Alliance. In May 1934, he organized a boycott against Woolworth's 125th Street store after the manager had refused to hire members of his group. These activities stimulated other community leaders to employ the boycott as an important tactic for the campaign (Naison 1984:117).

In June 1934, Rev. John Johnson, Rev. Adam Clayton Powell, Jr., several other leaders, and the editors of the New York Age formed an organization called the Citizens League for Fair Play. They began boycotting Blumstein's, the largest retail store in Harlem, to demand jobs for Blacks. Ira Kemp and Arthur Reid who led the league's "picket committee" were Garveyites who supported the development of Black business and the creation of economically self-sufficient Black communities. Nationalist groups defined the boycott as a struggle of "Negro against White." This boycott became a crusade against racial injustice and drew support from all sections of the community. Blumstein's and other stores finally agreed to hire Blacks (Naison 1984:118).

At the same time, White shopkeepers initiated a legal action to halt the boycott movement. In October 1934, following a meeting between Jewish shopkeepers and the mayor, police arrested the boycott leader, Sufi Hamid, on

charges of "spreading anti-Semitism in Harlem."<sup>15</sup> State Supreme Court Justice Samuel Roseman also granted a shoe company an injunction order against the boycott on the ground that "their activity might stimulate `racial riots and racial reprisals.'" The judge declared that the conflict between the boycotters and the company was solely a "racial dispute." (Naison 1984:121-122) But there had been no centrally organized anti-Semitic movement in Harlem, though propaganda was carried on by groups which channelled the grievances of Blacks. Since the majority of Harlem's rental collectors, shopkeepers, and money lenders were Jewish in Harlem, the Jews became a target of resentment.

In fact, the uneasy economic relationship between Jews and Blacks started earlier. As early as in 1883, the New York Globe, a Black oriented newspaper, stated that Jewish control of the southern money market victimized the Blacks in the region. In 1913, New York Age, a descendant of the Globe, continued that

[The Jew] is a peculiar race, ...parasitical and predatory... preying upon and devouring the substance of others rather than creating and devouring the substance of itself. That is essentially the race characteristic of all parasites, all race fungi. (New York Age, Aug. 21, 1913, quoted by Scheiner 1965:131)

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<sup>15</sup> During Black boycotts in 1990, Korean shopkeepers also raised the question of anti-Koreanism of the boycotters successfully. Korean and White newspapers also emphasized the "reverse racism" of the Black boycotters. State Supreme Justice Held also issued an injunction order to limit a Black boycott against Korean shopkeepers in Brooklyn in May 1990. See chapter 6 for details.

Marcus Garvey also complained about the Jewish control of the Black economic life. However, some other Black leaders urged fellow Blacks to learn from the success of the Jews. For example, Booker T. Washinton wrote in 1907, "Unless the Negro learns more and more to immitate the Jew in these matters, he cannot expect to have any high degree of success" (Washington 1907:183, quoted in Steinberg 1981:88).

The tension between Black residents and White shopkeepers culminated in the explosion of a riot. On March 19, 1935, the riot began with a rumor of the death of a Black boy who stole a five cent knife from Kress' Five and Ten Cent Store which swept through Harlem. The store was a major target for the "Don't Buy Where You Can't Work" campaign and refused to hire Blacks (Naison 1984:140).

In the afternoon of that day, a 16 year-old boy whom the manager of the store suspected as a shoplifter was grabbed by the manager. A policeman took him to the basement of the store to avoid onlooking spectators. One Black woman screamed that "they had taken `the boy to the basement to beat him up.'" (LaGuardia's Commission on the Harlem Riot 1969:7) One witness described the starting moment:

There were just a few policemen. They walked through the store to the back. Then something happened in the back. Some people say a woman screamed. All of the group surged to the back of the store. When I got back there, they were driven forward by the policeman who was in front of them, and one woman particularly

demanded that they produce the manager, and the boy and the policeman told her it was none of her damned business. All of this time I heard no explanation, nothing except among the people themselves indignation grew higher. In the meantime more policemen came into the store and they said, "drive these people out," and became rather rough and pushed the people. (quoted by LaGuardia's Commission 1969:14)

Soon the rumor of the death of the boy spread into the street. The rumor awakened the deep-seated sense of mistreatment, discrimination, dishonesty, exploitation, and denial by the shopkeepers and by society in general. One woman cried out "that the treatment was just like down South where they lynch us" (LaGuardia's Commission 1969:8). The resentment turned a hundred or more spectators into a protest group. The police attempt to disperse the crowd only aroused resentment and swelled the numbers in the crowd. Soon the rumor spread all over Harlem. Several thousand people participated in outbursts here and there. Leaflets were distributed.<sup>16</sup> Windows of hundred of stores

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<sup>16</sup> Below is the content of a leaflet distributed by the "Young Liberators," comprised mainly of young Blacks.

**CHILD BRUTALLY BEATEN!  
WOMAN ATTACKED BY BOSS AND COPS.  
CHILD NEAR DEATH**

One hour ago a 12-year-old Negro boy was brutally beaten by the management of Kress' Five and Ten Cent Store.

The boy is near death, mercilessly beaten because they thought he had stolen a five-cent knife. A Negro woman, who sprang to the defense of the boy, had her arm broken by the thug and was then arrested.

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**WORKERS! NEGRO AND WHITE.  
Protest against this Lynch Attack of  
Innocent Negro People.**

were smashed, and often looting followed. The police dispersed the crowds, but they gathered and destroyed stores again (LaGuardia's Commission 1969:8-12).

In the beginning, the resentment was expressed against White stores. But as the crowd grew, but all other stores also became the target of destruction and looting. Many Blacks also participated in looting "to express their resentment against discrimination in employment and the exclusive rights of property" (LaGuardia's Commission 1969:11-17).

The Communist Party of the United States of America in New York City organized a city-wide campaign against the butcher shops in order to drop the price of meat in June 1935. It soon spread to Harlem and a branch of the CPUSA organized a boycott in Harlem. With help from nationalist and religious groups, Harlem Communists led the march of Black housewives through the streets and demanded that butchers lower their prices by 25%. "Hundreds of aroused Negro women joined the demonstrations, warning butchers of a repetition of March 19 [1933's riot] if they failed to reduce their prices." When butchers agreed to cut prices, housewives tore down old price signs and put up new ones.

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Demand Release of Boy and Woman.  
Demand the immediate arrest of the  
management responsible for this lynch attack.  
Don't Buy at Kress'.  
Stop Police Brutality in Negro Harlem.  
JOIN THE PICKET LINE.  
(quoted from Mayor LaGuardia's... 1969:10)

All but one store reduced the price by 25%. Eventually the prices went up, but they stayed lower than that they had before the march (Naison 1984:149-150).

Prior to becoming Congressman, Adam C. Powell, Jr. also assumed an important role in the "Jobs-for-Negro Movement." In 1938, A. C. Powell, Jr., Rev. William Lloyd Imes, and A. Philip Randolph organized the Greater New York Coordinating Committee for the Employment of Negroes. James W. Ford, Black Vice-Presidential candidate of the Communist Party-USA, Captain A. L. King, the Garveyite Ira Kemp and Arthur Reid, founders of the Harlem Labor Union, also participated in the organization (Clarke 1969:235). The Coordinating Committee organized picket lines at local offices of Consolidated Edison and the New York Telephone Company to force them to hire Blacks (Naison 1984:268).

Other major targets were the stores on 125th Street. Even after several boycotts and riots, the owners of the stores in Harlem had been reluctant to hire Blacks. The Harlem Labor Union, a nominal affiliate to the Coordinating Committee and a nationalist group, organized a new boycott after the Supreme Court decision allowed picketing to protest the exclusion of minority racial groups from employment opportunities in April 1938 (Naison 1984:268). The HLU argued that all jobs should be controlled by Blacks in Harlem. Enough unemployed Blacks joined the picket line to force the shopkeepers to hire the members of the HLU. A

river-to-river picket line appeared on 125th Street. This spectacular event and 'the Don't Buy Where You Can't Work' chanting of the picket lines "struck terror in the hearts of the store owners"(Clarke 1969:235). The shopkeepers hired some HLU members by discharging their own employees, who were members of established unions.

However, in contrast to the HLU, the Coordinating Committee tried to avoid racial antagonism and to protect employees of established labor unions. Thus, the Coordinating Committee organized its own picketlines (Naison 1984:268). The Coordinating Committee negotiated with the White dominated Harlem Chamber of Commerce which, in August 1938, guaranteed that one third of all jobs be given to Blacks. In return, the Coordinating Committee promised to stop the picket line of the HLU (Naison 1984:269).

The HLU continuously drew support from the unemployed and refused to stop its own picket lines. Thus the conflict between the HLU and the Coordinating Committee continued. After a bitter controversy, they agreed that the Coordinating Committee should focus on companies outside Harlem, while the HLU focused on those in Harlem (Naison 1984:269).

In August 1943, a confrontation between a White policeman, a Black woman, and a Black soldier turned the potent tension in Harlem into a riot of even greater intensity. Thousands of people participated in looting and

demonstrations. Mayor LaGuardia reinforced the police force with 6,000 policemen and 1,500 volunteers. The result was six dead, hundreds injured, and hundreds of shops wrecked and looted. While Mayor LaGuardia said, "The hoodlums quickly sized up the situation and took advantage of it to smash windows and attempt to loot," Ralph Ellison, managing editor of Negro Quarterly, said that only white stores were looted and black stores were not touched by the rioters (New York Post, Aug. 2, 1943; Amsterdam News, Aug. 7, 1943).

In January 1948, after a series of pickets on the 125th Street area stores by Blacks, the Uptown Chamber of Commerce, consisting mostly of White businessmen, agreed to a "code of ethics."<sup>17</sup> The Chamber also agreed that non-members of the Chamber would place a pledge to consumers inside stores. The pledge promised: to promote efficient Black employees; to mark prices clearly on all merchandise; to abide by good business standards; to abandon all misrepresentation as to quality and classification in the sale of merchandise; to abide by an employment policy strictly consistent with the provisions of the State Commission Against Discrimination; and to cooperate with the recognized civic and charitable organizations of Harlem to promote the well-being of the community (New York Times,

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<sup>17</sup> Some Korean leaders also tried to establish their own codes of ethics after the Black boycotts against them in 1988 and 1990. However, the efforts did not receive support from ordinary Korean shopkeepers.

Jan. 28, 1948).

In July 1959, there was an agreement between the Labor and Industry Committee of the New York branch of the NAACP and seven Harlem liquor stores, owned by Whites, not to do business with wholesale liquor houses refusing to hire Black salesmen. The Labor and Industry Committee organized tight picket lines against three liquor stores which refused to buy from Black liquor salesmen. Only two customers crossed the picket line during the boycott. This move brought "seven White liquor stores to their knees." The retail stores sent the signed agreement to liquor distributors. The agreement included the passage,

... you are hereby informed that forthwith I will refuse to continue doing business with any wholesaler who will not send as a representative a Negro salesman. This salesman, being a Negro, will reflect the economic interest of the local community on which I depend for a successful operation of my business.

A spokesman for the NAACP declared that they would organize the picket lines against "other business enterprises practicing economic discrimination against Negroes" (Amsterdam News, July 4, 1959).

The riots of 1935 and 1943 were partially successful in changing some attitudes of the White shopkeepers and pushing them to hire Blacks. Some residents said, "White folks respect us more when they find out we mean business.... We got a great many jobs out of that riot that we couldn't get before in our own community...." (Hughes 1969b:218-219). The riot of 1943 also changed the police in Harlem.

"Chocolate and vanilla teams of policemen appeared on uptown streets walking together. Squad cars became integrated.... The riots of 1943 almost ended public police brutality on the streets of Harlem" (Hughes 1969b:219, my emphasis). However, the economic situation of Blacks did not improve much.

The repeated boycotts against shopkeepers in the area showed that Harlem residents were tired of the status quo which persisted with racial discrimination. With the minimal change of the situation, the tension and anger of Harlem residents exploded again in the 1960s when the whole American society experienced a new form of protest, the Civil Rights Movement, which culminated the protest history of Blacks against racism.

#### Riots and Shopkeepers in the 1960s

Even though there were some gains in income in the early 1960s, racism, poverty, and high unemployment continued. In 1964, 48% of Black families were in poverty, while 19% of White families were in poverty (National Urban League 1968:477). Most stores in the area were owned by outsiders. In Central Harlem, 85% of businesses were owned by White shopkeepers. In fact, there had been no progress for Harlem residents during the last half-century. The frustration ran deep. The struggles in various fronts, including racism, housing problems, school problems, and

economic problems, continued with higher intensity.

The New York Times reported, on January 25, 1960, that moderate Black leaders worried that "extremists" agitated Blacks about the rate of improvement. One of those was Malcolm X and his Temples of Islam. In August 1960, more than 8,500 people were attracted to the speech of Elijah Muhammad, the leader of the Temple of Islam. He called for Black unity and said that a White just "kicks you in the mouth instead of helping you" (Amsterdam News, August 6, 1960). The Temple of Islam preached,

a vision of the doom of the white "devils" and the coming dominance of the black man, promised a utopian paradise of a separate territory within the United States for a Negro state, and offered a practical program of building Negro business through hard work, thrift, and racial unity. (National Advisory Commission on Civil Disorders 1968:229)

They emphasized a doctrine of self-help and provided programs for the organization and operation of enterprises by Blacks. They also scoffed at the efforts of the Urban League and the NAACP to seek jobs in the Whiteman's enterprises. One Black writer wrote, "except for their demand for a separate state for Blacks, their enunciated program and statement have achieved general acceptance by a majority of colored Americans.... It is no longer a question of 'social equality' but rather one of 'economic justice'" (Stevens 1969:112). The fierce spokesperson of this perspective was Malcolm X whose thoughts exerted a great influence on the militancy of young Blacks during the 1960s.

He pointed out that,

The American black man should be focusing his every effort toward building his own businesses, and decent homes for himself. As other ethnic groups have done, let the black people, wherever possible, however possible, patronize their own kind, hire their own kind, and start in those ways to build up the black race's ability to do it for itself. That's the only way the American black man is ever going to get respect. One thing the white man never can give the black man is self-respect!

....

In every black ghetto, Jews own the major businesses. Every night the owners of those businesses go home with that black community's money, which helps the ghetto to stay poor. But I doubt that I have ever uttered this absolute truth before an audience without being hotly challenged, and accused by a Jew of anti-Semitism.... I have told them that if I tell the simple truth, it doesn't mean that I am anti-Semitic; it means merely that I am anti-exploitation.

... All Negroes... admit the white man's criminal record. They may not know as many details as I do, but they know the general picture.(Malcom X 1989:275-284)

In Black communities, the tensions as well as the expectation went high when the Civil Rights movement stimulated new hope and militancy to achieve it. They took to the streets in an assault on racial segregation and discrimination. They sought "a final toppling of the walls of segregation and discrimination," asserted Percy E. Sutton (New York Times, Aug. 12, 1963).

One of the continuing tension in ghetto areas was with White shopkeepers as Malcolm X pointed out. Many Black residents shared the belief that they were exploited and abused by local shopkeepers. Caplovitz (1963) showed in his study of consumer problems in Harlem that "the poor pay more." Since the poor did not have enough cash and good

information about merchandise, they were easy victims of fraudulent credit practices of the shopkeepers. The continuous destruction and looting of stores during the riots throughout the country during the 1960s, which Caplovitz referred to as "consumer revolts," gave a greater sense of urgency to the problem. Many studies showed that the prices for durable goods were not only higher in low-income market stores, but the operating costs of those stores were also higher. But the differences in the food prices were not clear (Sturdivant 1969:3-6). The rude attitude toward Black consumers and the indifference to the problems of Black residents were other factors for the resentment of Blacks (Wall Street Journal, Aug. 16, 1966).

The high prices and unfair practices of the shopkeepers in the area were not the only reasons for the resentment and consequent looting. Some Blacks considered looting as "getting back at whitey." One Black resident said,

what whitey don't understand is that America is a damn rich country and she flashes this richness in the brother's face and tells him, 'It ain't for you.' The brother gets out and grabs a bit of it now and then....  
(New York Times, April 8, 1968)

Wide-spread looting occurred during the 1964 and the 1968 riots in Harlem.

In July 16, 1964, during a confrontation between an off-duty policeman and several young Blacks, a boy attacked the policeman with a knife, and the policeman shot and killed the boy. Crowds confronted the police for several

days. Thousands of people shouted at the policemen and the Whites, smashed store windows, and looted stores (New York Times, July 17,19,20, 1964). Shouting, shooting, and triggered burglar alarms, as doors and windows were smashed, made a strident harmony on the streets. The riot ebbed after three days of violence. During the process, Mr. Gray, leader of the Harlem Rent Strike, urged the formation of a revolutionary organization to obtain equal rights for Blacks (Ferretti and Berck, 1986:353).

This call for the revolutionary organization continued through the 1960s in Harlem. One of those groups was the Black Panthers. Max Stanford was a member of the Harlem branch of the Black Panthers. When a rally was organized by the branch of the Student Non-Violent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) in Harlem in August 1966, he spoke in front of 250 cheering people. He proclaimed that Blacks must unite and overthrow their White oppressors. Stokely Carmichael, chairman of SNCC, also called for the unity of African-Americans to take over their own communities (Amsterdam News, Sept. 3, 1966). One of the major goals of the Black Panthers Party was to achieve power to determine the destiny of the Black community. In relation to the economic situation of Blacks, they believed that

the federal government is responsible and obligated to give every man employment or a guaranteed income. We believe that if the white American businessmen will not give full employment, then the means of production should be taken from the businessmen and placed in the community so that the people of the community can

organize and employ all of its people and give a high standard of living.(Black Panther Party 1970:2)

The Wall Street Journal reported on January 13, 1970, that "a clear majority of Blacks support both the goals and methods of the Black Panthers." Especially young Blacks supported them because of "their avowed determination to overturn the American `system,' their refusal to back down under intense police pressure."(Foner 1970:xiii)

The resentment against White America was also shared by other Blacks. Since a great number of the shopkeepers and building owners in ghetto areas were Jewish, the Jew was an easy target. Indeed, "the invective `Jew merchant' was spewed at all White merchants in Watts and even some Black store owners"<sup>18</sup> (Sturdivant 1969:9). James Baldwin, a famous novelist, resented the Jewish shopkeepers because they were a part of the White domination over Blacks. He expressed this sentiment in his article, "Negroes Are Anti-Semitic Because They're Anti-White."

When we were growing up in Harlem our demoralizing series of landlords were Jewish, and we hated them....

...The butcher was a Jew and, yes, we certainly paid more for bad cuts..., and we very often carried insults home, along with the meat.... The merchants along 125th Street were Jewish - at least many of them were... - and I well remember that it was only after the Harlem riot of 1935 that Negroes were allowed to earn a little money in some of the stores where they spent so much.

.... It is bitter to watch the Jewish storekeeper

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<sup>18</sup> Even these days, "Jews" implies some invective meanings for some people. One Black shopper spat out "Japanese Jew" to a Korean shopkeeper, when the Korean shopkeeper refused to refund. See chapter 6.

locking up his store for the night, and going home. Going, with your money in his pocket, to a clean neighborhood, miles from you, which you will not be allowed to enter.

....  
 In the American context, the most ironical about Negro anti-Semitism is that the Negro is really condemning the Jew for having become an American white man....

...  
 He is singled out by Negroes not because he acts differently from other white men, but because he doesn't.... And he is playing in Harlem the role assigned him by Christians long ago: he is doing their dirty work. (Baldwin 1969:3-10)

After several riots, as Blacks continued to believe that there had been no change in the unfair practices of the shopkeepers (Sturdivant 1969:16), White shopkeepers reinforced their stores with steel, cement, alarm systems, or moved out. As one Black manager of a shoe store in central Harlem put it, "They don't want their white faces to be obvious. They're pulling further into the background rather than joining the group." Most shopkeepers claimed the riots were not justified and saw no reason for further involvement in a hostile community (Wall Street Journal, Aug. 16, 1966). Riots induced many shopkeepers to avoid ghetto areas. Thus, after the riots, many commercial buildings went vacant. The fear of looting continued for shopkeepers, and insurance doubled. Many commercial buildings stayed vacant in Harlem until the late 1970s. Even today, vacant stores exist on the busiest street of Harlem.

New Korean immigrants were looking for business

opportunities requiring small capital in the 1970s. They found stores with low rent, and customers who would buy cheap merchandise which these Korean shopkeepers could provide. Thus the Korean immigrants rushed into the inner-city area from the late 1970s.

#### The Influx of Korean Shopkeepers into Harlem

Many Korean immigrants made a small fortune from wig trading during the 1970s. Some brought money from Korea. Others saved their salaries by working at stores owned by other Koreans. Some others worked in factories but became frustrated after repeated lack of promotion due to their broken English, and possibly due to racism. A good number of them were looking for better opportunities in small business enterprises and began small business with small capital from the 1970s. Since a few Koreans already had made a fortune from small business, other Koreans followed them.<sup>19</sup>

They found stores with low rent in Black neighborhoods. Some started green grocery stores in the 1970s. They swept the green grocery business in all areas of New York City through the mid-1980s. Many others opened various stores in the poor neighborhoods and also in many busy commercial strips. One of the first Korean shopkeepers

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<sup>19</sup> See chapter 4 for detailed discussion of capital accumulation of Korean shopkeepers.

to open a store in Central Harlem recalled:

After making a small savings from my wig peddling in Brooklyn and my wife's factory work, I wanted to open my own business. When I came here [125th street] in 1975, I could see a lot of buildings ruined by fire. Many people worried about my safety when I decided to move in to open a store. Whites were afraid of riots and crimes here. But if I had been afraid of crime or anything, I would have not come here. I came to America to succeed, or I would die.... Because the rent was cheap and affordable for me, because I was familiar with Black areas, and because some illegal activities such as drug trafficking generated cash among people here, I thought I could do business here.

...In the beginning, Black customers liked me. They told me that "we are same colored people. I am glad you open a store here. It is nice that I can shop at a colored person's." I knew that Whites had treated Blacks badly....

Soon many Koreans came here to open a small business. Some Koreans were bad and some others good.... The troubles with Blacks increased.... Blacks became suspicious of Koreans. They wondered how Koreans made money....

New Korean immigrants found that it was very difficult to get a decent job because of language problems, cultural differences, and sometimes racism. Even when the number of Korean shopkeepers was small at the time, it was clear to Korean immigrants that a small business produced more income than other decent jobs \. Thus, to run a small business became a dream for most Korean immigrants.

Many Korean immigrants flocked into Black neighborhoods to open a store soon after they accumulated a savings of around \$15,000 - \$50,000 during the two to four years after their immigration. The rent was inexpensive, and moreover Blacks would buy cheap merchandise which new Korean shopkeepers could provide. The Koreans did not have enough

capital to compete with White shopkeepers in White neighborhoods with quality merchandise. Many Korean shopkeepers agreed that it would be difficult to sell cheap merchandise in White neighborhoods. One Korean shopkeeper in Harlem said, "It is easier to deal with Blacks than Whites. Blacks shop impulsively if they have money. They are not bothering with details such as price and quality of goods." Another Korean shopkeeper continued, "We cannot succeed in White areas. White customers will not come to Korean stores. They will go to White stores. It is not only that White merchants can provide quality merchandise; White customers prefer White stores."<sup>20</sup>

One Korean shopkeeper recalled, "One of my friends opened a nice restaurant in a White area. No customers came. Soon he learned of a rumor that fleas and lice were in his food. That was a rumor spread certainly by a White restaurant owner. He lost \$300,000 overnight." It was a general consensus among Koreans that Korean shopkeepers

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<sup>20</sup> Loewen (1971) shows that White shopkeepers who opened business in Black areas were isolated and degraded by other Whites in the Mississippi Delta. Because of it, Whites shopkeepers avoided Black areas. However, the Chinese, because of their ambiguous social status, could open businesses in Black areas and succeeded. Because the status rule in New York city is not quite the same as in the South, I think there is less pressure (but there is certainly pressure) for Whites not to open business in Black areas. Many Korean shopkeepers expressed that White customers look down on Koreans and are very demanding. However, Korean shopkeepers in Black areas expressed that their status is degraded because of the low status of Blacks (see chapter 5 and 7 for more discussion).

cannot succeed in White neighborhoods except in labor-intensive businesses such as green groceries, dry cleaners, and fish markets.<sup>21</sup>

Around 1980, there were already more than twenty Korean stores on 125th Street in Harlem. The stores included wig stores, green grocery stores, fish markets, clothing stores, and variety stores. During 1981-82, Lloyd Williams, president of the Uptown Chamber of Commerce now dominated by Black businessmen, estimated that "Koreans had opened two out of every three new businesses on 125th street" (New York Times, Sept. 11, 1982). The number soon reached fifty around 1985. Sneaker and shoe stores, small restaurants, jewelry stores, and dry cleaners were added. Nail shops were introduced in 1987. The number of Korean stores in 1990 was about sixty-six.<sup>22</sup>

Within fifteen years, the Koreans had taken over more than one-third of the 160 stores on the busiest street in Harlem, 125th Street. "For years, 125th Street was a street

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<sup>21</sup> Because the children of White shopkeepers who owned labor-intensive businesses such as green groceries already had professional jobs or did not like to work hard, the White shopkeepers had to sell the stores to others. Korean immigrants appeared at the right time to take over those businesses. The Korean shopkeepers also destroyed the green grocery business of Whites by providing cheaper and better vegetables. One Korean green grocer recalled, "After I opened my business, nearby White shopkeepers closed their stores one by one. And Koreans took over their business. I put in extra labor to clean vegetables and sell them cheaply. Whites didn't clean enough."

<sup>22</sup> The number fluctuated because some Koreans opened new stores while others closed theirs.

made to be off-limits to Blacks, and property owners [mostly Jews and Italians] have not rented to Blacks," said Lloyd Williams. "Now they see Asian merchants where Blacks couldn't get in" (Village Voice, July 12, 1988).

One Black shopkeeper in the area responded to the influx of Korean shopkeepers:

Some feel that their anger could easily explode and then Koreans could be their targets, for they are seen by disadvantaged Afro-Americans to be foreign exploiters who don't live there, don't employ people from the neighborhood, take from the community and give nothing in return. The riots and boycotts in Harlem were the visceral reaction of people no longer able to suppress their anger and frustration. (quoted by Village Voice, July 12, 1988)

A boycott toward Korean shopkeepers began as early as 1981.

The complaints and boycotts among Blacks toward Korean shopkeepers continued not only in New York City but also in Chicago, Washington, Philadelphia, Atlanta, and Los Angeles. Black rap songs (Ice Cube's "Black Korea"), Black movies ("Boyz N the Hood" and "Do the Right Thing"), White movies ("Falling Down"), and Korean movies ("Western Avenue") deal with Korean shopkeepers and their conflict with Blacks. This increasing attention within popular culture to the conflict between Black residents and Korean shopkeepers show that the presence of Korean immigrants in Black neighborhoods is an important issue in current times.

### Conclusion

Blacks, who were discriminated and segregated because of White racism, demanded jobs and fair treatment from White businessmen when they dominated Harlem. Since the law and the politicians were on the side of the White shopkeepers, boycotts became a prevalent tactic beginning in the 1930s and drew support from various segments of the residents. High unemployment, deteriorating housing conditions, police brutality, and racism also contributed to sporadic riots and uprisings, depending on different perspectives.

In comparison with White race riots which took many Black lives during the 19th century, the Black riots were mainly directed toward property rather than people. Some scholars described the Black riots as "commodity riots" (Graham and Gurr 1969:397) or "consumer revolts" (Sturdivant 1969:3). But these riots were not about commodities. These were against White domination and discrimination over Blacks. The Black rioters could not attack White people due to the complex White domination.<sup>23</sup> Therefore, authority

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<sup>23</sup> This was clear during the LA riots in April 1992. White areas were well protected during the riots while Korean areas were abandoned by the police. Half of all property damage during the riot, about \$400,000,000 damage, and 60% of all burned stores (about 2,400), were owned by Korean shopkeepers in the area of the riots and in nearby Koreatown (Korea Times of New York, May 11, 1992). While Whites killed Blacks during the race riots in the 19th century, Blacks do not kill Whites during their riots in the 20th century. This reflects the fact that while the Whites who killed Blacks in the 19th century were seldom severely prosecuted or not prosecuted at all. Blacks who kill Whites would get very severe sentences through the "Justice" system. Thus, there is more protection for Whites.

and property became the main targets of riots in Black areas, as the local symbols of White domination (National Advisory Commission on Civil Disorders 1968:6). Policemen, storeowners, and landlords were those with whom the ghetto residents had direct contact. Many Black residents experienced White domination and racial prejudice through their everyday contacts with them.

The Black residents received daily humiliation and insults in their contacts with policemen, storeowners, and landlords. As Baldwin (1969) put it, the Black residents "very often carried insults home" from policemen and storeowners. The humiliation ran deep when they were totally excluded. As shown earlier, "what whitey don't understand is that America is a damn rich country and she flashes this richness in the brother's face and tells him, 'It ain't for you'" (New York Times, April 8, 1968).

The frustration came through exclusion not only from wealth but also from power and culture. Despite the spectrum of different orientations, expressed from the Garveyites to the Black Panther Party, these movements all maintained that economic autonomy is closely related to political and cultural autonomy. From the "Buy Black" movement to the "Black Power" movement, Blacks of inner-city areas had hopes at the beginning, that never really brought the desired changes.

Since many Harlem shopkeepers were Jewish, the boycotts

in the 1930s had some anti-Semitic undertones repeated by many Black nationalist leaders in the 1960s. Many nationalist leaders were accused of being anti-Semitic and anti-White. Many Black leaders were harassed and arrested by local, state, and federal governments. Many of them were put in jail. While they were described as criminals in the "White" society, they commanded sizable support from the Black community.

When Korean shopkeepers became a large group of storeowners on 125th Street in the early 1980s, the conflict between Black residents and Korean shopkeepers started. The Black residents carried home insults and humiliation again. The Korean shopkeepers took money out of Harlem. Yet despite these similarities with the conflict between the Black residents and Jewish shopkeepers, the situation is different in several aspects.

First of all, New York's City Hall was in the hands of a Black mayor in 1990. The main shopkeepers changed from Jews to Koreans, whose population in New York City is very small and thus whose political influence at the City Hall is very limited. Black people experienced the Civil Rights Movement and its achievement and frustration through the last half-century. While many professional and middle-class Blacks left for other areas, Black residents in Harlem became poorer during the 1970s and 1980s. New York State welfare grant declined through the last two decades. While

the welfare grant paid 110% of the federal poverty line in 1975, they paid 66.7% of the poverty line in the late 1980s (New York City Interfaith Hunger Policy Task Force 1989:4). In 1989, the poverty rate was 43.6% and per capita income was about \$ 6,737 for Blacks in a Harlem census tract<sup>24</sup> which included various Korean stores and also boycotted Korean stores (1990 Census of Population and Housing Summary Tape File 3A, New York County, Tract 213.01).

The process of the conflict between Blacks and Korean shopkeepers will be discussed in detail in chapters five and six. Before discussing the conflict between Korean shopkeepers and Blacks in Harlem and Brooklyn, I will discuss the immigration of Koreans to America and the emergence of Korean shopkeepers in New York City in the following two chapters. These chapters will help us to understand how the Koreans are put into contact with poor Blacks in certain situations. By understanding the process by which social conditions for Korean shopkeepers are constituted, we can understand better the constraints and environments which limit and guide the activities of Korean shopkeepers.

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<sup>24</sup> There were 3,503 Blacks, 157 Whites, 18 Asians, 47 native Americans, and 277 others living in the area. (1990 Census of Population and Housing Summary Tape File 3A, New York County, Tract 213.01)

## CHAPTER THREE

**"TO A DREAM COUNTRY": KOREAN IMMIGRATION TO  
THE UNITED STATES AND NEW YORK CITY**

After my firm went bankrupt in 1980, I was deeply frustrated. I decided to leave Korea and came to America alone in 1981. After I converted to Christianity, I always prayed for my family. I missed my family very much. I swept away tears often. I worked for a friend of mine in Philadelphia, but soon moved to New York City and found a job at a fish market. Tears came down all day long when I started to clean fish on the first day. I thought, "I was the owner of a small company in Korea but now I am just cleaning fish...." I regretted my past again and again.... Anyhow, my family was able to come to America nine months later. (a Korean fish market owner)

When I arrived here, my husband was a fish cleaner. What a smell and work! I could not stop crying.... Soon, I started to work with him at the same fish market. Whenever I heard the sound of an airplane, tears fell down. I really wanted to fly back to my country.... I had thought that America was a really rich and White country. But all that I could see were dirty streets and poor Blacks. I could not believe it. I asked my husband many times, "Is this really America?" (his wife)

The America-Korea Connection and the Early Immigration

Beginning in the 16th century, European countries have sailed eastward to contact Asian countries for trade and colonialization. In the early 19th century, Britain, France, Russia, and the United States finally arrived near the Korean peninsula and displayed their interest in trade and colonialization. The Korean government rejected Western demands for trade and closed her doors out of fear for

similar disasters which China had endured after her clashes with the Western powers in the early and mid-19th century (Lee 1984:262-266).

The United States as well as the European powers intruded many times into the Korean peninsula with force in the mid 19th century (Chay 1990). Finally, Japan was successful in forcing Korea to open her doors in 1876. Soon after, Korea and the United States of America signed the Treaty of Amity and Commerce in 1882. Britain, Russia, Germany and France followed the United States. The Korean peninsula soon became the battlefield of China, Japan, and Russia for control of this strategic location in East Asia. Here, Japan fought China in 1894, and Russia in 1904. Japan won both wars.

The Sino-Japanese War in 1894 uprooted a large number of Korean peasants, and many of them moved to major port cities in hope of finding employment (Yun 1977:34-35). When a long drought struck Korea in 1901, the Hawaiian Sugar Planters' Association explored the prospect of employing Koreans as farm laborers. They wanted to replace the militant Japanese who demanded higher wages and better working conditions. They tried to import European laborers, but Europeans were not willing to work for low wages<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Even Europeans received better wages, better housing, and one acre of land, and they were not willing to work under such poor conditions. They could get better wages on the continent. Asians came to work in Hawaii for less wages (Europeans got \$18-20 a month while Asians got \$15), worse

(Patterson 1977). After the annexation of Hawaii to the United States in 1898, contract labor<sup>2</sup> became illegal and laborers were legally free to find better employment. Many of them left for the continental United States where they could often get twice the pay (Patterson 1988:13). The Association contacted the minister of the United States legation in Korea. The minister asked the Korean government to permit Korean migration to Hawaii. The Korean government, who feared famine after the severe drought of 1901, allowed the emigration (Yun 1977).

In December 1902, the first group of Koreans, 121 emigrants, left Inchon for Hawaii, and during the next three years a total of 7,226 Koreans left Korea for Hawaii (Yun 1977:33). Most immigrants came from the port cities of Korea where they had engaged in manual labor.<sup>3</sup> Most of

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housing, and no land (Patterson 1977:17-18).

<sup>2</sup> This contract labor was similar to indentured labor. The contract specified the wage and the duration of labor in the plantations for the imported laborers. It was illegal to violate the contract for farm laborers. Since the contract was a result of a very unequal relationship between the planters and the poor peasants or laborers in Asian countries, imported laborers worked under abysmal working conditions without freedom to leave the farm until the expiration of the contract. Many farm laborers lived with very low wages, harsh supervision, and poor housing. Remember that Africans and Europeans were imported as indentured laborers to the American South during the 17th century.

<sup>3</sup> "Chinese and Japanese immigrants to Hawaii were mostly peasants, but only one-seventh of the Korean immigrants were peasants, the others were common laborers, coolies, low-grade government officials, ex-soldiers, students, house servants, mine workers, and political refugees." (Yun, Yo-

them were Protestants who had converted through the influence of American missionary activities after 1882. "American missionaries had encouraged and persuaded Korean Christians to depart from their homeland, which was deeply imbued with the Confucian culture of ancestor worship" (I. Kim 1981:23).<sup>4</sup> One Korean immigrant to Hawaii stated,

the great and good missionary... appeared in Korea and began telling the wonderful story of the Cross... Eagerly he asked of its power and a sample of its results. The one was told him by the missionaries, the other was pointed out to him in the advanced life of the United States. Soon the United States was the hope of Korea, for was it not there that the wondrous Cross had brought beneficent results? Was it not worth the while of any timid, downtrodden Korean laborer to make the attempt to reaching this haven of peace and plenty? As the Korean embraced Christianity he began to look for a place where it might be lived in peace. (T. Yi 1932:47, quoted by H. Kim 1977b:49)

The immigrants worked in plantations as farm workers. This immigration was soon stopped by the influence of the Japanese government which sought to protect Japanese plantation workers and to limit the anti-Japanese activities by Koreans in Hawaii in 1905 (Patterson 1988).<sup>5</sup> Before the

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jun 1977:35)

<sup>4</sup> The number of Christian converts in Korea increased very rapidly through the 1890s and the 1900s and the number reached almost 200,000 by 1910 (Paik 1970). Since Christianity was considered heresy at the time, the Christians were easily ostracized by other Koreans. The Christian converts were labeled as "foreign Koreans" (Kang 1987:10).

<sup>5</sup> "In 1902, there were 31,029 Japanese immigrants working on sugar cane farms in Hawaii, 73.5 percent of the total 42,242 sugar cane workers on the Islands... With an increasing number of Korean workers on the farms, Japanese workers

farm work immigration, there were some Koreans who stayed in the United States to study or to do business, but the number was less than fifty by 1902 (Choi 1979). Some 500 political refugees, who opposed Japanese rule over Korea, were allowed to enter the United States by 1924 (Mangiafico 1988:79). Because the farm workers were mostly bachelors, they sent photos to obtain brides from Korea.

The National Origins Act enacted in 1924, banned the immigration of all Asians.<sup>6</sup> Because of this Act, the

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pressed their government to influence the Korean government to suspend Korean immigration to Hawaii." (Yun 1977:39-40)

<sup>6</sup> Until 1875, there were no immigration laws in the United States. It meant that anyone who wanted to immigrate to the United States could immigrate freely. The American government gave up this Open-Door Policy gradually. Congress introduced laws for immigration restriction in 1875, 1882, 1885, and 1888, the restriction culminated with the National Origins Act of 1924.

In the 1870s and 1880s, convicts, prostitutes, persons likely to become public charges, Chinese, and contract laborers were prohibited. In terms of ethnic groups, the Chinese were singled out, because of the imagined threat of a mass influx of Chinese, the fear of competition in labor market, and the racism of White Americans. After the shift of the European immigration from northwestern Europe to southeastern Europe during the 1890s, the earlier European immigrants were alarmed at the possible challenge to their racial and cultural domination. The farmers and industrial workers feared the possible threat to their economic safety from new immigrants.

The Quota Act of 1921 restricted "the immigration of any nationality to 3 percent of those residing in the United States according to the 1910 census of the foreign-born population" (Kung 1962:81). The National Origins Act of 1924 limited the annual quota to 2% of the population of each nationality of the 1890 census. Congress prohibited the immigration of many Asians by the Immigration Act of 1917 which imposed the barred zone, "natives of which were declared inadmissible to the United States" (Kung 1962:292). While the Act of 1924 imposed quotas for Europeans, the Act prohibited the immigration of all Asians. All Asians were

immigration from Korea became almost impossible after 1924. Until 1945, it is thought that there were less than 10,000 Koreans in the United States (Yu 1986:14). The real influx of Korean immigrants to the United States started after the introduction of a new immigration law in 1965.

#### The Immigration Act of 1965

The introduction of a new immigration law in 1965, which changed the National Origins Act of 1924, made a major influx of Korean immigrants to the United States possible. The Act of 1924, which prohibited the immigration from Asia and thus from Korea, was "designed in the 1920s to perpetuate the cultural and political dominance of northern and western European stocks and which had been reaffirmed during the Eisenhower administration by the Immigration and Nationality Act<sup>7</sup> of 1952" (I. Kim 1981:27).

The new immigration act, which was formulated during the strong Civil Rights Movement of the 1960s, presented more liberal openings to the non-Whites. Skill and kinship became two major criteria to select immigrants to the United States. In other words, immigration now was allowed for

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ineligible for citizenship. (Kung 1962:80-82)

<sup>7</sup>. This Act reduced the annual immigration quota of any nationality to 0.166% of the number of that nationality residing in the United States in 1920. While the annual quota for northwestern Europe was 125,000, the quota for southeastern Europe was 26,000 between 1949-1958 (Kung 1962:292).

family reunions or for occupations where employers could not find American applicants (I. Kim 1981:26-28). Under the new law, each country was assigned with a maximum quota of 20,000, and the ceiling for the Eastern and Western Hemispheres was respectively limited to 325,000 each. The children, parents, and spouses of American citizens were exempted from the quota (I. Kim 1981:26-28).

Even before the new immigration act, a considerable number of Korean immigrants had entered the United States as wives of American citizens. They were called "war brides" because they were usually Korean wives of American soldiers who were stationed in Korea after the defeat of Japan in 1945, and also after the Korean war. The total number of these was 6,400 by 1964. Another major group immigrating to the United States were orphans adopted by American families. The total number of them was 5,300 by 1964. Some students, who came to the United States to study, also stayed after their graduation. The total number of immigrants from Korea to the United States from 1950-64 was only about 15,000 (United States Immigration and Naturalization Service, Annual Reports, 1950-1964).

After the passage of the new immigration law in 1965, Korean immigration to the United States dramatically increased through family reunions and professional job applications. Under the new law, some professionals such as nurses, physicians, and dentists could immigrate to the

United States without a pre-secured job certificate. The shortage of medical professionals, especially in large cities, made the liberal openings to the immigration of medical professionals possible. It is estimated that at least 13,000 Korean medical professionals immigrated to the United States by 1977 (I. Kim 1981:148). Other skilled laborers as well as medical professionals found their jobs in large cities such as Los Angeles, New York, and Chicago. These cities became the nuclei for the expansion of Korean communities. When the American job market declined during the late 1970s, and the ever-increasing number of Korean Americans could invite more Korean relatives from Korea, immigrants for professional skills declined while immigrants for kinship reunion reached 92% of all Korean immigrants in 1981 (Light and Bonacich 1988:145).

The code of family reunion made the chain migration possible for Korean immigrants. If one migrated to the United States, then he/she could bring their family members. The family members would bring their brides or bridegrooms and again, the spouses would bring their own family members from Korea. Thus, there was an endless chain reaction effect upon migration. The quota, 20,000 per year, assigned to Korea was always exhausted. Many others such as Korean wives and children of U.S. soldiers could immigrate as non-quota immigrants. The annual number of Korean immigrants to the United States steadily increased from 3,100 in 1966 to

33,000 in 1976. Since 1977, it remains around 29,000-35,000 per year (The United States Immigration and Naturalization Service, Annual Reports, 1965-1989).

This change of Korean immigration made the rapid growth of the Korean community possible. The "estimated" Korean population in America was 113,000 in 1970 (Yu 1977). This soon increased to 460,000 in 1980 (Koo and Yu 1981:4), and to more than 1,000,000 now.<sup>8</sup>

#### Korean-American Population in the United States

Year	1910	1930	1950*	1960*	1970	1980	1990
Number	4,994	8,321	8,176	14,331	70,598	354,329	799,000

\* American-born Koreans were not included; complete data not available.

\*\* These numbers are different from the 'estimated' number of Korean population (see footnote 8).

Source: U. S. Bureau of Census

Census of the Population (1910-1980).

Summary Report of 1990 Census (1990).

#### Who Immigrated to the United States and Why?

During the 1900s, the majority of Korean immigrants were poor urban "Christians" (Yun 1977). They had been poor laborers or low-level public officials. Because of their

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<sup>8</sup> The population of 1,000,000 includes not only Korean immigrants but also students, businessmen, visitors, and illegal residents who do not have permanent resident status nor American citizenship. The number is unclear since there is no precise mechanism for counting them. To count the number of illegal Koreans living in the United States is impossible. Census reports usually underestimate the Korean population in the United States. Because of English difficulty and other problems, many Koreans did not answer the census questionnaire.

religion, they were estranged from other Koreans and many of them also experienced economic hardship. With encouragement from American missionaries, thousands of them immigrated to Hawaii. But religion was not a significant factor after 1945 in Korea. The first president of Korea was a Christian, and Christianity became one of the most powerful religions during the last several decades in Korea. There has been a great tolerance of religion in Korea and religion was gradually considered to be an individual question rather than a public or political question after 1945. However, Christianity is the primary religion of migrants to the U. S., and christianity remains the dominant religion among Korean immigrants. While about a quarter of the total population are Christians in Korea, about 80% of all Korean immigrants are Christians in the United States.<sup>9</sup>

After the liberalization of the immigration process in 1965, the majority of Korean immigrants were well-educated and from the urban middle-class. The 1980 census report shows that 52% of Korean-American males over 25 years old and 22% of Korean-American females over 25 years old graduated from four-year colleges. Compared to 22% for American White males and 14% for White females, the rate of college graduation of Koreans in America is very high (Census of Population, Bureau of Census, 1980). In fact,

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<sup>9</sup> This is also in great contrast to the situation of Koreans in Japan. The majority of Koreans in Japan are Buddhists. Buddhism is the most popular religion in Japan.

the Koreans are the best-educated ethnic group in the United States. A nationwide mail survey of Koreans in 1979 found that 66.5% of the respondents had received a college education (Chung Ang Daily News of L.A., 1979, quoted by Koo and Yu 1981:8).

The Korean immigrants came from urban-middle class backgrounds which includes white collar workers, public officials, doctors, nurses, pharmacists, small and medium-size businessmen, and students. In 1973, 65% of Korean immigrants were from professional or managerial backgrounds (Yu 1982:51). However, the number of Korean immigrants from a professional or managerial background gradually declines, and the number of Korean immigrants for family reunion is increasing (I. Kim 1981:31).

In my research area in Central Harlem, 19 in a sample of 28 Korean shopkeepers<sup>10</sup> answered to my formal questionnaire that they had graduated from a four-year college. Six others had completed at least high school. Only two were limited to primary or junior high school educations, and one did not answer. Among the 28 shopkeepers, six had had their own small businesses in Korea, nine had been white collar workers, two had been

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<sup>10</sup> My formal questionnaires were addressed only to shopkeepers. However, my conversation with Korean workers revealed that less than half of Korean workers were college graduates (excluding family members). Thus, Korean shopkeepers had relatively higher education than Korean workers. Korean workers were also younger than Korean shopkeepers.

teachers, two had been laborers, one had been a public official, one had been a pharmacist, and three had not had jobs because they were too young then. Three had been students who came to the United States to study. Two of the wives of them immigrated as nurses.

If they had middle-class status in Korea, why did they give up their middle-class life and immigrate to America? The most important reason cited for immigration by Koreans has been an economic one (Light and Bonacich 1988:121). Koreans heard only the good sides of the American economic situations. The American dollar was very valuable and strong against the Korean won. The individual annual income of American people was at least ten times than that of Korean people up till the early 1980s. Thus a one month salary in America was nearly as a one year income in Korea during the 1970s.<sup>11</sup> This huge discrepancy between incomes served as the tremendous magnet attracting Korean people to America. Because of the high income in America, many relatives of Korean Americans and professionals in Korea aspired to immigrate to the United States to enjoy a more

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<sup>11</sup> As of 1993, average income in the U. S. is only about three times that of Korea. Thus, Korean white collar workers in Korea are reluctant to immigrate to America these days. Nowadays the immigration to America is not as popular among Koreans in Korea anymore. Many Korean immigrants lamented that if they had stayed in Korea their situation might have been better. One Korean American who visited Seoul, Korea, said with jealousy, "they [Koreans in Korea] are living better than us [Korean-Americans]." That phrase is not exactly true but expresses the feelings of many Korean Americans.

comforable life. Other Koreans envied the ability to immigrate to America. It was a popular idea in Korea up till the early 1980s that every one in the United States is rich. They did not know that a considerable part of the American population is also poor.

One of my interviewees, who illegally immigrated to America in 1981, thought that he could "pick up money in America:"

Before I came to America, I had thought I could pick up as much money as I wanted in America. Thus I decided to immigrate to America to pick up money after my business failure in Korea. In fact, I could pick up money on a beach when I immigrated to Los Angeles. I picked up a great number of empty cans on a beach and exchanged them a cent per can. I painted during weekdays and picked up cans during weekends.

Another immigrant put it this way:

I was a salesman without a college education in Korea. But you know, I didn't like to live poor all my life. I could only live from hand to mouth with my salary. If your parents are poor and you don't have a college education, you will be poor all your life in Korea. Since I could immigrate to America for family reunion, I decided to make an adventure. Here, I can earn more than educated people.

However, economic reasons were not the only reasons. Since the strong economic, political, and cultural influences of the United States on Korea have continued ever since the time, when South Korea was under the U.S. military regime for three years after the defeat of Japan in 1945, Korean people have related to many aspects of American society. Many Koreans admired not only the comfortable life

of Americans, but also the cultural and educational advances, as well as political stability of the United States.<sup>12</sup>

Due to the oppressive regimes in Korea during the 1970s and the early 1980s, and the severe tension between North Korea and South Korea during the late 1970s, many Koreans who feared possible political instability in Korea also immigrated to the United States. For North Korean Christians who fled from communist North Korea during the Korean War, America seemed an especially safe and attractive place. It was easier for them to leave South Korea than others since they did not have strong kinship ties in South Korea. They were feared being the first victims in the event that North Korea invaded South Korea.<sup>13</sup> They have a strong influence in the Korean community in New York City (I. Kim 1981:35). One of my interviewees said:

My father was a small landlord and a Christian in North Korea. After the establishment of the Communist regime by Kim Il Sung, they confiscated his land. My family was classified as reactionary. The commies bothered us everyday. We couldn't find any hope for life in North Korea. My family escaped to South Korea before 6.25 (the Korean War)... My brother came eventually to

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<sup>12</sup> However, an increasing number of Koreans, especially students, became more critical of American support for the military government in Korea after 1980.

<sup>13</sup> Tension between South Korea and North Korea was high, especially in the late 1970s. When an American captain was killed by North Korean soldiers near Panmunjum in 1975, the tension was so high that many Koreans believed that the war would start soon. Both Korean governments tended to exaggerate the possibility of war in order to oppress internal dissent.

America and established his business. All other family members followed him....

The authoritarian regime in South Korea also made some intellectuals and professionals emigrate to the United States. One ex-professor told me that he could feel the pressure after he criticized the government. Thus he decided to leave Korea and drove a taxi in Manhattan for several years. Even though many others did not feel severe fear or pressure, they aspired to possess the political freedom that the citizens of the United States enjoyed.

The United States has also been an attractive place for education for many Koreans. Education has been admired for centuries in Korea. The discrepancy of earnings and privilege between high school graduates and college graduates is very large in Korea. Degrees from good universities in the United States have been a great privilege for Koreans. Koreans also knew that the American-educated high bureaucrats, business leaders and professors assumed the leading role in their respective areas. Many parents stated that they emigrated for the education of their children. Many students who came to study in America during the 1960s and the 1970s also stayed in the United States after their graduation because they could find better jobs in America, and they had already become accustomed to American culture.

Many professionals, who could not find good jobs in

Korea, also wanted to immigrate to America.

By the 1970s South Korea had a population whose educational level was exceptionally high relative to the economic development of the country. Un- and underemployment was common among college graduates. In particular, Korea had difficulty absorbing the rapidly expanding numbers of health professionals produced in her own schools and hospitals. (Light and Bonacich 1988:111)

Thus the first block of immigrants who came to the United States as professionals were these medical professionals for whom demand was high during the late 1960s and the early 1970s (I. Kim 1981:chap.5).

However, most Korean immigrants usually followed the chain of connections which Korean immigrants could find. If they had some personal connections in the United States, it would be easier for them to come to the United States. Thus connections to American personnel stationed in Korea, "war brides," and previously immigrated Koreans were important for the actual chain migration. During the 1950s and 1960s, Korean brides of American soldiers and those who were working for American forces stationed in Korea were the majority of Korean immigrants. After the change of the immigration law in 1965, relatives of the "war brides" and many other Korean-Americans could easily immigrate to the United States for family reunions. The relatives of Korean-Americans became an ever-increasing majority of new Korean immigrants. These kinship chains also helped new Korean immigrants to open and manage their small businesses.

Then, why did urban middle-class Koreans immigrate to

the United States? First of all, the new immigration law simplified the immigration of professionals, whom the United States needed, by giving them more opportunities. The American consul in Seoul could select immigrants by giving visas selectively. Well-educated urban middle class Koreans also had better connections and information about America. Because Koreans studied English from 7th grade until college graduation, the educated middle class commanded some English. Through education and news about America, and the influence of American society upon Korea, they were accustomed to some American culture.

However, as one Korean immigrant put it, "now some less educated Koreans are allowed into the United States through family reunions. But 15 years ago, only higher-educated and professional people were allowed to immigrate." The majority of present Korean immigrants come for family reunion and are less educated than before.

#### Urban Settlements

As with other ethnic immigrants since the mid-19th century, most Korean immigrants also settled in a few of the largest metropolitan areas of the United States. The major areas for Korean settlement include Los Angeles, New York City, Chicago, Philadelphia, San Francisco, and Washington metropolitan areas. The Korean population in these six metropolitan areas occupies a clear majority of the Korean

population in the United States. Ninety three percent of the Korean-American population was living in urban areas while seventy four percent of the total American population was living in urban areas in 1980 (Yu 1986:21). Because of economic opportunities, as well as family and ethnic connections, Korean immigrants tend to settle in the metropolitan areas.

Since their English was very limited and subtle racial discrimination existed,<sup>14</sup> the Korean immigrants did not have many opportunities to obtain good jobs except through the medical profession. Thus, Korean immigrants preferred to establish their own businesses rather than labor under the supervision of "foreigners."<sup>15</sup> Even those who had a professional job such as nurses gave up their jobs to help in their husbands' business.<sup>16</sup> One Korean nurse recalled,

I immigrated to New York City with dozens of other Korean nurses from Germany in 1972. We married here and provided money for our husbands to establish small businesses. We had a lot of trouble in the hospitals. We had a poor command of English poor. Colleagues, supervisors and other administrators despised us, perhaps because of our poor English. All of us often

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<sup>14</sup> In fact, English language problems and racism are intermingled for many Koreans; it is difficult to separate them.

<sup>15</sup> Korean immigrants often differentiate "us" [Korean-Americans] from "foreigners" [other Americans].

<sup>16</sup> Since many well-established small businesses can deal with considerable amount of money, small businessmen always need reliable employees (a lot more things can be stolen by employees than by customers). A professional nurse will often give up her job to help husband's business. A small businessman often earns more than \$100,000 per year.

wanted to quit. Since their husbands needed extra labor and they could make more money in a small business, all but me eventually quit. Now I am left alone....

I married a Korean graduate student here. He dropped out of his graduate school and opened his small business. We hoped to continue our education to an advanced level, but after opening a store and having babies, we did not have time to do so. I wanted to quit the hospital, but my husband did not like the idea. He is conservative and doesn't like adventure. My job provides my family a safety net: a steady income and health insurance. But I often still feel frustrated in the hospital.

Korean immigrant white-collar workers or factory workers also found it attractive to open their own businesses. When older immigrants, who spoke fluent English, found their advancement in professional or white-collar jobs limited because of racism or their lack of ability, they simply turned to small business. In general, small business produces more income than many professional or white-collar jobs. Small businessmen need not concern themselves with cultural and language nuisances or "foreign" colleagues and supervisors.<sup>17</sup> If they own their own business, they become their own boss and work for themselves. Since they came from a country where the average working hours per week had been the longest in the world until recently and they were accustomed to work often

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<sup>17</sup> It is true only in a relative sense. They experienced many problems in their business because of their English language problems. However, one Korean shopkeeper told me, "if you know only how to count in English, you can open a business."

10-12 hours a day, six days per week.<sup>18</sup> Therefore, they were eager to work longer, to make more money quickly. They could also mobilize family and kin members, and use cheap but loyal co-ethnic workers.<sup>19</sup>

Since they could only open a store with small amount of capital, they tended to concentrate in poor minority neighborhoods. Most their businesses were small and served poor minorities neglected by White businessmen: the Blacks in Los Angeles, New York City, Chicago, Philadelphia, Atlanta, Washington, and many other smaller cities; Chicanos in Los Angeles and in many Texan cities; and Puerto Ricans and other minorities in New York City. One Korean businessman put it this way,

Many Koreans in this [New York] city work "twenty-five hours" per day. We set up small businesses in run-down areas where other people are afraid to go.... We have helped restore areas like Harlem. That's why Mayor Koch said that Koreans are number one. We open businesses in parts of the city where [business] people

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<sup>18</sup> The average working hours in Korea had been longest in the world for the last 20 years until 1988. It was common especially for factory and white-collar workers to work for 10-12 hours per day, five and half or six days a week during the 1970s and the early 1980s. Because the government and capitalists oppressed the labor movements harshly, the movement to improve working conditions and hours had not been successful during that period. Another reason why the Korean workers would work long hours might be that many Korean workers were transformed from rural boys and girls into factory workers. While about 80% of the Korean population was living in rural areas in 1960, now only about 15% live in there.

<sup>19</sup> See chapter 4 for a detailed discussion.

had given up.(C. Kim 1988:164)<sup>20</sup>

### Expansion of Korean Community in New York City

New York City has been a center for immigrants for many centuries. About 24% of New York residents came from other countries in 1980, and 31% of New York residents were immigrants in 1990 (Arian et al. 1990:6).<sup>21</sup> New York City has been the second largest receiving city, next to Los Angeles, of new Korean immigrants to the United States.

The beginning of Korean settlement in New York City dated back to the 1900s. However, the existence of a Korean community in New York City was not visible before 1970, because of the small size of the community.

In 1920, some seventy Koreans lived in New York, and about thirty Christians from among them established the first Korean church in the city, which still exists, near Columbia University. From that time until 1970, when a large number of Korean immigrants began to enter the city, the situation did not change much. A few Korean-Americans lived in Manhattan, and students from Korea came to America and stayed here or went back to

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<sup>20</sup> This raises the very important issue of why it is that Koreans and not Blacks are opening businesses in Black neighborhoods - this is the source of the conflict and conflicting interpretations about American society between Black residents and Korean shopkeepers. Both the reasons and the conflicting interpretations will be discussed in chapters 4, 5, and 6.

<sup>21</sup> In 1970, there were 1,437,058 foreign-born residents among 7,894,862 New Yorkers. In 1980, 1,670,199 were foreign-born people among 7,071,639 and there were 2,227,000 (estimated by a 1988 CUNY survey) foreign-borns among 7,322,564 New Yorkers. Thus the rate of foreign born population is increasing. The new immigrants include West Indians, Latin Americans, and Asians. (Arian et al. 1990:5-6)

Korea after their graduation. The total number did not pass a few hundred. The activities of the Korean community were led by students. (I.Kim 1981:182)

During the 1960s, an increasing number of Korean students came to the United States to study. Many physicians also entered the United States for internship or residency training through the Exchange Visitor Program. The majority of them stayed here because of the poor economic and job situations in Korea. Many other students also gave up their studies because of economic hardships or sometimes because of their business success. They turned to small businesses such as wigs or Korean imports.

During the 1970s, some Koreans who had lived in Manhattan moved to Flushing, Queens. The new Korean immigrants and other Korean immigrants who had lived in small and mid-size cities came to New York and settled in Flushing where the White middle-class had deserted in favor of suburban areas.<sup>22</sup> The Korean immigrants could find relatively inexpensive and safe housing in Flushing, Queens, and commuted to Manhattan where they had wig shops or green grocery stores or worked for hospitals and others. One Korean businessman recalled moving to Flushing from Manhattan,

We had lived in mid-Manhattan for several years. Once

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<sup>22</sup> Korean immigrants whom I interviewed did not remember whether there was racial conflict when they entered Flushing. (Remember that a community's transition in ethnic or racial composition was usually accompanied by tension in the United States.)

we got our business going, we moved to Flushing, Queens, in 1976.... Now, there are almost forty thousand Koreans living in Queens. Back then the neighborhood was mostly Jewish. We found a nice apartment with enough room for the kids, who were becoming pretty active.

Our home in Flushing was very near the subway to Manhattan [thus convenient to commute].... (C.Kim 1988:174)

Koreans and other Asians filled Flushing and eventually expanded into neighboring communities following the No.7 subway line, which runs from Flushing through mid-Queens to mid-Manhattan.<sup>23</sup>

The size of the Korean population in New York metropolitan areas soon reached about 20,000 in 1972, 100,000 in 1980, and 200,000 in 1987(Korea Times of New York, 1988).<sup>24</sup> It is now estimated that around 70,000 Koreans are living in Queens and the rest are dispersed in the Bronx, Brooklyn, Long Island, and New Jersey. After Koreans amass some savings, they tend to move from New York City to the suburban areas of Long Island and New Jersey.

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<sup>23</sup> See Kyeyoung Park (1990) for detailed discussion about the spread of Korean immigrants into mid-Queens.

<sup>24</sup> This number is exaggerated because some Korean leaders and ethnic newspapers prefer a bigger number in order to emphasize the importance of the Korean community in the New York area and thus gain attention from others. However, it is a good indication of how fast the Korean community in the New York metropolitan area has expanded. Professor Min in Queens College estimated the size of the Korean population in the metropolitan area to be about 70,000 in the late 1980s. The summary report of the 1990 census reported that the size of the Korean population is 96,000 in New York state and 39,000 in New Jersey.

### Conclusion

The immigration of Koreans to America reflects the American immigration policy. The American government controls not only the number of immigrants but also the their racial and ethnic composition. The immigration policy of the government also decides who can immigrate. This process implies that the government can discriminate over certain groups of the population, based on some racial, national, and occupational categories. While Africans were the least numerous immigrants during 1881-1983, Europeans were the most numerous.<sup>25</sup> After the changes of the Immigration Act of 1965, Asians and people from Latin America became the most numerous immigrants.

By importing large numbers of immigrants, the government provides relatively cheap laborers for the capitalists. The availability of numerous immigrants, sometimes combined with mechanization, pushed wages down. Most of the immigrants took the unskilled, lower-paying jobs. The immigrants not only contributed to the expansion of the American economy but also took jobs which might have otherwise been available to lower-class Americans, especially Blacks. Thus, some Blacks expressed their perception that "foreign" immigrants "stepped over" the

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<sup>25</sup> Total number of immigrants from Africa during 1881-1983 was 200,900; the number of European immigrants during the same period was 28,045,800; and the number of Asian immigrants was 3,897,500 (1987:42-43).

shoulder of Blacks to move upward.

According to Wolf (1982:380), "Racial designations, such as 'Indian' [Native America] or 'Negro,' are the outcome of the subjugation of populations in the course of European mercantile expansion." Koreans were mobilized as plantation laborers at the turn of this century, and after 1965 Koreans came to America as free labor and eventually became incorporated as a predominantly shopkeeper ethnic group.

In the process of the reproduction of American society, various groups have been differentially segmented, integrated, stigmatized, privileged, excluded, included, incorporated, and displaced. Korean immigrants experience these processes.<sup>26</sup> The introduction of new immigrants requires not only a new economic incorporation, but also a new symbolic and hierarchical incorporation into American economic and racial relationships. Korean immigrants

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<sup>26</sup> For example, Koreans also had to accept or develop new identities as Asians in American context. Asian identity is a very strange concept for Koreans in Korea. But in America, Korean immigrants are categorized and treated as Asian. This circumstance, coupled with their need to make connections to other Asian groups to increase their power, made them accept and develop some sense of Asian identity.

The concept of Korean may also change. In Korea, regional identity is very important. However, in America, Korean identity becomes more prominent than regional identity because they meet and experience themselves as Koreans or Asians in counter-position to Whites, Blacks, or Hispanics in American life. This development of new identities happens in the context of an already structured playing field, that is, the racialized subjugation and mobilization of world-wide labor through the American economic and political system.

concentrate in metropolitan areas and in small businesses in poor urban neighborhoods not because their original intent but because their circumstances in America made them suitable for the small business. This economic incorporation into American society will be discussed in the next chapter.

However, this economic incorporation also accompanies their symbolic and hierarchical incorporation into American racial relationships. The vague conception of racial hierarchy held by Korean immigrants has colored their expectation of racial order in America. Upon arrival it must quickly be adjusted in order to incorporate and explain their new experiences in America. Other racial or ethnic groups must also adjust their conceptions of racial stratification in order to incorporate newly arrived groups into their racial conceptions.

## CHAPTER FOUR

"BITTER FRUIT": EXPANSION OF KOREAN SHOPKEEPERS  
IN NEW YORK CITY

I, my brother-in-law, and other family members worked for my aunt's fruit and vegetable store in Harlem. We saved all that we earned. Two years later, in 1983, we took over a fish market across the street. The cost was about \$170,000. We got some money from Keh [Korean rotating credit club]<sup>1</sup> and borrowed some other money from our relatives. Since our money was not enough for the cost, we paid the remaining \$100,000 to the original store owner on a monthly basis for three years after taking over the store.

My brother-in-law, my sister, my parents, and I were working for the store. Meanwhile, my wife and brothers arrived from Korea. They also worked with us in the store. We hired nobody in the beginning. My children were raised in the store.... We could save enough money to open another store soon. My brother-in-law opened a small restaurant nearby, my brother opened a fish market later in New Jersey, and another brother also opened a fish market in downtown Manhattan. (A Korean fish market owner)

Historical Recollection

New Korean immigrants and some Korean students found a gold mine in the wig business during the late 1960s and early 1970s because of the sudden popularity of wigs among Black females. To wear a wig was in vogue among Black

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<sup>1</sup> The sum of the money from Keh and from their relatives was more than \$100,000. They used some of this money for an operation fund. For Keh, see the section of Capital Mobilization in this chapter.

females in the mid 1960s.<sup>2</sup>

The artificial wig business was very brisk. For many Koreans and students, the wig business was a starting point of their small capital accumulation for business. One Korean importer in mid-Manhattan remembered his small capital accumulation in the mid-1970s,

My wife went to various wholesale stores during the day, while I worked at a factory. We were able to buy wigs for \$3 apiece in bulk orders. On weekends I would go into the streets and sell them. I started out peddling in Harlem....

In one day of selling wigs I could make as much as one week salary in the factory. Soon I left the textile job and expanded my selling trips to Newark and Philadelphia. Then I found out where the black neighborhoods were, where people appreciated our low-cost merchandise....

I would walk down a street and see someone having a party in their backyard. They'd say, "We don't want to buy any wigs." I'd say, "Okay. I'll just rest here for a minute." I'd look around and choose the most beautiful lady. I'd go up to her and start to talk: "Whether you want to buy one or not, I'd like for you to try this new style one time." I'd take out a wig that was very beautiful. She'd shout, "Oh! That's beautiful." And all the people would come around and buy. (C. Kim 1988:171-172)

Korean immigrants were soon established in the wig business. For example, the above wig peddler became a wig wholesaler after several months of peddling. He and his wife imported and distributed wigs to many Korean immigrants

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<sup>2</sup> One wig peddler of that time remembered, "Black ladies liked the wigs because they don't have long straight hair. Most couldn't afford to buy a \$300 or \$400 human-hair wig. My wigs looked like human hair but only cost \$10. They were made from a nylon material. The colors were black, red, all shades of brown" (C. Kim 1988:173).

and graduate students. In a short period, many Koreans flocked into the wig business. They established wholesale stores in mid-Manhattan or retail stores in Black neighborhoods. They imported human-hair and artificial wigs from Korea<sup>3</sup> and distributed them all over the United States. As they could import cheap wigs directly from Korea, they could compete with Jewish wig wholesalers.<sup>4</sup> The Korean wholesalers who imported wigs mainly from Korea organized the Korean Wig Business Association in New York City in 1972 (Korea Times of New York 1988:46). They tried to monopolize and regulate the wig business through co-operation among members but failed because of the threat of the anti-trust litigation by Jewish wig wholesalers and the

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<sup>3</sup>. Korea started its export-oriented economic development in the early 1960s. They exported various cheap merchandise produced by very cheap labor. Thus, their labor-intensive products such as artificial wigs were very competitive because of their cheap price. By 1970, the wig industry was the leading export industry in Korea, earning 94 million dollars (I. Kim 1981:127). The wholesale price of an artificial wig was around \$ 3 and the retail price was around \$10 in the mid 1970s.

There were many human hair collectors during the 1960s in Korea. I also saw them shout in villages, "I buy hair, I buy hair." In order to sell long hair which commanded higher price, many women and girls in Korean villages did not have their hair cut for long time.

<sup>4</sup> Labor intensive wig manufacturing was in a boom in Korea from the 1960s because of the increasing demand from the United States. Most wig products in Korea were sold to America (I. Kim 1981: 124-125). However, Korean wholesalers in mid-Manhattan had connections to Korea and could import directly from Korean wig makers. Thus, they could buy cheaper than Jewish wholesalers who bought from importers in America or imported from Korean exporters who again gave the order to subcontractors.

severe competition among Korean importers.

Because of the sudden waning in wig popularity, accelerated by the oil shock of 1973, many people started dumping wigs. The wig business collapsed during the mid-1970s. However, many Korean who accumulated small capital in a wig business could establish other kinds of wholesale or retail businesses.<sup>5</sup>

Some green grocery stores were taken over by a few Korean immigrants in the early 1970s.<sup>6</sup> By offering customers well-cleaned and trimmed vegetables,<sup>7</sup> they could attract many New Yorkers to their small stores away from supermarkets and other groceries (Young 1983:54-55). They took over the business from retiring Jewish and Italian

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<sup>5</sup> For example, nine out of 28 Korean shopkeepers in my research area started their life in America as a wig retailer, peddler, or salesman. One Korean shopkeeper still owns a very successful wig store in the area. His parents, two brothers, and sister established the store there in 1976. The annual sales for the store was about one million dollars and 20% to 30% of that was profit. His parents are retired now, and the two elder brothers and one sister moved out to start other business. He said that there were many wig shops and wig peddlers in the area until the late 1970s, but every one left except him after the demand for wigs declined.

<sup>6</sup> The beginners of the green grocery business included Koreans from Brazil or Argentina. They emigrated from Korea to Latin America during the 1960s but migrated to the United States after the change of the Immigration Act in 1965. As a means of population control, the Korean government encouraged migration of Koreans to Latin America during the 1960s.

<sup>7</sup> One of my interviewees said that vegetables and fruits were sold without cleaning and trimming by Jews and Italians previously. He said that Koreans changed the face of green grocery stores.

green grocery owners. Soon the green grocery business became the main small business for Koreans in New York City. A few other Koreans also ventured into other small businesses such as small garment manufacture, deli groceries, or fish markets from the middle and late 1970s.

The common characteristics of the wig and green grocery business were cheap starting capital in relation to other businesses. In the case of the wig business, anyone could start wig peddling without any initial capital. In a 1981 study, 70% of the sample of Korean green grocers (28 out of 40) said they started their green grocery business because relatively little start-up capital was required in the business (Young 1983:57). Both the wig industry and the green grocery business also depended on the extremely low costs of labor at some point in the process.<sup>8</sup>

The green grocery business is also known for its requirement of intensive labor in the process of retailing. Other businesses which Koreans have taken over also required intensive labor. New Korean shopkeepers input their long labor hours and free family labor<sup>9</sup> for buying, cleaning,

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<sup>8</sup> The difference between the wig and vegetable businesses is that for the wig business the ultra cheap labor existed in Korea and for the vegetable business, Korean immigrants are the source of cheap labor.

<sup>9</sup> Because of Confucian ideology and the hard-pressed urgency required for establishment in a foreign country (see Park 1990:chap.4 for the discussion of the establishment), their family members (brothers, sisters, wife, sons, and daughters) were loyal to their family head.

and arranging vegetables and fruits. Because they competed well with Italian and Jewish green grocers, many Italian and Jewish green grocers gave up their businesses.<sup>10</sup> Many other Italian and Jewish green grocers also gave up because they became old enough to retire, and their sons did not want to continue the business. Koreans took over those establishments or established new green grocery stores (I. Kim 1981:281). In 1991, about 85% of about 1,500 green grocery stores in New York City were owned by Koreans. They also owned about 80% of 900 fish markets.

After amassing a small capital in labor-intensive small businesses, many Koreans moved to other small businesses such as liquor stores, dry cleaning shops, variety shops, stationery shops, and clothing stores. Because of this aggressive advance in various small businesses, the rate of self-employed persons among Koreans is the highest among all ethnic groups.<sup>11</sup> A survey done in 1977 revealed that an astounding 32% of Korean households in the United States

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<sup>10</sup> One Korean green grocer told me that an Italian gave up a green grocery after he and other Koreans had opened green grocery stores in an area. He heard that some Korean green grocery stores were set on fire because of this kind of competition. Some fish markets were also set on fire. This is a result not only of competition with other ethnic groups but also of competition among Korean immigrants.

<sup>11</sup> "Koreans have the highest business-ownership rate of any ethnic group, according to the Census Bureau's most recent survey, conducted in 1987. That study showed that more than one of every 10 Korean-Americans is a business owner. The figure for non-minorities is one in 15; for blacks, it's one in 67" (Wall Street Journal, June 16, 1992).

were engaged in business and that an additional 28% were thinking of opening a business.<sup>12</sup> About 9,000 establishments were believed to be owned by Koreans in New York City in 1986 (Korea Times of New York, 1988:56). While their population consisted of less than 2% of the total population in New York City, they owned 5% of all the establishments in New York City. This is a great change from 1967 when the number of Korean business establishments in New York City could be counted with fingers (Korea Times of New York, Sep. 25, 1990).

#### Networks and Overwork

As I mentioned in the previous chapter, once Koreans have immigrated to America, they could invite their family members. The majority of Koreans immigrated to the U.S. as family members. When Korean immigrants to New York City arrive at the Kennedy International Airport in Queens, mostly their family, kin members, and friends who have already immigrated to New York metropolitan area welcome them at the airport. These family and kin members are the guides in the New World for the recently arrived immigrants. If a new immigrant's family or kin members already have a business, the new immigrant's family or kin will certainly hire him/her. For the Koreans who come from other parts of

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<sup>12</sup> Notice the difference from the footnote 11. There are various possibilities. It may be caused by the difference of unit of count: individual and household.

the U.S. to New York area, stores of their family and kin members also provide the first working place in many cases.

If new immigrants have no relatives who own stores, they can use other ethnic networks. They can look in the classified advertisements of Korean ethnic newspapers. They can also church members in the Korean church where they attends.<sup>13</sup> They can also visit Korean stores by themselves and inquire about jobs. Since Korean store owners prefer co-ethnic workers for various reasons,<sup>14</sup> the new immigrants have a greater possibility of finding a job in a Korean-owned store. Because of Korean small business in New York area, one Korean business leader boasted, "In our Korean society, there is no unemployment problem" (quoted by I. Kim 1987:226-27).

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<sup>13</sup> There are more than 600 Korean churches in New York City. Approximately 80% of the Koreans in New York City attend church. Churches provide sources of various networks for Koreans: job opportunities, capital mobilization, counseling and assistance for domestic life, and political mobilization.

<sup>14</sup> Because store owners need reliable laborers who do not and who always work hard, Korean store owners prefer Koreans, and better get, relatives. Koreans believe they work harder than other ethnic groups. Because of English language problems, Korean owners feel more comfortable with workers who speak Korean. Because of the wage difference between Korean workers and Hispanic workers (they are usually undocumented immigrants from Central America), many Korean green grocery owners prefer Hispanic workers for simple but hard work. The Hispanic workers usually got \$250-300 while Korean workers got \$300-450 in 1989. Both groups worked about 10-12 hours per day, six or seven days a week. However, if a worker is needed on whom the owner can rely, like cashiers or managers, relatives or fellow Korean workers are preferred.

It is almost impossible for most new Korean immigrants, with the exception of qualified doctors and nurses, to obtain professional jobs even though many of them have college degrees. Those who find a job in American companies often feel frustrated because of their problems in English, skills, lack of status, and/or racism. Even those who find jobs in American companies will continue to look for jobs and business through Korean community networks after saving a small amount of capital because they think that they, as Koreans, have little hope of being promoted, and that they can earn more money through small business. It was well-known among Koreans during the late 1980s that the income from small businesses could range from \$50,000 to \$100,000.<sup>15</sup>

Thus, most new Korean immigrants begin their lives in America in a store owned by a fellow Korean. Sung Soo Kim, the president of Korean American Small Business Service Center of New York, Inc., estimated that "in 1986 some 70 percent of employed Koreans in the New York Metropolitan area found employment in Korean businesses" (quoted in I. Kim 1987:226). In a sample of 28 shopkeepers in Harlem, about two-thirds (18 of 28) began their life in America by

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<sup>15</sup> One Harlem shopkeeper told me in 1989 that a well-established Korean shopkeeper can earn at least \$100,000 per year. That was also his expectation for his new business. However, because of the grim expectation due to the recession of 1991 and 1992, the estimate is changed. Many of the Korean shopkeepers in Harlem said the recession of 1991 was the worst period for them.

working for Korean shopkeepers.<sup>16</sup>

When they begin to work in Korean stores, through connections with kin, fellow Koreans, Korean store owners, or the Korean news media, they quickly realize that their most achievable goal in America is to become a store owner and eventually a successful businessman.<sup>17</sup> Thus, to save money, open their own establishment, and expand their business becomes the only hope for their future life in the U.S. For this dream, the new immigrants endure the long hours and intensive labor of the green grocery stores, fish markets, deli groceries, or garment factories with low pay without medical or other fringe benefits. It is common for them to work 12-15 hours a day, six to seven days a week. Not only do they have no time to spend money, they also have no intention of spending that money.

In general, both spouses work together in the beginning. Koreans say that they usually spend the wages of one person for living expenses and save the wages of the other at the beginning. The stories about saving money are frequently reported in Korean ethnic newspapers. For

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<sup>16</sup> Four others were working for American companies. Three began their business as soon as they arrived here with money they brought from Korea or they borrowed from their kin. Three other situations were not clear.

<sup>17</sup> All of Korean workers and small store owners whom I met expressed this dream. Because they think they cannot get a privileged high-ranking job in America and that only business is relatively open to them, many Koreans want to compensate for their lack of status or downward mobility by earning more money.

example, one Korean taxi driver who immigrated in 1986 earned \$2,500 and his wife earned \$1,500 per month. They spent \$2,000 for living expenses and deposited \$2,000 into a Keh. Their goal was to save \$150,000 till 1991 in order to open a variety store (Korea Times of New York, Oct.2, 1989). Single persons have more difficulty saving money than couples:

A Korean green grocery owner who illegally entered into America in 1977 had worked in five green grocery stores in NYC for five years before he opened his own store on Grand Concourse, Bronx. He spent only 50 cents per week for living costs. 50 cents were for two subway tokens for a round trip to a Buddhist temple. He had meals and slept in the stores where he was working even though sleeping in a store was illegal.

He did not have time to spend money.<sup>18</sup> He worked from the dawn, to the late evening. Sometimes he worked on New Year's Day. Many of new workers quit in a week because the owners of stores pushed workers to work all day long without any rest, seven days a week. He sent most of the money he made to his family in Korea and saved the rest. He got his permanent visa in 1982 and invited his family from Korea. He opened a green grocery store with \$30,000 in 1982 since he knew only about the green grocery business. He was very delighted because he now worked for himself. (Sae Gae Ilbo, Sep.2, 1988)

However, it is well-known that the work in a green grocery is very difficult. Most Korean immigrants did not experience such hard work in Korea. One Korean worker remembered,

At the beginning of my work in a green grocery store, I couldn't sleep because of pain. My leg muscles were often "wrenched" when I slept. I felt pain in all my muscles before I slept. I didn't know that working in green grocery stores was that hard. I didn't do this

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<sup>18</sup> In 1980, his weekly wage might be around \$200. He should have saved all the money he earned.

kind of hard work in Korea. Maybe, nobody works like this in Korea.

There are more problems for Koreans with babies who want to save money. One female Korean college-graduate married a Korean American, who had immigrated one year earlier, in a hope that she could enjoy the comfortable American life. She thought that everyone in America was rich and enjoyed their leisure. But as soon as she arrived in New York City, she realized that life in America was like "a life in the hell." She did not expect that she would work as a cashier in America. Especially, a cashier who had to stand up for 12 hours a day, six days a week. Whenever she returned home, she was too tired and exhausted. "What a pain in the legs!" When she delivered a baby a year later, the situation was worse. She and her husband reasoned that "if we paid for baby-sitting, we couldn't save any money." With no savings, their dream for a comfortable life was gone. Thus, she carried her baby to the store where she was working and tied the baby to a stroller all day long in a nearby room. Whenever she heard him crying, her heart was torn. However, she and her husband saved \$20,000 after three years of heartbreaking work. Because of problems with child-care, many Korean couples invite a mother-in-law, usually the wife's mother, from Korea. These grandmothers, or sometimes grandparents, took care of the babies, while

their daughters and sons-in-law worked hard to save money.<sup>19</sup>

### Capital Mobilization and New Store

Because of a strong desire to save and mobilize money, the Keh, a traditional Korean rotating credit club, has survived the transition to the U.S. and has been rather revitalized in Korean American communities. For many centuries, Koreans have pooled their rice, and later cash, for expensive expenditures such as funerals, wedding ceremonies, the education of their children, and the purchase of land or other expensive things, as well as smaller expenditures for socialization.

The present Kehs in the Korean community can be divided into two categories. One is just for friendship,<sup>20</sup> and

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<sup>19</sup> One of the common complaints of Korean grandmothers in the Korean community in New York City is that they have to take care of their grandchildren. However, it is well accepted that taking care of babies or toddlers is the responsibility of a grandmother if a grandmother is alive. The grandmothers complain often that baby-sitting is physically demanding. Three generation families are the norm in a Korean community if the grandparents are alive. However, an increasing number of Korean grandparents want to live separately if money is available for them (it means refusal of baby sitting and avoidance of family tension).

<sup>20</sup> Because people are busy and concentrate on their own problems, it is difficult for many people to meet or visit friends and colleagues if there are no specific reasons. Many Koreans organize Keh clubs to meet friends. Monthly meetings for contributing a share of money to a Keh club is a good excuse to meet friends. They share various information and help each other if members have problems. This kind of Keh club usually has a small monthly pool and each member contributes a fixed amount of money. The order

the other is for capital mobilization. The latter is the issue in this section. This Keh usually has a bigger monthly pool, \$30-100,000, and gives the pool to the bidder who will pay the highest interest.

For example, 20 out of 28 in my sample of Korean shopkeepers joined from one to three Keh clubs. One Keh club whose members are mostly shopkeepers on 125th St. was organized as a \$30,000 pool Keh. The majority of them are shopkeepers and the others are store workers.<sup>21</sup> Six have half memberships and the others have full memberships. One full membership requires a contribution of \$1,200 every month for 25 months. The Keh-Ju (the president or leader) who organized the Keh club is responsible for any problems in the management of Keh.<sup>22</sup> In every monthly meeting, a member who bids the highest interest<sup>23</sup> for the pool can obtain that month's pool. Those who receive the pool will

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of who will take that month's pool is predetermined before each Keh starts.

<sup>21</sup> These 28 members include 20 shopkeepers and 8 store workers. Store workers tend to join at half membership because their income is not enough to afford a full membership.

<sup>22</sup> Keh-ju literally means the owner of the Keh.

<sup>23</sup> The interest is usually between 14% and 17%. For this Keh, the interest was between \$200 and \$500 per month. If the interest is too high, there is a greater possibility that the member who gets the pool may default her monthly contributions (\$1200 + interest) later. The high interest also hurts mutual-help spirit. Thus, the leader usually controls the possible high interest and prearranges who can get the monthly pool if there is competition on bidding. Each member can receive only one monthly pool.

contribute not only \$1,200 but also their interest payment to the total pool every month until every member has taken the monthly pool. For the first month, the total pool is \$30,000. However, the pool gradually increases because of interest payment. Thus, the last person of the Keh can get about \$36,000 without paying interest because the Keh dissolves after every member has taken a monthly pool.

Thus, for those who use the monthly pool at the early stage, a Keh club is the source of a loan, and for those who do not take their turn until the final month, a Keh club is the place to deposit money at a high rate of interest. Because one can immediately obtain a considerable amount of money if one joins a bidding Keh club, many Korean shopkeepers who have not established credit for formal financial loans join Keh clubs. Korean store workers can take the monthly pool when they want to open a business. They can also obtain a higher interest rate than available at any other financial institution.

Since there is no written contract among members, mutual trust is very important in Keh participation. Sometimes, the leader (Keh-ju) runs away with the pool or a member may disappear after obtaining a pool. Because of business failure, some members may be unable to pay back their monthly shares after taking a pool. This happens often. However, the Keh-ju has the responsibility to find

members and organize a Keh club. She<sup>24</sup> has the privilege to take the first month pool without interest. She also has to secure money from members until her Keh has gone through its cycle. The duration of one Keh usually takes two to three years.

Because most new Korean immigrants have no credit history in bank, no bank will lend money to Koreans who want to start a new business or to expand existing business. Even though only 3 out of 28 shopkeepers in my sample answered that they used money from a Keh for their first small business,<sup>25</sup> these statements by no means decrease the significance of Keh for the Korean community. Through my research, I have found that many shopkeepers help their family, kin, or friends open a store with money from Keh. Thus, many of those who receive help from family members or friends when they establish their own business have actually raised small capital indirectly through Keh. For example, one fish market owner worked with his entire extended family members which included five couples. The owner assisted two couples with money from Keh when they established their

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<sup>24</sup> Traditionally, Keh-jus are mostly female. The most frequent participants in Keh clubs have also been females. They usually join the Keh as a family representative.

<sup>25</sup> Of the 28 respondents, 19 answered they used individual savings for their first stores. However, this individual savings often includes money from Kehs.

In a study of Keh in the Chicago Korean community, only 20% of shopkeepers answered they used Keh money to start their business (Korea Times of New York, March 27, 1991).

independent business. The fourth couple plan to establish their own business with money from Keh. Of 28 my sample shopkeepers, 11 obtained financial assistance from their kin or friends. A Keh is even more important for those who have already established their own business. Most Keh members use money for floating capital (to expand inventory stocks, to remake stores, or to purchase new equipment) or for the expansion of business (e.g. opening another small business).

One of the most important functions of the Keh club is that the membership forces members to save money in order not to default on their club membership. Members who default will lose face in the Korean community among their acquaintances. Once they default, they will experience difficulty in borrowing elsewhere in the Korean community. This mandatory saving mechanism forces many Koreans to work two jobs, to seek other venues to make extra money, or to avoid spending money.

In fact, many Koreans prefer Keh clubs with a high monthly share in order to force themselves to save more. Thus, they give first priority to securing a monthly deposit for the Keh from their earnings and use the remainder for living expenses. If the income is not enough, they will endure substandard living conditions in order to deposit a monthly share or find another source of income.

A Korean worker who saves a considerable amount of money is usually intending to establish an individual

business. Since many of them are looking for a store while savings are still insufficient, they are also looking for various sources to mobilize capital. Frequent sources of money are family, kin, and friends. It is very difficult for Korean workers to borrow money from banks since they have little credit and have problems providing the appropriate documents.<sup>26</sup>

It is an ethical responsibility for Koreans to help their family and kin. Any who do not assist their family members will be often accused of ignoring fundamental ethics by other Koreans. Thus, the frequent financial helpers were parents, brothers, and sisters. Parents, brothers, and sisters who had immigrated earlier usually gave advice and money to new immigrant family members ready to open a store. Usually the money was provided without interest. New Korean immigrants also expected their brothers and sisters would help once the new business was opened. For example, one couple received \$10,000 from the husband's elder brother when they opened a green grocery. They also used their own \$20,000 savings. However, when the husband's brother's wife demanded the money back, the couple complained that the

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<sup>26</sup> There was only one shopkeeper who borrowed enough money from a bank to open a business among my 28 sample shopkeepers. He borrowed \$100,000 from a bank and \$80,000 from a relative for a gas station in California. He mortgaged his gas station for the loan from the bank. Because he had been in the U.S. Army before he started the gas station business, he could borrow money from a bank. He failed in his business and moved in New York City in 1984.

sister-in-law was very stingy.

Distant relatives or friends usually lend money with interest. Mutual credit associations have been formed in the Korean community, but the range of their activities is still very limited. Some immigrants bring money from Korea. Among my sample of 28 Korean shopkeepers, five brought a considerable amount of money to help themselves open a business. They brought \$50-200,000 from Korea. These are relatively recent immigrants. All but one immigrated to the U.S. after 1986. The Korean government had strictly restricted the amount an emigrating family could carry to \$10,000. From 1981, this sum was raised to \$100,000 per family. However, some Korean immigrants illegally carried more than the limit.

Occasionally, despite small capital, some Koreans will nevertheless open a store. Sometimes, they take over a store and its debt without paying any money for the business establishment. The newcomer merely needs to pay off the debt. Another method is to consolidate capital from two or three persons. For example, one Korean immigrant spent only \$4,000 to own a business.

The salary from my factory work was not enough for my family's living expenses. Since I heard and read about Koreans who were doing the green grocery business, I wanted to do the same business. When I heard that one green grocery owner was looking for a co-owner, I decided to start with him. I invested \$4,000. The other person also invested \$4,000. I learned from him how to do the green grocery business. (Sae Gae Ilbo, Sep.1, 1988)

In short, capital for the new store came from personal savings; from loans from family members, other kin, and friends; and from money acquired in Korea. The cost of opening their first stores among my sample shopkeepers was between \$5-200,000. Most opening costs fell between \$15-20,000 during the late 1970s, \$30,000 in the early 1980s, and about \$50,000 in the late 1980s. However, the cost depended on the kind of store and on the expected volume of sales.

Most shopkeepers in my sample established their own business within four years of their immigration to America (10 within 2 years, 7 within 3 years, 6 within 4 years, 2 within 5 years, another 2 within 6 years, and 1 after 6 years). But the increasing start-up cost of a store makes Korean workers save longer in order to establish their own business. One store worker complained that even though he worked two jobs, he still had problems saving enough money.<sup>27</sup> A Korean peddler on 125th St. also complained that he needed much more money to open a small business than did those who immigrated in the late 1970s. It is now said that about half the Korean households in the New York area have their own business.

However, the expansion of Korean shopkeepers sets its own limit of growth. Because of the expansion of new Korean

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<sup>27</sup> He is single. He spent considerable money to get a permanent visa.

businesses, cheap and loyal Korean laborers become scarce. Thus, Korean shopkeepers employ undocumented Mexicans or other Hispanics. The expansion of Korean shopkeepers makes the competition among them very intense. Some Korean shopkeepers in the same area do not talk to each other because they are in competition. Many Korean shopkeepers complain that the competition among Korean shopkeepers is the primary problem for them. Those remaining Korean workers also need much more savings than before to open their own business. There is an increasing possibility for Korean workers that they may not achieve their dream of owning their own business. This will probably stratify Korean immigrants into two different groups and increase the tension between these two groups will increase.

#### Self-Denial and Pain

Once Koreans establish their own small business, they begin to exhaust themselves in business. Since the primary small businesses for Koreans are labor-intensive businesses requiring low capital, the profit depends on mobilizing cheap and intensive labor. In order to push the store workers to work hard, the owner must work hard. Korean shopkeepers are also very worried about the possibility of failure. In order to secure success, they push family members, workers, consumers, and themselves to the limit.

Most Korean green grocery owners and fish market owners

work from dawn to dusk, six or seven days a week. Because they must buy vegetables and fruit at dawn at the Hunts Point Terminal, the major vegetable and fruit wholesale market in New York City, the green grocers get up anywhere between 1 and 5 A.M. Due to parking problems in the market, many green grocers arrive at 1 A.M. to get a parking place and to select better vegetables and fruits. It is said, "the earlier the better." They must also clean and trim vegetables and fruit in preparation for sale during the early morning. They either close their store about 8 or 9 P.M. or stay open 24 hours. As one Korean green grocer put it, "sometimes you get so tired, you cannot see the dollar in your hand"(Harris 1983).

One grocer recalled that he slept at 11 P.M. and arose up at 1 A.M. to shop in the Hunts Point Market. He slept only two hours at home (he also slept at the store when business was slow). He and his wife did everything for the green grocery store which needed at least 6 workers (Cho Sun Ilbo, April 1, 1987).<sup>28</sup> Many Korean green grocers sleep in their trucks or stores during the day. Fish market owners and deli grocery owners also feel the effects of lack of sleep.

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<sup>28</sup> Another Korean green grocer had a similar experience. Because he could not sleep enough he always looked forward to red lights when he returned from Hunts Point. Pulling up to a red light, he would fall asleep for a moment. Then the car driver behind him always honked a moment later because he did not move when the light turned green. Then he awoke and drove again. (Sae Gae Ilbo, Sept. 1, 1988).

Korean shopkeepers who own other kinds of small business can sleep better. However, they must also have their stores from 10 to 16 hours a day, and at least six days a week. Most take no vacations. Among my sample of 28 shopkeepers, only five shopkeepers took a vacation from 2 to 10 days off during 1989. The rest had no vacation. If they do not open their store, they believe they will lose money doubly because of no sales on that day and because the customers who use other stores on that day will begin to patronize other stores. One shopkeeper said, "I can hear the customers step to other stores when I take two or three days off. Even during a vacation, you cannot rest if you have a business."

The long and intensive work certainly produces a lot of problems for their body. Common complaints were pains in their legs, back, shoulders, or stomach. One female green grocer, working as a cashier, complained,

Since I have stood up all day long and have struck cash registers for six years, 12-14 hours a day, seven days a week, my knees and shoulders are ailing. I predict the weather better than a meteorologist because my knees and shoulders always bring prickle pains before rain fall.

A fish market owner also complained,

I hardly have a good breakfast because I must shop at the wholesalers at dawn. I also have lunch irregularly. If you are busy at 1 P.M., you cannot have lunch at 1 o'clock. Even if you have lunch, you have to pay attention to whether shoplifters come in and customers steal. Thus, you don't have any time to relax. I have to have dinner at home after closing my store. It is always around 8 or 9 o'clock. But I don't have time to digest before sleeping because I have to go to bed

early for tomorrow's shopping at dawn.

One Korean doctor reported that 3 or 4 of every 10 Korean patients had stomach problems. That is 3 to 4 times higher than the rate for American patients (Korea Times of New York, July 17, 1989). The Korean green grocers also have physical strain - aching backs, kidney damage from overexertion, and arthritic hands (Harris 1983).

A common saying among Korean green grocers is, "You cannot do this business forever. Make money quick and do some other business which gives you more time to relax." The reason why they want to move to other businesses is not only because of pain but also because of status anxiety. Among Koreans, the green grocery business is considered on a bottom rank because the owner should work "dirty" and "hard". Many green grocers are ashamed of it. Thus, many of them want to move to "clean" business such as dry cleaning or a jewelry store.

#### Mobilization of Family Members and Tensions

Once a store is established, the whole family and possibly other kin are mobilized to ensure stability and maximum profit. Family workers are reliable<sup>29</sup> and do not complain much about hard working conditions because they think they are working for themselves. Individual family

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<sup>29</sup> The store workers steal more than shoplifters. One third of the store workers steal something (Sae Gae Ilbo, May 26, 1989).

members are not paid, and the total income of a store is considered to be family income. Female participation in work dramatically increased in Korean communities in America in comparison with that in Korea. Professor Min of Queens College<sup>30</sup> reported from 1983 and 1984 data that while only 18.8% of married women in Korea were working, 56% of married women among Korean immigrants were (the rate for all American married women was 49%). Most Korean shopkeepers in Harlem were working as couples in 1990. Among my sample of 28 shopkeepers, 18 of them worked with their spouse.<sup>31</sup>

However, the participation of women in family business does not decrease their domestic work load. Husbands are reluctant to share housework with their wives. Most of the decision-making in business is done by husbands even though wives fully contribute to the establishment of the business and work as much as husbands do. Since wives contribute a lot, many women feel they must have some input into home and business matters.

Other family members and kin are also mobilized.

Twenty eight Korean shopkeepers of my sample hired or rather

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<sup>30</sup> This information comes from an article clipped from Korea Times of New York, circa 1988. The date did not appear on the clipping.

<sup>31</sup> Two (a wife and her husband) have separate stores nearby. The eight others includes two single men, a widow, a divorcee, two whose spouses have businesses in other areas, and two whose wives stay at home. Therefore, only two female spouses in my sample did not participate in business. Female spouses usually worked as cashiers.

mobilized sixteen family members and kin, excluding spouses. They include fifteen household members (four sons, one daughter, two mothers, five brothers, one sister, one sister-in-law, and one niece), and one distant relative. This number included part-time workers. However, if we consider casual help from sons, daughters, or other family members, the number will be higher. For example, when a grandfather from Korea visited his son who owns a store in Harlem, he came to his son's store everyday and watched shoppers.

Grandfathers and grandmothers who are usually living with their son or daughter are also frequently mobilized. Because they do not know English and can not drive a car, they can only stay home. However, it is very monotonous for them to merely stay at home.<sup>32</sup> Many old people said that "to stay at home is like staying in hell." They often come to the stores and stay there as a "watcher," taking care of babies and making meals for family members. As I mentioned previously, many of them who stay home take care of grandchildren.

One grandmother who came to a store in Harlem everyday told me she enjoys herself more at store even though she cannot speak English. "I take care of a grandchild and cook food for my son, daughter-in-law, and other employees in the

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<sup>32</sup> They cannot visit friends or centers for the old because they cannot drive.

store. If I just stand any place in the store, my presence will deter shoplifters. So I believe, I am more productive at the store than at home." Another grandmother was an active worker for at a store on the 125th St. She said, "I gladly work hard because I can see that I make money."

Grown children, who attend junior-high and high schools, often help their parents in stores during weekends, holidays, and vacation. In order to save the cost of baby-sitting, babies are often brought to the stores. One shopkeeper raised his babies in the store for two years. Babies or toddlers often play by themselves in the store without close supervision by their parents.

Since all family members are participating in the same store with intensive labor, there is often tension about who enjoys the fruit of hard labor and who decided what. Since many Korean immigrant women are active participants in small business, they have more influence on family matters here than in Korea. However, the increased participation of Korean immigrant women doesn't result in the change of attitudes of husbands. Many husbands want to maintain the patriarchal relationship. This and other matters heightened the tension in many couples. One wife of a Korean shopkeeper complained about her husband.

My husband has no ability in business at all. He doesn't pay attention to the arrangement of the window. The color and arrangement of clothing in the window is messy and cannot get attention from passers-by. Because he is so bored waiting customers at the store all day long, he just calls

his friends all day. When I saw this, I told him to cut the calls short. How do the conversations help our business? That doesn't make money....

I urged him to help with the children at home but to no avail. He doesn't move even a finger at home. When I managed a store, everything at home was in trouble. I took care of my youngest son at the store. I couldn't relax at the store because many things that are troublesome could happen. At home, I had to do all domestic work alone. I was easily irritated and felt anger at him...

Even if we can enjoy a little comfort now, how meaningful is it if my children fail? He doesn't pay any attention to the children.

Some couples who have severe complaints about their spouses endure their relationship out of fear of being single, having no money, or raising children alone. However, the rate of divorce among Koreans in America is rising even though the rate is much lower than the average in America. Professor Min of Queens College<sup>33</sup> reported that while the divorce rate in Korea is 6.2 among 1,000 couples, it is 36.8 among 1,000 couples for Korean immigrant couples (it is 72.6 among 1,000 couples for all America). Thus the divorce rate among Korean immigrants in America is six times higher than the rate among Koreans in Korea.

However, divorce brings more difficulties to wives than to husbands among Korean immigrants because it is easier for males to find a new spouse than for females (e.g. the ideology that values chastity). More problems arose when females run a business with their husband because of differential experiences of business (while Korean females

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<sup>33</sup> From an article clipped from Korean Times of New York, circa 1989. The data does not appear on the clipping.

concentrated on cashier, Korean males concentrated on business transactions). There are also possibilities of sexism directed against female divorcees in jobs or in business. Separation from children also often cause more pain for women. Because wives suffer far more than husbands after divorce, some Korean immigrant wives endure various hardships in order to avoid a divorce.<sup>34</sup>

However, the role of a wife is very important in capital accumulation. Therefore, she tries to exert a more important role in the family and business decisions in comparison with wives in Korea. Thus, Korean immigrant wives are increasing their influence and becoming more assertive. This also increases tension in some families because many Korean husbands are reluctant to relinquish their power. In comparison with females in Korea, Korean immigrant wives wield more power not only because of their contribution to the family economy but also because Korean immigrant families maintain a closer relationship to the wife's family. The influence of sisters of husbands also increases. While the importance of patrilineal kinship

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<sup>34</sup> There was one divorced Korean couple in my research area. The wife lamented that while she had worked really hard in a green grocery business with her husband, her husband did not give her any say in business and home matters. She had endured hard work and tension with her husband until he assaulted her brother who had co-invested in the business. To make a long story short, the couple sold the business and divorced. Both were socially and economically in very bad shape in 1990. Usually wives rather than husbands endure various difficulties as far as possible in order to avoid the divorce.

networks declines, the importance of a wife's or a mother's kinship networks increases in comparison with the situation in Korea (Park 1989). For example, when a mother helps her daughter and son-in-law in baby-sitting or when other members of the wife's family help the couple in business (these are common phenomena in Korean community), the wife's family claims more say in the couple's home and business matters.

The tension and change in family relationships is also coupled with the tension and anxiety of Korean immigrants regarding their social status. Many Koreans feel no satisfaction from their business because they experience a decline of social status (they were usually well-educated urban white collar workers in Korea). Because of this anxiety, they often try to compensate for their downward mobility by making "big money" quickly. The hard-pressed desire to quickly make money for that compensation also contributes to tensions not only in the relationships with family members but also with store workers and customers.

One Korean shopkeeper in Harlem lamented,

We Koreans are slaves of money. We don't have any holiday. Because we want to make more money as quick as possible, we cannot rest... If the business is not good, we are anxious. If the business is good, we continue to overwork for extra money. Thus, we open stores even on holidays. We just chase money without realizing how we are living.

#### The Sweat of Workers

As I already told, because Korean shopkeepers think

that Korean workers are more loyal than any other ethnic workers to Korean shopkeepers, they hire Korean workers as managers or cashiers. Korean workers are also hired as workers for hard labor as in the green grocery business or in fish markets. However, because of the decreasing availability of Korean workers (many of whom have already opened their own business), the increasing avoidance of hard labor by Korean workers (they find better jobs now because of the expansion of Korean business during the last two decades), and the relatively higher wages paid to Korean workers than to Hispanics and Blacks, Korean store owners are employing an increasing number of Hispanics, usually illegal immigrants.<sup>35</sup>

The Korean shopkeepers think Blacks are not qualified for green grocery or fish market work because they do not want to endure the hard work and easily quit.<sup>36</sup> According

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<sup>35</sup> In 1990, 28 Korean shopkeepers in my field area employed 41 Koreans (including family and kin members), 26 Blacks, 22 Hispanics, and 1 Chinese.

<sup>36</sup> This is a very important ideological point in the conflict between Blacks and Koreans. Korean shopkeepers think Black people are lazy because they do not work hard and quit easily. Blacks think that Koreans do not pay enough, disregard the labor laws, and over-exploit Black workers and others. A Black in Harlem answered my question about why he doesn't work in a fish market, "He [the Korean owner] doesn't share profits with me." He meant that Korean owners pay very low wages. In fact, the wage for Blacks and Hispanics was at minimum wage or lower, especially for undocumented Hispanics. In 1990, an illegal Hispanic received \$200 for 72 hours work per week in a green grocery store. The wage for undocumented Hispanics was between \$150 and \$300. Six Korean green grocery or fish market stores in my field area employed only 2 Blacks (one as a security

to Light and Bonacich (1988:368), hard work, long hours, and low pay are not welcomed by the local poor or unemployed because "the local poor had a certain conception of the length of a reasonable workday, of how hard they ought to expect to work, of how much leisure time a good life entailed, and so forth." Thus, Korean green grocers and fish market owners usually employ Koreans and undocumented Hispanics who endure hardship due to their expectation of becoming independent small businessmen or to the problems with their illegal status. Because they also come from relatively poor countries, the low wages and bad working conditions do not look bad in comparison with the conditions of their native country.

However, the Korean and Hispanic workers complained about long working hours, physically demanding work, and low wages. The workers in the green grocery or fish market business work 12 to 16 hours per day without overtime pay or any other benefits. One Korean fish cleaner said,

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guard, the other one as a fish frier), while they employed 14 Hispanics (illegal residents), and 15 Koreans.

Korean shopkeepers often hire Blacks as sales work which does not require hard physical labor. Still the wage was low (about \$3.50 per hour without any benefits) but the sales work was easier (physically) than the work in a green grocery store or fish market. However, because of low wages and no benefits, there was a high turnover for store workers, not only for Blacks but also for Koreans. Since Korean workers got better wages (about \$5-7) and they thought they were learning how to manage a business (Korean workers more often do supervisory and managerial work in Korean stores), their turnover rate was lower than that of Black workers.

I have no time to do anything except work and sleep. I work and sleep, work and sleep. On Sunday? I sleep all day long or sometimes I watch Korean video tapes. I don't know what happens in New York City or in the world. I can't do anything because I am tired. I just want to open my business soon. I don't think of any thing else.

One Korean green grocery worker also complained:

I worked for him [a Korean green grocer] for seven years. Thus, when I tried to buy my own business, I expected he would help me in terms of money. Because of my hard work, he made a lot of money. Right? I didn't expect much from him. But he didn't give me even one dollar. He is not a human being.

This statement shows that Korean workers expect help from their Korean employer when they try to open or manage a new business. This is true for some Korean immigrants, especially kin employees. Thus, they consult with their Korean employers about new business and get advice from them. Because of this expectation, many Korean workers are very loyal (at least in appearance) to their Korean employers. However, the majority of Korean workers did not get help from their previous employers. The paternalistic relationship between Korean workers and employers often means the exploitation of those workers with a vague future promise. When the promise is not realized, the Korean workers often express their disbelief and anger.

However, there is no paternalistic relationship between Korean shopkeepers and their Black or Hispanic workers.

When I worked in a restaurant,<sup>37</sup> the Korean owner told me

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<sup>37</sup> I worked in a restaurant which was located in mid-Manhattan for three months in 1986.

not to be close to Hispanic workers. His reason was that it "spoiled them."<sup>38</sup> One of his real reasons was his reluctance to let Hispanic workers know the difference in the wages of Korean workers and Hispanic workers. However, the Hispanic workers already knew the difference but endured the difference because of their undocumented status. Since they receive low pay in other areas, they do not have many choices.

One Korean green grocery worker told me of a similar experience. "When a Hispanic worker ate an unsalable fruit, the Korean owner told me not to give it to him but rather to throw it away." When I worked in a clothing store in Harlem, the manager tried hard to create a distance between Korean and Black workers. The manager also told me not to greet Black workers and not to compliment their sales ability. This distance is, in fact, an effort of Korean shopkeepers to create a hierarchical order among Korean shopkeepers, Korean workers, and Hispanic or Black workers. This hierarchical distinction is not only an effort to justify their authority but also an effort to justify different wages among different groups. Many Korean shopkeepers in the area were cold and expressionless to

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<sup>38</sup> A similar thing happened when I worked as a sales clerk in a Korean store in Harlem in 1988. When I told a Black sales clerk, "You are selling better than me," the manager of the store later told me that I should not say that again to the clerk. His reason was, "it spoils him." In fact, "spoil" is a code word regarding more demands from the sales clerk.

Black employees.<sup>39</sup> Through this cultural manipulation, the Korean shopkeepers try to devalue the labor of the employees, especially Black and Hispanic workers, to justify discriminatory wages for them. Certainly, Hispanic and Black workers know that they are devalued and isolated from Korean shopkeepers and workers. One Black worker in the above clothing store complained that the Korean shopkeeper was very stingy. However, they stay and work for Korean shopkeepers because they cannot find a better alternative.

#### Those Shopkeepers Who Failed

Even though the success rate among Korean shopkeepers is relatively high, many fail in their small business. The competition in small businesses became severe during the 1980s. Because the poor Blacks became poorer since the welfare for the poor was reduced, the enforcement of drug regulation decreased floating money in Black neighborhoods, the rent for a store has doubled and tripled during the 1980s, and the New York City economy declined since Black Monday in the stock market in 1987, the rate of failure among Korean shopkeepers has been increasing. In fact, more and more Korean shopkeepers complain about the fierce competition. It is said, "the old immigrants made money easy, but now it is really hard."

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<sup>39</sup> It is also applied to Hispanics. However, a few Korean shopkeepers did have very close relationships with their Black or Hispanic employees.

There were 3 Korean shopkeepers among 28 shopkeepers of my sample who experienced business failure. For example, one Korean shopkeeper said he realized as soon as he had opened a green grocery business in the mid-1980s that there was no hope for making money from that store because sales were very slow. He gave up in a few months and started another business. He believed that the previous Korean owner of the store deceived him about the prospects of that green grocery store. One variety store owner said, he also gave up his green grocery business soon after its purchase, but he could not start another business because he lost all his investments in that business. He and his wife worked again as store employees.

One couple eventually divorced after they had failed in their first green grocery business in Harlem. With a small amount of money left and a small loan from a relative, they opened another small green grocery store in Queens after the failure. But the husband and wife could not agree on business matters, and they argued and fought over many things regarding the business. Under stress, he began to beat his wife. Eventually, the new business failed, and they divorced. The wife lamented,

I couldn't forget the [first] store [in Harlem]. I put all of my hope, love, sweat, and blood into every corner of the store. Because that was my first store, I dreamed of many things from the store. The store was the hope for my hard life in America. But that's all gone now. Still, I miss the store. I couldn't leave here. I came back here to see my first love, my first store. Now, my life is broken. My family is broken.

I really feel sorry for my son and daughter. I always feel anxiety, and my mind is empty now. I don't have any more joy in my life.... (She shook her head with tearful eyes).

Because of the possibility of failure, those who have not yet stabilized their business or those who are on the borderline of profitability are very fearful for their future. In order to establish their business quickly, they try everything they can do. Owners of newly established businesses are more anxious because of the higher rate of failure for the beginners. Since the owners of newly established stores often treat customers and shoplifters harsher to extract more profit and establish themselves quickly than established business owners, the store-owners boycotted by Blacks were usually newcomers in small businesses.

#### Conclusion

Korean immigrants who were eager to take root and make money in the U.S. discovered some possibilities in small business. In fact, they had no other "respectable" choice other than small business. Good factory jobs disappeared as the manufacturing industry declined. Only a few professional jobs were available for them. However, they had a competitive edge in small business in comparison with other ethnic groups. They came from a country which has the longest labor hours in the world. They brought strong family and kin networks. They revised, strengthened, and

mobilized the family and kin networks which made the rapidly expanding reproduction of small businesses among Korean immigrants possible.

However, every social relationship for Korean shopkeepers is geared toward the quick accumulation of capital. This accumulation is based on sacrifices of shopkeepers, family members, store workers, and customers. The sacrifice of individual family members is justified as inevitable for "family survival" in a hostile environment. The small business is explained as a matter of whether the whole family can survive or die. With failure, they think that the whole life of the family will be ruined because everybody will look down on them, and an extremely hard life will follow.

Because of the hard-pressed desire for success and fear of failure, excessive hard work and family mobilization are exemplified. Because of this, the rate of failure among Korean shopkeepers is extremely low;<sup>40</sup> their income is also relatively high.<sup>41</sup> But, children were ignored and the burden for wives was doubled. Family life was forgotten. Tension among family and kin members erupted. Tension with

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<sup>40</sup> A survey conducted by Min and Jaret indicates that only 8% of Korean shopkeepers were not successful. The average failure rate within five years is about 50% for all American small businessmen. (From an undated newspaper clipping from the Korea Times of New York, circa 1989)

<sup>41</sup> A poll for 374 Koreans across America reported that their annual income was \$40,590. (Lotte News, July 7, 1992)

customers also erupted. This tension and consequent struggle for meanings and power are the subject for the next two chapters.

**PART THREE**

**BOYCOTTS, MEANINGS, AND POWER**

## CHAPTER FIVE

**"KOREANS NEED TO BE TAUGHT A LESSON?": BLACK BOYCOTTS  
AGAINST KOREAN SHOPKEEPERS**

They [Korean shopkeepers] came here only with rice bowls, but now take everything, money. They charge much more... No jobs for [Black] kids and nothing to [Black] people... They ain't say hello to us.... They create a very bad situation. (A Black in Harlem)

The Koreans needed to be taught a lesson. (A Black Reverend in Harlem. quoted in Lombardi 1986:15)

If they have time to boycott me, they have to work and save money to establish their own business. Those niggers [gumdungyi] want to drive me out. But it is a waste of time because I will never leave this place. If I leave, they will force other Koreans out.... This is free America where anybody can open a store in any place. (A Korean shopkeeper in Harlem)

In Washington, D.C., 11 Korean-owned shops were fire-bombed between 1984 and 1986 (Song 1989:10). The Black boycotts against Korean shopkeepers occurred in many cities such as Atlanta, Philadelphia, Chicago, Columbus, Los Angeles, and New York City during the last decade. Some boycotts began because Korean shopkeepers shot Black robbers, shoplifters, or innocent Blacks. For example, when a Korean shopkeeper shot a Black girl dead in 1991 after an altercation between them, the Brotherhood Crusade, a Black organization, began a boycott against the store. Some other boycotts stemmed from allegations of short-change, mistreatment, or shoplifting. Resentment of Korean

shopkeepers is considerable among Black neighborhoods even though many of Black residents do not participate in the boycotts.<sup>1</sup>

The anger is also wide-spread among Korean shopkeepers against Black shoplifting, robbery, and burglary. Nineteen Korean shopkeepers were killed in the Los Angeles area during the period of 1988 to 1991 (Washington Post, Nov. 29, 1991). Two to three Korean shopkeepers or their employees per year were also killed in New York City during the same period.<sup>2</sup> The general perception of Korean shopkeepers in poor Black areas is that they are serving Black consumers in "dangerous" Black neighborhoods.<sup>3</sup>

What are the causes of this mutual anger and resentment? The killings are only a minor part of the relationship between Korean shopkeepers and poor Blacks. For the majority of them, the mutual distrust comes from their everyday interactions. The everyday relationship between Korean shopkeepers and poor Blacks is also leading to more conspicuous social tensions and conflicts between them.

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<sup>1</sup> For example, Korean stores were the major target of the looting and arson during the 1992 L.A. riots.

<sup>2</sup> The title of an article which dealt with a killing of a Korean employee by a Black customer, who was denied credit for a pack of cigarettes, was, "A Korean Employee Was Stabbed to Death by A Black" (Sae Gae Shin Bo, Dec. 2, 1986, my underline added) The title emphasized the Blackness of the killer. These kinds of articles in local Korean news media made Korean shopkeepers heighten their negative attention to the Blacks.

<sup>3</sup> The killers of Korean shopkeepers are Blacks in most cases.

Tension and Feelings in Everyday Interactions<sup>4</sup>

In a Korean green grocery store after 3 P.M. on a clear Friday, the cashier lines were long. The cashiers were the owner and his wife. The cashiers weighed vegetables and fruits and received money from customers. The customers paid money and left the store with their plastic bags. The cashiers said hello to a few of customers whom they knew well but had little interaction with the rest of the customers. The cashiers were watching corners of the store carefully while weighing, packing vegetables and fruits, and receiving money from the customers. Suddenly, the owner (husband) shouted in Korean to a Korean worker who was trimming vegetables, "Watch that girl near you. She looks like a shoplifter." Some customers in the lines looked around, wondering what had happened. The worker watched the suspect carefully. She eventually bought some vegetables and exited the store with apparent anger, murmuring, "Fucking..."<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> For a further description of the meanings related to this section, see chapter 6.

<sup>5</sup> Because of prevalent stereo types and racism about Blacks, many Blacks have similar experiences in other stores. Harry Mayo recounted his experience when he and his friend were browsing, in order to buy a gift, a department store in Washington D.C. A clerk was following them. "He (a clerk of the store) went to check [the price] on a couple of things and then he said, 'If ya'll aren't going to buy anything, would you please leave the store.' He told us it was a female store, and to see young Black males walking around the store raised his concern. My friend called him a racist bigot and a white bitch." (Washington Post, Oct. 17, 1991) Even a well dressed Black female professor was also accused

One former Korean owner and cashier of a green grocery store in Harlem described her experience,

When I opened a green grocery store in 1986, all kinds of bums in the area came to my store to steal. At the time, I couldn't differentiate shoplifters from other customers. Some who wore coats put bottles of Mazola in their pockets, some who brought a diaper box with their babies stole Pampers and put them in the box. They picked up fruits on the stall outside of the store and ran away. When I caught them, they shouted me that "Why did you catch me? I just picked up a few things when you, Chinks, make big money in my country." And they often shouted at me to go back to Korea. Once I start to argue about why it is your country, the argumentation and fighting would continue. Because of my English problems, it was very difficult for me to win the verbal fights. Gradually, I could find who the shoplifters were and understood how they steal. The shoplifting decreased gradually when I became more familiar with people. At the peak, the amount of stolen reached two tenth of total sales.... Many ordinary customers also tended to steal when we didn't watch them carefully.

Some Korean store-workers also complained about Blacks' attitudes in their everyday interactions. One female Korean fish fryer in Harlem complained,

It is like a war everyday to deal with Blacks here. Every morning, I drag my foot to the store because I know I have to come here and fight for my living. Literally, I fight everyday. I am exhausted after 12 hours' fighting everyday. They don't pay money when I do pay attention to another customer. They insist they paid when I didn't really receive. Sometimes they run away. If one complains, others follow without any apparent reason.

Similar complaints are also common among Korean shopkeepers in other poor Black neighborhoods. Mr. Hong in

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of changing price tags for clothes in Saks in Fifth Avenue, New York City, even though the change, in fact, had been done by a clerk. (New York Times, April 30, 1991)

Brooklyn reported that he argued and struggled everyday with Blacks. He experienced three burglaries within 10 days after he had opened his green grocery store. Local "bums" of the area victimized him because he was a new face. Thus he bought a toy gun and carried it always. He often polished the gun and showed it to many customers. After that the area gang did not bother him (Sae Gae Ilbo, Sept.2, 1988).

A daughter of a Korean shopkeeper in Brooklyn described her parent's experience more vividly:

Of special horror is a group of children, 10- to 14-year-olds, who rush into our store chanting anti-Asian slurs, making fun of my parents' English and touching everything in sight. Asking them to leave would be a joke. My father, in his limited English, usually resorts to raising his voice to somehow intimidate these wild things into leaving. Of course, another barrage of colorful words and gestures toward my parents follows before they are finally out of the store.

Every time that happens, my mother tells me, her heart pounds and her whole body shakes so badly she stays paralyzed for minutes. She often loses sleep over such events. We chide her for worrying, but we feel worse. There is nothing more painful than knowing that your parents feel degraded and helpless. (Cindy J. Suh's letter to New York Times, May 18, 1990)

But some Koreans have a different perspective from the majority of Korean shopkeepers. One Korean shopkeeper well respected by Black residents in Harlem said,

I have had a business here almost 20 years. I think Blacks are very good people. I am very close to them. If you treat them well, they will treat you well. Because Koreans don't concern about Black people and only make money from Blacks, Blacks don't like us. New Korean shopkeepers made trouble because they are in a hurry to make money quick. Because they are scared by

the possibility of failure, they don't want to lose even one cent and are very aggressive. They only make money and don't want to give anything to Blacks. We have to give something to them to win their mind. We have to be more flexible to shoplifters. They are poor, and they need food and clothes. Give them what they want. They will be graceful to us. The amount of stolen goods is only a small portion of our profit.

For Korean stores, like other business, extreme security is one of the key aspects of business in Harlem. Jewelry stores and bank branches are well protected with bullet proof glasses and alarm systems. The bulletproof barriers cut the physical contact between the jewelry shopkeepers and the customers. Other stores also have monitors, protected cash registers, security guards, or watchmen.

For example, one Korean green grocery store employs a Black watchman. His duty is to watch customers and passersby all day long in front of the store. Although, he primarily deters shoplifting by his presence, he also sometimes catches shoplifters. His other role is to mediate. When there is an argument between Black customers and Korean shopkeepers, he is expected to intervene. The Korean shopkeeper expects him to get rid of the Korean owner's possible nuisance with Black customers. Thus the Korean owner can avoid direct arguments or fighting with black customers.

Most Korean shopkeepers in Harlem agreed that the newcomers among them are more aggressive. One of the

newcomers in Harlem explained that he and his wife were very anxious when they began their business. They worried that they would fail and then have to start again from nothing.

I am scared to death about the possibility of losing all of my investment. If I lose, I have to work like hell again from the bottom. If you experienced the bottom, you know what I am saying. That was not the life of a human being. Fourteen hours of physical work without any rest just for a little money! Those unstable days scared me very much. I was really mad whenever I saw someone shoplifting. I really wanted to beat them. They could ruin my business and my life, not only me but also my family, you know. I admit I am very harsh to Black shoplifters. But it happens because they steal. If they didn't steal, I wouldn't bother them. They deserved it. I know the Korean old timers accused me of mistreating Blacks. But they have already made enough money. I have nothing. They don't understand me.

However, this is not a full story. He not only mistreated shoplifters but also showed the cold shoulder to ordinary shoppers. Most other Korean shopkeepers are also very suspicious about Black shoppers. They suspect most Black shoppers as possible shoplifters. When I started to work in a clothing store in Harlem in 1988, the first thing that the manager of the store told me was "Suspect and watch all shoppers carefully. If we don't watch them, they tend to steal. We have to give them no opportunity to steal." Every shopper was watched as a possible shoplifter. When Black shoppers, particularly, young Black shoppers, came into the store, a sales clerk would follow and watch them. This suspicion creates tension between Korean shopkeepers and Black shoppers.

Black customers know that they are watched and suspected by Korean shopkeepers in their own "home turf." Usually Korean shopkeepers do not greet Black shoppers as they come in. This silence is an expression of the social distance which Korean shopkeepers try to create between them and poor Black shoppers. During a study conducted in Los Angeles, many Black residents stated, "I get so tired of being watched all the time like I'm some kind of criminal," "As soon as you walk into the store, they watch you until you leave," and "You can tell by the look on their faces when you go into those stores that they don't want you in there. I wonder why they set up businesses here in the first place" (quoted in Stewart 1989:94). A Black woman who participated in a boycott against Korean shopkeepers in Brooklyn said that she was angry because all Blacks were considered to be shoplifters (WLIB, a news in Feb. 6, 1990).

The majority of Korean shopkeepers not only suspect Black customers but also degrade them. Korean shopkeepers and Koreans in general think that they are superior to Blacks. Because they think poor Blacks are inferior, Korean shopkeepers do not want to treat poor Blacks as their equals. Some Korean shopkeepers are also anxious about their degraded social status because some of their fellow Koreans in Korea and in America as well as many Whites look down on Korean shopkeepers because they are staying in "decayed," "crime-ridden," and "dangerous," neighborhoods

where 'socially degraded' people are living.

Black residents often feel that Koreans are offenders who cannot even speak English correctly. Black residents consider the Koreans as "arrogant and rude" (Veneroso 1989:5). They also think Koreans are very suspicious. They feel unwelcome in Korean stores. They know that they are also watched and treated badly. The suspicion of Koreans and the anger of Black residents often result in violent altercations. In other cases, the offended shoppers endure the humiliation and stop using that specific store.

One Black in Harlem complained, "They [Koreans] talked to me like I was a fool, like I couldn't count money. I got so mad I wanted to slap his face. I never bought anything from there [Korean green grocery store] again" (quoted in Benjamin 1990:39). Another Black resident recalled,

...I found myself in a confrontation with a Korean man in a fish market..., where an elderly, dignified black lady got in a dispute with a Korean man who ended up calling her a nigger! Without giving the matter a thought I asked, 'Who are you calling a nigger muthafucka?' and demanded an apology. He said it was none of my business, I invited him to kiss my ass, he went for his fish knife, and I went for my boxcutter razor... That was when I decided to chill out on Korean markets. Except for [a] dry cleaner, with whose service I was superbly satisfied... Koreans wouldn't get a dime more of my money. (quoted in Benjamin 1990:39)

Lloyd Williams, the Black president of the Uptown Chamber of Commerce which covers all Harlem, explained,

Black anger arises from high unemployment and gentrification: developers buying whole blocks of Harlem to put up luxury condominiums. Rising rents drive out the local residents and merchants who have

been there for generations. And although they are responsible for neither the unemployment (65 percent among Harlem's Black youth) nor the gentrification, the Koreans are the most visible beneficiaries of Harlem's revitalization... The [Korean] newcomers are the problem. They come with a poor sense of history and a negative attitude toward blacks: shiftless, lazy, on drugs and don't want to work. (quoted in Veneroso 1989:5)

Many Blacks resent Koreans for siphoning money out of the Black community. Blacks see Korean shopkeepers as outsiders who come into their neighborhoods and become wealthy whetted helping any community cause. Lloyd Williams continued, "But we couldn't convince the Koreans that their interest should go past their store fronts into the community. When the city threatened to close down a local hospital, we couldn't get the Koreans interested" (quoted in Veneroso, 1989:4). This kind of complaint is irrelevant for many Korean shopkeepers since such community problems, Korean shopkeepers believe, should be solved by the local residents themselves and governments rather than the shopkeepers.

The anger of Black residents is often expressed in graffiti. The graffiti on the walls and gates of Korean stores includes "Bloodsucker," "Jews," "Fuck," "Vice," etc. However, many Black residents are indifferent to the race of store-owners - or at least they still use Korean stores. One Black woman in Harlem who used a boycotted Korean green grocery store explained that, "it's convenient." Because of the convenience, Black residents like to shop at the closest stores rather than Black stores even if they sympathize with

the Buy Black movement. And, in fact, they often do not have an alternative; most green grocery stores in poor Black neighborhoods are Korean-owned. Many Blacks in Brooklyn said, "they found the Koreans rude, but felt they had no choice because most nearby fruit and vegetable stands were Korean-owned " (New York Times, Dec. 21, 1988).

Because of this resentment, individual Blacks stop using Korean stores or start their own picketing. For example, a Black shopper had fought with the fish market owner because of a problem in change before the boycott. He brought a sign of boycott and shouted "boycott, boycott" in front of a Korean fish market in the afternoon. The next day, he did not appear. Some others threaten Korean shopkeepers to boycott without actually boycotting. Because boycotts are expensive in terms of both money and time, it is difficult for a boycott by an individual to succeed. of money and time, it is very difficult for an individual to succeed. Individual boycotts generally fail to change the attitudes of the targeted shopkeepers.

In general, a shopkeeper can exert more power than a poor customer in the shopkeeper-customer relationship in poor neighborhoods. A shopkeeper deals with hundreds of customers per day. Thus, one customer cannot affect the sales of a shopkeeper much. A shopkeeper can refuse to serve and can show disrespect to a customer while a customer does not have many alternatives. The customer can complain,

shout foul language, or resort to violence. Most customers simply swallow the humiliation rather than resist. Other options include avoidance of that specific store or pursuit of legal action. But courts are not concerned with minor mistreatment or disrespect. It also costs a lot of money and energy to bring a case to court. Thus, poor customers are not protected from routine minor mistreatment or humiliation. One potentially effective customer reaction is collective action.

One such collective action is a 'riot.' On August 4, 1990, about a hundred Black residents rioted and destroyed part of the R & N fruit store in Brooklyn after an altercation between two Black women and Korean shopkeepers. Some young Blacks raided the store, beat a Mexican worker, and fired guns. However, a sudden riot, without a long-term boycott, is often dismissed as immoral violence. Thus, it is the riots rather than the mistreatment and humiliation by a specific shopkeeper drew the attention from the public and the state agents. But when the boycott is well-organized, the situation is very different.

### The Beginnings of Boycotts

#### Boycotts in Harlem

Because of the pervasive racism in America, many Black grass-roots groups have been organized to protect the rights of Blacks and to achieve more equal social relationships.

Black churches have also been traditionally important organizations for Black movements. These groups often organized boycotts against some shopkeepers and companies. During recent years, PUSH, organized by Rev. Jesse Jackson, boycotted NIKE, because NIKE, PUSH insisted, did not hire enough Blacks even though Blacks constituted a sizable share of NIKE consumers.

The first Black boycott against Korean shopkeepers in Harlem started in July 1982. Members of the Universal Negro Improvement Association, a Black nationalist group which was originally organized by Marcus Garvey in 1914 in Jamaica and flourished in the late 1910s and 1920s in Harlem and other Black areas in the United States (Martin 1986:xv), "distributed leaflets asking black residents to boycott Korean shopkeepers on grounds that they didn't employ Blacks and pushed out other minority-run small businesses" (Harris 1983:198). Rumors such as the assertion that Koreans got resettlement money from the U.S. government when they entered the United States exacerbated the resentment of other minority small businessmen against the Korean shopkeepers in the area. However, this boycott did not have a specific target store. In fact, the UNIA promoted boycotts of all non-Black shopkeepers - not just Korean shopkeepers (New York Times, Sep. 11, 1982).

The Association's coordinator of the boycott, Shaka Zulu, said, "Our goal is for blacks to control the economic

life of the black community" (quoted in *ibid.*). Many Blacks in the area also believed that the Koreans were favored for Federal Business Loans over Blacks; the rapid growth of Korean business in the area further stirred this suspicion from the Black residents in the area.<sup>6</sup>

Because of the tension heightened by the boycott in 1982, Lloyd Williams feared that, "some hot day, a misguided remark or an insult could trigger anti-Korean violence" (Harris 1983:198). In order to mediate the brewing conflict between Harlem residents and Korean shopkeepers, a federal conciliator stepped in. The conciliator organized meetings between Korean shopkeepers and Black shopkeepers. The meeting did not produce a meaningful result. However, the boycott by the UNIA did not last long.

Another organized boycott, this time, against a specific Korean shopkeeper in Harlem started on Oct. 12, 1984. I will quote a detailed story in order to show how this boycott started from Lombardi's article in Daily News Magazine, March 17, 1985.

Jinks(Black male) had bought a can of soda... He banged the can on the counter and said he wanted his money back. He started to go outside... and changed his mind again. "Gimme the soda," he told Shi-Chen (Korean owner's wife, cashier). Jinks got his soda and change

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<sup>6</sup> The total number of Korean shopkeepers reached more than three dozen in 1982. The number of Black small businesses on the 125th St. was more than 60 at the time, according to Malvin Locus, president of the 125th Street Business Association (New York Times, Sept. 11, 1982).

and started to leave the store. He hesitated in the doorway, turned again, and said he hadn't got all of his change.

"I gave to you!" Mrs. Shin said. "You got it, man!" One of the customers protested. "Go on now!"

Jinks rolled his eyes. He said he was tired of being short-changed, insulted and laughed at by these Korean bloodsuckers. He said some worse things. Charlie [the Korean owner] went up to him and touched his arm, urging him to leave. Jinks yelled at Charlie, told him he shouldn't be pushing black folks around.

Then Bong Gu Lee, Charlie's brother-in-law, who was helping out, began moving in. Jinks grabbed a chair... and threw it, shattering the right side of the store window. By now a number of neighborhood people were gathering. Chung Lee, Charlie Shin's sister, who was working next door... came out and angrily told Jinks to leave.

... People were hooting and cursing, and Chung Lee... picked up part of the broken chair and threw it at the crowd. Then Jinks, encouraged by some hotheads, retrieved a piece of the chair and hit Chung Lee with it... Charlie Shin insists, " ...he[Jinks] reach in back pocket and come out with fold-knife. 'Why don't you go back to Korea?' he says. We go into store. He try to come in. I pick up mop..." (Lombardi 1985:13-14)<sup>7</sup>

The account, like other stories of altercations which caused the subsequent boycotts, is in dispute. Whereas Blacks emphasized the immoral aggression by the Korean shopkeepers, the Koreans' stories emphasize the immoral or illegal behaviors of Blacks. In this case, while B.B. Wilson, a Black employee of a nearby Korean store, said, "he [Jinks] wasn't drunk, 'just mad,'" and "they [the Koreans] were out there beating on the dude," the Shins insisted

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<sup>7</sup> Certainly, this story is not an objective observation. The reporter (Lombardi) collected stories from various witnesses and wrote it. It seems to me that this story reflects the stories of Koreans more than the stories of Blacks. The subsequent story of the boycott of 1985 in Harlem is based on Lombardi's article (1986).

that Jinks was "juiced" and that they were only trying to scare Jinks off, acting out aggressive moves. According to Rev. Juanita Hagan, who started a boycott next day against the Korean green grocery store, the Koreans were armed with "long sticks" and one was carrying "a long knife." Other Koreans in the area agreed that the Shins were tough guys and quick with their fists (Lombardi 1985).<sup>8</sup>

The next day, Rev. Hagan started a boycott and others joined. She said, "one of those Koreans ran a cart across my foot and didn't even apologize!" Rev. Hagan felt "the brother in the street was outnumbered," though she admitted she did not see the beginning of the argument. But from her experience, she believed that she knew what would have to happen. She said,

the Koreans needed to be taught a lesson. They have a bad attitude about Black people in Harlem. They watch you like you bound to steal. They givin' you 45 cents when it should be 50, and three-quarter pound of string beans instead of a pound. After all, this is our neighborhood...

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<sup>8</sup> A Korean shopkeeper told even in 1989 that the Shins had hot tempers and were aggressive. The blacks thought the Shins beat Jinks. Of course the Shins denied any wrong doing. The Shins also denied that they have a history of violence: "They say we beat up an old black lady! We wouldn't have lasted three years on this street if true... people wouldn't come to us. In clothing business or fish business, not so easy to steal as with potato or apple, so they don't know... We see someone steal, we say 'Put'em back'; sometimes they throw fruit or vegetable on floor and call bad name... sometimes we know someone hungry, we give soda and bread...but you can't give everything away"(quoted in Lombardi, 1985:14).

On the second day, a group of people joined the line and were unusually vociferous and angry. By the third day, they were dominating the picketing. Rev. Hagan didn't know them and planned to stop the boycott on the third day. But the unknown group took over the boycott and started picketing several Korean-owned stores. The leader was Mantide Evans, a political organizer from Elmhurst, Queens; he headed an "umbrella group" calling itself the "Concerned People of Harlem" which included members of the old Marcus Garvey back-to-Africa movement, a Buy Black movement group founded by Carlos Cooks, some members of the Black Muslims, and a few Communists. He stated that the picketing was "a training process to educate Harlemites about the business world." He said that "we are trying to raise the consciousness of our race" to the understanding that Blacks should own 50% of the businesses where they reside and that, short of leaving Harlem, there was little the Koreans could do "to placate the community."

Leaflets handed out on the street urged neighborhood people to "Buy Black... Boycott all non-black merchants in the black community... koreans, arabs, east indians, hispanics and europeans"(sic). An open letter circulated in 1982 demanded an "apology" to the community in the form of turning over the leases of four Korean businesses to the Concerned People of Harlem, for free. The letter also required the 125th Street Korean Merchants' Association and

the Korean Produce Association to agree to restrain their members from entering the fish or fruit-and-vegetable business in Harlem altogether. Other leaflets referred to "bloodsucking Koreans" who "think blacks are stupid" and take profits out of the community to "their luxurious Korean homes... and laugh!" (Lombardi 1985:15). The boycotters also demanded the employment of Black people in Korean stores (W. Kim 1986:227).<sup>9</sup>

This boycott was the first long-term boycott against Korean shopkeepers in Harlem. The Korean shopkeepers were very scared because they realized that they were politically very vulnerable and that the anger of the Black people was directed towards them. They saw that unlike what the

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<sup>9</sup> It is not clear whether the boycotters really represented the Concerned People of Harlem or another independent organization. Lombardi (1985:15) reported that "A man at the Concerned People of Harlem headquarters at 29 E. 125th St. who calls himself Marcus Garvey III dismisses Evans (the leader of the boycott) and disavows the demands, charging they were authored by 'an agent of the Koreans.' He says the demands 'do not represent the views of the Concerned People of Harlem.'" However, Marcus Garvey III accused Koreans of "moving into the black community, uninvited, and taking over small businesses, preventing blacks from controlling their own economic destinies..." (Lombardi *ibid.*).

Some Koreans believed that a female Korean shopkeeper who had a bad relationship with the Shins instigated Rev. Hagan and the boycotters. Korean local newspapers also reported similar stories. But I think that the circumstances show that the boycott was not instigated by a Korean shopkeeper, because the demands of the boycotters were not limited to the questions related to the Shins. The boycotters raised the questions about the presence and attitudes of all Korean shopkeepers. The Korean shopkeeper accused as an instigator denied the accusation. However, she was very critical to the attitudes of the Korean shopkeepers in Harlem toward Blacks.

authorities in their home country, Korea, would do in a similar situation, the New York Police did not disperse the boycotters. They also found that the City Hall did not have the power to solve the problem. This experience made them consolidate their local merchant association and more actively solicit the support from politicians and government officials.<sup>10</sup>

The same green grocery store, again, became a target of Black boycott in 1988. This time, the owner of the store was another Korean green grocer. The store owner was well known for his violence against Black shoplifting suspects.<sup>11</sup> The boycott started because, the picketing group claimed, the Korean store owners had physically assaulted a Black couple accused of shoplifting in the store. The female owner said that the couple took some grocery items and left without paying for them. She blocked them from exiting and the altercation started. She also claimed that the couple hit her with a frying fan when she demanded that they return the stolen items. However, the news of this incident was soon relayed to Father Lucas of the Resurrection Roman Catholic Church.

Father Lucas, the leader of the boycott, said he had heard about the repeated assaults on Black people by the

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<sup>10</sup> This will be discussed in chapter 6.

<sup>11</sup> The owner told me that he often chased shoplifters for many blocks and grabbed stolen items back. He often fought and beat shoplifters.

store owner.<sup>12</sup> He also asserted that the Koreans of the target store were racists because the owners beat old Black women, disrespected Blacks, sold inferior produces, and said to Blacks "why don't you go back to Africa?". After learning of the incident, Father Lucas announced a boycott in his church. This boycott was supported by the December 12th Movement which, at the time, also boycotted three other Korean stores in Brooklyn and Queens.<sup>13</sup>

During the boycott, policemen were deployed everyday in front of the store. Six to twelve boycotters appeared from 6 to 8 P.M. on weekday evenings and all day long on Saturdays. They shouted "boycott, boycott, boycott" and other slogans with megaphones, distributed leaflets, and insulted and harassed those who entered the store.<sup>14</sup> Their boycott pursued various goals: to demand respect from Korean

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<sup>12</sup> Sabihya Prince interviewed Father Lucas for me.

<sup>13</sup> Father Lucas said that he announced the boycott in his church without discussing with the leaders of the December 12th Movement. Because he is one of the important leaders of the Movement and they share the decision-making process of the Movement (Hornung 1990b), I doubt his assertion. At the time, the December 12th Movement organized boycotts against Korean stores in Brooklyn and Queens too. The boycotts were manned by the December 12th Movement and all leaflets distributed during the boycott were printed under the name of the December 12th Movement. Sonny Carson, a leader of the December 12th Movement, claimed his group did not lead four boycotts of Korean stores in New York City. Instead, Sonny Carson asserted, the boycotts were the "spontaneous reactions" of outraged residents and that his group merely "supported" them." (Song 1989)

<sup>14</sup> From the perspectives of the store owner and the police, the boycotters was threatening the customers or local residents rather than representing them.

shopkeepers; to close the store; and to promote the 'Buy Black' campaign.

During the boycott, the sales of the store fell by 50%. The Korean Produce Association of New York and the Korean Merchant Association in Harlem tried to solve the problem, but they failed. The target store owner and the leadership of the Korean Merchant Association of Harlem tried to reach Father Lucas in order to forge a compromise, but Father Lucas rejected the attempt. In order to pursue a solution, the Korean Merchant Association petitioned a meeting of the community board of the area. At the meeting, Father Lukas accused Korean shopkeepers of being rude, violent, and racist. His views received applause from the attendees and prevailed at the meeting. The targeted Korean shopkeeper was booed and humiliated by the attendees. The targeted Korean shopkeeper was furious that the other Korean shopkeepers were apologetic and did not defend him vigorously enough in the meeting. The boycott continued for 14 months. However, the store survived the boycott because the sales during non-boycott hours produced enough profit to survive.

#### Boycotts in Brooklyn

Before the Harlem boycott which I described above, a boycott against a Korean green grocery store in Bedford-Stuyvesant, Brooklyn, started in August, 1988. A 67-year-

old Black woman and her daughter claimed that Koreans of a Korean green grocery store had attacked them on Aug. 27, 1988. The Korean store owner accused the two Black women of stealing a package of codfish.

The City Sun, a Black newspaper, reported that "Witness said the owner had lunged at the women with a knife, causing the elderly woman to be hospitalized. Within minutes of the incident, outraged area residents and local activists descended on the store, demanding that police arrest its owner" (City Sun, Dec. 7, 1988). However, the store owner said, "the trouble... began... when his wife spotted a black woman, Paulette Clark, shoplifting a piece of dried codfish. When his wife confronted Ms. Clark, the woman punched Mrs. Chung and fled outside. Mrs. Chung followed, a couple of other Koreans intervened, and by the time it was over Ms. Clark was flailing away with a plastic bottle of fabric softener and waving a knife" (Wall Street Journal, Oct. 26, 1988).<sup>15</sup>

One of the flyers distributed by the December 12th Movement insisted that "Koreans are not our enemies, but we cannot allow anyone to disrespect us or used against us" (quoted in Amsterdam News, Nov. 12, 1988). Certainly other flyers of the December 12th Movement promoted the boycott of all Korean stores in the area. One flyer, which featured a

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<sup>15</sup> I am not sure which description is correct. As usual, both descriptions possibly exaggerated one aspect of the confrontation.

caricature of vampires in the center of the leaflet, read "Boycott Korean Merchants! Korean merchants are vampires!" The pamphlets also described Koreans as parasites and profiteers. The boycotters in front of the store shouted, "Boycott, boycott... Close'em down... pass'em by... let'em die... Koreans out of Bed-Stuy" (Wall Street Journal, Oct. 26, 1988). The number of boycotters ranged from one half-dozen to a hundred.

The most famous Black boycott against Korean shopkeepers started on January 18, 1990, on Church Ave., Brooklyn, when a rumor that an old Haitian lady was severely beaten by three Koreans in a Korean grocery store spread throughout the neighborhood. Yet again, the story was in dispute. The boycotters insisted that when a Korean employee demanded that the Haitian woman open her bag to see if anything was stolen, she refused. Then, three Koreans grabbed her and knocked her down. The Koreans said that then she refused to pay the full price. When confronted by a Korean cashier, she threw a pepper at the cashier and yelled "You fucking Chinese." Thus the melee started. The hospital's record shows that she was treated for a small cut on her cheek (Hornung 1990a:33).<sup>16</sup>

Some customers and residents soon appeared in front of

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<sup>16</sup> Since there is no evidence, it is hard to know what exactly happened at the time. Three Koreans who were accused of the beating were eventually acquitted. But the question here is not the exact fact but how the reality was constructed and why it was constructed in that way.

the store to protest.<sup>17</sup> The protesters were organized by the Flatbush Coalition for Economic Empowerment.<sup>18</sup> This group "is concerned with bringing money and power into the neighborhood," one leader of the group said. In order to manage daily mobilization for the boycott, they soon

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<sup>17</sup> The protest seemed to start right away after the incident. One woman in a next store recalled, "The customers were mad and they went right after the store. They never bothered us." While some remembered "a ragtag picket line springing up within a hour," others said it appeared the next morning. (Hornung 1980:33)

<sup>18</sup> Right after the incident, the Flatbush Coalition for Economic Empowerment distributed the below leaflet.

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 FLATBUSH COALITION FOR ECONOMIC EMPOWERMENT  
 INCIDENT: WOMAN BEATEN BY RED APPLE OWNER  
KNOWN FACTS

- 1.ON JANUARY 18TH ABOUT 6 P.M. A WORKING MOTHER ENTERED THE RED APPLE MARKET LOCATED AT CHURCH AVENUE AND ST.PAUL'S PLACE
  - 2.THE PATRON(WORKING MOTHER) WENT IN TO PURCHASE GREEN PEPPER, BEFORE SHE COULD DO THAT A FEMALE EMPLOYEE ASKED TO LOOK IN HER SHOPPING BAG. THE PATRON REFUSED AND WAS ACCUSED OF STEALING.
  - 3.THE PATRON TOLD THE EMPLOYEE IF SHE WAS BEING ACCUSED OF THEFT, THEN THE POLICE SHOULD BE CALLED. AT THIS POINT 3 KOREAN MEN ASSAULTED HER, KICKING AND BEATING HER UNTIL SHE WAS BLEEDING AND JUST ABOUT UNCONSCIOUS.
  - 4.THE POLICE ARRIVED DURING THE ASSAULT. THEY SEARCHED HER BAG AND FOUND MEAT PURCHASED ELSEWHERE. THE OWNER WAS TAKEN TO THE 70TH PRECINCT ISSUED A DESK SUMMONS FOR ASSAULT AND RELEASED.
  - 5.THE VICTIM WAS TAKEN TO CALEDONIA HOSPITAL WHERE SHE SAT FOR 8 HOURS WITHOUT ANY ATTENTION AND WAS SENT HOME WHERE SHE IS STILL SUFFERING FROM INTERNAL INJURIES.
- BOYCOTT MERCHANTS WHO DISRESPECT AND DON'T SUPPORT THE COMMUNITY

**MASS COMMUNITY MEETING**

THURSDAY: JANUARY 25, 1990 AT 7:30 P.M.  
 AT ST.PAUL'S CHURCH-ST. PAUL'S PLACE & CHURCH AVE.  
 TEXTE FRANCAIS AU VERSO

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organized a group called the Flatbush Frontline Collective. The two groups had a combined membership of 17 (Hornung 1990a:33). "People automatically came out and gathered in front of the stores once word spread that a woman had been assaulted at Red Apple, ...due to the fact that the community residents had constantly and repetitively witnessed... [p]hysical and verbal abuse " (Albert, spoke-person for the Flatbush Frontline Collective, in 'Like It Is' aired Oct. 28, 1990 by WABC).<sup>19</sup>

The Flatbush Frontline Collective soon reached Sonny Carson, a famous community activist who led the struggle for community control of the public schools in Brooklyn in the late 1960s, or alternately known as the kidnapper who was convicted for kidnapping in the 1970s. Sonny Carson was also a leader of the December 12th Movement which had organized many boycotts against Korean stores. He became the leading strategist of the boycott.

#### The Boycott Process

Since physical violence could potentially strengthen the moral position of the other group, the boycotters aimed at the reduction of the targeted stores' revenue. The shopkeepers and the Korean Produce Association of New York similarly distributed propaganda that depicted the

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<sup>19</sup> Sabine Albert was the spoke-person for the boycotters. She also asserted that what happen at the Red Apple is not a solitary incident.

boycotters as "reverse racists." The boycotters' other aims were to increase the participation of local residents, to stir and heighten their consciousness, to garner public support, to secure equitable treatment, and to close down the targeted stores as a lesson to other racist shopkeepers. The store owners' options were: to increase police protection, to decrease the moral legitimacy of the boycotts, to get financial supports from other Koreans, and/or to wait until the boycotters stop the boycotts. Since the Koreans did not want to give up their businesses and the boycotters did not want to compromise, the conflict became a long-term stalemate. Thus, the boycotts became a routine demonstrations in front of the targeted stores.

The boycotts led to a 50% to almost 100% decline in the daily revenues of the targeted stores. During the first few months of the boycott in 1985 in Harlem, about 7-10 people (later only 3 people) picketed behind the police line. At the beginning, "they literally stood in the store's doorway and followed customers up the block, berating them" (Lombardi 1985:16).

In the 1988-9 boycott in Harlem, the picketers stationed themselves behind the police-erected blue sawhorses five feet away from front of the store. The boycott against the NaNa Fruit and Vegetable Market<sup>20</sup> on 125th street had continued from September 1988 to October

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<sup>20</sup> The name of the targeted store is altered.

1989. The boycotters demonstrated from 6 to 8 PM on weekdays and all day long on Saturdays. During weekdays, 5 to 8 boycotters stationed in front of the store shouted through the bullhorn, "Don't shop- shut'em down," "Pass 'em by- Watch 'em die!," "Boycott! Boycott!" On Saturdays, more people participated in the boycott. Sometimes, they shouted to entering customers that "the owner beat old Black lady." "Don't buy here." "Boycott, boycott." They also booed and insulted those who defied the boycott. When Joe Harris, a carpenter who lived nearby, bought five lemons, the boycotters shouted toward him "house nigger!" and "Uncle Tom!" (Amsterdam News, Oct. 1, 1988). Because of this combative boycott, sales plummeted to almost zero during the boycott hours. To attract more sympathy and participants, the boycotters distributed leaflets which accused the store owners of being violent racists.<sup>21</sup> However, the

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<sup>21</sup> One boycott leaflet states,

**9 MONTHS STRONG! THE BOYCOTT CONTINUES!**

SEPT. '88

-Gap Dol Kim and Ul Sun Kim, owners of NaNa's Food Market, 125th St., brutally attack an elderly Black woman.

-The boycott begins.

**NaNa'S MUST GO**

Oct. '88

-Police from the 28th Precinct, working with the Kims, began arresting boycotters on phony charges in order to break the boycott.-Police began providing Nana's 24 hours a day/7 days a week personal security.

NOV. '88

-Gap Dol Kim says, "Niggers should put their chains back on and go back to where all Niggers come from.

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DEC. '88

-Gap Dol Kim proudly says he believes in the philosophy of the KKK!

JAN. '89

-Ul Sun Kim says on Channel 13 that she would never hire Black people to work for her because "all Black people are lazy."

FEB. '89

-The Kims and the Korean Merchant Association of Harlem go to Community Board #10 and try to end the boycott. They fail!

MARCH. '89

-Gap Dol Kim arrested for assaulting a demonstrator. He spends 7 hours locked up in the 28th Precinct, then released.

-The police, having upset the Koreans, arrest 2 demonstrators for no reason at all.

APRIL '89

-The court dismisses phony assault charges brought by the Kims.

MAY '89

-The Kims plead poverty in court. They say they are bankrupt because of the boycott and ask for a tax-payer funded attorney.

JUNE '89

-Gap Dol Kim falsely accuses young Black girls of stealing but because community demands Gap Dol to be locked up instead, police let the girls go.

-State Senator David Paterson publicly supports the boycott.

JOIN THE LINE! MAKE HISTORY IN CLOSING NANA'S  
DECEMBER 12TH MOVEMENT

NO JUSTICE!- NO PEACE! ON TOWARD THE GENERAL STRIKE!

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Another leaflet goes,

Buy Black, WE MUST CONTROL: OUR MONEY, WHAT WE BUY AND WHEN,  
WHEN WE PRODUCE FOR THEM, AND WHEN WE DON'T!

ECONOMIC INDEPENDENCE

Brothers and sisters, we are engaged in a struggle for our very survival. The boycott represents one aspect of our continuing struggle for self-determination and total liberation of the Black Nation....

It is extremely important that we view the ongoing boycott of NaNa's in its proper perspective. Anyone or any group that comes into our community must respect us; no exceptions. Especially when it comes to the actuality of our spending our hard earned money with them. Under no circumstance should we

distribution of the leaflets failed to increase participation. They also displayed a big cloth screen which showed a big, powerful Black fist. This image symbolizes the Black power and the destruction of the racist white power. The banner also carried the name of the group, the December 12th Movement, which organized the boycott. Another poster read "BUY BLACK" in large print and featured the addresses of four Black fruit and vegetable stores (or vendors). One day there was a figure made of wood and paper which carried a small sign that read, "Owners said, Black go back to Africa."

But business during off-boycott hours was almost the same as before the boycott. Many Harlemites had on several occasions ignored the pickets and patronized the store. Some were afraid of being harassed by the protesters, and had simply changed their shopping hours. At times they showed up as early as 8 A.M. or 9 A.M. before any pickets arrived (Amsterdam News, Nov. 12, 1988). Thus, the store

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be subjected to verbal or physical abuse. An attack on our women and children should be an act of war. As a community we should never tolerate disrespect.

The question or issue that we should focus our attention on is not whether or not the boycott action at NaNa's is a correct or incorrect strategy, but rather who is going to control the vital life lines; and what are you doing about them....

As we enter into the 52nd week of the boycott, we say to our bothers and sisters "NaNa's Must Go, join the boycott line." We must consciously participate in the struggle to recapture our community. No one is going to do for us, what we can and must do for ourselves. Never give up. We love you....

**The Black Nation Must Be Free! FREEDOM or DEATH**

[Original bold letters. I changed personal and store names]

could generate enough profit to survive during off-boycott-hours. However, almost nobody came into the store during the boycott hours.

The store owners also tried to placate customers by explaining that they were not beating any Black. A poster on a window of the targeted store carried an explanation of the boycott from the perspective of the owner.

Dear Customer: They claim that Koreans have beat up black people. But it is not benefit to Koreans to beat up our customers and we have the evidence to prove this fact. The management of "NaNa fruit market" will work harder to serve our customers and Harlem community. Dear Customer, the management of NaNa Fruit Market apologizes for the shopping inconveniences caused by December 12 Movement. The Dec. 12 Movement has been boycotting Koreans for past four years. The Dec 12 movement are organization located in Brooklyn. Their purpose of boycotting "NaNa Fruit" is solely to benefit their movement, not to benefit the harlem community and its people. They boycott us because we are Korean. [I changed the store's name]

When troubles occurred in a fish market near the boycott site, Black shoppers often threatened to boycott the fish market. This threat and the actual boycott of Korean stores made the Korean store owners pay more attention to Black shoppers. Several Korean shopkeepers in the area told me that they became more careful and polite to Black customers after the boycott. They also reported that several Black shoppers threatened to boycott when the shopkeepers did not satisfy them. Other Black customers also became more assertive.

One college professor<sup>22</sup> told me that a Black radical group in Harlem had a list of stores whose owners were mistreating Blacks and the group would burn down those stores when a crisis started. The professor informed me that when the store owners mistreated Black shoppers, the group collected such complaints from Black residents in Harlem. She also asserted that she dissuaded some of them from setting one store afire during the boycott. According to her, they did not set the store on fire. I could not confirm this story from any other source. However, two Asian stores (the boycotted Korean store and one Yemenite store) were set on fire during the boycott period. Police suspected drug related fights, but the Korean shopkeepers suspected the boycotters.

The Brooklyn boycott against two Korean stores in 1990 drew great attention from local residents and the news media. After the altercation on Jan. 18th, 1990, the ranks of the protesters grew swiftly. The Flatbush Coalition for Economic Empowerment soon distributed flyers in the area and

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<sup>22</sup> She was living in Central Harlem and teaching in a college in New York City when I met her in Spring 1989. She complained about the rudeness of Korean shopkeepers and talked about many racist aspects of American society. She insisted that Koreans should get a preferable treatment from White banks. According to her, without it, Koreans could not expand their business so rapidly. When I explained how Koreans mobilize capital within their ethnic community (see chapter 4), she doubted my assertion. However, she seemed to have some connection with radical groups in Harlem because she said she met them and discussed with them. She supported the activities of the boycotters.

organized mass-community meetings and nearby rallies before marches to the targeted store. The Flatbush Collective Frontline soon started to organize the boycott. The members called people through their networks and distributed flyers in the area. Their meetings and rallies drew hundreds of local Haitian and Black residents. The speakers included various local and city Haitian and Black leaders. The December 12th Movement soon got involved into the boycott. The Frontline got advice from Sonny Carson. The December 12th Movement also participated in mobilizing people, and members of the Movement were key speakers in rallies. They also organized rallies in Harlem and distributed flyers to passersby in order to promote the Brooklyn boycott.

Policemen were deployed as the protesters' number grew. Widespread media attention beginning in May 1990 also increased the number of participants in the boycott. At its peak, about 600 protesters gathered and about 400 policemen were deployed in front of the store. New York City's Human Rights Commission (Commissioner de Leon) intervened. Eventually, the Mayor, courts, state politicians, FBI, and federal politicians intervened as the boycott grew and got more attention from the news media. Carson advised the protesters not to negotiate with the city until officials arrested the three Koreans who had allegedly beaten the Haitian woman.

The Korean shopkeepers in New York City thought that

Carson organized a boycott against another Korean store because of his political ambition. The Koreans believed that Carson exaggerated the incident to sell his nationalist Black Power ideas and to drive Korean shopkeepers out of Black neighborhoods. Thus, Koreans were determined to support the Korean shopkeepers at any expense. Koreans supported the store owners with hundreds of thousands dollars. During the boycott, daily sales dropped from thousands of dollars before the boycott to mere tens of dollars.

#### The Ends and Impacts of Boycotts

There are several different reasons why the boycotts eventually stopped. First, some small individual boycotts did not continue for a long time because the protesters could not support them. When a spontaneous boycott against a Korean C-Town supermarket in Elmhurst, Queens occurred, the Korean owner apologized right away and fired the employee who was accused of beating a young Black who was suspected of shoplifting by the employee.<sup>23</sup> The owner also sought help from local Black leaders; these leaders decided that the boycott was not necessary because the owner had helped many community causes. The boycott did not continue for even a week.

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<sup>23</sup> Again, the stories from the young Black and the Korean employee were contradictory.

In some other cases, local residents opposed boycotts. Two 1988 boycott attempts by the December 12th Movement in Jamaica, Queens, ceased within a month because participants were harassed by local residents and the police severely their boycott activities. However, when organizations were involved, the boycotts could continue for a longer time.

Boycotters and organizations behind boycotts needed reasons not only for the beginning of the boycotts but also for the end of the boycotts to maintain the sympathy of local residents. If the targeted store owners sold their stores and left the area, the boycotters eventually stopped their boycotts and could celebrate their successes. They stopped their boycotts in a 1985 Harlem boycott and in a 1988 Brooklyn boycott after the targeted store-owners moved out. However, there were also political pressure to stop the boycotts from Black politicians.

The 1988-89 Harlem boycott supposedly ended under pressure from then mayoral candidate David Dinkins. Even though the leader of the boycott denied this rumor, Dinkins stated several times that he was influential in stopping the boycott.<sup>24</sup> The 1990 Brooklyn boycott might also fall into this category. When the court decided that there was no evidence that three Koreans beat a Haitian woman and Mayor Dinkins pressed hard on the boycott leaders, the boycotters eventually lost support from the residents and stopped the

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<sup>24</sup> See chapter 6 for detail.

boycott.

The first boycott in Harlem in 1982 stopped without a closure of any Korean stores because the boycotters did not target a specific store. The distribution of flyers which charged Koreans with getting preferential treatments from the American government and White banks increased suspicion of Korean shopkeepers among the area residents. The Koreans shopkeepers in Harlem were also scared after realizing that they were described as vicious merchants. After the boycott, the Korean shopkeepers started to participate in local business associations and community affairs and to donate funds to the Police Athletic League and other community events in the area. Eventually, the Korean shopkeepers in the area organized their own business association to deal with community relationships more effectively.

The 1985 boycott in Harlem led to economic disaster for the targeted store owners. They sold their building and business to another Korean and eventually gave up their green grocery business in Harlem. They had to sell their building at a discount price because of the stigma that caused Black shoppers to avoid the store. When the boycotters expanded their boycotts against other nearby stores, they did not get enough support from the local residents. Other shopkeepers survived without economic hardship but developed deep resentment of the Black boycotters. One shopkeeper, whose store was boycotted in

1985, said that he hated the demonstrators. He also insisted that the boycotters victimized Koreans in order to heighten the political presence of the boycott organizers among the Blacks. Some Black residents in Harlem also complained that the boycotters boycotted Korean shopkeepers in order to increase their political influence in Black neighborhoods.

Even though the targeted store owner in the 1988-1989 Harlem boycott survived, Korean shopkeepers in Harlem felt that the boycott threatened all Korean stores. The Korean shopkeepers in the area noticed that Black shoppers had become more assertive in their demands. The Korean shopkeepers also told me that they became more receptive to the Black shoppers' demands and more careful about possible conflicts. The Korean shopkeepers were afraid of being boycotted. The Korean stores near the targeted store also experienced a decrease in their revenue. The targeted shopkeepers and nearby Korean shopkeepers criticized the boycott, the leadership of the Korean Merchant Association, local police, and the city government very harshly. They tended to blame the problems of poor Blacks on the poor Blacks themselves.<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> It is not clear why they place the blame more on poor Blacks than other Korean shopkeepers. One explanation may be that they experienced a decrease in their revenue because of the boycott. The other one might be that the nearby Korean shopkeepers of the targeted store were young and relatively new shopkeepers. They were more aggressive in making money and more anxious about Black shoplifting.

In all three Harlem boycotts, there were efforts to solve the problems through negotiation. In the 1988-1989 boycott, Father Lucas rejected any negotiation because he thought that respect could not be the object of negotiation. He and the boycotters insisted on the closure of the targeted store. In other Harlem boycotts, the demands from the boycotters included the surrender of some leases of Korean stores to Blacks. The Koreans rejected the demands. Thus, in fact, there was no successful negotiation between Korean shopkeepers and Black boycotters in Harlem.

The only case where negotiation between the Korean shopkeepers and Black leaders succeeded involved the 1988 Brooklyn boycott. In this case, the actual boycotters and the Black participants in the negotiation were different. The Black participants were main-stream Black leaders such as Assemblyman Al Vann. Assemblyman Vann agreed with the December 12th Movement-led boycott's charge that "Koreans gave little or nothing back to the communities in which they reap economic benefits." Rev. Butts of Abyssinia Baptist Church in Harlem explained the Black boycotts as "coupled with a resentment of the Koreans' attitude, in resentment of the fact that blacks have been unable to develop their communities" (quoted in Amsterdam News, Nov. 12, 1988).

The negotiated resolution in the 1988 Brooklyn boycott

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Because they worked hard, they considered others who did not work hard more negatively.

addressed a number of Black grievances in Bedford-Stuyvesant. All 32 Korean merchants in the areas agreed to open accounts at either Freedom National Bank or Carver Savings Bank, two local banks owned by Blacks. They also agreed to donate money to community organizations and to start a job training program for local youths. The resolution stipulated,

- 1). Korean merchants would contribute to a local trust fund whose resources will help encourage entrepreneurship, presumably for Blacks, in the area.
- 2). The merchants would utilize the services of local Black-owned and/or operated banks.
- 3). The merchants would advertise their products and services in the Black media.
- 4). They also would utilize the services of other local business in the predominantly Black neighborhood.
- 5). The merchants would support financially and in other ways cultural and educational programs aimed at the youths of the two communities in order to promote racial understanding.
- 6). The owner of the Tropic Market must sell his business.

This resolution did not satisfy all factions of both groups. Sonny Carson and the December 12th Movement had steadfastly refused to accept any negotiation and accused the Black negotiators of "selling out".<sup>26</sup> Many Korean shopkeepers were also angry because they thought that the Korean representatives had sold out the Korean shopkeepers. They considered the resolution as a defeat which included many unacceptable concessions by Korean representatives. The targeted store owner was also dissatisfied with the

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<sup>26</sup> See chapter 6 for detail.

resolution. But he had no other alternative than to leave the area.<sup>27</sup> After the resolution, the targeted Korean shopkeeper gave up his business and left the area. Accordingly, the boycott lost its steam, and the boycotters eventually disappeared. Despite the resolution, the situation in the area did not achieve racial harmony. No education program for young Blacks was started. Humiliation and poverty continued.

This negotiation only revealed the chasms between different social classes among Blacks. Carson admitted that

his group has little support from the black middle class. But Carson says he does not need their support, who he calls 'sellouts' to the white culture (Song 1989:6).

The boycotters and some Blacks in the area also thought, "the negotiators were selling out and not addressing the major question of who will control business in black neighborhoods" (New York Times, Dec. 21, 1988). In contrast, a Black participant in the negotiation said, "If Mr. Carson won't accept the agreement, that's his problem.... Mr. Carson is not the community. The community had decided what it wants" (Song 1989:8).

In the case of the 1990 Brooklyn boycott, negotiation

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<sup>27</sup> The store owner's brother told me that the store owner lost all investment in the store (more than 100,000 dollars). The store owner's brother was very critical to the resolution and considered that as a great defeat. From his discussion, I got the impression that the store owner reluctantly admitted the selling out of the store.

was not possible because the boycotters were successful in mobilizing hundreds of protesters and because the Korean leadership in New York City did not want to repeat the "defeat" they experienced in the 1988 Brooklyn boycott . The alleged victim of the beating brought the incident to court. However, a Jury of the State Supreme Court in Brooklyn acquitted all of the accused Koreans. Eventually, support from area residents and the number of boycotters decreased after the decision. In Spring, 1991, the boycotters seldom appeared in front of the target store. In Summer 1991, the targeted store owner sold his store and left the area.

Even though the continuing boycotts failed to produce any noticeable change in poor Black neighborhoods, many Korean shopkeepers from Church Ave. Brooklyn to Harlem admitted that they were more cautious and polite to Black shoppers than before the boycotts. The Black customers became more aggressive in asserting their rights. One Korean shopkeeper near the targeted store on Church Avenue, Brooklyn, said that the Black customers became more aggressive, and that there were now even more problems in business. She also expressed her increasing fear of doing business in Black neighborhoods. Many Harlem shopkeepers expressed similar opinions. Black customers also noticed the change of attitude in Korean shopkeepers. As one newspaper reported, "An East Flatbush shopper notices the

Korean shopkeepers now smile more and always say `thank you'" (Kwong 1991).

Korean newspapers also started their campaign for the change of attitudes of Koreans toward Blacks. One Korean newspaper routinely carried a short slogan, "Don't use the term, gumdungyi [nigger]." One Korean news article suggested that Korean shopkeepers needed to understand Black culture and to refrain from giving Blacks the impression of insult or contempt. Koreans also worried about the rumor that some Blacks were willing to blow-up stores by injecting propane gas into stores if they could get a few thousand dollars (Chung Ang Ilbo, May 16, 1990).

#### The December 12th Movement

A group which organized most prominent boycotts against Korean shopkeepers during this period was the December 12th Movement.<sup>28</sup> The December 12th Movement frequently provided key manpower, strategy, and ideology for the boycotts against Korean shopkeepers. This December 12th Movement is an organization of Black community activists mainly in Brooklyn and in Harlem.

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<sup>28</sup> The December 12th Movement has organized many protests against police brutality and white racism, and boycotts against many Korean shopkeepers. They also promoted a general strike in New York City. Their main hero is Malcolm X. (Hornung 1990b)

Coltrane Chimurenga,<sup>29</sup> Sonny Carson, and other Black activists organized in 1986 the Black Men's Movement, an amalgam of Block associations and neighborhood patrols that organized around two issues: police brutality and the influx of crack in Black neighborhoods. This group led many protest marches against New York City Mayor Koch and police precincts (e.g. protesting the authorities' handling of Howard Beach incident) after Michael Griffith was killed by White mobs in Howard Beach, New York City. This group also protested police killing of Black suspects and marched against crack dealers. Carson and Chimuranga severed their alliance with Revs. Al Sharpton and Louis Farrakhan because of their differences in social philosophy and protest strategies.<sup>30</sup> They renamed their organization the December

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<sup>29</sup> Chimurenga holds a master degree in Education from Harvard University. He was one of New York Eight Plus who were arrested as urban terrorists(planning a jail break and armed car robberies) but eventually acquitted in 1985. The eight were the first people to be held under a newly passed National Preventive Detention Law, called the Bail Reform Act of 1984. Chimurenga was a member of Republic of New Afrika and associate of the Black Acupuncture Advisory Association of North America which provided community health care in Harlem and South Bronx (Churchill and Wall 1988:364-365). Jiuliani, Republican candidate for the Mayor of New York City in 1989, was the prosecutor of New York Eight Plus.

As a self-styled communist, Chimurenga proclaimed himself to be staunch opponent of capitalism, but he insisted on Black neighborhoods developing their own network of small businesses that would provide goods and services, jobs, and capital for Blacks. (Hornung 1990b:29)

<sup>30</sup> The December 12th Movement has a militant position against social injustice and racism than other Black politicians or activists. See chapter 6.

12th Movement to memorialize the separation date from Revs. Al Sharpton and Louis Farrakhan. The December 12th Movement includes Marxists, community activists, a Father, and a lawyer as its core leaders.

The December 12th Movement tried to provide Black New Yorkers an alternative leadership to

the leadership offered on the one hand by Dinkins and Jackson, modern-day Booker T. Washington who cut deals and compromises that sell their people short, and that offered on the other hand by Sharpton and Farrakhan, Garveyite caricatures who use their pulpits to preach false sermons of black nationalism...(Hornung 1990b:29)

Chimuranga further explained that the position of the December 12th Movement is to make "us control our own lives, and watch our own streets, begin and conduct our own businesses, teach our own children, take care of sick and old" (ibid.). Thus, Sonny Carson expressed "We need men who can come together and work, who can protect our community and our families. That's what we're all about, achieving self-determination" (ibid.:28).

Chimurenga also commented on the boycotts organized and/or supported by the December 12th Movement.

It frames a number of very important issues... First, an attack upon one of our women is an attack upon all of us. Second, the boycott shows that we still do something to take power away from people who don't give us the respect we deserve. And third, we are showing our own people that we do have power, purchasing power, economic power, if we act together... The boycott is an issue of black people standing up... To the simple-minded, it's a matter of pitting black against yellow.

This statement shows that the December 12th Movement's purpose is to protest various "racism" and "social

injustice" against Blacks and to promote "Black Power." However, various government officials considers them to be "dangerous criminals." Because of the movement's militant position, the FBI and New York Police Department monitor the members very closely. Chimurenga said, "I have been watched, bugged, followed, filed, and cross-filed for so many years that I just consider it part of my life" (ibid., p.28).<sup>31</sup>

### Conclusion

Because of humiliation and mistreatment by Korean shopkeepers and because of anger and suspicion regarding the sudden and rapid growth of Korean businesses, many Blacks expressed their anger and initiated personal boycotts against Korean shopkeepers. However, these silent personal boycotts did not affect the attitudes and revenues of Korean shopkeepers. But when organizations organized and supported boycotts, boycotts could be sustained for long period of time and seriously affect the financial situation of the targeted stores. The organizations mobilized people by stimulating the resentment of racial injustice among Black residents. Flyers and rallies conveyed these feelings. However, because some Blacks patronized the targeted stores during the boycotts, it was very difficult for many Black

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<sup>31</sup> For the detail discussion of the relationship between the December 12th Movement and the state agents such as police, prosecutors, and politicians, see chapter 6.

residents to maintain moral enthusiasm during the long-term boycotts.

The boycotts also demonstrated that there are many people who are ready to fight against racism and organize for a "justice" for Black people. The December 12th Movement includes such individuals. This group is staunchly resistant to racist practices and capitalism. However, in everyday practice, they emphasized not their anti-capitalist ideas but their anti-racist ideas, propelling the latter into the foreground of protests because anti-capitalist ideas have less appeal than anti-racism among the Black population.

Their boycotts were simultaneously a failure and a success. They did not achieve their original goals of the closure of targeted Korean shopkeepers, the rise of Black Power, nor the creation of a permanent Buy Black Movement, and had to end their boycotts with no visible results. However, they heightened the consciousness of many Blacks regarding the attitudes of Korean shopkeepers and their massive presence in Black neighborhoods as important issues and caused Korean shopkeepers to change their attitudes to some degree. They also raised questions for many Blacks about the racism in American society.

Whether the causes of the boycotts are minor altercations between Korean shopkeepers and "suspicious" Black shoppers or not, those incidents made participants

examine the meanings of the relationship between the two groups and the events in the context of American society. In the process of the conflict, various meanings and interpretations were deployed and argued. This contest of meanings cannot be understood outside the context of power. Some groups will try to spread certain meanings and interpretations and other groups will counter with different meanings and interpretations.

The challenge, toward existing social relationships, not only with Korean shopkeepers but with White-dominated society as well, was accompanied with related meanings and interpretations of social relationships. The challenge to existing ideological, political, and economic social orders by the boycotters and the December 12th Movement raised questions regarding how the social order is criticized, reconstructed, or maintained in relation to the existing social forces and existing normative order. These issues will be dealt within the next chapter.

## CHAPTER SIX

"BLOODSUCKER" vs. "THOSE NIGGERS": CLASHES OF  
MEANINGS AND POWER

When a Black shopper wanted to get refund of his deposited money(\$20) for a lay-away suit, the Korean shopkeeper responded to him, "no cash refund." The conversation continued with tension.

B:(a young Black male customer) Why not?

A:(pointing a sign on a window) Look at over there. You can just exchange. No refund at all.

B:(hesitant with anger) You have to refund.

A:(with a flat face, pointing to a sign, "no refund", on the window): Read the sign over there.

B:(looks at the Korean shopkeeper with apparent anger) ...

A:(no change of expression) ...

B:(finally choosing a pair of pants) It is \$19.99. No tax. O.K.?

A:(with a despising smile) No. Pay tax.

B:(with apparent anger) Where are you from?

A: America.

B: Japan?

A: ....

B: China?

A: ....

B: No money for tax.

A: Pay it.

B: (angrily) Japanese Jew.

A: ....

B:(finally pays a 20 dollar bill and three quarters and gets change, \$19.11, from A) Japanese Jew...

He spat out again "Japanese Jew" when he went out. After he went out, the Korean shopkeeper also spat out "michin saeki [crazy asshole]".

This story was the conversation between a Black shopper and a Korean shopkeeper at whose store I worked in 1988.

`Japanese Jew,' `michin saeki,` and other invective words

express well the mutual mistrust and negative images, separating these two groups. This exchange occurred within in the concrete political and economic environment between the two individuals involved. How can this individual incident be interpreted in the context of the general relationship of the two ethnic groups in New York City?

One of the posters on the walls on 125th street in Harlem depicted a young Black sweating to pull a rickshaw with a Korean in it. Another poster depicted a Black hand powerfully grasping and crushing something. Why is it that discontented Black shoppers or boycotters cannot crush Koreans in reality as they do in drawings? In this chapter, I will explore how the meanings are expressed; how and what kind of social relationships are mediated through the meanings in the Black-Korean conflict; how both groups try to achieve moral high grounds; how they contextualize the conflict in relation to American society; and how their efforts and presentations are limited by and related to state agents, especially politicians and law enforcers.

#### The Stories of Boycotters and Blacks

There is a difficulty in measuring how many Blacks in the poor New York City Black neighborhoods share the ideas of the boycotters. However, the boycotters' success in closing several Korean stores and the degree of intensity of the boycotts show that there is considerable sympathy for

the boycotts in poor Black communities. Views of the boycotters and Blacks about Korean shopkeepers in poor Black communities have certain core themes.

#### Koreans as Arrogant and Racist Individuals

The most common complaint of Black residents was that Korean shopkeepers are rude to Black shoppers. Blacks explained their experience in Korean stores in a meeting between Korean shopkeepers and Black local leaders in Harlem. "When Blacks stay in a store for a while in order to look at commodities, Korean shopkeepers often said 'if you want to buy, buy it. Or go out'." They also said that Koreans do not say hello to Black customers. Other complaints also included, "Koreans don't treat us like human being," or "Koreans don't smile to us." Similar complaints can be heard in many areas where Korean shopkeepers do their business.

One letter from a Black expressed the feeling. "

You [Korean shopkeepers] look down upon us [Blacks] and treat us like shoplifters. You, in general, don't greet us, don't smile, and are very scornful of us. When you talk among yourselves, you don't call us Black but gumdungyi [nigger]. Many of us know what you mean by that... Of course you will point out that there are a lot of drug, violence, and crime in Black neighborhoods. But the majority of the shoppers are decent citizens. How can you mistreat us like that when we support your income? You have to thank us because our difficult struggle for equality for a century after the Civil War achieved an equality, at least, before law... How do you dare to show contempt for us when you make money from our neighborhoods and you are protected by the laws which resulted from our

struggles? We are really shocked and angry.<sup>1</sup>

When Black shoppers hear Korean shopkeepers and their employees use Korean, the customers are often suspicious of the Koreans' discussions. They suspect that the Koreans are attempting to cheat or insult them by using language unintelligible to consumers. Others Blacks complained that Koreans put money on the counter instead of in the hands of the shoppers. One of the Harlem boycotters said they boycotted a Korean store because "its owner showed disrespect to Blacks, and we [the boycotters] heard a bunch of complaints about the mistreatment by the store owner." Reverend Calvin Butts, a pastor of a large Black church in Harlem, said that Koreans came in with a very bad prejudice instilled by media and other sources (Korean Times of New York, Sept. 6, 1986).

Another complaint was that Korean shopkeepers are very suspicious of Blacks. When the Church Avenue boycott started in January 1990, one Black woman complained that Korean shopkeepers are suspicious about Blacks. It is certainly true that Korean shopkeepers and, I think, other shopkeepers too, consider Blacks, especially young Blacks,

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<sup>1</sup> This letter seemed to be translated into Korean by a Korean Professor and sent to the Korea Times of New York. This letter appeared as a series in Feb. 1990. I retranslated those articles into English.

to be potential shoplifters.<sup>2</sup>

Certainly, Harlem Korean shopkeepers knew about the complaints of the Black residents in the area. The former secretary of the Korean Merchant Association in Harlem said, "the complaints of Blacks are `Korean shopkeepers pushed Black shoppers to buy, pay, and go out fast. If they did not buy, Koreans would frown their face.'" He continued, "Koreans do not talk to a shopper if the customer seems not to buy any thing... Korean shopkeepers might be trying to hustle shoppers through the checkout process as quickly as possible to avoid hiring an additional cashier - as might be necessary if they take the time to count change for every shopper, as Americans do." Other Koreans explained that in Confucian culture women cannot touch male hands, thus female (usually Korean) cashiers put change on the counter rather than in the hands of male customers.

However, Father Lucas who led the boycott against a Korean shopkeeper in Harlem in 1988 had a different idea. "None of the boycotts started over `cultural differences' or `language barriers.' Vicious assaults, especially against African women and babies, were the last straws after long patterns of disrespect and verbal abuse of African people"

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<sup>2</sup> Many young Blacks said whenever they enter a store they find suspicious stares. Some young Blacks stated that they have reacted by splitting up to see who the clerks will follow, or by pretending to snatch something from a shelf and then laughing at a clerk when they reveal an empty hand (Washington Post, Oct. 17, 1991).

(Amsterdam News, Oct. 6, 1990). One Black man said he saw a Korean chase a Black and beat him with Tae Kwon Do.<sup>3</sup> This seems true because one Korean shopkeeper said to me that he chased shoplifters for many blocks and had sometimes kicked them down.

Sonny Carson, one of the founders of the December 12th Movement, says,

Some Korean merchants have taken on the attitude reminiscent of the slave masters. They have the same racist attitude that they are superior. They are arrogant and suspicious... I don't believe black people will ever get a free and fair share of anything... The Koreans are beginning to attack our people physically. We are prepared to fight by any means necessary. I don't think there can be any resolution. (quoted in Song 1989)

During the 1990 Church Avenue boycott, a Black nurse wondered how Korean dare to beat a poor Black woman even they thought she stole something. "If she had enough money, she would not steal it. Even though I agree that the person who stole did a wrong thing, the Koreans who dare beat those poor people are very bad."

#### Koreans as Exploiters

Many Blacks think that the Korean shopkeepers are concerned only about money. One Black said, "they suspect all of us... They just try to make money. They are concerned about nothing but money. We boycott those merchants. Not good guys. There might be good Korean

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<sup>3</sup> Korean martial art.

merchants. We have no problem with them." Reverend Calvin Butts succinctly summarized the view. "Because Koreans want only to make money, the bad sides of capitalism are in between the two groups" (Korean Times of New York, Sept. 6, 1986).

Black residents in the Church Avenue area in Brooklyn said that some Korean shopkeepers overcharge Blacks at the cash register and randomly raise prices. Many shoppers complained that some Korean cashiers do not give them receipts; their employees sometimes add a few extra dollars to large bills, hoping that the shopper will not notice. When a receipt is requested, the shoppers said, the Korean employees retally and rebag the entire purchase, banging and bruising the produce (New York Times, May 17, 1990).<sup>4</sup>

Shoppers also complained about the suddenly escalating prices of produce in some Korean stores, especially before major holidays. For example, a shopper said that the price

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<sup>4</sup> During my fieldwork in Harlem, I didn't find any case where a Korean cashier intentionally overcharged Blacks at the cash register. Sometimes the cashiers made mistakes and the customers accused them of rip-off. However, the Korean shopkeepers used various tactics to maximize their profits. For example, some store owners discussed among them about the price of specific items in order to fix it. Certainly the store owners wanted to mark the prices as high as possible in order to maximize their profits. But because of the competition with other stores, they cannot mark the price as they want. One Korean grocery store-owner regularly checked the price of fruits and vegetables in a nearby supermarket. When the prices were high, customers often mentioned the prices in other stores and complained. Then, the shopkeeper would mark down his/her price because of the fear to lose customers. I think, this mechanism of marking price is common for any shopkeepers.

of potatoes in one store went from \$1 for five pounds to \$1.29 for four pounds in one week. Shoppers said that if the market owners receive a particularly good shipment of produce, they raise prices without informing shoppers, and that mangoes and plantains were often sold by size and not weight. For example, one complaint was that each mango or plantain could be marked with a "O," or an "X," indicating its price to the cashier but not to the shoppers (New York Times, May 17, 1990).<sup>5</sup>

When shoppers complained about prices, Korean shopkeepers often blames the price charges on wholesalers. One Korean grocer explained, when tomatoes jumped from 69 cents a pound to \$1.69 in the 1989 winter, he said, incredulous customers asked him point-blank, "Are you crazy?" He said hardly anyone understood that the markup wasn't his, but the result of freezing weather in Florida (New York Times, May 17, 1990). A fish market owner in Harlem also frequently changed the price because the wholesalers frequently changed the price. However, because of the possible resistance and anger from shoppers, the

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<sup>5</sup> I think this is particularly true for many green grocery stores. In order to get better price with better quality vegetables, the grocers often go to the wholesale market at Hunts Point of New York City at 1 A.M. The earlier he goes to the wholesale market, the better vegetables he can get with same price. If they get better vegetables or fruits, they will mark higher price on them. Any retailers can mark as much as they want in America. However, the Customer Codes in New York City require that all prices be clearly marked.

owner did not double the price when the wholesalers doubled the wholesale price because of a hurricane.<sup>6</sup>

Another common complaint was that Korean shopkeepers do not refund. In fact, most Korean shopkeepers in Harlem did not refund. They only allowed the exchange with a similarly priced item. This practice particularly made many Black shoppers angry. I saw many incidents where a Korean shopkeeper and a Black shopper were shouting at each other because of this refund policy. Black shoppers usually gave up and exchanged with another item because a sign of 'no refund' is always attached to a counter or a window inside stores. Even though a shopper complained, the police, the court, or other formal consumer institutions were not a useful help for them because of the inconvenience of using those institutions and the lack of information about them.

A letter from a Black succinctly summarized their view

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<sup>6</sup> The price determination is troublesome for many shopkeepers. Korean shopkeepers complained that the wholesalers marked up the price too high when the weather changed or the harvest was not good. One fish market owner always had problems to determine the price of whittings whenever the wholesalers doubled the wholesale price (this often happened when the weather of seas was not good) because of the possible complaints from shoppers. He and other Korean fish retailers thought the wholesalers ripped off Korean retailers. However, the general rule of thumb for the retail price was to double the wholesale price. If the wholesale price of an item is very expensive, say 200 dollars for a leather jacket, a shopkeeper cannot double the whole price because only few shoppers will buy. The retail price would be determined at about 350 dollars. If the wholesale price is very cheap, say 50 cents for a pair of ear rings, the retail price would about two dollars (four times of the wholesale price).

about how Korean shopkeepers exploit Blacks. "You are selling us poor quality goods, the prices are usually high, and you are very reluctant in refunding even those goods that have problems. It seems to me that you are harvesting a great profit from black neighborhoods" (Korean Times of New York, Feb. 1, 1991). A resident in Flatbush, where a boycott against two Korean stores was going on, expressed a similar view. "[T]he Koreans make money and leave the neighborhood. They do every night. They drive up in their Jaguars, they collect the cash, and then they drive out of the community to where they live. And that is wrong."<sup>7</sup>

#### Koreans as Outsiders

In the rally for the 65th anniversary of the birth of Malcolm X in front of the State Building on 125th Street in Harlem in 1990, Sonny Carson appeared and made a speech about the general strike. The leaflets about the 1990 Church Avenue boycott against Korean grocers were distributed. About 100 young Blacks gathered. The main theme of the rally was to take back "our street, our culture." The 1990 Church Avenue boycotters in Brooklyn also responded with a shout, "our street," when their leader shouted, "whose street ?"

When Korean shopkeepers appeared and established

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<sup>7</sup> CBS, "48 hours: Simmer in the City," broadcasted on July 12, 1990.

considerable business activities on 125th Street in Harlem, they were viewed as outsiders by Black residents. The coordinator of the 1982 boycott in Harlem said, "the Koreans have come into 'our' community, taking millions of dollars 'out'...." (New York Times, Sept. 11, 1982, my emphasis). Accordingly, one member of the December 12th Movement complained about the over-representation of Korean shopkeepers on 125th Street. "If you look at 125th Street, which is the main microcosm of all the black communities, there are 160 stores from river to river... Koreans own 53 of them. That should seem strange to the leaders of the community how, in a short time, these people have come in and grabbed hold of the economic life of the 125th street" (New York Voice, Dec. 3, 1988).

A letter from a Black to a Korean newspaper expressed a similar feeling.

Even though you open your business in our neighborhoods you don't want to be our true neighbors. You are not living in our neighborhoods. You don't attend community meetings for the improvement of neighborhoods and don't like to serve for these communities. You excuse yourself because of language problem. But I haven't heard that you don't make money because of your lack of English. And if you come into this country, you have to learn language and culture of this country. Until what time will you excuse yourself and hide behind the bullet proof glass?" (Korea Times of New York, Feb. 1, 1990)

### Blacks as Generous

Many Blacks think that while only Blacks accept all ethnic shopkeepers, other ethnic groups are more exclusive.

One Black Muslim vendor on 125 Street contended that only Blacks are open to other ethnic groups. He explained that Blacks cannot open businesses in White areas because Whites would not use Black stores, but Blacks use any store here. "We are open, but they are not. Only Blacks welcome any ethnic merchants. Look around here [in Harlem]. You can see all ethnic merchants."<sup>8</sup> He implied that Koreans must have problems in doing business in White areas because of White racism and that Koreans are successful in Harlem because of the Blacks' tolerance.

This tolerance is easily transformed a the feeling of betrayal when Blacks believe that the reciprocal relationship is violated. One speaker during the meeting for the 1990 Church Avenue boycotters asserted, "we are a generous people. In response to our kindness, the Koreans charge us high prices, give us inferior goods, and abuse our mothers and sisters"(Kwong 1990:29).

#### Koreans as Unfair Competitors

While many members of the December 12th Movement think that the Korean shopkeepers took economic opportunities away

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<sup>8</sup> From a similar perspective, the president of the Uptown Chamber of Commerce also agreed. "Nowhere are Koreans welcomed in greater numbers- or with more open arms- than in our communities. Everyone with an open mind knows this to be true. ...The issue with the one store being boycotted is one of insensitivity, arrogance, ignorance and racism, a fact recognized by many Harlem residents- and other Korean business persons"(Daily News, July 2, 1989).

from Blacks, some other Blacks think that the Korean shopkeepers filled the vacant spaces and revitalized decayed Black streets. It is very difficult to prove whether the Korean shopkeepers took economic opportunities away from Blacks or not. However, there is some indirect evidence. While the number of Korean shopkeepers was about three dozen and the number of Black shopkeepers was more than 60 on 125th Street in 1982 (New York Times, Sept. 11, 1982), the numbers were reversed in 1990. There were about thirty Black shopkeepers and sixty six Korean shopkeepers in 1990 on the same street. Even though the reversal of the numbers of shopkeepers of two groups on 125th Street does not directly prove that the Korean shopkeepers took businesses from Blacks, Black shopkeepers feel the pressure from Korean shopkeepers.

Black shopkeepers talk about and fear the competitiveness of Korean shopkeepers. Sikulu Shange, a Black record shop owner on 125th Street, complains that "the Korean businesses are jacking up the prices of real estate sky high." He added, "I am furious after hearing that a Korean merchant had approached my landlord to buy my lease. Why are they working around me to force me out?" Shange opened his record shop in 1977, when Harlem was what he described as a "disaster area." He built his business, he says, through "raw courage and raw power." Now it may all be for nothing because Shange says that he cannot compete

with the offers Koreans have been making to landlords (Lombardi 1985).<sup>9</sup> Korean shopkeepers are also aware of their strength over Black shopkeepers. They often expressed the idea that Korean shopkeepers sell the same goods with cheaper prices than Black shopkeepers.

#### Koreans as a Part of Racist America

When Black shoppers feel the suspicion and arrogance of Korean shopkeepers, "they are reminded of how they have been treated all of their lives and view the Korean merchants/employees as just another racist element in society and a part of a racist system contributing to the perpetuation of discrimination against blacks in general and low-income blacks in particular" (Stewart 1989:93). This feeling is well expressed in individual complaints as well as in boycotts.

The boycotters considered Korean merchants as "tools of a general conspiracy by the U.S. Government to keep the Black community's economic life in chaos and under outside control. The banks finance non-Black merchants, the police protect them, and the politicians speak up for them" (from a boycott leaflet). Thus, the overrepresentation of Korean

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<sup>9</sup> It is widely believed among Koreans in New York City that the influx of Koreans in small business hiked rent very fast during the 1980s. The fierce competition for a same business spot among Korean shopkeepers was often reported in Korean newspapers. The rent hike is also possibly related to the economic boom of New York City during the mid 1980s.

shopkeepers in Black neighborhoods is not simply the result of the efforts of Korean shopkeepers alone. There are more general forces in America which limit Black business opportunities but encourage the influx of Korean shopkeepers into Black communities.

In relation to this issue, the most frequently raised question is where Korean shopkeepers get money in establishing their businesses in such a short period. One Black asked, "Another question is where you got money to open a store ? ...You must get special help from Korean or American governments. Most of us believe the existence of preferential treatment of you and this makes us angry" (Korea Times of New York, Feb. 1, 1990). This idea is shared by many people. One Black college professor, living in Central Harlem, also insisted that Korean shopkeepers 'must' get some help from the American government or the Unification Church. For her, the rapid success of Koreans is not possible without an external help.

Other agents of racist America are banks and landlords. One Black businessman said, "now they [White landlords] see Asian merchants where Blacks couldn't get in." Father Lucas, the leader of the 1988-89 Harlem boycott expressed a similar view, "Koreans get loans from banks and other financial institutions, insurance, as well as commercial sites from the City and privately owned businesses while the same treatment is systematically denied

in general to Africans located in America" (Amsterdam News, Oct. 6, 1990).<sup>10</sup>

Because of this racism, many Blacks think, only Blacks are excluded from joining in businesses in their neighborhoods. "Why is influence and control of our neighborhoods accepted everywhere except in the African-American and Latino communities? Many wish to bring control of the economics of these communities into African-American and Latino hands. That's the way things work in Chinatown, Williamsburg, Howard Beach or Little Italy- without a whisper of racism being uttered" (Daily News, July 2, 1989). Thus, according Sonny Carson, "It's racist that we don't own any business." Father Lucas continued the story, "What you find in African-American communities is that some else controls it. The Koreans happen to be the people now. Before, it was the Jews and the Italians" (New York Times Dec 12, 1988)

From the perspectives of the boycotters and many Blacks, their anger against Korean shopkeepers is easily

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<sup>10</sup> That seems to be partially true in Los Angeles. One representative of Shell admitted that they prefer Koreans because Koreans work for long hours and use their free family labor (Bonacich 1992). This also can be applied to the practices of landlords who think that Koreans will not be on default. It is also possible that Koreans can get loans from banks easier than Blacks. I think this is possible because Koreans are expected to be successful in their business. Koreans can also get more information about small business from the City Hall or other government agencies than Blacks because those information are circulated through Korean newspapers and ethnic networks.

related to their anger against the whole society because the presence of Korean shopkeepers is the result of the pervasive racism against Blacks. Many Blacks felt that they were degraded and rejected by the White society in general and also by the Korean shopkeepers in their neighborhoods in particular. Thus, a leader of the 1990 Church Avenue boycott said, "Now they [Koreans] are acting as agents of the white racist establishment to control the African-American community" (Kwong 1990:29).

In this context, Korean shopkeepers symbolize the total social injustice against Blacks. For the members of the December 12th Movement and other Blacks, the rejection of the Korean shopkeepers is one of the starting points for rejecting American racism (Hornung 1990b).

#### Resistance for Education

Because the boycotters feel that there is a connection between racist Koreans and the racist American government, the boycott leaders think that the boycotts against Korean shopkeepers is an effort not only to punish individual racists but also an effort to educate people more about pervasive racism of American society and American government and an effort to establish and expand the bases of struggles against pervasive racism.

One leaflet distributed during the 1988-89 Harlem boycott stated, "The purpose of the boycott was to educate

and organize our people to stand together as one and defend ourselves and each other." Chimurenga, one leader of the December 12th Movement, says of the boycott, "we are showing our own people that we do have power, purchasing power, economic power..." (Hornung 1990b).

Through the boycotts against Korean shopkeepers, the leaders wanted to show Black people that Blacks can act as protagonists, fight for self-determination, and control their own neighborhood and its economy. In order to show their determination not only to Blacks and but also to power elites and the Whites, they tried to shut down the Brooklyn Bridge in 1990. "We will take the bridge and shut down the subways, stop traffic to show the racists in this city that business cannot go on as usual. We have power and we can use it, make it grow," Chimurenga continued, "We can act before we are acted upon. That's how we want black people to think. To think about their right to self-determination, to reject the postcolonial mentality and build a life in our own neighborhoods" (Hornung 1990b).

Thus, Omo Wale Clay, a leader of the December 12th Movement, concluded that the boycott has sparked a "cultural" struggle in the community. For one thing, local residents are demanding that Church Avenue be renamed after Toussaint L'Ouverture, the Black revolutionary who freed Haiti from French colonial rule. The boycott has brought home the realization that Blacks, who are the overwhelming

majority in the neighborhood, are underrepresented on Community Board 14, where they hold fewer seats than Whites, "It has also helped to expose David Dinkins," Clay said, "as nothing but the tool of the white establishment" (Kwong 1991).<sup>11</sup>

Thus, the activists hope that through small but active and determined protest against small 'racist' players and their protectors, they reveal large 'racist' players in American society to Black people. Black rage is usually directed at other Black people, Korean shopkeepers, and other small players in everyday interactions.

These targeted expressions of black rage, though often downright cowardly and petty, signify the social invisibility and relative powerlessness of a people toward whom American elites have been and are indifferent... Most American elites, owing to narrow, self-serving notions of freedom and justice, have been flabbergasted at the expression of black rage (West 1990).

#### Buy Black Movements

"Buy Black" movements are another form of education through resistance for Black activists. "Buy Black" posters are found on many lamp posts or walls in Harlem. The basic messages of "Buy Black" movements include "Pool your resources together and create your own business. Buy from Black-own business and keep the money in the Black community, creating jobs for Black people" (Kwong and Lum

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<sup>11</sup> The events related to the Community Board 14 will be discussed in a later section of this chapter.

1988:10).

During the 1988 Harlem boycott, the Afrikan Nationalist Pioneer Movement distributed a leaflet on the 125th St. In a leaflet, George Edward Tait, the administrator of the movement, declared that the fact that Buy Black Movement had not yet been successfully implemented is both "an indictment of our collective intelligence and an insult to the record of our race.... For over forty years, we continue to witness the economic exploitation and ensuing erosion of Harlem by the arrogance and avarice of aliens," he continues,

It is highly ludicrous that a campaign must be launched to trigger the transference of economic power in the black community from non-Black control to black control; other ethnic communities automatically establish and relentlessly maintain their economic sovereignty. But we have allowed Harlem to be made into an interracial economic prostitute for Italian, Jewish, Arab, and Asian pimps who take the money and raise their families, build their communities, develop institutions, and win their wars.

For him,

'Buy Black' is not concerned with working for the alien business in the community; it is targeted toward removing the alien business from the community. It is not the private program of any individual, organization or institution but rather a family business venture for Afrikans from Afrika, the Caribbean, the Americas and elsewhere. The 'Buy Black' campaign solicits the strength of community support for the sake of community survival."

The 'Buy Black' movement was started more than 75 years ago by Marcus Garvey in Harlem. The "Buy Black" campaign is also one of the crying issues for the December 12th Movement. Their efforts to place control of economic life

of the Black community in Black hands haven't had a serious impact on the development of Black business.

### Self-Critics

Certainly Blacks don't speak with one voice. A New York Newsday (June 15, 1990) poll showed that while 27% of Blacks were sympathetic with the Church Avenue boycotters only 6% of Whites were sympathetic with the boycotters. While 37% of Blacks were sympathetic with the store owners, 68% of whites were sympathetic with the store owners.<sup>12</sup> However, this poll did not say how much of the poor Black population has complaints against Korean shopkeepers in poor Black neighborhoods where Korean shopkeepers maintain their daily interactions with Black shoppers. Supports or opposition to the boycott do not tell how those respondents actually experienced their contacts with Korean shopkeepers and thought about their relationships with Korean shopkeepers.

During my fieldwork, some said they objected the boycott but also insisted that Korean shopkeepers did not treat Blacks well. One Black complained that the boycotters were doing too much. Another Black person thought that the

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<sup>12</sup> This result was affected by the continuous negative description of the boycotts by major newspapers in New York City and by the denouncement of the boycott by Mayor Dinkins. It seems to be true that even though the boycotters did not get support from the majority of Blacks, they have considerable support among poor Blacks.

boycotters demonstrated because they wanted to expand their political base. However, this did not mean that they had positive images of Korean shopkeepers.

There are some Blacks who have more positive views of Korean shopkeepers. One retired Black said, "Koreans are united and working very hard. We [Blacks] are lazy, divided, and consuming drugs. We have to learn from Koreans... The professional Blacks try to enter the White society. They betray the poor black. We are not united like Koreans." The Amsterdam News (Oct.8, 1988) carried some criticism of Black boycotts against Korean shopkeepers, even though the newspaper is usually supportive of the boycotts. One reader pointed out that Koreans did not come to exploit Blacks but came to open their business with their hard work and money in vacant buildings, that Blacks should not attack Koreans from Black chauvinism, and that the boycotters were parasites seeking to satisfy themselves through so called struggles against racial discrimination. Another reader insisted that Blacks cannot revive the area if Blacks expel all Koreans in Harlem.

Jim Dowdy, a long-time Black business leader and head of a business organization in Harlem, said, "I absolutely deplore the harassment of these [Korean] people [by the boycotters]... They have the same rights on 125th Street that I have on 42nd" (Lombardi 1986:16). He and one Black community board member are very popular among Korean

shopkeepers in Harlem. According to several Korean shopkeepers, they are very supportive of Korean causes.

### The Stories of Koreans

#### Blacks as Crimogenic<sup>13</sup>

The robbery and shoplifting by Blacks were very often mentioned by Korean shopkeepers. One Korean shopkeeper said that when she opened a new green grocery business in Harlem all kinds of tramps and shoplifters gathered in her store. She thought that the shoplifters tested how the new Korean family could handle shoplifting.<sup>14</sup> Most Korean shopkeepers in Harlem recited very often how they caught shoplifters or how Blacks stole in their stores. One time in my presence, a Korean fish market employee darted out and came back. He said a Black took a bunch of red snappers without paying money. Thus, even when they have lunch or work at a cash register, their eyes usually stare at all corners of their

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<sup>13</sup> I took this term from Michael Lewis (1978). Many Whites believe that minorities have the innate tendency toward crime. According to Lewis (1978:76), "our [Whites's] interest in crime [in minorities] is a function of a culturally induced need to distinguish ourselves from criminal deviants so that we may claim a measure of moral superiority for ourselves."

<sup>14</sup> See her story in chapter five. The most frequent target of petty shoplifting was green grocery stores. It seems to me that not tramps but poor people stole vegetables and fruit because they have no money to buy them. The prices of stolen vegetables are usually small. However, the Korean shopkeepers believed that if they do not catch petty shoplifters, more shoplifters and their friends will come back to steal.

stores.<sup>15</sup> It is said that some Korean shopkeepers gave up their business because of shoplifters (Sae Gae Ilbo, May 20, 1989).

One Korean shopkeeper knew some Black thieves who were living in the same building where the Korean shopkeeper opened her business. She lamented that the thieves stole from her store and other stores very often. The members of the family who were thieves were arrested and put in jail again and again. According to her, when one member of the family was released, she gave some money to him as pocket money. Because she thought it was better to bribe them than to be robbed, she regularly gave the thieves pocket money. She mentioned that after her "help" for the family, they did not steal from her store again. They also guarded her store from other thieves.

For Korean shopkeepers, the fear of burglary was not limited to "strange" Blacks. In the store where I worked,

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<sup>15</sup> According to one policeman, Koreans are extremely sensitive to shoplifting. He said He did not understand why Korean shopkeepers did not charge ordinary shoppers more. To charge ordinary shoppers more for stolen goods is a general practice of most retail businesses. In fact, Korean shopkeepers charge as much as other shopkeepers. But Korean shopkeepers want to gain extra profit by limiting shoplifting as far as possible. However, more established Korean shopkeepers were more tolerant and less sensitive to shoplifting. But new and small Korean shopkeepers were most sensitive to shoplifting. Because their businesses were not established yet, when they found shoplifting they sensed the possibility of failure of their businesses. They knew that the failure would make them do long hours of labor and extreme sacrifice of their family lives again. This thought makes them anxious and fearful of shoplifting.

the wife of the shopkeeper took care of the store when her husband visited Korea. She told me not to tell her black employees that her husband visited Korea because she feared that the Black employees would relate the news to Black thieves whom they knew. She thought that the Black employees were not unsterustworthy. When a box of leather jackets was stolen during one night after her husband had come back, she wondered whether there was a connection between her employees and the thieves.

Gangs of young Blacks often smash jewelry store windows and grab gold rings and necklaces, especially during Halloween days. In one case, young Blacks cracked one Korean jewelry store window with a large stone and grabbed some gold jewelry. In another case, three Black youths successfully robbed a Korean jewelry store with a machine gun at about 10 A.M. Because of this and other problems, all Korean jewelry stores at 125th Street were covered with bullet proof glass. When a bunch of young Blacks passed a Korean jewelry store, the Korean store owner said that there is nothing to expect from 'qumdungyi'[nigger].<sup>16</sup>

There was a riot on 145th street in northern Harlem in July 7, 1992. The Korean owner of a looted sneaker store said, "as many as 10,000 pairs of Nike, Reebok and other

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<sup>16</sup> In fact, some young Blacks "delighted in descending on a small store in a large group and stealing." One young Black said "it was the only time he felt happy and stimulated." (New York Times, Nov. 19, 1992)

high-priced sneakers, the entire fall inventory, were stolen by looters in the early morning of July 7. A rioter swinging a pickax broke through the new metal security shutters." Spatters of blood here and there attested to the intensity of the shoving and grabbing. A son of the owner cried, "they used a demonstration [against the police brutality] as an excuse to go out and rob other people of their dreams...." (New York Times, July 8, 1992). Another shopkeeper described how he was robbed by a Black with a gun in his store and how his body had trembled with fury.

One Korean female shopkeeper explained that Blacks were originally cursed by God. According to her story, there were three sons for Noah. Because Ham, the youngest son, saw his father naked and told his brothers the news, he was cursed by God. Because Ham was cursed, his descendants are always living with difficulty. According to her, Ham's descendants are Blacks. Thus, Blacks are always poor and commit crime and violence. She concluded, "it is in the blood of Blacks."<sup>17</sup>

Many Korean shopkeepers believed that the conflict between Blacks and Koreans started from Blacks' innate

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<sup>17</sup> See Genesis 9 of the Bible for a related story. Ham's son, Canaan, not Ham himself, was cursed not by God but by Noah. There is no mention in the Bible that Ham's descendants are Blacks. She also mentioned that God gave power to Whites, intelligence to Yellows, and physical ability to Blacks. Accordingly, Whites got the power of this society, Blacks excel in sports, and Yellows excel in studies.

criminality and their jealousy of Korean success. For evidence, many Koreans frequently claimed that most Blacks tend to steal. One Korean shopkeeper said that it is silly that the large conflict between Blacks and Koreans always started from a small shoplifting. One Korean salesclerk said, "because there are always Blacks who steal, the bad relationship between Koreans and Blacks is inevitable." When boycotters accused Koreans of beating Black women and children, the president of the Korean Merchant Association stated, "it is deplorable that shoplifting is justified by boycotters." Thus, while boycotters emphasized that Korean shopkeepers abused Black people, Korean shopkeepers emphasized that Blacks were stealing.

#### Blacks as Naive and Irrational

A drycleaner in Harlem said,

a Black brought a coat with a cut which I didn't check when I got the coat. He insisted that I made that cut. He demanded compensation. I know I didn't do it because there are many Blacks who do same cheating. His demand drove me crazy. However, I refunded him because, if I fight, the image of my store will be damaged. If a quarrel starts, Blacks always support a Black even though they don't know nothing about why we started."

The belief that Blacks always support another Black in a dispute with Korean shopkeepers regardless of the cause was well shared by most Korean shopkeepers.

Another common belief about Blacks is that Blacks cannot succeed in business because they are naive, that is,

Blacks do not have enough intelligence to manage complex business interactions. Some Korean shopkeepers thought that Blacks are naive because Blacks do not think of their future. They commonly noted that "if Blacks have money they do not save it but spend it soon."

Other Korean shopkeepers argued that Blacks are naive because many Blacks wanted to get refunded for products even though the items were purchased several months before and they were sometimes deliberately damaged to get the refund. However, "in comparison with Whites," says another Korean shopkeeper, "Blacks are not hard to please." He meant that Blacks did not pay much attention to quality and neatness of vegetables and fruit like Whites and that Blacks did not complain like Whites. Thus, for him, it was easier to deal with Blacks than with Whites. He interpreted this as naivety of Black people.<sup>18</sup>

#### Blacks as Lazy and Welfare-Dependent

Several Korean shopkeepers who once employed Blacks complained that the Black employees did not work hard. They continued, "when they got weekly wage, they didn't come to work for several days because they had money to spend."

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<sup>18</sup> He had had his green grocery store in a White area before he opened his business in Harlem. According to him, Whites didn't buy if the quality of vegetables were not at their expectation and Whites were difficult to satisfy while Blacks were easily pleased if he paid "only a little attention" to them. He mentioned, however, there were more petty shoplifters in Black area than White area.

Especially, Blacks were not employed for intensive labor. Green grocery workers or fish cleaners were required to work diligently for twelve hours per day. Because illegal Hispanics did not demand high wage and worked very hard, such work was usually given to Hispanics. Koreans were also employed for hard jobs. When one green grocery store owner was asked why she did not give an employ to Blacks, she answered, "Blacks cannot do the job." Other Korean shopkeepers also shared the idea that Blacks do not work hard. Many Koreans considered employing Blacks a waste of money. However, this is not true in many other cases. In one store where a Black was employed as a cook, the Korean store owner said that her employee was an exception to the rule.<sup>19</sup>

One Korean female shopkeeper said, "Blacks from Africa or the Caribbean area try to establish their own small business. Vendors in this area [they are all Blacks] are from foreign countries. But American Blacks are lazy. Because of their tradition acquired during the period of slavery, they don't work voluntarily. Rather, robbers are

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<sup>19</sup> When I asked a young Black why he did not work for a Korean store, he answered that because the wage was very low and Korean owners did not share their profit with Blacks. A Black watcher in the store where I worked also complained that the pay was too low. He got 180 dollars per week in 1988. He worked six days per week and eight hours per day. In fact, he worked more than eight hours a day because the store owner kept his store open till late. There was no pay for overwork. The Black watcher once told me that he worked only as much as he paid. Thus, for him, he worked slow because he got low pay.

more diligent because they have to plan and execute the plan by themselves."

Another Korean shopkeeper said, "80-90% of Black who receive milk, cheese and other things from welfare agencies or from churches sell them out." Many Korean shopkeepers believed that Blacks depend on welfare and bear more babies to receive more welfare money. One fish market owner said,

I work hard for paying tax which support welfare for Blacks. Because of the welfare, Blacks are a little bit more quiet. If there is no welfare, they will rob and steal more. Since they are lazy, they want more babies to get more welfare. It is a good world for them because the governments give them welfare. Koreans wouldn't get welfare, because it is shameful.

One jewelry store owner explained that he could not understand why young Blacks waste their money on gold and diamonds.<sup>20</sup> He lamented that because the Blacks waste their money they could not establish their own businesses. Many Korean shopkeepers often mentioned that Blacks do not know how to save, that Blacks spend everything for the moment, and that Blacks enjoy now and do not think of the future.

#### Blacks Became Jealous

Because many Korean shopkeepers thought that Blacks were responsible for their own problems, when they experienced the Black boycotts against Koreans, they

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<sup>20</sup> He excused his jewelry business by saying, "I open a jewelry store, because there is a demand. If I don't open, other people will open."

impugned the motives of the boycotters. One Korean shopkeeper in Brooklyn said, "Blacks want to disrupt our businesses because they cannot do what we have done." Many Korean intellectuals have similar views. One Korean lecturer at Columbia University said, "Blacks are jealous of us because we have done in 15 years what they were unable to do.... They are angry because we took away their excuse" (quoted in Veneroso 1989:13).

Certainly, the success of Koreans where Blacks have failed puzzles many Blacks. Lloyd Williams, a Harlem businessman, charges, "I know for a fact that the Korean mafia is financing a lot of their businesses" (Veneroso 1989:13). The rapid expansion of Korean shopkeepers throughout New York City continues to confound many New Yorkers - particularly Black residents. However, the suspicion of the origin of money for the establishment of Korean small businesses was often interpreted by many Koreans as a result of Black jealousy.

#### Koreans as Victims of Reverse Racism

According to Sung Soo Kim, the president of the Korean American Small Business Service Center of New York, Inc., "at the beginning, boycotters demanded jobs, scholarships, our participation in community affairs, communication of both cultures. In 1984 Harlem boycott, they want to get more budget for the development of Harlem by making Koreans

scapegoats. They seem to appeal to the city and the state to distribute more welfare to Harlem by exposing problems" (Chung Ang Ilbo, Feb. 15, 1985). However, the boycotts were eventually organized by more radical Black nationalists who demanded that Korean shopkeepers sell the boycotted stores to Blacks or close.

When Blacks started their boycotts at Church Avenue and in Harlem, other Korean shopkeepers said that they recognized that even though the Black activists boycotted only one or two stores, their intention was to scare away all Korean shopkeepers. Certainly, after the boycotts, many un-boycotted Korean shopkeepers also became more careful in dealing with Black people. Because the boycotters also distributed leaflets which demanded Blacks boycott all Korean shopkeepers and described all Koreans as racists, many Koreans felt that they were condemned as racists just because they were Koreans. Many Koreans believed that the Black activists had become reverse racists because of their frustration in this society.

Sung Soo Kim, who tried to negotiate resolutions to the Harlem and Brooklyn boycotts, angrily called the Black boycotts against Korean shopkeepers "obnoxious, outrageous and racist" (Song 1989:9). He also demanded "black community activists resist the easy temptation to target Korean merchants in venting their justifiable frustrations, using us as scapegoats" (Daily News, July 2, 1988). Other Korean

shopkeepers described Sonny Carson and other protesters as racial hate-mongers. The Koreans involved emphasized to city officials and the news media that the protesters wanted to expel all Korean shopkeepers from Black neighborhoods. Even the boycotted store-owner on Church Avenue told the news media that he did not know why the boycotters boycotted him. Thus, he presented himself as an innocent victim of Black racism.

Many Koreans even saw the boycotts as a Black conspiracy to destroy Korean business in order to achieve the Black self-determination. One group of Korean businessmen sent a letter to Mayor Dinkins and complained about "a pattern of an overall plan [by Black activists] to force us out of New York." An article from the Village Voice reported that "their[Koreans'] position was not to give in on the demand to close the [boycotted] store, thus preventing a 'domino effect.' ...The hard-line Koreans see this struggle as their fight for civil rights, which they must win, ironically, from the blacks." (Kwong 1991)

#### Koreans as Victims between Whites and Blacks

Henry Hong, who organized the travel of Black pastors in New York City to Korea in 1990, said, "Black nationalists try very hard to find any excuse to express their discontents and explode the discontents toward Koreans who are relatively powerless. Thus, the discontentment of

Blacks toward Koreans is in fact the discontentment toward the American government and the Whites" (Korea Times of Washington, D.C., Nov. 27, 1992).

This feeling was well expressed when many Black looters targeted Korean stores during the L.A. riot of 1992. During the riot, many Koreans said that the Los Angeles police gave up Koreatown while they protected White enclaves like Rodeo Drive. Because of this racism, many Koreans believed, Koreatown was set ablaze. One Korean in L.A. said,

[L.A.P.D. chief] Daryl Gates wanted the blacks to let out their outburst toward the Koreans, because he knew that the blacks didn't feel very good toward the Koreans. I do believe there must have been some conscious politics, because [the police] just weren't there. (quoted in Kim and Yang 1992)

Many New York Korean shopkeepers think that the situation they see in L.A. is also possible in New York City.

#### Koreans as Serving Blacks

Many Korean shopkeepers felt anger when the boycotts against Korean shopkeepers started because they thought that they had come to serve Black consumers when most of the other ethnic shopkeepers had left. Korean shopkeepers that thought they maintained their stores in spite of the dangers of poor Black neighborhoods. One Korean shopkeeper responded to a Black boycott,

Blacks make us their target of the anger because we are powerless. They cannot stand up against a White store. They failed to open their own stores when this area had plenty of vacant stores. Now they complain about that we are working hard to serve them. If we leave here,

who want to come to this dangerous place? We made this street a busy commercial street.

A female Korean shopkeeper also responded,

'Buy Black' movement won't work because Black shopkeepers sell lower quality goods with higher prices than we do. They [Black activists] talk empty talk because we serve them [Blacks]. They told us to close our stores during a [day of outrage] demonstration. We didn't close at all. They just try to threaten us.

### Koreans as Hard Working People

The Korean shopkeepers are so proud of themselves for reviving the community or the streets that they exaggerate the difficulties and dangers of the inner city Black communities. Here, the important issue is not whether or not the Koreans really revived the streets in poor Black neighborhoods, but that many Koreans believe that they revived "dead" neighborhoods.

One former Korean fish market owner in Harlem mentioned, "We came to a 'dead' neighborhood. There were no stores, and buildings were vacant. Koreans came here and managed their businesses with determination. Eventually the businesses became 'alive' and the neighborhoods too. We feel proud of what we are doing for this country... I am very grateful to God who made hope and joy possible in this evil, miserable, and decayed place" (Korea Times of New York, July 30, 1986, my emphasis added).

### Cultural Miscommunication as the Cause of the Conflict

In many cases, cultural and linguistic barriers further

contributed to escalating tensions between Black shoppers and Korean shopkeepers. However, the degree to which cultural differences attributed to the conflict is not clear. Despite the problem of understanding the role of cultural differences, many Korean leaders mentioned cultural differences as a major cause of the tension between Blacks and Koreans. Ordinary Korean shopkeepers emphasized language problems more than cultural difference. In fact, an English language problem is very serious for most Koreans not because they cannot sell goods but because they often cannot grasp nuances and meanings of English words. Many Korean shopkeepers failed to respond to Black shoppers because the Korean shopkeepers did not understand what the Black shoppers said.

Sung Soo Kim responded, when many Blacks complained Koreans are rude,

Confucian teachings dictate that a woman may not touch a man's hand - that it is deemed unseemly. Many cashiers often plunk down change on the counter, avoiding the customer's proffered hand. Some customers interpret this as a personal insult when none was intended. In addition, the meager grasp of English of many Koreans often comes across as 'rudeness' and 'arrogance.' (Daily News, July 2, 1988)

He also said, "you must understand that in Confucian culture we don't smile very much..." (New York Times, May 17, 1990).<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> It seems to me that even though the existence of cultural and language barriers is certain, the Korean leaders overemphasized the role of cultural and language miscommunication in the conflict between Blacks and Koreans.

### Self-Critics: Koreans as Racists

Certainly Korean shopkeepers do not speak with one voice. One Korean shopkeeper in Harlem was very critical of other Korean shopkeepers. She said, "We [Koreans] did many bad things to Blacks. Some Koreans are really bad. Even though I am a Korean, I can tell you that Koreans are racists. They consider themselves superior to Blacks. They should change their attitudes. They are wrong, not Blacks."

One shopkeeper in Harlem commented on the shopkeeper who had been a target of the 1988-89 Harlem boycott. He said, "he beat many people. I told him not to beat poor Blacks who steal because they are hungry and need food. He didn't listen to me. He was notorious in the area. He is now much better after the boycott. Blacks didn't boycott all Koreans...."

One Korean reader commented on the L.A. riot of 1992, "If we can live in a White suburban neighborhood and send our children to good schools, we'd better express our thanks to Blacks before we despise them.... I feel shameful that we feel superior to Blacks. Blacks and Koreans are all colored in the eyes of Whites" (Korea Times of Washington,

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The cultural miscommunication is a good excuse for the bad relations between Blacks and Koreans. However, this emphasis cannot explain why some Koreans who cannot command English well get maintain a good relationship with Black shoppers. I think, the attitudes of Korean shopkeepers are more important than the cultural and language barriers for the conflict. One Korean shopkeeper in Harlem whose English was very poor had a good relationship with her Black customers because she showed her sincerity to Black customers.

D.C., May 13, 1992).

#### Ethnic News Media

During the boycotts of Korean shopkeepers in poor Black neighborhoods, Black and Korean news media showed almost opposite views on the conflict.

Sonny Carson and other boycott supporters appeared on WLIB, the most popular Black radio station in New York City, and expressed their opposition to the mediation of the conflict, their determination to close down two Korean stores, and their opposition to Mayor Dinkins's efforts to peacefully settle the conflict. During its news hour, WLIB frequently reported the opinions of the boycotters but not of the boycotted Korean shopkeepers or other Korean shopkeepers. WLIB often reported Black residents' anger about the beating of Black women by the Korean shopkeepers and the pervasive prejudices of Korean shopkeepers against Blacks. During the boycotts, they accused the White media (television channels and major newspapers in New York City) of having biased views against Blacks.

The Korean television and radio stations reported the boycotts from an opposite view. They reported only the opinions of the boycotted Korean shopkeepers and business leaders who emphasized that the Black radicals sought only to expel Korean shopkeepers from Black neighborhoods. The Korean television reported that Korean shopkeepers and leaders considered the Black boycotters to be extortionists

and extremists without the support of Black residents. In a television news program, an anchor woman explained that the Korean shopkeeper targeted by the 1988 Brooklyn boycott closed his store because of the "absurd" demands from the boycotters and the "ill advised" negotiation between Korean leaders such as Sung Soo Kim and Black leaders including Black assemblyman Albert Vann. The Korean television and radio news programs usually concentrated on the "reverse racism" and "unreasonable demands" of the boycotters rather than on the prejudice of Korean shopkeepers in poor black neighborhoods.

In printed news media, the situation was almost the same as in the ethnic electronic media. However, newspapers printed some opposite views which did not appear in electronic news media. The Amsterdam News, the leading Black newspaper in New York City, usually reported the alleged beatings of Black women by Korean shopkeepers as facts even though the involved Koreans denied the allegations and were later found not guilty.<sup>22</sup> While Korean newspapers always described the Church Avenue boycott as dangerous and threatening, the Amsterdam News described the same boycott as successful.

The Amsterdam News carried a story about the Church

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<sup>22</sup> The decision by a Jury does not mean that the Koreans involved did not beat the Black woman. It just mean that there is no evidence to prove that the Koreans beat the Black woman.

Avenue boycott on the front page on May 19, 1990. "Some 800 persons marched and rallied... to highlight their determination to carry on their boycott against two Korean fruit and vegetable stores..." In an editorial article on the same day, the Amsterdam News accused a Black high school teacher who crossed the picket line with his students of creating negative ideas about the Black protest in the minds of black children. The article also accused the White news media of using the boycott breaker to "discredit and vilify any black person who stands up for his rights and his dignity in this racist land we call America."

Articles in the Black news media usually presented Sonny Carson, Father Lucas and the boycotters as determined opponents of racial injustice. However, the boycotters were also often criticized as too harsh toward Black Mayor Dinkins, who tried to mediate the conflict. The Amsterdam News also reported opinions of the boycotted Korean owner in the case of 1988 Harlem boycott and the views of some Black opponents to the Church Avenue boycott. But the number of anti-boycott articles was very limited.

Korean newspapers emphasized that the boycotts were a political excuse for Black radicals to convey their political messages to Black residents. The Sae Gae Ilbo (Jan. 25, 1990) reported that the boycott organizers fabricated the fact that two Korean shopkeepers beat a Black woman. The Chung Ang Ilbo (Sept. 15, 1988) analyzed the

forces behind Black boycotts against Korean shopkeepers in 1988. It continued,

The boycotts till now were simple protests by local hoodlums. But Sonny Carson began to involve when large number of hoodlums participated in the boycotts. He and other local activists organized local organizations to continue the boycotts and the United Africa Business Association, a Black muslim organization, also joined. They are basically extortionists. They demanded money.

Thus, to Koreans, the boycotters were not ones who sought justice but ones who disturbed social order with absurd demands. The "Buy Black" movement was also described as a racist attempt by Black activists to expel all non-Black businessmen from Black neighborhoods. Even the Amsterdam News was described by an article in a Korean newspaper as a radical newspaper that promoted the enhancement of Black consciousness and enlightenment. (This implies that black consciousness and enlightenment cause problems.) The article continued, "accordingly, many organizations in Harlem influenced by the Amsterdam News began to support the boycott and other Black newspapers also reported the boycott." Thus, the Black hostility against Koreans spread through Black activism and the Black news media. From this point of view, the Korean news media reported that the boycotts did not have community support and that the boycotters were outside agitators.

Because of articles in the Korean news media, the crimogenic theory of Blacks was not limited to individual Koreans who experienced Black crimes. One article of the

Korea Times of New York (Mar. 9, 1991) emphasized that Koreans have to pay attention to Black robbers. The title of the article is "Crime Is Much on the Minds of Manhattan's Korean American Merchants." In the article, one Korean shopkeeper expressed his thought that police cannot stop crime because "nobody knows when it will strike." He continued, each businessman has to find a way to protect himself, suggesting that a merchant has "to be on guard every minute." Another news article was entitled, "The Rapid Increase of Robbers Aimed at Koreans in All New York City." The Chung Ang Ilbo (Jan. 7, 1989) used "Blacks Frequently Threaten Koreans in Harlem" for an article. The article reported that Korean shopkeepers closed their eyes when Blacks openly shoplifted because the Koreans were afraid of possible threats from Black mobs. An article<sup>23</sup> in the Korea Times of New York was entitled "One Out Of Four Among Black Men in Their Twenties Are In Jail." Subtitles included "Education from Fellow Criminals Rather Than in Schools," and "Half the Criminals in Jail Are Black."

While Black newspapers called the "White" news media a racist element in society after it continuously called for the active intervention of Black Mayor Dinkins in the boycotts and described the boycotts as racist provocations. Korean newspapers, however hailed pro-Korean news from the "main-stream" news media and frequently carried the Korean

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<sup>23</sup> The date is unclear in my news clip.

translation of supportive articles. Korean newspapers also exaggerated the support of Whites for the boycotted Korean by describing active expressions of support from a few individual Whites as a support from the majority of Whites. For example, when a White sent letters to Mayor Dinkins and President Bush in order to complain about the inaction of the government, it was reported in an article entitled "American Citizens Support Koreans in the Church Avenue Incident" (Sae Gae Ilbo, Mar 1, 1990).

However, Korean newspapers also reported dissenting views. Many articles in Korean newspapers admitted that common problems for Korean shopkeepers include lack of respect for the Black residents, failure to greet customers, and tendencies to "throw" change to the shoppers (e.g. Chung Ang Ilbo, Mar. 27, 80). Through frequent discussions of the problems between Koreans and Blacks, the advised Korean people on how to behave and how to respond to shoppers. One Korean newspaper even proclaimed "Don't Call Them 'gumdungyi'." These views were, however, not pro-boycott views. While they tried to point out the problems of Korean shopkeepers, their main emphasis was on the problems of Black grass-root activists and lack of protection of Korean shopkeepers by the city government and the police.

#### Mainstream News Media

New York City has two daily national newspapers which

have considerable influence not only on city residents but also in the national scene. There are three daily local newspapers which have daily circulations totalling hundreds of thousands copies in and near New York City. National weekly news magazines such as Newsweek, Time, and Money also dealt with the conflict. They devoted different amounts of attention to the conflict between Koreans and Blacks and had different views and analyses of the conflict.

The New York Post had the most anti-boycott views. They consistently called Sonny Carson and the boycotters racists. Some Blacks complained that the New York Post is also the most anti-Black news paper in New York City. The Wall Street Journal, which also had a fierce anti-boycott view, did not devote much attention to the conflict. The New York Times provided very detailed and fair description of the discontent of Black residents against Korean shopkeepers from the early 1980s.<sup>24</sup> However, the New York Times also expressed negative views against the Black boycotters. The Daily News and the New York Newsday also continuously expressed their anti-boycott views.

However, I will not deal with the individual differences among the main stream news media here, because they, in fact, expressed considerably similar views and analyses of the conflict between Blacks and Koreans. The

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<sup>24</sup> For example, as early as Sept. 11, 1982, the title of an article was "Korean Merchants Face Ire in Harlem."

several main stream television stations will not be differentiated either. Because they are owned by Whites and influence the thoughts of many Whites, they were called "White news media" by many Blacks. The "White news media" or "main stream news media" had tremendous effects on the views of the Whites and the directions of the city government policy. These influences created the social condition where the Black boycotters, their sympathizers, and the Korean shopkeepers expressed their ideas and contested against each other for media support. Therefore I will now focus on how the main stream news media, in general, dealt with the conflict.

#### Koreans as Model Minority

Most main stream newspapers expressed their curiosity as to why Koreans were successful in small business even though they had immigrated just one or two decades beforehand. In the early 1980s, they wondered who provided capital for Korean shopkeepers. The Newsday once reported in 1981 that the Korean green grocers were supported by the Unification Church. However, the main stream news media focused more on the Korean shopkeepers' hard work than the external sources of financial support for Koreans, because Koreans raised capital themselves rather than receive any preferential financial treatment from external sources.

Thus, the success of Korean shopkeepers was described

as the results of self-help efforts. According to a New York Post editorial (June 25, 1990), "the secrets of their [Koreans'] success are plain: a capacity for hard work; loyal families that labor as units and stick together; the ability to save small amounts of capital to increase the wealth of the entire community. It is a formula for success and advancement which other American ethnic groups have pursued in the past...." An article about Koreans in the New York Times (Sept. 24, 1989) summarized the success story of Koreans with its title, "Success and Its Price: The Koreans' Big Entry Into Business."

This description of Koreans as a model minority not only exposed Korean success but also highlighted the failures of other groups, especially poor Blacks. For example, an article from Newsweek (May 18, 1992), after analyzing the 1992 L.A. riot, rejected the opinion that many minorities fail because there are no jobs and money in America because Koreans proved that they can succeed without money. Thus the Newsweek article insisted that violence, crime, and poverty in inner cities cannot be justified. For the author of the article, solutions to the problems of the inner cities (thus of Black residents there) lay with individual responsibility, family values, and respect for labor.

## Black Resentment

By contrasting Korean successes with Black failures, many news reporters described the conflict between Koreans and Blacks as a result of Black resentment of Korean success. One article in the New York Post (Feb. 9, 1990) described that, "on one side are immigrants who are pursuing the American dream, using the time-tested recipe of saving money and hard work.... On the other side are professional race-baiters like Sonny Carson, engaging in group defamation... [T]he underlying issue is who has economic opportunity and control...." Another article (New York Times, Sept. 24, 1989) stated, "In Los Angeles as in New York, the Koreans' success at taking over small businesses has stirred resentment in black and Hispanic neighborhoods, and many complain that they disregard American laws on working conditions and wages."

In the same context, Harris(1983), in his "Making It: How the Koreans Won the Green-Grocer Wars" in Money, said,

The success of Koreans has stirred resentment in Harlem and other run-down neighborhoods. Last summer[1982] the Universal Negro Improvement Association, a small black-power group, distributed leaflets asking residents to boycott Korean merchants on grounds that they didn't employ blacks and pushed out other minority-run enterprises. (Money, March 1983)

An editorial in the New York Times (Mar. 3, 1992) described Black boycotts as a result of perceived economic challenges from Koreans. The editorial implied that the oversimplification of Asian-Americans as a "model minority"

caused racial bigotry and violence against Asian-Americans by Whites as well as Blacks. Thus, the Black boycotts against Korean shopkeepers were also interpreted as manifestations of racial hysteria and bigotry caused by the stereotypical perception of Asian success in America. According to an article in the Wall Street Journal (Oct. 26, 1988), "it is probably that some blacks would respond with suspicion and resentment toward a small, readily identifiable group that seems to be doing well while everyone else is going downhill."

#### Koreans as Rude

The New York Times often investigated the everyday tensions between Koreans and Blacks in poor neighborhoods while other newspapers and television news programs focused more on overt aspects of the conflict.

For example, a long article on May 17, 1990 in the New York Times focused on the stories of Black shoppers at Church Avenue, Brooklyn about Korean shopkeepers. Main stories in the article included that Korean shopkeepers often accused innocent Black shoppers of stealing, cheated shoppers, changed prices without apparent reasons, sometimes did not mark the prices, and were very rude and arrogant. Another article in the New York Times (Dec. 21, 1988) also reported that "many blacks said they found the Koreans rude but felt they had no choice because most nearby fruit and

vegetable stands were Korean-owned."

One short article in the Daily News (May 11, 1990) emphasized that "Brooklyn boycotts aren't anti-Korean." The writer quoted Lloyd Williams. "Koreans work well with the white media... To portray this as black against yellow is an absolute lie... The December 12th Movement should be applauded for keeping these issues in the forefront; somebody ought to do it. This is an issue of community control and an issue of community respect." According to the story in the article, the boycott is only aimed at specific Korean stores whose owners showed disrespect to Black shoppers.

However, in the New York Times as well as in other major news media, the main theme of the articles related to the conflict between Koreans and Blacks was the "extremism" of the boycotters. Thus, the articles about the problems of Korean shopkeepers were buried in the avalanche of anti-boycott news reports and articles.

#### Boycotters as Reverse Racists

During the mayoral election of 1989 in New York City, the New York Post (Oct. 24, 1989) described Sonny Carson as "a Klansman in black face," when the controversy over Sonny Carson in connection to Dinkins' campaign for Mayor erupted. At the time, Sonny Carson professed to be anti-White. His fierce anti-White ideology and activities became a campaign

controversy during the mayoral election campaign. At the time, major main stream news media described Carson very negatively and caused trouble for Dinkins' campaign. However, Democratic Candidate Dinkins defeated Republican Candidate Giuliani.

Former Mayor Koch of New York City harshly criticized Mayor Dinkins during the Church Avenue boycott in 1990. Koch complained that Mayor Dinkins did not condemn the racist tones of the boycotters, that some city officials had defended the demonstrators' free speech, and that the police did not enforce the injunction order to move the boycott fifty feet away from the target stores. Mr. Koch frequently expressed similar views, as a guest editor, in the New York Post and also appeared in several television news programs. The New York Times' article (July 30, 1990) accepted Mr. Koch's message as morally correct even though the article said Koch was not an ideal messenger.

The New York Times (May 8, 1990) described Sonny Carson as a racist provocateur in an editorial article. "[T]here is nothing ambiguous about the behavior of Robert (Sonny) Carson, the convicted kidnapper and racial provocateur who is leading the boycott.... The boycott... recalls inflammatory efforts by Mr. Carson and others against Korean merchants in Harlem, the Bedford-Stuyvesant section of Brooklyn and Jamaica, Queens. 'In the future,' Mr. Carson says crudely, 'there'll be funerals, not boycotts.' ...Race

fires are alight." After the Church Avenue boycott started, an editorial of the New York Post (Feb. 9, 1990) maintained, "that [boycott] campaign is as ugly as anything we've seen in New York economic life. Indeed, it is all too reminiscent of the early stages of Nazi rabble-rousing against Jewish shopkeepers- the constant group slanders...."

In an editorial article in Time (July 23, 1990), Krauthammer accused Black radical activists of being rejectionists.

For them mainstream American values are inherently oppressive and racist, to be rejected at root.... The rejectionists have nothing to offer the black community beyond the momentary satisfactions of articulated rage. To the whites they shake a fist at, they are a mere nuisance. But for blacks to whom they promise the world but offer nothing, they are a cruel deception.

In the same context, an article in the Wall Street Journal (Oct. 16, 1988) was titled, "Black Neighborhoods' Self-Defeating War Against Koreans." It said, "by driving Asians out of business, neighborhood activists will wind up making things harder for black consumers while doing nothing to create jobs for black workers." Thus, the Black boycotts were described not only as pursuing "the expulsion of all Koreans" but also as being counter-productive for Black welfare. Because of their "reverse racism," the boycotters were "probed for criminal violations," as a title of a news article indicated (Newsday, May 15, 1990). The article reported that the FBI opened its investigation of the boycott for possible violations of federal civil rights laws.

### Blacks are Divided

Many news articles described the boycotts as acts of racial hate by Black extremists. The White public, which is certainly influenced by the main stream news media, resented Black boycotts against Korean shopkeepers. Because of the anti-boycott views of the White new media and public, some Blacks who opposed the boycotts against Korean shopkeepers became celebrities in the White news media.

When the president of the Congress of Racial Equality brought 14 local women to sue the boycotters at Church Avenue in May 1990, their stories were carried by most White news media. Their stories recounted how the boycotters threatened the local shoppers with insults and abuse. Claims that the Black boycotters often threatened and hassled Black shoppers were frequently carried in major news papers. The implication of such reports was that the boycotters maintained their success with threats rather than voluntary participation of local residents.

Thus, after Mr. McCray, a Black high school teacher, crossed the picket line with his students in May 1990, he was hailed as a hero and became an immediate celebrity in the main stream news media. He appeared in major television news programs and talk shows, and newspapers put his story on the front pages. He was described as a brave, courageous, decent citizen seeking racial harmony. Along with him, many others who condemned the boycotters were

interviewed and featured in news articles.

Because of the pressure from main stream news media, politicians, White and Asian New Yorkers, Mayor Dinkins also crossed the picket line in September, 1990. His espousal of racial harmony, his condemnation of the Church Avenue boycott, and his crossing the picket line provided steady headlines for the mainstream news media. This development further eroded moral support for the boycotters among the Black population.

#### Efforts to Influence the Views of Main Stream News Media

Korean community leaders and the targeted shopkeepers tried hard to persuade the mainstream news media to describe Koreans as victims of radical Black nationalism. When the targeted store-owner in the 1990 Church Avenue boycott was asked whether he knew why his store became a target of the boycott in an interview with a television reporter, he answered "I don't know, I don't know, I want to know." Thus, he could present himself as an innocent victim. Other Koreans interviewed by main stream news media and letters sent by Koreans to the main stream news papers insisted that the causes of the conflict were Black jealousy, cultural misunderstanding, black shoplifting, or Black nationalism. One Korean leader emphasized that Koreans should be careful when they expressed their views to the mainstream news media and that the focus should be on the problems of the

boycotters.

Black boycotters and their sympathizers also tried to reach the main stream news media. They continuously pointed out that the target of the boycotts were specific Korean stores whose owners abused or beat specific Black shoppers. They also pointed out that the Korean shopkeepers in general had been rude and did not contribute to local affairs, and that Blacks were victims of pervasive racism. However, they had a difficult time finding friendly ears in the main stream news media.

#### Responses to the Main Stream News Media

The focus on the 1990 Church Avenue boycott in the mainstream news media coincided with the time when Al Sharpton and other Blacks marched into Bensonhurst to condemn the racist killing of Yusef Hawkins by White youths and the reluctance of a hidden eyewitness to the killing to come forward. It also coincided with the extreme Black anxieties over the sentences that would be given to the White youths in New York City. Some Blacks complained that the sudden, overblown reports of the Black boycotts by the "White" news media intended to appease the moral anger of Blacks by showing that Blacks were not only racial victims but also racists. According to the complaints, the boycott was used to demoralize the legitimate anger of Blacks over the racist killing of a Black by the White youths.

It will never be known whether the main stream news media really wanted to defuse the overblown racial tension, especially Black anger, by focusing on the Black boycott. However, coverage of the boycott in main stream news media, especially television, suddenly increased when the Black and White tension over the killing of Yusef Hawkins was at the highest in May 1990. This was possibly and partially a result of the sensationalization of the racial tension by the news media to draw more viewers and readers which would draw more advertising revenue. When other events such as Nelson Mandela's visit to New York City drew attentions from New Yorkers, the spotlight on to the boycott eventually faded from the mainstream news media.

Some Black activists thought that Koreans had a strong influence on the main stream news media, and thus they reported the conflict between Blacks and Koreans from the perspective of Korean shopkeepers. Others considered the main stream news media as dividing minorities to conquer them. For example, "once again, it's 'divide and conquer' - with people of color pitted against each other. Many Koreans and other immigrants are programmed prior to coming to the U.S. to look with disdain on black and Hispanic customers" (News Day, July 2, 1989). Other Blacks accused the mainstream news media to try to divide Blacks.

Some Korean leaders also considered the mainstream news media as dividing minorities for a different reason. One

Korean business leader said that the mainstream news media divided Blacks and Koreans by describing Koreans as a model minority and chiding Blacks failing to do same thing that Koreans did in this country. But most Korean leaders and news media focused on the contents of the mainstream news reports and carried Korean perceptions on the same events in their news media. When the mainstream news media focused on the negative aspects of the Black boycotts against Korean shopkeepers, Koreans in New York City were somewhat relieved. Koreans were very afraid of the possibility that Whites, mainstream news media, and the city government could make Koreans scapegoats in order to please the Black population.

#### Korean Efforts to Expand Their Moral Base

Korean shopkeepers and leaders understood that they needed some allies and support from the Black population in order to overcome the discontents of the poor Black population after the 1982 and 1985 Harlem boycotts against Korean shopkeepers. They also tried to establish connections with Black politicians and local leaders. They also sought to participate more in local affairs in order to persuade poor Blacks that Koreans were also concerned about the problems of Black communities. Here I will focus on the Korean shopkeepers' effort to expand positive relationships with poor Blacks. The efforts to establish connections with

Black leaders will be dealt in another section in this chapter.

After the boycotts of 1984, 1988 in Harlem and of 1988, 1990 in Brooklyn, Korean leaders intensified their efforts to participate in local cultural activities with Korean dances or martial art groups. Through cultural exchanges and participation in local affairs, the Korean leaders tried to appease Blacks and also, in some cases, to persuade Black people to consider the cultural differences to be the cause of the conflict between the Korean shopkeepers and poor Blacks.

#### Harlem Week

Since 1988, the Korean Merchant Association in Harlem has participated in the annual Harlem Week Festival which draws several thousand spectators from all over New York City. The Harlem Week is the biggest annual festival in Harlem and most participants of the festival are Black. Lloyd Williams, one of the organizers of Harlem Week, invited the Korean Merchant Association in Harlem to join the festival. For the International Carnival program of the festival, the Korean shopkeepers in Harlem paid their own money to bring a traditional Korean dance troupe which performed various traditional Korean dances.<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> These traditional Korean dances are not performed any more in everyday life in Korea. Thus, the dances are called "classic dances" in Korea. While they are performed as

In the 1989 Harlem Week, the Korean shopkeepers joined the festival again with the traditional Korean dance troupe. At the time, a boycott was continued two blocks away from the place where the International Carnival program was held. The Korean dance performances assumed new meanings after the boycott did start. In 1989, Korean shopkeepers worried about the possibility that the Black spectators might boo the performance because of the boycott against a Korean shopkeeper. When the spectators did not boo, one Korean shopkeeper said that she was very relieved. She recognized the possibility that the Korean dance performance symbolized not only Korean culture but also Korean shopkeepers.

This is one of the reasons why Korean shopkeepers brought a very colorful and exotic Korean dance troupe to Black neighborhoods. Through the performance of very exotic dances, the Korean shopkeepers could give the impression to Black spectators that Korean culture is very different from American culture. This implies that if Korean shopkeepers behave differently from Americans, that might be the result of the unique Korean culture. On another dimension, the

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symbol of the tradition in Korea, they are performed as symbol of the uniqueness of Korean culture in America. Because of its colorfulness and exotic flavor, those dances were adopted for the symbol of Korea in America even though most Koreans in Korea do not perform the dances. Nowadays, most Koreans except the elderly population enjoy Western style dances. In short, Korean dances are 'Korean' dances only for foreigners while those dances are 'classic' dances for Koreans. That is, the 'Korean' dances are reproduced in a different context with different meanings.

presence of colorful Korean culture in the Black festival may lend legitimacy to the presence of Korean shopkeepers in Black areas. The president of the Korean Merchant Association in Harlem explained that the reason why they participated in the festival was to enhance the friendship between Koreans and Blacks. Thus, the performances of Korean dances are culturally mediating the social relationship between the two groups.

The Korean shopkeepers also participated in other programs during Harlem Week. They donated 500 dollars to fund programs for the elderly. They also donated money to the president of the Uptown Chamber of Commerce for the cost of the festival.

#### Other Black Festivals and Parties

Koreans participated in the Brooklyn festival held in Prospect Park in June 1990. Two Korean dance troupes performed for spectators of different races. The motto of the festival was racial harmony and the banner behind a Korean food table proclaimed "We Are One." Koreans provided free food and the Korean Produce Association donated fruits and snacks for the festival. Howard Golden, Brooklyn Borough President, attended the festival and spoke about racial harmony.

A Korean-African-Caribbean festival was also held in September 1991 in northern Brooklyn. An NAACP chapter

director, presidents of Korean shopkeeper associations in Brooklyn, and the president of the New York Korean Association also attended. Koreans provided food. A Korean dance troupe performed Korean dances and a Tae Kwon Do group demonstrated Korean martial art.

The Korean Produce Association held a cultural event in April 1990 near Church Avenue where Blacks were boycotting Korean shopkeepers. The event included programs which explained Korean culture, Black culture, the civil rights movements, Koreans' view on Blacks, and so on. The intention of the event was to increase cultural understanding of each other. The organizer expected that through cultural understanding, the two groups could decrease the misunderstanding and conflict between Blacks and Koreans.

In order to establish friendly relations with some Black leaders, about thirty Korean leaders in New York City participated in an annual party given by a small Black newspaper, the New York Voice, which had been relatively friendly to Korean shopkeepers in 1988. The newspaper remained relatively friendly to Korean shopkeepers during the Black boycott on Church Avenue in 1990.

#### Donations to Black People

Fourteen Korean church members distributed about one thousand and five hundred blankets to homeless people,

mostly black, in Manhattan. They distributed them through the nights of December 22nd, 24th, and 25th in 1990. The blankets were called "Blanket of Love." This name certainly indicates that Korean people "love" Black homeless. It was reported that Black homeless repeated "Nice Korean" or "Thank you." This event was organized by the Korean Afro-American Friendship Group (its president was the first president of the Korean Merchant Association in Harlem) and the Pastors' Association for Peace (Korea Times of New York, Dec. 27, 1990).

The Amsterdam News carried two photos on August 27, 1990, which showed that the Korean Merchant Association in Harlem sponsored an end-of-program party for the kids of Phipps Day Care Center of the 28th Police Precinct. The Korean Merchant Association also donated to other activities of the police precinct, such as the police athletic league. The Korean Merchant Association donated food for the annual party for the elders in Harlem. They also donated to various other groups and events. For example, one fish market owner was asked to donate for a cultural program of the National Alliance Party. Even though he did not know about the party and the cultural program, he donated 75 dollars without question.

The Korean Drycleaners' Association in New York collected and donated about ten thousand articles of clothing every year to New York City government which

distributed them to poor residents. The Korean Produce Association donated thirteen thousand pounds of fruits and vegetables to the homeless in 1990. The Korean Produce Association also donated enough food to feed 400 homeless persons to the Council of Brooklyn Churches for Thanksgiving Day in 1990. At the ceremony, the president of the Produce Association said that the food was sending the love of Koreans to their neighbors in Brooklyn. Brooklyn Borough President Howard Golden said that charitable efforts of the Korean Association could break down walls between ethnic groups and promote harmony (Korea Times of New York, Nov. 26, 1990).

#### Black History Month Celebration

The Korean Produce Association of New York and the Uptown Chamber of Commerce organized an evening of culture exchange in February, 1990 at the Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture. This was also sponsored by the New York Daily News. The theme was "hands across the water." Korean shopkeepers in Harlem, members of the Korean Produce Association, Black members of the Uptown Chamber of Commerce, and a few Black politicians participated in the cultural exchange. The number of the participants was around seventy. The expense was paid by the Korean Produce Association. There were various performances of traditional Korean dances by a Korean dance troupe and a jazz

performance by a Black jazz trio. David Paterson, a New York State Senator, Sung Hwan Kim, a former president of the Korean Produce Association, Won Duk Kim, a former president of the Korean Merchant Association of Harlem, and Gerobin Gilbert, a Vice President of Program Development in WNBC-TV, received awards from both organizations.

The president of the Korean Produce Association announced scholarships for two Black students chosen by the Uptown Chamber of Commerce. He said,

The event, this evening, during Black History Month, 'An Evening of Cultural Exchange' is a further demonstration of the various ethnic groups in our community working together to share our cultural differences, and learn from one another. We are pleased tonight to honor several persons in the Black and Korean communities who have demonstrated their commitment to ethnic groups working together to achieve positive goals.

At the end of the celebration, Lloyd Williams, president of the Uptown Chamber of Commerce said that even if he tried hard to work for the unity of Blacks, there would still be those who said bad things against him. He emphasized, "We, Blacks, have to unite." He implied that Blacks had to unite in order to deal with Whites and Koreans effectively.

In fact, the meeting was a celebration for Lloyd Williams. The meeting gave an opportunity to Lloyd Williams to show his influence to Koreans and to Blacks. Koreans seemed to beg help from Lloyd Williams by offering him to choose the scholarship recipients. Lloyd Williams invited Black dignitaries to the program to demonstrate his

influence in the Black community to Korean shopkeepers. He organized the cultural exchange program at the expense of the Korean Produce Association. Koreans used this cultural exchange program during the Black History Month Celebration as an excuse to meet with Black leaders.

#### Code of Ethics for Korean Shopkeepers

In order to avoid further deterioration of the relationship between Korean shopkeepers and Black residents, Korean business leaders, especially the Korean American Business Center organized hearings to draft an ethical code for Korean shopkeepers in New York City. At one hearing in a Korean church in Queens, a panelist suggested that Korean shopkeepers should understand the three hundred year history of Blacks in America and establish an impartial and cooperative relationship with other ethnic groups. However, this effort to make a code of ethic failed, because there was no enthusiasm among ordinary Korean shopkeepers.

Local Korean newspapers also campaigned for a better relationship with Blacks. One Korean newspaper devised a code of ten rules for Korean shopkeepers (Korean Times of New York, Sept. 28, 1991). The rules include "1) do not use the term, gumdungyi [nigger], 2)do not shout and do not point your finger to shoppers, 3)do not behave like a rich person, 4)participate actively in local affairs, 5)do not chase shoplifters out of the store, 6)restrain the use of a

gun, 7)study English and Spanish, 8)do not answer with no, 9)always think that Black is beautiful, and 10)do not think that Blacks are naive."

#### Other Efforts

The Korean shopkeepers of the Korean Merchant Association in Harlem advertised their association in the Amsterdam News. The contents included "The Korean Merchants Association of 125th Street extend their[Koreans'] best wishes to our[The Amsterdam News'] numerous friends and customers for a happy Thanksgiving and look forward to your continued support in the future (Nov. 19, 1983)" or "we [Korean shopkeepers in Harlem] too are a part of the Harlem Community and join in the celebration of Black History Month (Feb. 11, 1984; Feb. 16, 1985)." Kim Won Duck, president of the Korean Merchant Association at the time, explained that if he had advertised more in the newspaper, the newspaper would have written friendlier articles about Korean shopkeepers. He believed that if Korean shopkeepers want to construct a good relationship in Black communities, "we [Koreans] have to make Black newspapers report even when we contribute a very small thing to Black communities." However, the advertisements of the Korean Merchant Association in the Amsterdam News did not continue.

The Korean shopkeepers, on several occasion, in Harlem also attended a Black church, one of whose pastors was

Korean. When they attended they presented small donations to the church. They also joined in the celebration of one hundred years of the Central Hospital of Harlem in 1988. The president of the Korean Merchant Association said, "even though we don't use the hospital, the party is a good opportunity to communicate with Black community" (Sae Gae Ilbo, Apr. 20, 1988). Reverend Jesse Jackson and Representative William Gray also attended.

Many Korean shopkeepers in Harlem tried to appease Black shoppers by displaying their photos with Black dignitaries such as Jesse Jackson and David Dinkins or photos of Martin Luther King, Jr. or other Blacks. One store was decorated with photographs which showed that the owner participated in many local affairs and donated several things to local organizations and parties. In another store, the Korean owner was photographed with Jesse Jackson and David Dinkins. Other stores also have drawings of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. or Black mothers and children. However, no Korean stores displayed photographs or drawings of Malcolm X. On the street, however, posters and tapes of Malcolm X and his autobiography were sold by several Black vendors.

Local Police, the Courts, and Law

Police and District Attorneys

Local police are supposed to maintain social order in everyday life. However, their abilities are limited. They have to follow laws and codes and are influenced by local politics. For Korean shopkeepers, the police are a major ally even though Korean shopkeepers hesitate to report petty crimes to the police because of various nuisances.<sup>26</sup> However, local policemen are the only people who physically protect Korean shopkeepers from criminal or angered Blacks. In Harlem, community policemen continuously patrolled on foot and by car on 125th Street. The policemen sometimes visited stores and asked the store owners if there were any problems.

Local policemen are also supposed to protect local residents. However, their protection is limited to criminal matters. In civil matters, policemen cannot intervene. During my work in a Korean store, two black customers came in a store and asked the Korean store-owner for a refund. The Korean store owner refused. The two women finally

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<sup>26</sup> Most Korean shopkeepers did not want to close their store for the appearance to the court or the police as eyewitness (it will take several hours or one day. It means he/she cannot make money for the time). They were also afraid of retaliation from those who commit crime. They also thought, once commodities were stolen or mischief happened, there is no way to recover in the case of petty crimes. Even when they reported, they complained, the police did not concern about petty crimes and policemen were not kind to Koreans either because of racism or because of language barriers of Korean shopkeepers.

summoned two policemen and complained that the Korean shopkeeper refused to give them a refund. One policeman told her, "I can't do anything for you. You can bring this matter to a small claims court." She and her friend left in a rage. Although the two women sensed the moral injustice in the store owner's refusal to refunding, the policemen considered it a civil matter.

Whenever there were Black boycotts against Korean shopkeepers, local police were deployed. In the 1988-89 Harlem boycott, two or three policemen were always standing near the store and a police car was always parked near the store. They came from a nearby police precinct, two blocks away from the store. During the 1990 Church Avenue boycott, about a dozen officers from the Brooklyn South Task Force patrolled outside the stores; about six hundred police officers were mobilized during the peak of boycott. Dozens of police cars filled the street. Police officers stood guard atop nearby roofs. In the 1988 Harlem boycott, about 50 police officers patrolled the vicinity of the boycotted store.

The police presence minimized physical confrontation between the boycotted store owners and the boycotters. When physical contact between them occurred, the police officers intervened and often arrested perpetrators if there was any damage to body or property. Thus, the boycotters were limited to a certain area and could only shout slogans.

When boycotters shouted outside of a designated area or resisted the police, they were arrested on charges of criminal contempt, disorderly conduct, resisting arrest, or other misdemeanors.

The police protected the rights of both sides: the right of free speech for the boycotters and the right to do business in any place for the Korean shopkeepers. They also protected shoppers who wanted to shop at the boycotted store. In June 1990, when the president of the Congress of Racial Equality led about twenty shoppers to the two stores, police officers escorted them as the protesters, who numbered about fifty, were shouting.

Thus, the dominant confrontation form in everyday boycotts was limited to shouting matches or the chanting of slogans such as "boycott, boycott." Sometimes, the boycotters insulted the shoppers who tried to use the boycotted stores. The boycotters also begged, persuaded, or threatened the customers to dissuade them from using the stores. Often the boycotters, the shoppers, and the targeted shopkeepers exchanged foul languages and ridiculed each other. Some boycotters called the shoppers "house nigger," or "Uncle Tom"; the Black boycotters complained that the Korean shopkeepers called them "niggers" and told them "go back to Africa." The Korean shopkeepers complained that the boycotters called them "yellow monkeys," "bloodsuckers", and that some boycotters made lewd gestures,

and shouted, 'G.I., two dollars.'<sup>27</sup>

The police tried to mediate the conflict through informal meetings and connections. On many occasions, the police advised targeted Korean store owners to close their stores for several days to cool down the angry mood of boycotters, or they invited both sides to compromise. Brooklyn District Attorney Charles Hynes once conferred with lawyers of both parties in the Church Avenue boycott. That meeting focused on efforts to resolve two criminal complaints as a step toward ending the boycott of two Korean stores. The first complaint involved the Haitian woman's assertion that she had been assaulted in the Red Apple grocery store on Church Avenue. The second complaint involved the wife of the owner of a boycotted store who asserted that a demonstrator punched her on February 1, 1990 (New York Times, May 17, 1990). Both had filed criminal and civil complaints to seek several millions of dollars in compensation for damages.

The police also tried to find out who had organized the boycotts and to investigate the involved organizations. Some members of the December 12th Movement were allegedly be

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<sup>27</sup> The wife of a boycotted store owner explained that the "two dollars, G.I." implies that Korean women sold their body cheap to American soldiers during the Korean War. That meant, said she, that she is a product of the cheap sexual intercourse, or that she would sell her body cheap to the boycotters.

shadowed by detectives.<sup>28</sup> Even though the police denied it, the Village Voice reported that one member of the December 12th Movement was shadowed by two detectives. The police also possibly have the files for Black nationalists (Hornung 1990b).

When the boycotts against Koreans continued in Brooklyn and Harlem, federal investigators stepped in. In the 1990 Church Avenue boycott, the Department of Justice inspected the possibility of racial discrimination by the boycotters in March 1990. U.S. Attorney General, Dick Thornburgh, instructed Brooklyn U.S. Attorney, Andrew Maloney, to investigate the boycott for the violation of federal civil rights law. Andrew Maloney directed the Federal Bureau of Investigation to investigate the boycott.<sup>29</sup> The F.B.I. in Manhattan opened a preliminary inquiry into possible civil rights violations in the boycott in May, 1990 (Newsday, May 15, 1990). They conducted a similar investigation in the 1984, 1988-89 Harlem boycotts. In the case of the 1988 Brooklyn boycott, the F.B.I. was said to have investigated a

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<sup>28</sup> The December 12th Movement organized many protests against the police brutality over Blacks in New York area. In Harlem, the Movement once organized a protest against an alleged police beating of two Black youths in front of the precinct which deployed police officers in front of the boycotted Korean store. Members of the Movement considered the police as an occupied force of Black neighborhoods.

<sup>29</sup> According to Attorney Maloney, the federal civil rights law applies to any two or more people who conspire to deprive someone of any federally protected right, such as conducting business in inter-state commerce.

possible extortion charge against Sonny Carson. However, federal prosecutors have not yet charged anyone in relation to the Black boycotts against Korean shopkeepers.

The views of district and federal law enforcement concerning the December 12th Movement were well expressed by federal attorney Giuliani in the early 1980s. "Throughout Giuliani's early years as New York's top federal prosecutor he painted Chimurenga<sup>30</sup> as Public Enemy No.1" (Hornung 1990b:27). Top city officials and federal prosecutors characterized the Church Avenue boycott as an illegal act masterminded by the December 12th Movement. The F.B.I. and police reports described the group as "a para-military-style group that poses a serious threat to public safety" (ibid.:28). One police officer considered the 1990 Church Avenue boycott to be a mountain made from a mole-hill. He thought there were no beatings at all from the beginning, and that the boycott organizers used the incident as an excuse to mount their nationalist political campaign. The December 12th Movement, whose members included boycott leaders such as Sonny Carson and Father Lucas, may be under surveillance by the New York City Police Department and the F.B.I. (ibid.).<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> Chimurenga is an ideological leader of the December 12th Movement.

<sup>31</sup> In fact, FBI and NYPD had various surveillance units and files in the past. The present existence of those units were denied by them. The wording of what follows is from Churchill and Wall (1988) where no other reference is cited.

The members of the December 12th Movement responded by impugning the motives of law enforcement officials. Sonny Carson accused the F.B.I. of intervening in a peaceful boycott. "The police will always use something to portray us as violent criminals or terrorists," said Chimurenga. He continued,

They will move to stifle dissent and shut down our voices, tell us we don't have rights. But the boycott will continue.... The police know that. They know that we don't commit crimes, that we present a point of view that threatens them and their power.... Our message is rooted in the neglect and anger experienced

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**COINTELPROs:** FBI domestic Counterintelligence Programs designed to destroy individuals and organizations the FBI considers to be politically objectionable. Tactics included all manner of official lying and media disinformation, systematically levying false charges against those targeted, manufacturing evidence to obtain their convictions, withholding evidence which might exonerate them, and occasionally assassinating "key leaders." The FBI says COINTELPRO ended in 1971; all reasonable interpretations of FBI performance indicate it continues today, albeit under other code-names.

**JTTF:** The Joint Terrorist Task Force, created in the late 1970s as an interlock between the FBI and New York city red squad to engage in COINTELPRO-type activities.

**Key Agitator Index:** The list of FBI files devoted to individuals considered so politically objectionable by the Bureau that they must be "neutralized" for "internal security."

**Racial Matters Sections:** The COINTELPRO components of FBI Field Offices aimed at black political organizations.

**Security Index:** The listing of all FBI files devoted to individuals considered politically objectionable by the Bureau.

**Black Desk:** a section of the NYPD to gather information about "radical" Black activists. The existence was revealed in 1988.

**Unusual Occurrence Addendum files:** secret files on crimes and crime victims used by Brooklyn and Manhattan Borough Command offices (Amsterdam News, June 9, 1990). They are not official files. The existence of the files was revealed by Newsday in May, 1990.

by black people. They want to make us look like crazies for expressing that anger. They say we're criminals because we want what's rightfully ours, not the promises of puppet politicians.... We want the political and economic power to run our communities and run our lives. We won't be intimidated. (Hornung 1990b:35)

### Court and Law

The court does not help Blacks with everyday humiliation because it is difficult to build up enough evidence of discrimination from everyday humiliation and harassment to produce a guild verdict. The constitution guarantees the right of free speech for all Americans. When the boycotted store owner in Harlem brought the boycott matter to a court in order to stop it, a judge decided that boycotters have the right to express their ideas. The judge also said that the boycotters could not bother the store owner and individual shoppers. Thus, the boycotters have the legal rights to boycott and the store owners have the legal right to do business.

In the 1990 Church Avenue boycott, the owner of the targeted store sought an injunction from the court in order to stop the boycott. New York State Supreme Court Judge Held gave the store owner a restraining order which did not stop the boycott but kept the boycotters fifty feet away from the store in May 1990. The judge also directed police to enforce the order. When the judge chided the boycotters for refusing to negotiate and awarded a restraining order

to the Korean shopkeeper, Sonny Carson, who sat in the courtroom, shouted to the judge, "why don't you have those men [the involved Koreans] arrested?" When the judge ordered him removed from the chamber, he again shouted to the judge, "you're a racist." Outside of the court, one Black, not related to the boycotters, burned an American flag.

However, the police did not enforce the restraining order because, according to the police, the police are not obliged to follow civil court decisions like the restraining order. The boycotters affirmed that they would continue their boycott no matter what happened to them. Thus, the intensity of the boycott was not influenced by the court decision. The Korean shopkeepers sued the New York City police department because the police did not enforce the restraining order in June 1990. Judge Held of the State Supreme Court ordered the New York Police Department to enforce the restraining order he had imposed in a civil suit by the store owners.

In appealing, the city argued that the police were not obligated to enforce court orders in civil cases between private parties. But the Appellate Division of the New York State Court affirmed, in September 1990, Judge Held's order on the reason that the executive branch is obliged to enforce a court order by the constitution. Top city officials (possibly Mayor Dinkins) decided not to appeal any

more and to execute the restraining order. At the time, Mayor Dinkins was about to cross the picket line himself and decided to take the side of the boycotted Korean shopkeepers under pressure from the mainstream news media, the White majority, and the Korean shopkeepers. From September of 1990, the boycotters who shouted "boycott" or distributed fliers within fifty feet distance of the targeted stores were arrested by police officers on misdemeanor charges such as criminal contempt or disorderly conduct.

During the Church Avenue boycott of 1990, an increasing number of Blacks insisted that they fell down in Korean stores and brought the incidents to the court. However, these suits did not achieve their goals because no judge ordered any Korean shopkeeper to compensate for damages. The Korean who was accused of beating a Haitian woman in the Church Avenue boycott was also acquitted in January, 1991.

In a response to the Judge's holding on the restraining order, one demonstrator shouted through a bullhorn on the following day, "they tell us we can't protest, what they fail to understand is they can't tell us what we can do and can't do... We'll be here everyday..." After the Appellate Court upheld the order to the police to enforce the restraining order, one Black man said, "this court decision is no different than the court decision that said we are three-fifths of a person, or the decision that said we are separate but not equal" (Daily News, Sept. 19, 1990).

Father Lucas also commented, "Blacks can't get justice from this system.... And we don't want the court decision to encourage the Koreans to think they can go back to doing the same thing. So the boycott has to continue, until the store closed down"(Kwong, 1991).

In 1991, the New York State legislature passed a law supported by Governor Cuomo and Mayor Dinkins which prescribed heavier sentences for collective hate crimes. Thus, the politicians created another law in order to control collective hate crimes. Certainly the law was phrased in general terms and intended to regulate any violent racist crimes; the bill could be used to regulate not only White "racist" attacks on Blacks but also Black "racist" attack on other groups. The problem lies with the definition of "racist." In general, law, law enforcement institutions, and the court limited the actions each party could take. However, the shopkeepers' private rights of property and their rights to do business were protected while the demonstration of the boycotters was regulated.

#### Koreans' Efforts for Connection with the Police

The police are important power in relation to shoplifting and robbery, because they protect shopkeepers from any physical violence or property damage and limit the range of expression of anger from the discontented shoppers. Therefore, Korean shopkeepers tried very hard to make the

police their friends. Because the police also needed friends in local areas, the police, especially the section for community affairs, also tried to reach out to Korean shopkeepers. Because the police are obliged to protect various rights of individuals which include private rights of property and freedom to pursue legitimate business, Korean shopkeepers considered their close relationships with the police beneficial to their business activities.

The Korean Merchant Association in Harlem donated money and T-shirts to the Police Athletic League (PAL) where the police organized athletic events for young Blacks in the area. According to a Korean shopkeeper, some young Blacks who joined the PAL told the Korean shopkeepers that they would protect Korean stores and teach a lesson to the boycotters. The Korean Merchant Association in Harlem also donated to the small community services of the nearby police precinct.

The New York City police has a Community Patrol Officer Program. Police officers of the Harlem precincts patrolled on 125th Street and visited stores. They often entered stores and asked about problems. These visits decreased the anxiety of Korean shopkeepers in "alien" areas with relatively high crime rates. During the 1988-89 Harlem boycott, the president of the Korean Merchant Association in Harlem often met police officers from a nearby precinct to discuss the boycott and get advice from them.

However, there seems to be no special working relationship between the Korean shopkeepers and the police officers of the nearby precinct. They maintained their relationship as ordinary police officers and ordinary businessmen. The police protection given to the Korean shopkeepers during the boycott was a necessary police activity to protect legal social transactions. Because the police are more oppressive to the groups which try to break laws or to disrupt social order, the police officers were hostile to the boycotters. Police activities focused on regulating the activities of the boycotters during the boycott.

Local Korean news papers encouraged Korean shopkeepers to join advisory committees of local police precincts. In order to get advice from local community leaders, police precincts organized advisory committees consisting of various community and ethnic leaders. This provides the police with access to the local and ethnic communities and to solve problems and tensions through the advisory members. In the case of Flushing, Queens and Jamaica, Queens, Korean shopkeepers joined the advisory committees of respective police precincts.

At the city level, the relationship with high ranking officers of the police department was more important because police responses to irregular incidents such as black boycotts against Korean shopkeepers depends on the decisions

of high ranking police officers. The relationship with high ranking police officers is also important because they decide which complaints they will investigate.

There are several Korean members in the advisory council for the New York Police Department. The executive director of the Asian American Advisory Council of NYPD is a Korean.<sup>32</sup> He also participated in 1982 efforts to solve the conflict between Korean shopkeepers and Blacks in Harlem. He helped to organize the Asian-Black Association and suggested to Korean shopkeepers that the employment of blacks, the use of black banks, and the donation to black organizations might help solve the conflict. Under his leadership, the Korean Advisory Council was created in the NYPD. The Korean advisory council members, according to themselves, tried to achieve some objects: the establishment of hot lines in police stations for Koreans; scholarships for model students; and friendship with local police officers(Cho Sun Ilbo, June 9, 1989). They wanted to create an active connection between the Korean community and the police department. The president of the Korean Merchant Association in Harlem was also a member of the standing committee of the Korean advisory council of the NYPD in

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<sup>32</sup> He was also selected as a person of the year by the Congress in 1990. He worked as a chairman for the Asian Coalition for Bush in the East in 1988. He is also a vice chairman for the Asian American National Republican Assembly (Korea Times of New York, Mar. 15, 1991). Thus, he has a considerable influence in political arena, more than any other Korean in New York City.

1990.

The Asian-American council of the NYPD organized a meeting between city police leaders and Korean leaders in July 1990 at the peak of the Church Avenue boycott. The president of the Korean Merchant Association in Harlem, the commissioner, and vice commissioners of the NYPD attended the meeting. Deputy Commissioner Holliday, who was in charge of community affairs at the NYPD, actively participated in many meetings with Korean leaders; she received several awards from various Korean organizations. She organized meetings between city police officers, local police officers and Korean leaders and related Korean issues and problems to the NYPD. In one meeting, she promised to continue supporting Korean community activities.

#### Local and Federal Governments and Politicians

In the 1984 Harlem boycott, then City Clerk David Dinkins tried to mediate the conflict. The presidents of the Korean Association of New York, the Korean Produce Association, and the Korean Merchant Association in Harlem attended a meeting with David Dinkins and City Comptroller Golden in November 26, 1984. The president of the Uptown Chamber of Commerce also attended a later meeting. Dinkins suggested that the boycott was not helpful to the revitalization of Harlem. However, the boycott continued through 1985 and attracted wide attention from the news

media and politicians.

When the boycott continued, demands included the selling of the boycotted stores to Blacks and support of the "Buy Black" campaign. Some politicians, especially White politicians, were very critical of the boycotts. State Senator Franz Leichter<sup>33</sup> (D, Manhattan) asserted in a news conference that pickets at Korean green grocers in Harlem were pointing "an economic dagger at the hearts" of the Korean shopkeepers. He stated, "we<sup>34</sup> firmly believe that shopkeepers are entitled to locate anywhere in the city without regard to race, religion, country of origin or sex. We deplore the picketing of shopkeepers if the aim is to prevent them from carrying on a lawful business. We believe that the picketing of certain Korean greengrocers on 125th St. is not a proper way to deal with the various problems that have arisen" (Daily News, Jan. 31, 1985).

Leichter called for the involvement of the Institute for Mediation and Conflict Resolution in the dispute, even though the representatives from that group were already holding talks with Harlem politicians and civic leaders. Because the Korean Merchants Association in Harlem had already agreed to sit down with the boycotters while the

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<sup>33</sup> State Senator Leichter was mentioned as a possible candidate for City Comptroller at the time. The protests on 125th Street was conducted outside the boundaries of his district.

<sup>34</sup> He represented several politicians in the news conference.

boycotters refused, the blame was put heavily on the boycotters by politicians. For a White politician who aspired to a city-wide political position, this was a good opportunity to get attention from news media and also from the White voters who resented Black nationalism.

During a 1988 Brooklyn boycott, then Mayor Koch invited Korean leaders including the president of the Korean Merchant Association in Harlem to a meeting with city officials. The Human Rights Commissioner, and Police Commissioner and other related officials also participated. They agreed that the boycotters exaggerated the altercation between a Korean shopkeeper and two black women and that the boycotters might be acting illegally.

Black Assemblyman Albert Vann, whose district encompassed the area, was negotiating with Korean leaders during the boycott. Sonny Carson, who led the boycott in 1988, departed from the Black negotiating team because of a difference in opinion. Even though Albert Vann accused Koreans of being hostile and discriminatory, he wanted to negotiate. Assemblyman Albert Vann met Sung Soo Kim, who represented the Korean merchants of the area, and both declared the conflict a local incident. Albert Vann agreed with the boycotters that the Koreans should change their attitudes. He once agreed that the boycott leaders tried to enhance the Black political power by changing the passive attitudes of Blacks through the boycott (Sae Gae Ilbo,

Sept. 30, 1988). After several meetings, Albert Vann and Black business and religious leaders reached an agreement with Korean business leaders. After the agreement, the boycott dissipated.

Black politicians usually agreed that Korean shopkeepers mistreat and are rude to Black customers. However, White politicians thought that the problems should be peacefully resolved through mediation or court action; they believed the protests to be unnecessary. The lawyer for the targeted Korean shopkeeper was a White assemblyman who volunteered his help and opposed the boycott. He said that he would bring the matter to court if the boycotters insisted on boycotting Korean shopkeepers rather than a single individual because that kind of boycott clearly violated civil rights law.

In the 1988-89 Harlem boycott, then Manhattan Borough President David Dinkins invited Korean representatives to his office. The president of the Korean Merchant Association, a boycotted fish market owner, and the presidents of various Korean organizations participated in the meeting. They discussed the possibilities of peaceful resolution. City Hall also organized a meeting that a targeted store owner and other local shopkeepers attended along with city-wide Korean leaders. The city officials said that they warned the boycott organizers that if the boycotters violated the law, the authorities would react

forcefully to enforce the law.

Mayor Koch, on November 1st, 1988, announced his position on the boycotts against Koreans in Harlem and Brooklyn. He thought that the boycotters boycotted all Korean stores and that those activities were illegal and violated the human rights of Koreans. He said that the boycott in Brooklyn clearly violated the law. The Human Rights Commissioner of the city government declared that he would bring the boycotters to court. Benjamin Ward, Police Commissioner, said that it is illegal to obstruct the business activities of Koreans. The Police Commissioner also said that he would enforce regulation of the police line very strictly to protect customers (Chung Ang Ilbo, Nov. 3, 1988, and Sae Gae ilbo, Nov. 2, 1988).

However, the boycott in Harlem continued until the mayoral election in 1989. During that period, as a mayoral candidate and Manhattan Borough President, David Dinkins tried to mediate the boycott. Although the boycotters rejected any mediation, they disappeared about two weeks before the mayoral election. Mayor Dinkins said later that he had influenced the boycotters to stop the boycott.

Another Black boycott against Korean shopkeepers on Church Avenue, Brooklyn in 1990 presented a difficult challenge to the newly-elected Mayor David Dinkins. Councilwoman Susan Alter(D-Brooklyn) first attempted to bring the boycotters and Korean shopkeepers together;

Brooklyn Borough President Howard Golden brought representatives of both sides together. However, both mediation efforts fell through. Deputy Mayor Bill Lynch, the Mayor's Community Assistance Unit, and the City's Human Rights Commission worked to bring about a resolution. In April, Dinkins set up a fact-finding committee to investigate the boycott, and in the weeks after the incident letters were sent to Dinkins by Korean leaders, attorney Colins Moore, Alvin Berk, the Chairman of Community Board 14, and board member Ollie McClean asking the Mayor to help resolve the problem (Newsday, May 15, 1990).

However, Mayor Dinkins and city officials tried to mediate the conflict from a neutral position at the beginning. This position reflected Mayor Dinkins' narrow victory over Republican candidate Giuliani in the 1989 mayoral election. His narrow victory stemmed from overwhelming support from Blacks and Hispanics and considerable support from Whites in New York City; he couldn't afford to alienate any group.<sup>35</sup> This made his

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<sup>35</sup> While 91% of Blacks and 65% of Hispanics voted for him, 29% of Whites voted for him (Windhoff-Hertier, 1992:50). About 54% of Asians voted for him. According to an informal statistics, Koreans were equally split between Giuliani and Dinkins. In a victory speech after the election, Dinkins emphasized the contribution of Jewish votes for his win. Dinkins later said, "What helped me win was a coalition," including about a third of the white vote, "most of which was Jewish, although in the general election, more Jews voted for my opponent than voted for me." (The New York Times, Feb. 21, 1990)

It is known that Black grassroots activists such as Sonny Carson have considerable followers in Brooklyn.

position difficult. On May 11, 1990, he condemned the Black boycott in a broadcasted speech. But days later, Mayor Dinkins also said, "I'm confident that this [boycott] is a legitimate dispute," and "I believe the boycott has gone on too long, but it's important to remember that a picket is as American as apple pie" (New York Times, May 16, 1990).

At the time, the racial tension was very high because of the trial for the Bensonhurst killing of a Black by White youths, the aftermath of the Central Park jogger case (a White jogger was raped and beaten to almost death, allegedly by young Blacks), and a physical attack on three Vietnamese by Blacks in Flatbush (they might have misidentified the Vietnamese as Koreans). Al Sharpton marched into White Bensonhurst with several hundred Blacks and several hundred other Blacks marched to boycott two Korean stores on Church Avenue. In these circumstances, mainstream news media, Whites, and Koreans were mounting their pressure on Mayor Dinkins to take a firm opposition to the boycotts and other

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Because of the influence of Sonny Carson among poor Blacks, Dinkins paid 9,800 dollars to Sonny Carson and his organization for a mayoral campaign for Dinkins in 1989. However, Giuliani and his adviser described the payments as "a payoff" to Sonny Carson. Dinkins's campaign manager, Bill Lynch, said that he had paid them to produce a large turnout of Black voters in housing projects in Bedford-Stuyvesant. He said, "I was hiring an organization that has roots in the community." (The New York Times, Oct. 18, 1989)

Those Black politicians who were elected by Black majority tended to have relatively more pro-boycott positions. For example, Assemblywoman Rhoda Jacobs of East Flatbush said that because of injustice done by Koreans, Black people responded to the boycott. (WABC-TV, 'Like It Is,' Oct. 21, 1990)

"racial" demonstrations.

While some of the demands (i.e., community control over Black neighborhood economy and the closure of the targeted stores) of the Black boycotters were beyond the accepted ideas of American capitalism, some other demands (i.e., the intimidation of clients by protesters in front of the stores) were considered by state agents as illegal. The boycott was painted as a threat to Koreans' civil rights and public order by mainstream news media. Finally the increasing number of crimes and racial tensions caused Dinkins' approval rate to plummet by 20% among Whites, Queens residents, people making more than \$50,000 a year, and college graduates during his first nine months. One Bensonhurst White female responded, "the thing with the Korean market was a disgrace. He [Mayor Dinkins] should have gotten in there and done something" (Newsday, Sept. 28, 1990).

The Koreans in New York City also rallied near City Hall on September 18, 1990, urging an end of the Black boycott against two Korean stores and the active intervention of the mayor. Many Koreans brought signs reading, "Our Seoul brothers are your soul brothers," "Boycott Bigotry," and "racial harmony." When Mayor Dinkins arrived, the Koreans booed him. Dinkins said the city police would enforce a court order keeping boycotters fifty feet away from the target stores. Maxine Paige, a Black

singer, sang "The Star-Spangled Banner" and "We Shall Overcome." After the rally, Deputy Mayor Bill Lynch had a meeting with a delegation of Korean- and Chinese-Americans.<sup>36</sup>

Because of the mounting pressure, Mayor Dinkins declared in September 1990,

It was appropriate that mediation be given a full opportunity here. This protest, however, has proved to be different... They wish only to beat these store owners into submission and to force them out of business.

Whatever may have happened here in January to touch off the boycott... forcing these shopkeepers out of business amounts to cruel and unusual punishment. (quoted in Hornung 1990a)

The police also started to enforce the restraining order and Mayor Dinkins crossed the picket line by himself. This infuriated the black boycotters and their supporters. Father Lucas said, "after the earlier goof of branding the boycott racist, Dinkins made the latest ill-advised gaff of going to the Red Apple and Church Street markets making some small purchases with lots of press coverage and gigantic symbolism to the African community. It is perceived as a response to the challenge of the likes of Mel Miller

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<sup>36</sup> Chinese leaders in New York City actively supported Koreans during the boycott. Many Chinese crossed the picket line in order to show their support for the boycotted Koreans. Chinese and other Asian Americans seemed to perceive the boycott as anti-Asian. However, a few Chinese criticized the boycotted Korean shopkeepers as rude and expressed their sympathy toward poor Blacks.

(majority leader of the State Assembly)<sup>37</sup> which was in fact a challenge to show how removed the Mayor is from the thinking, behavior, and wishes of Black folks" (Amsterdam News, Oct. 6, 1990).

As one of Mayor Dinkins's advisors admitted, "They [the boycotters] have enough support in the community to stand up to the police, the courts, and the mayor" (quoted by Hornung 1990a:31). Thus, the boycotters could withstand mounting pressures not only from "White" media and White politicians but also from Black politicians such as Mayor Dinkins.

When Korean-American leaders visited President Bush in June 1990, the president of the Korean Association of Greater New York explained Black boycott at the Church Avenue to President Bush and asked his consideration of the matter. However, there was no intervention from the White House in the boycott.

#### Efforts to Establish Connections with Politicians

Because of the continuing tension between Korean

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<sup>37</sup> He blasted the inaction of Mayor Dinkins in a hearing of City Council. City council members, a Congressman in Brooklyn, and other politicians also criticized Mayor Dinkins because Mayor Dinkins did not try to solve the conflict. The Korean consular general in New York City also visited Mayor Dinkins on June 26, 1990 and suggested Mayor Dinkins intervene in the conflict. Governor Cuomo didn't take a side on the boycott. When Gov. Cuomo visited Flushing, Queens for his informal re-election campaign, he urged Asian shopkeepers to understand the unique history of Blacks in America. He also visited Korean stores in Flushing.

shopkeepers and poor Black residents, Korean shopkeepers needed support from politicians during the crisis. In order to achieve that, Korean shopkeepers and business leaders tried to establish various connections with politicians. Korean leaders and shopkeepers in Harlem and in New York City tried very hard to establish good relationships with Black politicians. One Korean leader said, "we have to learn by heart that a group without political power will be victimized even though that group has big money," and "we have to meet politicians again and again in order to establish political connections."

In the 1988 democratic primary for the American presidency, Koreans organized a fund-raiser for Jesse Jackson in April, 1988. Koreans also organized fund-raisers for Dukakis and Bush. However, the organizer of the fund-raiser for Jesse Jackson was the Korean-Americans for Better Racial Relations,<sup>38</sup> which promoted unity and mutual understanding between Koreans and other ethnic groups, especially Blacks, in New York City. Their leaflet stated, "the reasons why we support Reverend Jesse Jackson are that he has paid attention to Korean problems and that he will be a very important source for us to solve the problems confronting Korean-Americans [the Black-Korean conflict]."

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<sup>38</sup> The president of the Korean Merchant Association in Harlem also joined the group as an executive committee member. Presidents of various merchant associations were the backbone of the organization.

They collected about twenty thousand dollars for Jesse Jackson.

The president of the Korean Merchant Association in Harlem joined in the Asian-American Coalition for David Dinkins for Mayor as one of nineteen chair members. Nine of 19 chair members were Koreans. Koreans also organized their own independent campaign organization for David Dinkins. The Asian-American Coalition for David Dinkins was dominated by Chinese and had a close relationship with the Korean-Americans for Dinkins.

The Korean-Americans for David Dinkins group was organized in April, 1989, when then-Mayor Koch and then-Manhattan Borough President Dinkins ran against one another in the democratic primary for Mayor. It was the first time that Koreans organized an independent organization to actively participate in an election campaign for a White or Black politician.<sup>39</sup> They mobilized Korean traditional dance troupe to campaign in poor black neighborhoods and

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<sup>39</sup> Because of the Black boycotts in 1988 and 1989, Koreans wanted to have more close relationship with Black politicians. That was the reason why Koreans actively participated in the campaign for David Dinkins. One participant in the Koreans for David Dinkins said, "The reasons why we support David Dinkins are to impress Blacks with our active campaign for David Dinkins and to mitigate the hostility of Blacks against Koreans. The conflict between Koreans and Blacks just started and will be worse. We need more fundamental strategy and one of them is to support Black politicians such as David Dinkins." (Sae Gae Ilbo, Oct. 13, 1989). The president of the organization also said that the purposes of the campaign were to enhance the civil right of minorities in his Harlem campaign.

Asian neighborhoods for Dinkins. Their campaigns were held in Harlem, Jamaica, Bronx, and Flushing.

The Koreans for Dinkins and local Korean shopkeepers organized a campaign in Harlem in May 1989. Five local Korean shopkeepers and about twenty other Koreans participated in the campaign. A traditional Korean dance troupe came to Harlem and performed at several locations for about two hours. The Korean shopkeepers distributed leaflets to blacks on the street. Blacks on the streets expressed their curiosity and thanks when the exotic dance troupe campaigned for David Dinkins. However, two Blacks<sup>40</sup> said to the Koreans during the campaign, "get out of here" and "God damn." The Korean shopkeepers attached campaign posters supporting Dinkins on walls and windows in all Korean stores. They also collected registration cards for the election from Black shoppers.

After the exotic campaign in Jamaica, Queens, the president of the Korean Merchant Association in Jamaica said, "I couldn't achieve any real communication with Blacks for the last fourteen years. But when I talked about Dinkins and campaigned for him, we [he and Blacks] feel very close." He expressed that campaigns for Dinkins were a good opportunity for Koreans to communicate with Blacks. He guessed that about 90% of Blacks supported Dinkins (Sae Gae

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<sup>40</sup> They wore shabby clothes. I got the impression at the time that poorer blacks might be more hostile toward Korean (or toward Asian or aliens) presence in Harlem.

Ilbo, June 17, 1989). Even though the Korean shopkeepers in Harlem did not express the same excitement, they smiled and expressed their pride when they campaigned for Dinkins. The efforts of Koreans to support David Dinkins, thought many Koreans, were appreciated in Black communities (Chung Ang Ilbo, Nov. 6, 1989).

The campaign for Dinkins was, in fact, a public relation effort in the Black-Korean relationship. The Korean shopkeepers did not sincerely believe that Dinkins could bring peace for the troublesome relationship between Black residents and Korean shopkeepers. However, all Korean shopkeepers but three on 125th Street between Saint Nicholas Avenue and Lenox Avenue displayed various campaign posters for Dinkins inside and outside of their stores. One shopkeeper said, "because the sure majority of Black residents support David Dinkins, it[to carry campaign posters for David Dinkins] is a sure sign that we are on the side of Blacks." At the bottom of most campaign posters, 'the Korean- Americans for David Dinkins' was clearly printed. The Korean shopkeepers also wanted friendly politicians in the City Hall. The president of the Koreans for Dinkins said, "he [David Dinkins] believes that Koreans revived the local economy in poor black neighborhoods." However, there were different voices too. One Korean shopkeeper in Harlem was worried about the possibility that the election of David Dinkins would embolden Blacks to

demand more.

The Korean-Americans for David Dinkins for Mayor also organized two fund raisers to support David Dinkins. One was held on August 31, 1989, in a Korean restaurant in Queens. More than two hundred Koreans attended the party and most Korean leaders in New York City also attended. Several Korean shopkeepers in Harlem attended. Black politicians such as Mayoral candidate David Dinkins, Representative Charles Rangel from Harlem, and several state legislators also attended. David Dinkins emphasized that he would try hard to abolish all racial discrimination, protect small business, increase security on the street, and so on. He asked for active support from Korean community. Other Black politicians also addressed similar themes at the party. An earlier fund raiser with Korean supporters on May 12, 1991, in a Korean restaurant, David Dinkins had said that he would do his best to solve ethnic conflicts and end racial discrimination. He also promised Koreans that he would hire more Asians and Koreans in the city government.

After the election, Koreans pushed Mayor Dinkins to appoint more Koreans in the city government. Because of the lack of qualified people and also the lack of a potent lobby, only a few Koreans were appointed in the mid-echelon positions of the city government. Many higher and better positions were given to Chinese. This was possibly because more Chinese people voted for Dinkins than Korean people in

New York City, both in terms of numbers and rates.

The Korean Produce Association honored David Dinkins for his support of Koreans in 1989. In the annual party of the Korean American Small Business Service Center which included most Korean business leaders as its members, David Dinkins proclaimed December 1st as "Korean-American Small Business Day." In a proclamation, read in his absence by Deputy Mayor Sally Hernandez Pinero, Mayor Dinkins declared, "Korean American entrepreneurs make important contributions to our city's economy and to the health and well-being of their fellow New Yorkers." Several City officials and council members were also honored for their support for Korean small businessmen. In the case of the 1990 annual party, the Korean Produce Association awarded the woman of the year award to New York City Comptroller Holtzman and other awards to Brooklyn Borough President Golden, Manhattan Borough President Messenger, President Williams of the Uptown Chamber of Commerce in Harlem, and other city and state officials. The Korean Seafood [fish retailer] Association, the Korean Drycleaners' Association, the Korean Nail Salon Association, and other business association of Koreans invited and honored city officials, local leaders, city and state politicians in their annual parties.<sup>41</sup>

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<sup>41</sup> However, prominent politicians usually sent their representatives. For example, Mayor Dinkins did not attend any annual parties of Korean associations in person in 1989 and 1990.

However, Korean shopkeepers soon discovered that they were disappointed, for example, after the 1990 Brooklyn boycott because the Mayor Dinkins did not forcefully intervene in the boycott. The Sae Gae Ilbo (Apr. 6, 1990) titled a story about David Dinkins, "Dinkins Treats Korean Community Coldly." The article reported that Dinkins did not appoint Koreans to city government posts and did not pay enough attention to the Church Avenue boycott. In a rally Koreans organized for 'racial harmony' near the city hall in Sept. 1990, Mayor Dinkins was booed. Right after the rally, he personally condemned the Black boycott as a racist boycott and crossed the picket line as an expression of his support for the boycotted Korean stores on Church Avenue. After this event, he was enthusiastically welcomed by thousands of Koreans in a Korean folk festival organized by the Korean Produce Association of New York.

Korean shopkeepers also tried to build a productive relationship with less powerful local politicians. There was a call from the office of a Black assembly-woman in the area to the president of the Korean Merchant Association in Harlem in May 1990. The president called Korean shopkeepers in the area and told them to bring soft drinks and fruit to the office of the assembly-woman. They delivered five boxes of coke, two boxes of apples, and two boxes of oranges for free. The secretary of the assembly-woman received the presents and expressed her appreciation. The beverage and

foods were used for the excursion of elderly constituents of the assembly-woman. The Korean Merchant Association in Harlem also donated fruit and beverages to other politicians such as city council members and state legislators in the area.

Because of lack of support from other politicians and because Koreans needed their own representatives in local governments, a few Korean persons ran for elective positions. One Korean who ran for City Council in 1991 said that the boycott of Church Avenue could have been resolved immediately had political power been available to Koreans. His campaign promises included resolving racial disputes, especially between Koreans and Blacks. However, he and another Korean council candidate were defeated. No Korean politicians have been elected in New York City or New York State yet.

#### Local Leaders

One Korean leader in Harlem said that the best way to solve the tensions between Blacks and Koreans is to meet with community leaders frequently. One Korean business leader recommended as early as in 1985, "Black people respect their local organization, church leaders, doctors, artists, and politicians and community leaders. We need to communicate with them in order to prevent the escalation of the problems and to solve the problems. We need to

establish good relationships with them rather than starting contacts after a conflict occurs" (Chung Ang Ilbo, Feb. 15, 1985).

A similar view was also expressed three years later. After the 1988 Brooklyn boycott, Korean shopkeepers near the boycotted store organized their own formal association in September, 1988. The temporary president of the Association said, "all thirty-two Korean shopkeepers in this area should become diplomats to overcome this difficult time... One of the reasons of the escalation [of a trivial altercation into a big boycott] is that we didn't establish frequent contacts with community organizations" (Sae Gae Ilbo, Sept. 23, 1988).

#### Korean Trip of Black Local Leaders

During the Church Avenue boycott, Korean business leaders led by a Korean shopkeeper in Harlem and Korean ministers led by the Cross-Cultural Pastors Association for Peace organized the Korean Afro-American Friendship Group in order to communicate with Black community leaders. The first work of the Friendship Group was to send Black community leaders, mostly ministers of various Black churches in New York City, to Korea. The Korean leaders expected that the Black leaders who visited Korea would have a good impression about Korea and Koreans and thus would mitigate the Black hostility toward Korean shopkeepers in

poor Black neighborhoods.

The Friendship Group was established by the former president of the Korean Merchant Association of Harlem who also gave a liberal financial support for the visit of Black church leaders to Korea. One chairman of the board of the Korean Merchant Association in Harlem also donated two thousand dollars, and the president and other members of the Korean Merchant Association in Harlem donated another two thousand thirty dollars for the event.

Thirty-nine Black leaders visited Korea during Oct.22 - Oct. 29, 1990. They were greeted by the Mayor of Seoul, top leaders of the ruling party in Korea, Korean ministers in Seoul, and bureaucrats. The ministers said in a departing news conference at Kimpo international airport in Seoul that they would inform their parishioners of the Korean tradition and its culture. "Koreans are not used to smiling at a person they don't really know, especially women don't contact other people with hand" said one minister. "We will tell our church members that the Korean character is not directed against Blacks." Another visitor also said that "we'll be the peace-promoters between New York's Korean and Black communities" (Korea Times of New York, Oct. 31, and Nov. 2, 1990).

The former president of the Korean Merchant Association in Harlem who organized the visit said, "the Korean-Black relationship worsened by the Church Avenue boycott will be

somewhat relieved by this visit... When there was a trouble between Korean merchants and Black peddlers in Harlem, a Black minister who visited Korea mediated and solved the trouble." He concluded by emphasizing that a good relationship with the Black community and Black ministers was very important for Korean shopkeepers. Having evaluated of the visit, the former president announced that the Group would solidify good relation between the Korean and Black communities through cultural and sport exchanges and more visits of Black leaders to Korea.

Sonny Carson, a leader of the Church Avenue boycott, criticized the visit of Black ministers to Korea as a ridiculous gesture. In response to a Korean university's offer to provide a one and half million dollar scholarship fund for Black students who want to study in Korea, Carson said that Blacks do not beg anything from Koreans but demand respect (Newsday, Oct. 26, 1990).<sup>42</sup>

#### The Cross-Cultural Pastors' Association for Peace

Those who visited South Korea for nine days in October 1990 were from the Cross-Cultural Pastors' Association for Peace, an inter-racial group of Protestant pastors from the New York metropolitan area, founded in 1988 after a Black boycott of Korean grocers in Brooklyn. The Association's

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<sup>42</sup> Four Black students were invited by a Korean university and they began to study in Korea from 1993.

president was the Korean-born Reverend Henry H. Hong and its 120 members are mostly Black pastors.

Rev. Hong ministers to a Black congregation and heads Black churches in Queens and the Bronx. He is working with several religious leaders to bridge the cultural chasm between Koreans shopkeepers and the Black communities they serve. Rev. Hong urged Korean shopkeepers to hire Blacks. He said, "because you make money here, you better hire here." He also received a Korean Dr. King title from the Amsterdam News (Aug.2, 1992).

When he organized the Korean trip of Black pastors in 1990, he said that Black pastors would play a major role in bridging the gap between New York City's Korean and African-American communities and in dispelling misunderstanding. "I don't know what's going to come out of it, but at least we're going to make a try [at easing racial friction], and that's what it's all about," said Rev. William Price, pastor of Mount Sinai Helping Hand Church in Harlem and a member of the Association. In the spring of 1990, the Association held an interracial church service and prayer rallies in front of the boycotted Korean grocery stores on Church Avenue (Korea Times of New York, Aug. 8, 1990).

A Korean pastor in a Black church in Central Harlem often visited the president of the local Korean Merchant Association to solicit attendance and donations for special services from the Korean shopkeepers in the area. The

Korean Merchant Association also donated food and other things to the homeless through Black churches. However, Korean shopkeepers in Harlem did not establish any stable relationship with Black religious leaders.

#### Community Boards

Alvin M. Berk, the White chairman of Community Board 14 in Brooklyn commented in a letter to Mayor Dinkins that Mayor Dinkins' silence about the boycott raised questions about City Hall's commitment to racial harmony in February 1990. He distributed the letter to all community board members and to local residents. Black community board members returned his letter with anger; one local Black leader responded that Blacks demonstrated for justice and human rights.

With anger, some people who supported the Church Avenue boycott disrupted the activities of the Community Board 14. The protesters demanded more Black members in the Board.<sup>43</sup> Only eleven of the 50 members were Blacks even though the Black population comprised 46% of the district's population in 1990. The protesters charged that the board had too few Black members and could not represent the interests of the Black population. The protests became embroiled in the boycott of two Korean grocery stores in the district. Some

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<sup>43</sup> The members are recommended by City Council members and appointed by the Brooklyn Borough President.

of the same people who led the boycott were involved in the protests. The organizer of this protest was Mr. Foster, the chairman of the African People's Political Club of Flatbush.

The disruption continued well into 1992 as the protests of Black community activists caused racial controversy in the area. The board's district manager said, "Their agenda is to obstruct and perpetuate a deep racial mistrust in this community." But the protesters said, "Right now I see Flatbush just like South Africa. The majority are [Blacks] here, but we have no power, economically or politically." The chairman of the Community Board responded that "This board is not about race. This board is about delivering services to the community without regard to race. Service delivery is not racial." While the protesters disrupted several board meetings, accusations of racism, racial slurs, and anti-Semitic remarks were exchanged. The police arrested several protesters, but Mr. Foster vowed that protests would continue until Blacks were given an adequate representation on the board (New York Times, Feb. 10, 1992).

In Harlem, the Black dominated Community Board 10 held a hearing about a Black boycott against a Korean store in February 1, 1989. About one hundred Blacks and several Korean shopkeepers attended. The hearing was dominated by the boycotters and their leader, Father Lucas. When one Korean shopkeeper explained cultural differences, and the resulting misunderstandings as the causes of the problems,

the Blacks at the hearing booed her and demanded that the Koreans leave Harlem. Father Lucas drew enthusiastic applause from the audience by emphasizing that many Korean shopkeepers were rude and racist, that Korean shopkeepers took economic opportunities from Blacks, and that Black communities needed Black business.

The Korean shopkeepers did not have many friends on the Community Board. However, one Black female board member had a very close relationship with Korean leaders in the area. Some Korean shopkeepers said that she supported "capitalist ideology" and supported the presence of Korean shopkeepers in Harlem as beneficial for Blacks in the area. After talking to the board member on the street, a female Korean shopkeeper told me, "she is on our side." The board member also had a close relationship with a Black business leader who maintained frequent contacts with Korean shopkeepers and opposed the 1988 boycott.

#### Efforts for Local Organizations

The president of the Korean Merchants Association in Harlem and some other Korean shopkeepers joined local business organizations whose members were mostly Black. For example, the Korean shopkeepers joined the Uptown Chamber of Commerce and the 125th Street Local Development Corporation, both led by Black businessmen, in order to establish good relationships with Black business leaders. Even though the Korean shopkeepers did not participate in the Chamber of

Commerce meetings, the president of the Korean Merchants Association pushed Korean shopkeepers to join the Chamber and pay dues as a gesture of friendship. About a dozen of Korean shopkeepers paid a \$ 200 membership fee to join the Uptown of Chamber of Commerce without attending any of the organization's meeting.

The Korean Produce Association of New York City, which represented the boycotted store in Harlem, also tried to garner the friendship of Black leaders. The organization twice awarded the president of the Uptown Chamber of Commerce in order to get his support. However, as I mentioned earlier, Lloyd William, President of the Chamber, remained ambivalent towards the Korean shopkeepers in Harlem. The president of the 125th Street Local Development Corporation was well known for his pro-Korean and pro-capitalist position among the Korean shopkeepers in Harlem.

As I already mentioned, the Korean Merchant Association bought space from a Black newspaper for advertisement. By advertising in a Black newspaper, the president of the Korean Association not only tried to persuade Black readers to accept the presence of Korean shopkeepers in Harlem but also made some connections with local Black journalists. The president of the Korean Merchant Association expected the newspaper to dilute the bad image and to enhance the good image of Koreans in Harlem. However, the relationships were soon severed, and new president of the Korean Merchant

Association did not try to buy any influence.

### Black Politicians vs. Grass-Roots Activists

The Black boycotts against Korean shopkeepers revealed not only the chasms between poor Black residents and Korean shopkeepers and between Blacks and Whites but also between Black grassroots activists and established Black politicians. For example, the switchboard of most popular Black radio station, WLIB, lit up with complaints after Mayor Dinkins's widely broadcasted speech<sup>44</sup> on May 11, 1990, in which he said the boycott of two Korean stores by blacks was based on race (New York Times, May 17, 1990). This shows that the Black grassroots activists garnered considerable support for the boycott from Black population of New York City. Different approaches by Black politicians and Black activists toward Korean shopkeepers in Black neighborhoods also symbolized the division among Black population about Black boycotts against Korean shopkeepers.

When David Dinkins first as City Clerk and later as Manhattan Borough President tried to mediate the 1984 and 1988-89 boycotts in Harlem, the boycotters resisted mediation and demanded the expulsion of targeted store owners. A similar situation emerged in the 1988 Brooklyn boycott; while Assemblyman Albert Vann and his associates

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<sup>44</sup> All but one of the major television channels in New York City broadcasted his speech for racial harmony.

pursued negotiations, the boycotters accused Albert Vann of selling out.

When Albert Vann and local leaders met with Korean shopkeepers during the 1988 Brooklyn boycott, Sonny Carson warned that "blacks are disgusted with bourgeoisie who sold blacks out. Whenever blacks try to achieve any thing, they divided blacks... They are Uncle Tom, betrayers of the black community..." Vann responded, "I am aware that there are other people in the black community who are opposed to an amicable resolution in this matter. But they don't represent the majority of the opinion in our community. The point is that what we're doing is a starting point in a road to control commerce in our own neighborhood."

Even though Albert Vann and Sonny Carson shared the view that the Korean shopkeepers elicited the deep resentment of Black residents through their conduct, Vann and Black activists have opposite views about the meaning of the presence of Korean shopkeepers in Black neighborhoods. Elombe Brath, a member of the December 12th Movement said, "I find it curious that these alleged black leaders are trying to build a relationship with the Koreans without ever coming to investigate what has happened in regard to the African community in regard to the Korean merchants." In contrast, Albert Vann disputed the notion that Koreans took business opportunities away from Blacks. "The Koreans did not run blacks out of business. They filled a vacuum. There

are reasons why blacks have not filled that vacuum; some of them are racial, and some are economic" (New York Voice, Dec. 3, 1988).

The gulf between Albert Vann and Sonny Carson symbolizes the distance between Black grassroots activists and established politicians in New York City. Albert Vann started his political career as a grassroots activist with Sonny Carson and Jitu Weusi<sup>45</sup> who, as members of the Congress of Racial Equality, fought together for community control of local schools in the 1960s. However, Albert Vann eventually became one of the most powerful assemblymen while the others remained grassroots activists.<sup>46</sup> Sonny Carson believes that Al Vann had sold out (Sampson 1990). Sonny Carson and his colleagues believe that other Black politicians had also sold out.

For example, during the 1990 Brooklyn boycott, many Black grassroots activists said that David Dinkins was a tool of the White establishment, especially Jews, and that his comments on episodes like the Black-led boycott of two

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<sup>45</sup> He once ran for Governor of New York City on a ticket of a small third party. He supported the Church Avenue boycott in 1990 and he also presented a speech for the supporters of the boycott in a rally. He is one of the most influential Black activists in Brooklyn.

<sup>46</sup> Albert Vann is Chairman of the Black and Puerto Rican Legislative Caucus in New York State Legislature. He is said to talk regularly with Gov. Cuomo. He was "considered as one of the power elite of black politicians nationwide" during the mid 1980s. (Sampson 1990)

Korean groceries in Brooklyn were an affront to Blacks.<sup>47</sup> Chimurenga, a leader of the December 12th Movement, charged that Dinkins turned a blind eye on the depth of Black discontent and dissatisfaction in New York by refusing to treat the protesters as a group agitating for respect and power. To Chimurenga, "the city's first black mayor becomes an Ed Koch in black face, a political minstrel show for the 1990s" (Hornung 1990b:35).

Father Lucas, a member of December 12th Movement and the boycott leader in Harlem expressed a similar view.

After the earlier goof of branding the boycott racist, Dinkins made the latest ill-advised gaff of going to the Red Apple and Church Street markets making some small purchases with lots of press coverage and gigantic symbolism to the African community. It is perceived as a response to the 'challenge' of the likes of Mel Miller (majority leader of the State Assembly) which was in fact a challenge to show how removed the Mayor is from the thinking, behavior, and wishes of Black folks. All that the mayor's action will do is to strengthen the determination of the boycotters and make Black folks more distrustful of the present administration. (Amsterdam News, Oct. 6, 1990)

Sonny Carson echoed this opinion on a Black radio talk show. Infuriated by attacks on Mayor Dinkins, Percy Sutton, a former Manhattan Borough President, the owner of WLIB, and a close personal advisor to Mayor Dinkins, declared that he would close his station if Blacks continued to attack Mayor

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<sup>47</sup> A conversation between a poorly dressed young Black and a Korean shopkeeper in a Korean store in Harlem during the mayoral campaign of New York City in 1989 is very symbolic. When the Korean shopkeeper urged him to register, he replied, "He [Dinkins] is like Ice Cream. He has no backbone... [Registration] no make any sense."

David Dinkins through his station (New York Times, May 19, 1990).

Black politicians and Black grassroots activists such as Sonny Carson and Chimurenga have very different strategies for establishing black movements. The activists try to establish their leadership not from the ballot box but from the street by galvanizing Black dissatisfaction. Chimurenga said, "Our message is rooted in the neglect and anger experienced by black people" (Hornung 1990b:35). He continued,

[T]he real task is to organize and build a movement from the grassroots, from the people up. There is resistance all over. The question is how to organize it" (Hornung 1990b:28). "We see ourselves as the vanguard, the leadership of what will become a large movement to free the people.... We can't rely on City Hall [where the mayor is a black]. We can rely on going to our streets, where our people live.... We will take the bridge and shut down the subways, stop traffic to show the racists in this city that business cannot go on as usual. We have power and we can use it, make it grow. We can act before we are acted upon. That's how we want black people to think. To think about their right to self-determination, to reject the postcolonial mentality and build a life in our own neighborhoods. (ibid.:35)

The December 12th Movement led the protests against Columbia University which planned to replace the Audubon Ballroom, where Malcolm X was assassinated, with a new science research building. The Movement's members often carried photos of Malcolm X in their rallies and cited "the spirit of Malcolm X" in boycott leaflets against Korean shopkeepers. Father Lucas, a leader of the Movement, also spoke about Malcolm X for students in City College in

February 21, 1990. On the same day, the December 12th Movement organized a rally to commemorate the 25th anniversary of Malcolm X death in Harlem. When one of the leaflets, distributed by the Movement, explained a speech delivered by Roger Wareham, a member of the December 12th Movement to the United Nations,<sup>48</sup> the title of the leaflet was "From Harlem to Geneva, Carrying on the Legacy of Malcolm X." The leaflet states, "the December 12th Movement is fighting to uphold his [Malcolm X's] legacy in words and deeds"(underline, original).

While Sonny Carson and his colleagues emphasized the legacy of Malcolm X and steadfastly opposed elected Black politicians who preferred peaceful compromises through the legal political process, some other grassroots activists emulated Martin Luther King Jr. and partially cooperated with elected Black politicians. For example, Al Sharpton,<sup>49</sup> who led marches into Bensonhurst to protest a racial killing of a black in the neighborhood was critical

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<sup>48</sup> According to a leaflet of the December 12th Movement, Roger Wareham, Esq., Center for Law and Social Justice at Medgar Evers College, and Representative of the December 12th Movement, delivered to the 46th Session of the United Nations' Commission on Human Rights at Geneva on Feb. 6, 1990, a speech which explained racist injustice in the United States and demanded the Commission on Human Rights to investigate U.S. violations of human rights.

<sup>49</sup> According to Representative Owens in Brooklyn, Al Sharpton is "able to mobilize a segment of the community who cannot be mobilized any other way" (New York Times, Jan. 21, 1991).

about Mayor Dinkins. He commented after Mayor Dinkins's speech for 'racial harmony' in May 1990, "I think his coming out against the Korean boycott is an insult.... It was like a James Brown record - talking loud and saying nothing" (Daily News, May 12, 1990). In another interview, Al Sharpton said,

...the so-called good times in New York are over. In hard economic times, black people will turn away from the leaders who tell us to be patient and wait. You know David Dinkins, Doug Wilder, even Jesse Jackson, they can't appeal to the black middle class when the black middle class is vanishing... I don't know if they can cross back to the roots of their power... I'm not the issue, the issue is leadership and black people need it badly. (Village Voice, Jan. 1, 1991)

However, he eventually established a closer relationship with established Black politicians.

On Jan. 21, 1991, Al Sharpton was greeted on the steps of City Hall by Mayor Dinkins after he led a march across the Brooklyn Bridge to celebrate the birthday of Martin Luther King Jr. Al Sharpton reiterated his belief that nonviolent civil disobedience is the vehicle for Black Americans to achieve justice in this country - Dr. King's philosophy. About Mayor Dinkins, he stated, "I don't excuse him for not being aggressive enough on some racial issues, but he's not responsible for the fiscal condition this city in." He finally emphasized that he was ready to "meet white New York halfway-not on their terms, but on fair terms."<sup>50</sup>

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<sup>50</sup> New York Times, Jan. 21, 1991. He also ran for United State Senator in New York state Democratic primary in 1992. He received more votes than a White mainstream candidate,

Because Al Sharpton and his group have different strategies in establishing Black grassroots leadership, Chimurenga said, "we consider Sharpton an enemy of the people." As for Farrakhan, a Black Muslim leader, he also considered Farrakhan "as a traitor for his condemnations of Malcolm X" (Hornung 1990b:27).<sup>51</sup>

The chasm between Black politicians and Black grassroots activists is wide in New York City. When Sonny Carson organized several rallies against police brutality, racial killings, and attacks on Blacks in 1987, Black politicians, including the then Manhattan Borough President David Dinkins, City Police Commissioner Benjamin Ward, Representative Flake, and Representative Owens in Brooklyn all avoided commenting publicly on Sonny Carson.<sup>52</sup> This

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New York City Comptroller Holtzman. He got votes mostly from New York City Blacks.

<sup>51</sup> The basic difference between Martin Luther King Jr. and Malcolm X was well summarized by Hornung (1990b:29). "King pressed for progress through a series of moral confrontations tempered by compromise, while Malcolm X urged replacing white institutions and values with black organizations that serve as the first step toward self-determination." Another story of Dr. King and Malcolm X in Harlem showed the distance between the followers of them. "...they [Blacks] sensed that he [Dr. King] was essentially a white choice. This feeling surfaced in New York at the time when the city council changed Harlem's 125th Street to Martin Luther King, Jr., Boulevard. Soon afterward, local residents aired their own sentiments by renaming Lenox Avenue [a major avenue in Harlem] after Malcolm X" (Hacker 1992:63).

<sup>52</sup> New York Times, June 1987 (the date is unclear in my news clipping). It is very difficult for Black politicians to criticize Sonny Carson or other influential Black activists, because "a lack of support, especially by Carson, of a black

silence symbolized the difficulty Black politicians have in dealing with grassroots activists and also the distance between Black politicians and grass-roots activists such as Sonny Carson and his colleagues.

However, there are also divisions between Black politicians. After Mayor Dinkins criticized the Church Avenue boycott as race-based, a number of mainstream Black leaders, including Dinkins's supporters, joined grassroots activists like the Rev. Al Sharpton, Sonny Carson and Father Lucas in publicly chiding Dinkins for being overly cautious, slow to speak up for Black concerns and quick to appease Whites and Jews<sup>53</sup> at "the expense of a time-honored tradition [boycott] of the civil rights movements" (Newsday, June 6, 1990; New York Times, Sept. 22, 1990).

### Conclusion

The opposing views in the stories by Black boycotters and their sympathizers on the one side and by Korean shopkeepers on the other, reflect the difference in their social positions. While the boycotters and poor Blacks expressed their discontent over the presence as well as the

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politician in Brooklyn can be seriously detrimental" (Sampson 1990).

<sup>53</sup> Because Dinkins did not want alienate White supporters (especially Jewish voters who voted more for Dinkins than Protestant or Catholic Whites), he could not speak out for Black causes. Without a considerable support from Whites, he cannot win the mayoral election in 1993.

attitudes of the Korean shopkeepers, the Korean shopkeepers described the discontent as the result of jealousy, cultural misunderstanding, or misdirected resentment which should be targeted toward White American society. The Korean shopkeepers have a vested interest in maintaining the present Korean shopkeeper/Black consumer relationship in order to guarantee their profits in small business. However, the Black boycotters and poor Blacks, as an economically and politically deprived group, have an interest not only in achieving better treatment from Korean shopkeepers but also in enhancing their political and economic status through their staunch resistance to the present power and economic relationships with Korean shopkeepers in particular and with American society in general.

Korean shopkeepers, by contrasting themselves as hard-working against an image of Blacks as crimogenic and irrational, thereby attempted to justify their success in small businesses and their inconsiderate behavior toward Blacks. This contrast of images also allowed their description of the Black discontent as an irrational response. Because Korean shopkeepers considered Blacks to be inferior and also wanted to make money quickly, shopkeepers paid more attention to the problems caused by Blacks such as shoplifting, burglary, robbery, looting, "irrational" complaints, and laziness than to the welfare of

Blacks. For Korean shopkeepers, community participation or concern for shoppers was not thought to be a job requirement of shopkeepers in a capitalist country.

The boycotters and their sympathizers tried to present Korean shopkeepers as bloodless merchants who do not care about Black communities and focus only on making money through prejudice toward Black people. They saw, through their unequal relationship with Korean shopkeepers, an expression of a racist society which always rewarded groups other than Blacks. They saw not only White power but also Black politicians supporting Korean shopkeepers. Thus, the boycotters aimed not only at particular Korean shopkeepers who "beat" Blacks, but also at Korean, and furthermore alien, shopkeepers who, the boycotters thought, discriminated against Blacks, deprived them of opportunity. They also aimed at the power structure which keeps Blacks in the bottom rank of a social order.

Thus, Korean shopkeepers and Black boycotters expressed their ideas in the context of American economic and political relationships. Because the American economic and political relationships are primarily represented in terms of race relationships through its history, the meanings expressed not only by those two groups but also by White media and politicians dwelled more on race relationships rather than the shopkeeper/consumer relationship. By representing the Korean shopkeeper/Black consumer

relationship as a race relationship between Blacks and Koreans, the discourse produced by the conflict between two groups became a discourse to reanalyze American race relationships rather than class relationships.

Blacks as well as Koreans and Whites were active participants in this representation. The December 12th Movement, which maintained socialist ideas as its ultimate goal and despised the inactivity of the Black middle class, mobilized Black people to boycott Korean shopkeepers by stating "Korean shopkeepers beat Black women and children." In their leaflets, they often targeted all Korean shopkeepers and launched "Buy Black" movements. Korean shopkeepers reported the boycott as a "Korean-Black" conflict to the Korean-American community and to the mainstream news media. The news media and politicians also referred the conflict as a "Black-Korean" conflict. Thus, the conflict between Korean shopkeepers and Black residents in inner-cities became, in fact, a conflict between Blacks and Koreans. This representation of the conflict not only expresses the reality but also redefines reality. This redefinition of reality is partially intentional because the involved parties try to mobilize their own ethnic groups and to resist other racially-defined groups such as Blacks, Whites, or Koreans. Yet the redefinition is partially unintentional because the involved groups merely adopted the prevalent and familiar mode of thought in America.

However, displayed meanings and the redefinition of reality are part of the social practices of the involved groups. Cultural symbols and catch-phrases such as African tri-color flag, Malcolm X, vampires, racial injustice, racial harmony, minorities, White media, capitalism, reverse racism, "gumdungyi," and "Japanese Jew," not only express feelings but also create feelings. Through the expression and creation of feelings and meanings, social relationships are expressed, redefined, recreated, and readjusted. However, the recreation and readjustment of social relationships are interconnected with existing power relationships. Various power relationships between Blacks and Koreans; between the federal and local governments, Korean shopkeepers, and the boycotters; between the news media and the involved groups; and between Blacks, Whites, and Koreans, are all intermingled in the expression and imposition of ideas in an attempt to reshape reality.

One of the fundamental issues in this interconnection was the social responsibility of Korean shopkeepers in poor Black neighborhoods. The boycotters emphasized that Korean shopkeepers neglected their community responsibility by extracting profit without returning anything to the Black community and by mistreating Black residents. Korean shopkeepers rejected the idea of social responsibility for saying that Korean shopkeepers are not responsible to the problems of Black communities and that, in a free capitalist

country, anyone can do business any place and can live in any place. The irreconcilable clash over morality between the Korean shopkeepers and the boycotters, as well as many Black residents, was expressed in their clash of power. As a clash of power Whites and state agents were drawn onto the side of Koreans against many poor Blacks and Black activists on the other side. The clashes of meanings and power rippled through various fields of society.

By proposing Black nationalism (e.g. "Buy Black") rather than socialism (e.g. abolition of private property), the December 12th Movement tried to garner support from poor Blacks. Poor Blacks and some members of this Movement were more readily responding to "nationalist claims" than to socialist claims. While most Blacks whom I met clearly expressed opposition to White-domination, they did not speak about capitalist domination. Instead, they aspired for a "fair share" or "equal participation" in power and economy in terms of race. In fact, a "fair share" can be either a nationalist or a socialist claim. Because different claims would attract different alignments of social groups, the prevalence of "nationalist" claims means that many Blacks interpret American history and society in terms of racial relationships rather than class relationships. This is also true among "Whites" or "Koreans."

However, the nationalist claims of poor Blacks are also directed against some aspects of "American" capitalism: a

needed social responsibility of Korean shopkeepers in poor Black neighborhoods, the expulsion of Korean shopkeepers, a forced increase of Black business, etc. These assertions directly stimulated local and federal governments to intervene into the conflict between Korean shopkeepers and Black boycotters, and the state agents tried to enforce the American capitalist social order. Mayor Dinkins as a part of the state system which should enforce its laws could not but condemn the nationalist claims of the boycotters and enforced American capitalist order with the police. This was a reluctant move for Mayor Dinkins. Because he needs votes from both Whites and Blacks to be reelected, he could not alienate both segments of his constituency. A condemnation of the boycott would alienate a considerable number of poor Blacks; his continued inaction would alienate many Whites. This was his dilemma. His eventual condemnation of the boycott also increased the moral dilemma of many Blacks too.

To the FBI, the NYPD, and those White politicians dependent on White votes, the members of the December 12th Movement were violators of the law not only because they tried to impose nationalist claims but because they tried to fundamentally change the existing social order. For law enforcement officers, they were not petty criminals but major instigators of social unrest. By bashing Sonny Carson and other Black activists, White politicians can stimulate

White nationalism and garner votes from them. Judges at the courts responded negatively to Black activists, because Black activists did not respect the order of law which, Black activists thought, function to perpetuate racism against Blacks in America.

The clashes of meanings and power were not separated in the conflict between poor Blacks and Korean shopkeepers because meanings required actions, and actions required meanings. These meanings and actions rippled through various parts of society because many meanings and actions in the conflict were evaluated, regulated, and influenced by those groups who became involved. In order to limit and mitigate the spread of negative meanings towards Korean shopkeepers, Korean shopkeepers tried to expand their moral base, and to build various connections to Black leaders, local residents, state agents, and White politicians. The Black boycotters used nationalist appeals and confrontations to spread their ideas and to make their power grow.

**PART FOUR**

**SOCIAL ORDERS**

## CHAPTER SEVEN

## CONCLUSION: DISCUSSION

[A steel worker's complaint about his boss]: This one foreman I've got, he's a kid. He's a college graduate. He thinks he's better than everybody else. He was chewing me out and I was saying, "Yeah, yeah, yeah." He said, "What do you mean, yeah, yeah, yeah. Yes, Sir." I told him, "who the hell are you, Hitler? What is this 'Yes sir' bullshit? I came here to work, I didn't come to here to crawl." (Terkel 1974:xxxiii)

[A general foreman's way to control linemen]: When you get familiarity [with linemen] it causes- the more you get to know some body, it's hard to distinguish between boss and friend. This isn't good for my profession. (Terkel 1974:183)

"Honesty," in sum, was a code phrase not just for an absence of the deception but also for the centrality of control over the producers in this form[truck system] of merchant capital. (Sider 1986:70)

Social Orders

## Private Ownership of Property and Class Order

Property is "the material crystallization of a set of social relationships" (Sider 1986:110). Only when one person can exclude others, does the ownership of property meaningful. Thus, we are dealing with "the rights between persons to a material object," (Goody 1962:287, quoted in Sider 1986:110), when we deal with the ownership of property. In capitalist societies, the private ownership of property is more exclusive than in any other type of society. Non-owners are, in legal terms, excluded from the

use, consumption, and exchange of private property.

The accumulation of capital is the result of a social relationship where a capital accumulator can amass a sum of money or credit through a set of social relationships, specifically the capital-labor relationship. Shopkeepers also have a set of socio-economic relationships. A shopkeeper buys goods from wholesalers and sells them to consumers. Through relationships with wholesalers and consumers,<sup>1</sup> shopkeepers can realize their profit.

A shopkeeper has an exclusive property ownership of goods after taking the goods from wholesalers by paying with money or credit. The shopkeeper can, in legal terms, place any price on it and sell to consumers in American capitalism. The difference between the amount he/she pays for goods to wholesalers and the price he/she puts on the goods for consumers is the source of his/her profit. Thus, the profit for shopkeepers comes from his/her mediation of wholesalers and consumers. The appropriation of profit for shopkeepers is the materialized results of the mediation of specific social relationships. The moment of the exchange

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<sup>1</sup> Wholesalers are connected to other wholesalers, industrial capitalists, or, in some cases, small producers. Shopkeepers are located at the front of capitalist distribution. In other words, shopkeepers realize "surplus value" for capital in the distributional fronts. Consumers are mostly wage-earners who reproduce their labor power through consumption. Most wage-earners work for capitalists, petty capitalists, or state systems. This capitalist circulation of labor and commodities conditions the social position of shopkeepers.

between a shopkeeper and a shopper, in general, is the moment of the appropriation of profit. After exchange, the shopkeeper has private ownership of the money which the shopper hands over to the shopkeeper; the shopper also has private ownership over the goods she/he purchased and will eventually consume. This exchange act is habituated in our daily interactions and can be called a "habitus" (Bourdieu 1977).

Capitalist law sanctifies the exclusive private ownership which guarantees profit for shopkeepers in general. Through repeated everyday interactions, we are accustomed to the exchange relationship. Most people accept this relationship as natural. We do not raise questions about the exchange relationship itself. The exchange relationship is already hegemonized. Consumers have accepted this relationship of exchange. However, it does not mean that the reproduction of this habituated relationship is beyond contest. These relationships can be partially doubted, contested, disputed, or rejected in certain circumstances.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Bourdieu's (1977; 1984) scheme over the reproduction of society through classificatory practices poorly explain how and when the reproduction of social relationships can be collapsed, especially in relation to the centralized apparatus of power, that is, state system. Even though the habituated exchange relationship itself is not a target of Black boycotts against Korean shopkeepers, their protests over the certain dimensions of the exchange relationship also include, directly and indirectly the critiques of the exchange relationship itself. For example, the "Buy Black" campaign criticizes not only the presence of "alien"

Derogatory terms such as theft, robbery, shoplifting, and burglary which describe behaviors violating private ownership show the legal sanctity of the exchange relationship to be based on the exclusive private rights of property. Terms such as theft or shoplifting already presuppose that the behaviors in violation of the exclusive private rights of property are immoral. This again presupposes the ideas that the exclusive private rights over property should not be violated. Theft is not simply behavior to steal an object, it is a violation of a certain rule of social relationship. (If there is no ownership, there is no theft.) The moral feelings invested in "theft" and its wide acceptance by most people already reveal the leadership of anti-"theft" forces, that is, the private property owners and the supporters for private ownership of property.

Shopkeepers and consumers, in most cases, make contact casually. Consumers can change their shopping route any time. These casual contacts create the myth that they are equal.<sup>3</sup> However, shopkeepers are dealing with several

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shopkeepers but also the "unjust" (i.e. free and racist competition) element of the exchange relationship itself with some ambiguity. This ambiguous and partial critique can be transformed into a frontal critique on the habituated exchange relationship under certain circumstances.

<sup>3</sup> This relationship is quite different from the relationship between an employer and an employee or a boss and his/her subordinate. The latter relationships are, relatively, more formally structured into a stable, unequal relationship even though the employees or subordinates can quit any time.

dozens or hundreds of consumers each day who need goods for individual consumption. Shopkeepers have more knowledge about how to manipulate consumers than vice versa and individual complaints from some consumers do not cause a big problem for shopkeepers. If consumers do not have enough knowledge about stores, prices, and goods, their choices of stores and goods will be limited. When a consumer has an individual complaint and a shopkeeper refuses to solve the problem, it is also difficult for that consumer to fight against the shopkeeper because the fight would require a lot of energy and time from a consumer. The legal system also requires some energy, time, and money. It is difficult to mobilize other shoppers to protest against the shopkeeper because consumers, in general, have only casual and individual contacts with the shopkeeper. There are, in general, no communal experience and social relationships among consumers. If any collective memory or appeal among them can be invoked in mobilizing consumers, the collective memory can become a good rallying point for the complaints.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> The power relationship between shopkeepers and area residents is not equal. However, the relationship is not predetermined by economic position. One Korean professor sent a letter to a Korean newspaper (Korea Times of New York, Sept. 17, 1991). In it, he related a story from the Deep South. When a Black shopkeeper caught a White shoplifter, the shopkeeper called the police to arrest him. Two days after the incident, the store was burned down by Whites and the Black shopkeeper was injured very seriously by a shooting. When a Korean grocer shot a White to death in his store in a White area of Bay Ridge, Queens, some Whites tried on three occasions to bomb the store. The store-owner sold his store and left the area immediately

The generalization and habitualization of the exchange relationship and the general acceptance of them limit the possibility of the criticism of the role of shopkeepers by the Black boycotters (or by any other boycotters).<sup>5</sup> The limitation of protest by the Black boycotters to the excessiveness of Korean shopkeepers in treating Black residents is also evidence that commodity fetishism is widely accepted by most of the American population. The commodity is not seen as a medium for surplus value, nor is the exchange seen as the point of realization of surplus value. Because any critique of the private ownership of property will stimulate the feelings of poor Black residents in inner cities, the boycotters focus on retrieving Black rage regarding racial injustice by emphasizing mistreatment at the hands of Korean shopkeepers.<sup>6</sup> The boycotters also

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(Sae Gae Ilbo, Feb. 8, 1990). As I already said, many Korean shopkeepers complained about White shoppers because they, explicitly and implicitly, demand racial deference.

<sup>5</sup> Most boycotts in America focus on specific aspects of business. For example, the tuna industry was boycotted because the ships which caught tuna also killed dolphins. (For other boycotts, see Rodkin 1991.) Korean green grocers and fish market owners also boycotted wholesalers in New York City. They focused on the disrespectful acts of one or two specific White wholesalers. Even though the Koreans boycotted only one or two White wholesalers, they knew it would have a ripple effect on all other White wholesalers (See afterword).

<sup>6</sup> Because major members of the December 12th Movement are socialists, they may oppose the capitalist exchange relationship. Yet they did not make the capitalist relationship itself an issue. They emphasized the racist element of the relationship (mistreatment and the under-representation of Blacks) because of social conditions in

raise questions about the price and quality of commodities being sold by "alien" shopkeepers. On another side, they organize their campaigns around issues such as self-determination and the "Buy Black" movement. By paraphrasing the conflict between Korean shopkeepers and Black consumers in terms of racial relationships, the boycotters and their leaders want to show the possibility of economic and political impact through Black power, the determination to resist racial injustice, and racial pride to poor Black residents. That is, they want to change the mentality of defeatism widespread in Black communities.

#### Racial Order

Skin color or perceptions over skin color have multiple and sometimes contradictory meanings for many people. Skin colors have been socially constructed<sup>7</sup> (partially based on the various spectrum of definite skin colors) and socially imputed with meanings through history and social relations. Any construction of racial names is simultaneously a process of the culture and politics of homogenization and

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which they must appeal to the Black population, and possibly to the moral feelings of other populations. Socialist phrases might derail moral appeals not only to Blacks but also to most Americans. This should be understood in the context of American history where "Blacks" have been the target of brutal racism for centuries. Race is a fundamental and "real" category for most Americans.

<sup>7</sup> In fact, very few people have any pure black, white, red, or yellow color on their skins.

differentiation. The process of differentiation and separation creates artificial boundaries and homogenizes the divided and bounded space as racial units. Under this construction, those units are rearranged, reshuffled, expanded, reconstructed, and reproduced through history and social relations. Through this process, people are put into racialized units.<sup>8</sup> This process is also the process of the social construction of social order in terms of race relationships.

Because unequal social relationships run also through racialized social relationships, skin color or racial identity is socially evaluated, and has various implications in daily interactions between differently racialized individuals and groups in American life. The fundamental unequal relationship in racialized units in America is between Whites and Blacks. "America is inherently a 'white' country: in character, in structure, in culture" (Hacker 1992:4).<sup>9</sup> "White" people consider "Blacks" as "inferior." Even though Whites absorb new Middle Eastern immigrants and

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<sup>8</sup> As Field(1990:118) states, "Nothing handed down from the past could keep race alive if we did not constantly reinvent and re-ritualize to fit our own terrain."

<sup>9</sup> Even though Wilson (1978; 1987) declared that the significance of race is declining, not only poor Blacks but also middle class Blacks still experience significant racial discrimination and harassment (e.g. Feagin 1991).

Asian immigrants,<sup>10</sup> they are particularly reluctant to absorb Blacks as full citizens (ibid.). Through the inferiorization of Blacks, "[a]ll white Americans realize that their skin comprises an inestimable asset.... It serves as a shield from insult and harassment.... What it does ensure is that you will not be regarded as black, a security which is worth so much that no one who has it has ever given it away"(Hacker 1992:60, emphasis original).

At the beginning of the Korean influx, the boundary between Black residents and Korean shopkeepers was not clearly defined because the Koreans were not visible, and they did not fit into the Black vs. White model. Thus, some residents considered Korean shopkeepers as fellow colored people. However, the newly-arrived Koreans already had a sense of different social status from that of poor Black residents. The Korean shopkeepers further developed the inferior images of Blacks in America. Black residents soon realized that the Koreans were not different from other, White shopkeepers. However, many Black residents still consider Koreans as a neutral third party while they consider Whites as the prime negative force for Blacks.

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<sup>10</sup> Loewen(1971) shows an interesting example. In his book, Mississippi Chinese who were considered Blacks when they entered the Mississippi Delta were eventually accepted as Whites. A conversation with a White Baptist minister is revealing. "You're either a white man or a nigger, here. Now, that's the whole story. When I first came to the Delta, the Chinese were classed as nigras." ["And now they are called whites?" (question by Loewen)] "That's right!."

Most Korean shopkeepers consider Whites as the owner of this society. Korean shopkeepers experience racial humiliation when they deal with White wholesalers at Hunts Point (the fruit and vegetable wholesale market of New York City) or at Fulton Fish Market (the wholesale fish market in New York City).<sup>11</sup> They also realize that White shoppers often demand racial deference. Their attitudes are very assertive and demanding. Whites are very difficult to deal with, according to Korean shopkeepers. That is the reason why many Korean shopkeepers prefer poor Black neighborhoods and stay there even after they accumulate enough capital to open stores in White areas. However, in the political dimension, Korean shopkeepers are very ambivalent about "White" power. Many Koreans are worried about the possibility that the White majority and politicians will make Koreans a scapegoat in the conflict between Blacks and Whites and/or Blacks and Koreans. Most Koreans thought that Koreatown was deliberately abandoned by the "White" police in L.A. riot in April, 1992. But, in another sense, many Koreans also believe they cannot but depend on White power to contain Black rage against Korean shopkeepers.

#### Racial Order and Spatial Order

The rigid racialization in America is also expressed in the racialization of space. For example, the Black

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<sup>11</sup> See afterword.

population is highly segregated from Whites. As the change of Black residential areas in New York City shows,

Americans have extraordinarily sensitive antennae for the colorations of neighborhoods. In virtually every metropolitan area, white householders can rank each enclave by the racial makeup of the residents. Given this knowledge, where a family lives becomes an index of its social standing. While this is largely an economic matter, proximity to blacks compounds this assessment. For a white family to be seen as living in a mixed - or changing - neighborhood can be construed as a symptom of surrender, indeed as evidence that they are on a downward spiral. (Hacker 1992:38, emphasis added).

These White reactions might be considered the same as branding Blacks as carriers of contamination. Blacks might be seen as infecting a neighborhood simply because they are Black. The feelings in the term of "infection" includes not only fear of racial "contamination" but also fears of crime and the downturn of property values. This process produces inner cities with high minority concentrations. This spatial order raises a question about which shopkeepers will work in "contaminated" inner cities. From the point of view of the Whites or those who buy the view of "contamination," some minorities such as Jews in inner cities, Chinese in the Mississippi Delta, or Koreans in inner cities have risked the danger of not only Black crime but also Black "contamination."

The segregation of territory gives claims of exclusive rights over space to the occupants. Hispanics do not have as much territorial exclusivism in comparison with Blacks because they are new to their territory. They are

relatively vulnerable to counter-claims if they claim exclusive territorial rights.<sup>12</sup> Whites claim exclusive territory rights in, for example, Carnarsie, Bensonhurst, or most suburban areas in New York area. When Whites claim territorial exclusivism, they may rely on terror (arson, physical attack, and absence of patronage) to exclude Blacks and frequently other minorities.<sup>13</sup> However, Whites are more permissive regarding the entry of Asians to their neighborhoods than to the entry of Blacks. Thus, "[s]urveys of neighborhoods and schools show that Black Americans spend more of their lives in segregated settings than even recent immigrants" (Hacker 1992:146).

Blacks have also mobilized territorial claims on commercial strips of Black neighborhoods rather than residential areas<sup>14</sup>. The commercial strips of Black

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<sup>12</sup> Among Asians, only Chinese have an visible and exclusive territory known as Chinatown. In fact, like Black inner-cities, Chinatowns are also a product of the White exclusion of Chinese. Chinese who migrated during the 19th century were confined in ghetto-like areas.

<sup>13</sup> A White Italian in Carnarsie described his violence against Black families. "We got them out of Carnarsie. We ran into the house and kicked the shit out of every one of them" (Massey and Denton 1993:91).

<sup>14</sup> Because Whites and Asians avoid Black residential areas, Black territorial claims on residential areas are not so meaningful. This does not mean that there are no other racial groups in Black neighborhoods. In the census tract which includes the boycotted Korean stores in Harlem, 157 Whites, 18 Asian, 47 Native Americans, and 277 others were living among 3,503 Blacks (1990 Census of Population and Housing). On 125th Street in Harlem, the number of Black shopkeepers is only about 30 among about 160 shopkeepers.

residential areas are used by Blacks but primarily occupied by White or Asian shopkeepers, while the commercial strips in other racial residential areas, according to many Blacks, are not allowed to Blacks. They note a racial injustice in the racial and spatial distribution of shopkeepers.

#### Social Order, Humiliation, and Discontents

In capitalist societies, there exist a tension between two ideas: 1) people are equal; and 2) there are differences of prestige, wealth, and power among different groups. How can people negotiate this tension in everyday life? In pre-capitalist societies, the cultural construction of unequal social relationships were sanctioned by cosmological order. In capitalist societies, the difference in wealth and power is explained in terms of individual differences in intelligence, work, competitiveness, and/or other virtues.

In this context, lower-class people are considered to be those who lack certain individual virtues and values (Wolf 1982:afterward). Antonio Gramsci once concluded, "for a social elite the features of subordinate groups always display something barbaric and pathological"(quoted in Gutman 1977:73). For example, throughout the Reform and Depression eras, "[p]opular representations of Irish, Italians, Poles, Jews, and others as mentally deficient, diseased, and/or innately criminal were wide spread" (di Leonardo 1991:236). Bourdieu (1977b; 1984) also finds the

distinctions among different classes.

The hierarchical differentiation in virtues, values, and tastes is one of the important aspects of capitalist differentiation in class and status, thus in wealth, power, and prestige. The hierarchical differentiation in virtues and values is an important element in the relationship between Korean shopkeepers and poor Black residents. This hierarchization in virtues, values, and tastes justify the social inequality as a matter of course. Most Korean shopkeepers in my research area thought they deserve wealth for their hard-working and Blacks deserve the poverty for their laziness and immorality. However, while some Blacks blamed their poverty as their fault, most Blacks blamed the racism. Thus, it can be said that the hierarchization of virtues and values among different groups is often accompanied by discontents, complaints, resistance, and organized boycotts.

Everyday interactions are an important locus where the manipulation of hierarchization in virtues, values, and status occurs. Whether the relationship is between a male and a female; between a boss and a subordinate; between a White and a Black, or a White and a Yellow; or between a merchant and a fisherman, there are often some symbolic interactions which connote and express, implicitly and explicitly, the difference in social classes or positions. This symbolic interaction is contingent not only upon the

difference in class, race, gender but also on individual ability, determination, willingness, social customs, and available symbols.

Through these symbolic interactions for the hierarchization in virtues and values, domination/ acceptance/ resistance between or among persons and groups are partially renegotiated and restructured in everyday interactions. One important aspect of hierarchization in virtues and values is humiliation. "[Domination] always entails attempts to humiliate the dominated. So crucial are the insults and the slander that they must themselves be seen as an attempt to situate domination in time - to present reasons and justifications for its current existence, and to make claims against the future" (Sider 1987:21). These insults and slanders also produce counter-insults and slanders from the dominated. However, because of the power difference, and because of fear of discipline and terror from the dominant, the dominated often develop delicate, multivocal, or "back stage" (Scott 1985; 1990) counter-claims and insults. The relationship between claims and counter-claims, insults and counter-insults already presupposes the influence of state power, past physical confrontations, and the present and future possibility of symbolic and physical violence, customs, and cultural

norms.<sup>15</sup>

### Social Order and Everyday Humiliation

Socially superior groups in economy and power try to create and expand their cultural distance from lower groups in order to legitimate their social wealth and status. However, superior groups cannot distance themselves too far because they also need to incorporate lower groups into an "imagined community" (Anderson 1983), or they may need to create a myth of "imagined reciprocity." By making the distance too wide, superior groups will risk greater discontent and efforts by the lower groups to become independent, to change, or to overthrow. The tantalizing efforts by superior groups to maintain certain cultural distance, while nevertheless incorporating lower groups, are multi-faceted and ambiguous.

Through cultural manipulation, superior groups spread cultural trenches and nets which persuade people to believe that there is a difference between superior and lower groups and that a cultural difference justifies differences in power and economy. Cultural trenches and nets are also deployed to persuade people that all share some communal identities. Attitudes, gestures, hair, clothes, language

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<sup>15</sup> James Scott(1985; 1990) paid insufficient attention to the implication of state power in his dealing with the weapons of the weak. When the weak sense the possibility of disorganization of the state and the ruling class, their resistance often becomes explosive.

(ideas, intonation, pronunciation, words...), postures, paraphernalia (watches, rings, jewelry, ties, shoes...), decoration of a location, location of each individual, arrangements of place, customs, rituals, supernatural beings, and the human body are possible cultural trenches to be manipulated in order to reproduce and recreate the unequal and ambivalent interactions. The fluid, interactional cultural relationship (as well as economic and political fluidity) creates endless dynamics of social relationships.

One of those cultural trenches is the "crimogenic" image of certain minorities. "To many white Americans, not only are blacks poor by their own volition and incompetence; they also fail to exercise sufficient self-control and as a result are wanton in their disregard of common decency and the law which protects it" (Lewis 1978:77). This myth<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> Relatively more Blacks than Whites are in jail. This does not imply that Whites seldom commit crime. Many Whites who may commit rape, assaults, or theft are not arrested because they can defend themselves and usually draw better treatment from the police, prosecutors, the court, and jury (e.g. a nephew of Senator Kennedy in Palm Beach). If we consider white-collar crime, the reality is much more opaque. If a Black is caught two times for illegally passing subway turnstiles (the loss to the city is only about three dollars), he could be put in jail for three months. However, several inside or junk bond traders of the New York Stock Exchange were on probation or in jail for short terms (e.g. Michael Milken) even though the damage by them to numerous people was several hundred million dollars. The range of white-collar "theft" is considered widespread. The social cost for white-collar crime and tax evasion is much higher than that for violent crime (Monteiro 1991). Those who commit white-collar crime and tax evasion are seldom put in jail, and seldom described as "criminal."

makes Whites believe that Blacks fail partially because of their immorality. In this context, Blacks are easily recognized as a negative reference group. This accusation is a part of a pattern of discrimination and humiliation that affects Blacks, especially poor Blacks, in everyday interactions. One Black university professor stated after being accused as a shoplifter, "What it does to our collective psyche is that it makes sure you never forget that you are black and not welcomed" (New York Times, April. 30, 1991).

Whenever new immigrants arrive, the construction of a adjusted racial order is a locus of struggle. To input new (racial or ethnic) names<sup>17</sup> into American racial conception requires a reshuffling or readjustment of the existing order of names in order to incorporate and differentiate new names. Despite numerous and readily available identities, the fact that ethnic or racial categories becomes the criteria for incorporation into the American order implies that racial and ethnic conceptions are prominent in the American mind. Research into ethnic status in New York City revealed that the status of Koreans was 43rd among 50 ethnic categories in New York City and that the status of Blacks

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<sup>17</sup> The names, Black, Irish, or Korean, do not show the multiple complexities inside Blacks, Irish, or Koreans. A name often makes us ignore the complexity inside the named. Homogenizing effects of a name also cause us often minimize the complex relationships between or among "names" (Wolf 1982:18-19).

was 42nd (Korea Times of Washington, D.C., Nov. 27, 1992). This ranking demonstrates that generally accepted ethnic status of Koreans and Blacks is similar. Despite these similar positions, Koreans try to insert themselves above Blacks within the American racial order through the practices of humiliation and mistreatment.

The "crimogenic" idea of Blacks is shared by both Korean shopkeepers and by Whites. This idea is serving in justifying the wealth and status of Korean shopkeepers. Korean shopkeepers have some other means to manipulate Black residents in everyday interactions because their business put them in direct contact with Black people everyday. Korean shopkeepers frequently use the word, gumdungyi [nigger] in their private discourse but also sometimes in front of Black shoppers. As Hacker (1992:42) writes, "nigger" reminds Blacks that "Blacks are still perceived as a degraded species of humanity, a level to which whites can never descend." By using gumdungyi, Korean shopkeepers imply that not only Whites but also Koreans cannot descend into the position of "nigger."

Korean shopkeepers also relate to Black shoppers with a negative attitude because they think many Blacks are inferior and criminal. Through humiliation and mistreatment, Korean shopkeepers want to undermine the assertions of poor Blacks for fair treatment and for better prices. By driving down the claims and assertions of poor

Blacks inside the store, some Korean shopkeepers may sell low-quality goods at a high price. All the boycotted Korean shopkeepers had only a short period of business experience. This implies that they had not worked out "compromised" attitudes toward poor Blacks or that they may have tried to extract maximum profit with harsh mistreatment in order to quickly establish their business. Thus, they are highly suspicious of any Blacks and treat ordinary shoppers and shoplifting suspects badly in order to minimize their losses, as well as minimize complaints from Blacks regarding quality and price of goods. Many Korean shopkeepers who are "well-established," are more tolerant of Blacks and Black suspects and expressed less severe judgements towards poor Blacks. They have already compromised their behavior and ideas through various conflicts and confrontations with Blacks. They do not need to worry as much about Black shoplifting and other problems because they have produced steady profit, or have already made enough money to provide some peace and tolerance regarding property loss.

In an experimental study of car dealers in Chicago, Ayers (1991) found that females paid about \$150 more than males and Blacks paid about \$400 more than Whites for the exact same car.<sup>18</sup> In the article, one car dealer says,

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<sup>18</sup> It is difficult to prove whether Korean shopkeepers sell their goods for higher prices. According to Korean shopkeepers, their prices are certainly higher than big discount stores because of the difference in purchasing power. (However, big discount stores are rare in inner

"You know, sometimes it seems like the people that can least afford it have to pay the most" (Ayer 1991:872). This article did not inquire why car salespersons or car dealers want more money from females or Blacks. However, the results show that status difference is often transferred into ability to negotiate a favorable price. Individual transactions in a store are not free from the hierarchical difference in social status. Domination of shopkeepers over Blacks within stores creates a condition where Blacks are limited in expressing their full claims and assertions as consumers. Through humiliation or hierarchical differentiation in social status in terms of race, Black consumers encounter discrimination and frustration. By using hierarchical differentiation, shopkeepers do not give full information and fair treatment to low-status consumers.

Humiliation and ridicule remind subaltern groups of their subordinate position and creates anxiety. Humiliation

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cities.) They also believe that their prices are lower than that of Black shopkeepers because Korean shopkeepers have greater purchasing power (more capital) or have cheaper and hard-working labor. But, the difference in brands and quality makes the comparison more difficult. However, it is true that Korean as well as other shopkeepers generally sell low-priced and low quality goods in inner-cities, commanding a higher margin of profit. In comparison with invested capital, many Koreans believe that Korean shopkeepers in inner cities can harvest higher rates of profit than those in White neighborhoods or downtown where more capital investment is required for space and higher quality goods.

and ridicule are a form of "symbolic violence"<sup>19</sup> to keep a subaltern group in order. Symbolic violence is partially an expression of the superiority complex of the victimizers and is partially intended to generate feelings of inferiority from the victims. In the relationship between Korean shopkeepers and poor Black consumers, Korean shopkeepers try to put the double burdens of "inferior" race and lower class positions on the shoulders of poor Black consumers. As Fields (1990:106) says, "[p]eople are more readily perceived as inferior by nature when they are already seen as oppressed." Korean shopkeepers want to fix the inferior image of poor Blacks through everyday interactions. If poor Blacks already accept their image of inferiority, they will resist less. When poor Blacks think the inferior-superior relationship between Korean shopkeepers and poor Black residents is absurd, and Korean shopkeepers continue their insistence on an inferior-superior relationship through symbolic manipulation, tensions and confrontations result in

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<sup>19</sup> Bourdieu (1977a;1990) explains symbolic violence as a means of domination through, for example, gift giving in small scale societies. Thus, he describes symbolic violence as "gentle, invisible violence, unrecognized as such, chosen as much as undergone, that of trust, obligation, personal loyalty, hospitality, gifts, debts, piety, in a word, of all the virtues honored by the ethic of honor" (Bourdieu 1990:127, for the better discussion of symbolic power, see Bourdieu 1991:163-120). I use "symbolic violence" as a more negative term than Bourdieu. In my sense, symbolic violence is an effort, with symbolic manipulation, to create psychic injury, self-doubt, self-feeling of worthlessness, or negative subjectivity in the victims. Insults, degradation, humiliation, devaluation, and unfair criticism can be considered as symbolic violence in this sense.

due course. However, because symbols are usually vague and ambiguous, these tensions and confrontations are also ambiguous.

Both crimogenic idea and the practice of humiliation are both explanations and a justifications for Korean shopkeepers regarding the differences of social status and social meanings between Korean shopkeepers and poor Black residents. These practices put the responsibility of Black problems such as poverty upon the shoulder of Blacks. According to Korean shopkeepers and mainstream news media, Blacks have the same chances as Koreans, but they fail because of a lack of "something" among poor Blacks. "Something" may be intelligence, hard working ethics, or some other individual virtues. In contrast to Blacks, Korean shopkeepers think of themselves as "smart," "hard-working," and "law-abiding."<sup>20</sup> Thus, the differences of social status and wealth are natural for Korean shopkeepers. In fact, it is a post factum justification of the differences in status and wealth. The causes of the differences, understood post factum by Korean shopkeepers and the boycotters, are respectively, the "laziness," "criminality," or "inferiority" of Blacks and "racism" of Koreans and White America. Whether either claim is true is not the point here. The point here is the implication of

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<sup>20</sup> However, some Korean shopkeepers note that Blacks have better physical body. Thus, they excel in sports and dance.

those claims in the reproduction of social relationships.

The failure of poor Blacks is also criticized in relation to the success of middle class Blacks. A newspaper editorial stated,

But to blame race for all poverty is to demean those many millions of black Americans who have refused to be victims, who do not wallow in self-pity, who do not whine or make excuses but choose instead to live proud and productive lives." (New York Post, May 17, 1990, emphasis original)

Thus, the poor Black residents in inner cities are blamed regardless, due to the success of either Koreans or middle class Blacks.

This ideological attack, symbolic violence, and everyday humiliation may persuade many poor Blacks to accept their problems and low status as their own fault. However, the opposite is also true. Symbolic violence and everyday humiliation can ignite anger and rage. If space for more open discourse for poor Blacks can be acquired, the rage and anger can be contagious because of deep-seated feelings of injustice and frustration. Through the emphasis of an independent identity (that is, Black), more autonomous space to express anger, rage, and feelings of injustice is acquired. In the open public and private spaces of streets, parks, subways, stores, etc., the victimizers can often feel the mood of vengeance in the expressions of the victims. Through various means, subaltern classes or groups may try to discipline themselves, and to revenge the dominant.

### Discontents and Confrontation

As I explained previously, the relationship between shopkeepers and shoppers is usually unequal. However, the hierarchical nature of the two is not predetermined. The relationship is continuously negotiated and compromised through various interactions and contentions. The "newness" of Korean shopkeepers is especially important because there is no given criteria or accepted norm around which Korean shopkeepers and poor Black customers can negotiate or compromise in their social relationships. The lack of accepted criteria and the determination of Korean shopkeepers to insert themselves above Blacks creates "[extra/] ordinary contentions and episodic confrontations" (Sider 1986:72) between the two groups. This contention is not only about struggle over ethnic status but also about struggle over the appropriation of profit.

Theft, shoplifting, and burglary can be considered not only as a crime but also as a political act. Korean shopkeepers complain that Black shoplifters do not feel shame when they are caught. This "lack of morality" could be a political statement because, according to Bruce Wright, a Black New York City judge, they are simply breaking "a social contract that was not of their making in the first place" (quoted in Hacker 1992:187).<sup>21</sup> Thus, it is a joy

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<sup>21</sup> In fact, young Blacks developed various anti-White, "anti-social," from the White perspective, culture. "If whites speak Standard American English, succeed in school,

for some young Blacks to disrupt the rules. In one style of disruption is a group of young Blacks may enter a store, disrupt business, grab anything at random, and run away. This "wilding" is described as "joyful" by some young Blacks.<sup>22</sup>

However, everyday individual contentions and confrontations do not produce visible effects on the way Korean shopkeepers treat poor Blacks and extract profits. Korean shopkeepers ignore individual contentions and confrontations because they know there are several hundred other consumers each day. Some individual Blacks often try to boycott Korean stores, but they fail because they do not have the manpower, resources, and determination. Occasionally local looting and riots destroy some Korean businesses. However, looting and riots draw heavy moral attacks from news media, politicians, and the White majority. Successful or long-term boycotts had been organized only by Black activist organizations.

Black activist and nationalist organizations try to

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work hard at routine jobs, marry, and support their children, then to be 'black' requires one to speak black English, do poorly in school, denigrate conventional employment, shun marriage, and raise children outside of marriage. To do otherwise would be to 'act white'" (Massey and Denton 1993:168). This oppositional culture is a way to protect their Black identity and a means to express that they are not a subordinate part of White America, at least culturally. Thus, the ideals in White America are often ridiculed and rejected by young Blacks.

<sup>22</sup> For Whites and Koreans, these kinds of acts are another proof of the immorality of young Blacks.

organize Black people in order to pursue an independent "Black interest." By collectivizing the power of "a sack of potatoes," these organizations want to form an effective class or "race-class."<sup>23</sup> The December 12th Movement created manifold interactions among poor and young Blacks through various rallies (e.g. city-wide "Day of Outrage" demonstrations, demonstrations against police brutality and drug dealers, and boycotts of Korean shopkeepers). Continuous collective confrontations can increase the size of the collectivity by allowing Blacks to experience the possibility of "Black Power". The confrontations also increase the opportunity for the collective experience of "Blackness" by Black participants and residents. These confrontations are, for Black activists, forward-looking confrontations which are construct, solidify, and expand the consciousness, networks, and linkages in and between Blacks.

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<sup>23</sup> Not only small peasants but also the urban poor (the unemployed, part-timers, and small-business workers) are often "potatoes in a sack," because they don't enter "into manifold relationships with each other" (Marx 1967:123-124). However, poor Blacks often form communal but fractured discursive fields through their concentration in a separate living space, their shared experience of racism, the shared aspiration for justice, and the shared memory of the past. Modern transportation and information systems extend the discursive field. Thus, the beating of Rodney King by L.A. policemen was not only an event for L.A. but also an event for the U.S. and the world. The image of the beating and the consequent acquittal of the policemen creates a temporal manifold relationships with among Blacks. Black activist groups try to strengthen those manifold relationships through confrontations and organizations. By doing so and putting their interest hostile to the interest of dominant groups, "they form a class" (Marx 1967:124) or a "race-class."

However, for state agents and many Whites, the same confrontations are considered as dangerous, criminal, and disruptive activities and an expression of moral disorder.

For Black activists, "Korean bashing" is, in a sense, an issue with the kind of emotional appeal needed to unite the Black community behind its radical leaders (Kwong 1990:29). They might think that anger over the mystery<sup>24</sup> of the rapid success of Korean shopkeepers and individual discontents and sporadic confrontations against Korean shopkeepers can be absorbed into collective confrontations. Korean bashing could have more powerful appeals to the concrete thoughts and experience of Black residents because they contact Korean shopkeepers everyday. Korean bashing could provide poor Blacks a rallying point against injustice in America by highlighting the Korean case in the context of American racism.

If the Korean question provides a contemporary issue, the life of Malcolm X provides a historical repertoire of actions and expressions for many Blacks. Martin Luther

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<sup>24</sup> This mystery is accompanied with an idea of "irregularity" or something "uncommon." For many people, the rapid success of Korean immigrants was difficult to comprehend through common sense, especially compared to the failure of Black business in general. Thus, the existence of the "uncommon" or irregularity behind the success story of Koreans received wide-acceptance and created curiosity. The suspicious "uncommon" entity also ignites curiosity for some people and anger for others who suspect the nature of that "uncommon" entity. The "uncommon" entity could be racist assistance to Koreans from the government, and banks (for many Blacks) or an exceptional hard work of Koreans (for many news media).

King, Jr. also provides a repertoire for other Blacks. For the December 12th Movement, however, which focuses on inner city Blacks, the repertoire of Dr. King does not represent the interest of poor Blacks. For them, the strategy of Dr. King fails. The peaceful marches which intend to appeal to the morality of liberal Whites failed to achieve any real change for poor Blacks. The direct confrontations which intend to threaten the stability of "racist" society are considered more relevant to achieving fundamental social equity for the December 12th Movement. Not by begging for morality, but through "Black Power" which can disrupt the existing order, they believe they can obtain an equal share and respect. Their symbol, frequently expressed in their leaflets for the boycotts against Korean shopkeepers or for general strikes, displays their feelings very well. In it, a muscular Black hand grabs and breaks something very powerfully.

However, individual discontent and symbolic manipulation is not the same as participation in collective confrontations are not the same. The December 12th Movement has its own networks and chapters in New York City. Its members as well as other boycott participants distribute leaflets on streets, organize rallies, send and make opinions to newspapers, radio stations, and television news programs to stimulate the moral indignation of Blacks, to persuade Blacks to join the boycotts or demonstrations, or

to build manifold interactions among Blacks. This does not mean that the confrontations can create a homogeneity of Blacks or poor Blacks. Elected Black officials complain about the tactics of "radical" confrontation used by the boycotters, and some Black leaders and poor Blacks complain about the political intention of the radical activists.

The process of confrontation is also a process of constructing images of the self as victim and of others as victimizers. Being victims, they can command moral superiority, at least among those who accept these images. The images of morality are invoked "to debate the present" (Roseberry 1989:223), the past, and the future, whatever its historical veracity is. These images are partially accepted by some liberal Whites (Hacker 1992) and by some state agents. Black activists also include a partial image of the present in their immediate alternative image. In this alternative image, the capitalist social relationships are expressed with a human face, that is, with a demand for a "fair share" for Blacks. In fact, various groups share parts of the images or readings of the past and the present of the others. This partial sharing is well-expressed in the ambivalence of members of the December 12th Movement toward capitalism, of liberal Whites toward Black nationalism, and of some Korean shopkeepers toward Black contentions. They often express contradictory, fragmented ideas. Their positions are fluid, to some degree, and

conjoin with social contexts.

However, there are certain disjunctions between images and actions. The acceptance of a particular reading of others about the past and the present does not mean that emerging actions will recruit full participation. The acceptance of images or readings is different from the concessions or compromise in political and economic practices. That is, even though the confrontations in images and readings conjoin with the physical and political confrontations, there are also disjunctions between them. Thus, seeking minor or major changes in social order requires not only "cultural war" but also organizations.

Black boycotts are acts in defiance of American racial order and also of the racial order in Korean minds. The boycotts are also in defiance of the capitalist social order, particularly in the realm of the distribution of goods for individual consumption. That is, discontent and boycotts are multivocal. They aim not only at the attitudes of Korean shopkeepers and other shopkeepers, they are also partially directed at the existence of these shopkeepers, Black politicians, American racism, and capitalism. Connections between these targets are played in a fluid manner because of the fluctuation of situations and the change of discursive space and context.

Korean shopkeepers also know that the claims and targets of the boycotts are multivocal. When a neighboring

Korean shopkeeper is boycotted, all other Korean shopkeepers in the area, and for that matter in the city talk about it and complain that the boycott, in fact, is aimed at each of them. By mere show, or "threat" of physical confrontations against a few Korean shopkeepers, Black boycotters successfully, but only partially, change the attitudes of Korean shopkeepers. Korean shopkeepers lessen their insults, lower their watchful eyes, and momentarily lessen their profits, and instead, tighten their etiquette and their supervision of each other.

Through these concrete, minor changes, physical and economic confrontations can provide partial claims and hopes for the future to some Blacks. Certainly, the failure of the confrontations can also provide partial self-denial and hopelessness for the future. However, by reclaiming the focus on the victimization of Blacks, the boycotters hope to augment the sense of injustice among Blacks and to increase the desire of Black Power to retake "what should be rightfully owned by Blacks." Through this process, the members of the December 12th Movement want to establish their hegemony (moral and political leadership) among Blacks in order to counter White domination.

#### Developmental Process of the Conflict

Although there was some Black resentment of Korean shopkeepers, such discontents did not erupt into collective

confrontations in the late 1970s when there were few Korean shopkeepers in Harlem. Initially, the presence of Korean shopkeepers was not readily visible; the Black residents' ideas about Korean shopkeepers remained vague. Some Blacks even expressed their curiosity and asked the Korean shopkeepers whether they were Chinese or Japanese. Some other Blacks welcomed Korean shopkeepers since they considered that "Koreans are not Whites." Because the number of Korean shopkeepers was very small, Korean shopkeepers behaved carefully despite belief in their superiority to poor Blacks.

After the massive influx of Korean shopkeepers beginning in 1980, Black residents expressed their increasing anger at their mistreatment by Korean shopkeepers, especially by new Korean shopkeepers, and at the occupation of business strips by new 'alien' shopkeepers while Black were excluded. The rapid increase of Korean shopkeepers also increased the suspicion and anger of Blacks rapidly. This anger and suspicion was often expressed by individual Blacks. This anger was also sporadically expressed through collective complaints and boycotts led by various groups beginning in 1982. Through these complaints and boycotts, the two groups became more conscious about the presence and acts of each other.

Korean shopkeepers responded to these boycotts by organizing their own association, by intensifying efforts to

expand their moral base for Black residents, and by strengthening their connections to state agents and Black leaders. However, Korean shopkeepers' increasing visibility and their mistreatment of local Blacks promoted the involvement of more determined and well-organized Black nationalist groups. These nationalist groups also tried to expand the moral base for their "Buy Black" campaigns in Black neighborhoods by targeting the Korean shopkeepers who became the most visible shopkeepers in poor Black neighborhoods during the 1980s. This collectivization of the tension between two groups increased both the involvement of various state agents and the attention of the news media.

Through this process, the conflicts between poor Black residents and Korean shopkeepers symbolize not only the relationship between the two groups but also the positions of the two groups in the context of American society. While Black boycotters understand the presence of Korean shopkeepers as an expression of the White domination over Blacks, Koreans and the White news media interpret the Black boycotts as a 'reverse racism' for new immigrants. Thus, the tension between the two groups became more collectivized through the last decade. This tension has also been increasingly presented by Koreans and the White news media as a symbol of the inability of Blacks to excel through their own self-help and by many Blacks as a symbol of the

pervasive racism against Blacks in America, where only Blacks are systematically excluded.

#### Ripple Implication and Effects

During the process of the conflict, both groups tried very hard to establish their moral superiority and to enhance their moral appeals to mainstream news media and to the general public. These moral battles included not only interpretations of the cause of conflicts and of the past, present, and future relationships between the conflicting groups but also interpretations of the justness of American society and the capitalist social relationships, especially exclusive property rights. Black boycotters and Korean shopkeepers also interpret the conflict in American contexts, while news media, Whites, and state agents interpret the conflict in the context of American society.

For Korean shopkeepers and state agents who have to deal with any illegality in the conflict, "Black activist bashing," especially, "Carson bashing" is an issue with the kind of emotional appeal needed to attract support from the White community and news media, to divide Black support for the boycotts, and to turn the tide against the nationalist demands of the Black boycotters. These connections which cross over racial, ethnic, and class lines provide a moment to reshuffle racial connections in New York City. By bashing the "reverse racism" of Black boycotters against

Koreans as a member of "Asians," Asians were presented as new victims of "new racism." The category of Asians suddenly became a visible racial umbrella which connected hitherto discrete ethnic units such as Koreans, Chinese, Filipinos, and Vietnamese into one category. Especially after some Vietnamese were misrecognized as Koreans and beaten by Black youths, Asians felt that they cannot but live under the common umbrella of "Asians."

Whites, as well as Asians, were reshuffled. The aggressive offense by Black activists produced tension among liberal Whites. White complaints appeared all over the mainstream newspapers in New York City. This process produced a vivid image that Blacks were not only victims of racism but also that some Blacks were racists. Sonny Carson's famous "anti-White" comments during the mayoral election campaign in 1989 and his previous "anti-Semitic" comments, sensationalized by news media, provided a context for Whites in understanding "reverse racism." This contextualization was further strengthened by the comments of the police, some federal agents, and Mayor Dinkins over the boycotts. Because of "reverse racism," the ties between Blacks and liberal Whites were further strained. Mark Naison said, given the influx of immigrants from Asia and Latin America, "the politics of black rage and white guilt no longer serves the cause of justice in a multiethnic New York" (New York Times, Jan. 21, 1991).

However, the discontent over White domination is widespread among the Black population. Even Mayor Dinkins mentioned that "there was a time when we had been so brainwashed, as it were, by whites in the United States that we did not fully appreciate the grand and glorious heritage that is ours" (New York Times, Feb. 21, 1990). The boycotts against Korean shopkeepers were another opportunity for some Blacks to explore how Whites react. As many Blacks expected, Whites again came out against Black causes.

Thus, the mistrust, injustice, immorality, and racism of each other are reconfirmed. Korean shopkeepers became more conservative and demanded stronger discipline of "criminals" (including boycotters) by the police and other law enforcement institutions. The law enforcement institutions reconfirmed their suspicions over Black activists as disrupter of social order. The Black activists again reconfirmed the racism of the police, FBI, offices of district and federal attorneys, and the court. Some liberal Whites were shocked by Black "reverse racism" toward Koreans. Other Whites again confirmed their distrust toward Blacks. Still other Whites saw two "barbaric" minorities engaged in a dog-fight. The image of Koreans and Blacks during the L.A. riots is a good example. The Koreans were described as overreacting to the riot, with guns and rifles, while Blacks were described as hoodlums and gang members.

Persuasion or Coercion?

Through its multivocality, ambiguity, and fluidity of meanings, not only the dominant groups but also the resisting groups provide their own moral and political alibi. Because the subaltern groups also have their own alibi, it is very difficult to say that the dominant groups exercise moral leadership over all dominated groups. Some dominated groups can create multivocal and autonomous spaces where the moral leadership of the dominant group only partially penetrates. Korean shopkeepers and Black boycotters are good examples. While Korean shopkeepers accept and internalize racism and capitalism, they also express their resentment about White demands for deference. Black boycotters reject racism and White deference while they partially accept the capitalist social relationships.

The partial rejection of the leadership of the dominant group by the dominated groups means that there should be continuous negotiation and struggle in order to temporarily stabilize the fluid and ambiguous boundary between autonomy and penetration. In other words, the unequal social relationships are not fixed. They are challenged, reinstated, and reconstituted through interactive talks, symbols, forces, and economic constraints. Dominant groups in stratified societies have the tantalizing requirement to reproduce the "biased" balance of power in reproducing their unequal social relationships.

## Persuasion

The dominant groups may want to create and reproduce social environment where their superiority is not challenged. If the unequal social relationships can be accepted as common sense by the dominated, the reproduction of the unequal social relationships would be easier for the dominant. However, common sense is a series of stratified deposits, multiplicity of distinct and often contradictory ideas; thus, common sense always has a possibility of change (Gramsci 1987). Common sense is also a locus of struggles to input "biased accents" in the "common sense" vision of the world. Classification, the words, the names (Bourdieu 1989) which construct common sense of the social reality are also at stake in the struggles. The construction of negative images over Blacks is also a way to cause negative images to be perceived as common sense. For many Whites and Koreans, the negative images of Blacks are common sense. However, this is not common sense for many Blacks, because this make no sense to them.

Korean shopkeepers do not have a patrimonial bond with the Black population. Korean shopkeepers have no cultural repertoires which can be claimed as communal with poor Blacks.<sup>25</sup> Thus, they cannot counter the boycotters' claims

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<sup>25</sup> Any Black shopkeeper, having problem with a Black consumer, can mobilize a variety of communal repertoires, persuasive to Blacks, to counter the possible "collective"

of Koreans as "outsiders" or "exploiters." In the movie, "Do the Right Thing," a Korean shopkeeper avoids the destruction of his store by shouting, "Me black, Me black." In reality, that does not work. Many Korean intellectuals insist that Blacks and Koreans are part of the same oppressed minority. This makes only partial sense to many Blacks and Koreans. Some Blacks think Koreans are not the proper target of Black rage because they are both minorities. However, because of the attitudes of Koreans, their residence in White areas, and their economic position, the claims of Koreans as outsiders make more sense to Black residents.

Korean shopkeepers have to create cultural repertoires in order to use them. By participating in several local, Black festivals, donating to several Black organizations, joining in local ceremonies, campaigning for Black politicians, and advertising in Black newspapers, Korean shopkeepers try to create a common sense that Korean shopkeepers are also a part of Black communities. That is, the cultural participation of Korean shopkeepers in Black neighborhoods is an effort by Korean shopkeepers to blur the boundary between Black residents and Korean shopkeepers and to make Korean shopkeepers partial insiders of Black

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claims against him/her. However, there may also be some distance between Black shopkeepers and poor Blacks (Loewen 1971).

communities.<sup>26</sup> For example, Korean traditional dances in Harlem provide a context where Korean shopkeepers "coordinate and coadjust a multiplicity of emotions and interests" (Sider 1986:94) between Korean shopkeepers and Black residents. Because of the multiplicity and ambiguity of meanings in Korean dances, the intentions and reactions are fluid and vague. However, the Korean shopkeeper who organizes the Korean dance performance felt much more clearly about the implication of Korean dance toward the conflict between Korean shopkeepers and poor Blacks.

While Korean shopkeepers try to persuade Black residents not to feel angry toward Koreans, the boycotters try to both persuade Black residents to join the boycott and to persuade Korean shopkeepers to stop discrimination. The Black boycotters and relevant Korean shopkeepers try to discuss the issues. This partial negotiation and persuasion is not effective, because both groups project a very different agenda. In fact, they give up the attempt to persuade each other. Because dialogue does not work, they try other methods of persuasion: displays of power and determination. It is very difficult to call these acts

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<sup>26</sup> This does not mean that Korean shopkeepers want to eliminate the boundary. They do not want to become the same as Blacks who are degraded in America. They just want to blur the boundary to some degree in order to make the centralization and organization of scattered discontent and anger against Korean shopkeepers difficult.

persuasion or coercion.<sup>27</sup> In fact, persuasion often presupposes political coercion and economic constraints. Both are interconnected but with some disjunctures.

One of the examples is the barrage of negative images of the Black boycotters in mainstream newspapers. In a sense that the newspapers produce only images, this is a method of persuasion. But in another sense, the barrage of negative images, which will certainly produce a negative response among Whites, politicians, and possibly some Blacks, can also create a great political pressure or an excitement of exposures for the boycotters. However, negative images of the boycott may isolate the boycotters, fostering detrimental pressure from various social groups including some Black organizations.

The mainstream news media provided sensationalized images of the conflict between Blacks and Koreans during May and June 1990. These sensationalized negative images of the Black boycotters (particularly Sonny Carson) created an uproar over "reverse racism" not only from White viewers but also from some Black viewers. These viewers believed that the demand of the boycotters to expel Korean shopkeepers was "racist" and the boycotters preached "racial hatred" in Black neighborhoods. This uproar directly influenced the position of Mayor Dinkins about the boycott. By May 1990, he criticized the boycott as "based on race." This

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<sup>27</sup> It could be called a "persuasive threat."

expression of opposition was a powerful persuasion for many Blacks because the Black mayor had received 91% of the Black vote just six months earlier and also maintained a claim to a strong communal bond with the Black population and their aspirations. This situation made many Blacks cross the picket line. Even though the Black boycotters were not persuaded by Mayor Dinkins at all (rather the opposite happened), they then had to deal with the consequence of his speech to other Blacks.

#### Coercion and Constraints

According to Wolf(1990), power is composed of a series of stratified power relationships. These power relationships are also the locations of pressure and coercion in the conflict between Korean shopkeepers and black boycotters. These relationships presuppose each other during the conflict between poor Blacks and Korean shopkeepers.

On the level of individual daily interactions, the physical confrontations or threats of confrontation and symbolic violence through name-calling or humiliation provide the context of temporal coercions. However, as I have explained, Korean shopkeepers have more power in everyday interactions through the support of state power and the nature of the interactions. Individual coercion, that is, physical confrontation by a consumer will not produce

effective results for what he/she wants. According to some Blacks, Korean stores are the only stores in their immediate area. Because of these economic constraints, they must shop at Korean stores in many Black neighborhoods.

Individual physical threats or coercion of Korean shopkeepers against shoplifting suspects may reduce shoplifting. But this type of physical confrontation often produces innocent victims. Above all, physical discipline by Korean shopkeepers of innocent victims or shoplifting suspects, whoever they are, is illegal. Physical discipline is monopolized by the state system. However, violations of law does not guarantee the imprisonment of the violator because of various problems in legal system, legal agents, or social relations.

Collectivization of power is an important step in fighting a more powerful person because of the strength of numbers, the possibility of attention from friendly forces (although the opposite is also possible), and the possibility of overpowering a "higher" individual by a group. However, collectivization will make an issue a collective matter, thus the other side may try to collectivize their power, and furthermore intervention from third parties such as state agents or other forces may also occur. Collective boycotts against Korean shopkeepers inspire Korean shopkeepers to form Korean merchant associations all over New York City and the surrounding

area. That is, in order to counter the collectivization of Black power against Korean shopkeepers, Korean shopkeepers have also collectivized their power through the formal organization of dispersed individual shopkeepers or "potatoes in a sack." Collective boycotts also brought the police into the matter and inspired members of Korean shopkeeper organizations to busily contact state agents and private local leaders.

A boycott itself is economic coercion. The Black boycott was an economic coercion forcing several Korean shopkeepers to lose money and close their stores. The boycott may also be considered political persuasion and pressure because it demonstrates that other Korean shopkeepers or any non-Black shopkeepers who mistreat Blacks may become a target of a later economic coercion. The boycotters successfully apply force to the boycotted Korean stores. During the boycotts, sales at the boycotted Korean stores dove down to tens of dollars from thousands of dollars. If the boycott is part-time as in Harlem in 1988, a store could manage to produce enough profit to sustain their store. However, this economic constraint of the boycotts is countered by the police who try to open and maintain free business interaction or by Korean shopkeepers who donate money to the boycotted stores.

The presence of dozens or hundreds of police officers created an image of physical confrontation in the conflict.

However, only a few boycotters were actually arrested for violating minor laws, and other boycotters and Korean shopkeepers were ticketed because of their physical confrontations. Because the police maintained a balance of power through the appearance of physical force and because more law enforcement agents could be mobilized, there was no direct confrontation with the police or between Korean shopkeepers and Black boycotters.<sup>28</sup>

Since state agencies have to follow the laws which protect not only individual property rights but also the individual rights of free speech, they allow the boycott to continue while protecting the property rights of Korean shopkeepers. However, the boycotts are restricted to prevent the violation of the property rights of the target store-owners. Thus, the imposition of communal responsibility on the Korean shopkeepers by the protesters is not possible. The capitalist law and state systems protect individual property rights over communal responsibility. The determination of the Black boycotters to boycott and the determination of the Korean shopkeepers to stay open, and the rights of free speech and property which are to be protected by state agents, create a stalemate.

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<sup>28</sup> The direct confrontation with the police or even with the army is possible as the L.A. riot in 1992 showed. In the L.A. riots, there was also a direct confrontation involving guns and rifles between Korean shopkeepers and rioters.

When the front was stabilized among Korean shopkeepers, police agents, and Black boycotters, there was a fierce struggle to win the influence of Mayor Dinkins, other politicians and other state agents. When the President of the Association of New York met President Bush in June 1990, he requested the intervention of the federal government in the 1990 Church Avenue boycott. The intervention from the federal government agents was very limited. However, the FBI which had previously destroyed the Black Panther Party and other Black activist groups investigated the boycott and members of the December 12th Movement.

Mayor Dinkins and his subordinates applied pressure hard to stop the boycott. There was also pressure on Mayor Dinkins to take the side of the boycotters because Black activists in the boycott had considerable influence over the Black population in Brooklyn. These interactional pressures between Black activists and Black politicians created tension among the Black population in New York City. Even though the boycotts are over at this moment, the tension between Black activists and Black politicians remains.

#### Conjunction of Persuasion and Coercion

Political force, economic constraints, and physical confrontations are interpenetrated and intermingled in the case of the Black boycotts against Korean shopkeepers. The enforcement of certain coercive tactics also presupposed a

certain degree of cultural consensus because the participants followed specific rules. For example, the boycotters and Korean shopkeepers avoided individual beatings not only because of the state agents or the fear of notoriety but because they also shared, to some degree, the idea that private beatings of individuals were improper. On the public stage, they also shared the idea that each side should follow specific aspects of law (e.g. civil rights for all).

Because the both groups also wanted to gain moral superiority in order to appeal to Black residents and the general public, their confrontations were constrained to a moral struggle. The desire for moral superiority limited not only physical confrontations but also the presentations of meanings. Because of the desire for moral superiority and the presence of police force, the expression of certain ideas were restricted or stimulated. Thus, it can be said that expressions or censure of certain ideas presuppose the existence of coercion and constraints.

Minor everyday coercion (disciplinary strategies using oney, power, physical forces, and symbolic violence) is intermingled with the manipulation of claims, symbols, and customs. Possibility of coercion and cultural forms are often inseparable. Harassment and humiliation are partially coercion and partially persuasion. Because the nuance of cultural activity reflects a background of coercion and

ambiguity, many victims knowingly ignore racist attitudes, insults, provocation, and irritation. Everyday racist jabs and insults injure the minds of victims and often remind them of the threat of physical force.

Persuasion and coercion are not under the exclusive possession of the ruling bloc. Resisting groups such as Black boycotters also use both of them. The social fields might be full of multivocal, vague, clear, series of dis- or conjoined, episodic or relatively stable ideas, customs, symbols, constraints, and coercions. Thus, partial accommodation of opposed ideas and partial coercion (not only physical, but also economic and political) are common not only among the dominated but also possibly among the dominant. Because the dominant groups need not only to discipline the dominated groups but also to incorporate them into a shared or "imagined" boundary, it is difficult for the dominant to exclude all of the ideas and customs of the dominated. That is, "[t]he process of domination imposes a dialogue between dominators and dominated" (Sider 1987:22).

#### Orderings in Meaning, Power, and Economic Relationships

The relationship between Korean shopkeepers and poor Black residents is not only economic but also a relationship of power and meanings. Each relationship interpenetrates the other. By using their economically higher position, Korean shopkeepers try to insert themselves above Blacks in

the American racial order. Through humiliation and insults, they may drive down the claims and assertions of Black consumers during the economic interactions. This continuous humiliation is only possible through the unequal power relationship which is again based on the unequal economic relationship between Korean shopkeepers and poor Black residents. This does not mean that the economic relationship determines other relationships. There are some disjunctions among the relationships on different levels.

Each relationship is also fully embedded in wider social relationships. The meanings projected to each other cannot be fully understood if the social context of American racism, the history of the experience of oppression of Blacks, and the newness of Koreans in America are ignored. The power relationship between the two can be understood only in the context of state power and the American electoral system. The economic relationship between the two already presupposes American capitalism. Not because Koreans have a greater access to the government, news media, and the White public, but because all of the above have, or believe to have, an interest in maintaining the present American capitalist and racial order, Korean shopkeepers could obtain supports from state agent and Whites. However, this is contingent upon specific conditions because a temporary alliance of some Whites and some Blacks is also possible.

Because of the lack of social power and the lack of social support from Whites, state agents, and news media, poor Blacks cannot depend on the existing or legitimate channels which are biased against poor Blacks. Legitimate channels (the police and the courts) are more supportive of higher classes and prosecute only the conspicuous wrongdoing of superior classes. Minor mistreatment and cultural humiliation do not become issues. Thus, Blacks feel frustrated with legitimate channels and depend more on disruptive tactics, demonstrations, and street confrontation.

Economically and politically higher classes or groups often describe lower groups as pathological, barbaric, dirty, or lazy. By describing them so, the higher groups may claim their innocence and blame the victims. Through their power, they may try to silence discontent and criticism directed against the higher groups. This creates better conditions for the reproduction of unequal social relationships. However, this process is full of tensions, due to the changing balance of power and negotiation.

The continuous actions and negotiations make the reproduction of concrete unequal social relations relatively uncertain. The various dimensions of assorted practices or actions influence the process of the reproduction of social relations. Social orders in different dimensions of social practices are interpenetrated and interconnected. There are

"the unbreakable links among language, power relations, and the materiality of everyday life"(Pred and Watts 1992:xvi, emphasis original). Thus, it can be said that "[s]ocial relations presuppose the legal system, state system, and culture"(Hoffman 1975:114).

While different racial experiences and rhetoric are the principal framework for understanding the conflict between Korean shopkeepers and poor Black residents, the state and capitalist social relationships are the principal ordering forces in everyday power-relations between them. However, the Black boycotts against Korean shopkeepers also simultaneously aim at different dimensions of social orders. The boycotters could project alternative images of racial, cultural, political, and economic orders in the limited spaces during a limited time. The partial disruption of the reproduction of the social relationships by the December 12th Movement and the boycotters provided some sense of claiming the future -- a future of challenging, yet not replacing, power.

## AFTERWORD

The Korean Seafood Association of New York<sup>1</sup> -- which protects the rights of its 800 KSA member-- has declared an immediate boycott of Slavin and Sons, 106 South Street. Picketing and protest will begin July 28, 1988 at 7 AM in front of Slavin and Sons.<sup>2</sup>

Slavin and Sons has consistently demonstrated unfair business practices when dealing with KSA buyers. These include: the monopolization of certain goods, poor quality of merchandise sold, unprofessional conduct with KSA buyers, and inconsistent refund policies.

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 In many cases, the fish market is the sight for quick-temper, competitive attitudes that force sellers and buyers to engage in unprofessional business activity. Some of these aspects have been entrenched in the fish market as part of the game. Slavin and Sons, however, go beyond the limitations of the game. Consistently, repeatedly, deliberately, time-in and time-out, they have shown complete disrespect and dishonesty towards Koreans. And this is exceptional. And it cannot be tolerated...(from a leaflet for a boycott by Korean fish retailers against a White fish wholesaler)

Conflicts between Korean Shopkeepers and White Wholesalers

When new Korean green grocers first came to Hunts Point, Bronx, the wholesale market for vegetables and fruits in New York City, in the late 1960s and early 1970s, some

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<sup>1</sup> The association is for the Korean fish retailers in the greater New York City area. They organized several boycotts against individual White wholesalers in the Fulton Fish Market which supplies about one to two hundred million dollars of fish and marine products for New York City and vicinity every day.

<sup>2</sup> At the time of the boycott, Korean fish retailers considered Slavin and Sons to be the worst wholesalers for the Koreans.

wholesalers who were openly anti-Asian refused to deal with those Korean immigrants. Others overcharged. One of the first Korean grocers, recalled that Korean green grocers were not allowed to open crates to inspect the produce they were buying. Another Korean green grocer, who has a Ph.D. degree in Nuclear Physics and entered the green grocery business in the late 1960s, said that the wholesalers always yelled, "Chinks, go away. We don't want Chinks around here." One day he challenged a wholesaler. He blew up and threw some punches at a wholesaler. But the wholesaler soundly beat him. He sighed, "I was too ashamed to tell my wife, too ashamed to tell my family"(Harris 1983).

Korean fish retailers experienced similar things. A Korean fish market owner in Harlem remembered that whenever he bought a box of 125 pounds of whiting, the real weight of the box was always about 100 pounds. The price depended on the mercy of the wholesalers (the price always fluctuates in the wholesale market because of the whims of the weather, supply and demand, and the wholesalers). If he demanded an explanation, the wholesalers and his employees would insult him with foul language and threats. If he checked inside the box to find out whether the fish were good or not, the wholesalers and his employees would insult him again. In an incident that occurred in 1984, one Korean fish retailer demanded an explanation. The argument began between the Korean fish retailer and one of the employees of the

wholesale stores, and the employee eventually killed the Korean fish retailer.

As in the case of the conflict between Black residents and Korean shopkeepers, the two groups involved have different understandings about the origin of conflict. Accordingly, the wholesalers expressed an opposite view. One wholesaler stated that the conflicts began because the Koreans would pick out the best of the contents and leave the rest scattered on the floor. He also added, "The fact that they didn't speak English well didn't help either" (quoted in Harris 1983).

Whatever the cause of the conflict, the frustration of Korean green grocers and fish retailers runs deep. Whenever they reported this injustice to the police, nothing happened. They suspected a connection between the police and the wholesalers. When the number of Korean fish retailers increased quickly during the mid-1980s, many Koreans hoped to direct some activism against the worst wholesaler in the market in order to show all wholesalers that Korean fish retailers had punitive power.

When Korean shopkeepers organized their boycott against White wholesalers, the Koreans ironically mentioned almost the same things which Black boycotters mentioned about Korean shopkeepers: disrespect, high price, humiliation, and abuse. Because the frustration was deep, the solidarity was strong. The boycott target, Slavin and Sons, was

notorious among Korean fish retailers for mistreatment and price manipulation. The Korean Seafood Association (KSA) demanded that the owner respect Korean fish retailers and practice fair business. After four months, the wholesaler surrendered. The business could not manage to produce a profit, primarily because the Korean fish retailers were the majority of the retailers, and they had stopped patronizing the wholesale store. After this victory, the KSA taught several "bad" wholesalers some lessons with the threat of boycotts or through actual boycotts.

During the boycott, the Koreans tried to reach various government officials and politicians for a beneficial intervention. Since the Korean fish retailers targeted only one store and demanded only the change of specific "unfair" practices, they were not considered a threat to social order by the state agents. However, the state agents also did not consider the practices of the wholesaler to be criminal. As usual, small humiliations and unfair practices did not draw the attention from state agents. The Korean fish retailers also tried to "play" fish wholesalers against each other competitively. The wholesalers in the market frequently donated money for KSA events to attract Koreans to their stores. One wholesaler rented a space to the KSA for 100 years at no charge.

After the boycotts, there was a visible change in the attitudes of the wholesalers. Aside from the boycotted

wholesalers the other wholesalers compromised their attitudes and their business practices. Nevertheless, some months after the boycotts, a few wholesalers again expressed their contempt of Koreans openly. Korean fish retailers and green grocers also wanted to take further action to change more fundamental discriminatory practices which were hitherto considered "acceptable." Thus, there have been periodic boycotts by Korean shopkeepers against subtle and open discrimination, mistreatment, and humiliation by White wholesalers. This fluidity and dynamics of tension between them has often erupted into a violent confrontation between individuals in the two groups.

While some of the demands from the Black boycotters went beyond the limit of capitalism (e.g., community control over its economy) and American racial order (e.g., Black Power), the demands from Korean fish retailers were within capitalism's boundary (e.g., do fair business), and the Koreans did not challenge the racial order. That is, they did not demand "Korean Power," or "Buy Korean Movement." Thus, the Koreans were not considered a threat to social order by the state agents. In the case of the Black boycott against Korean shopkeepers, they were considered a threat. Thus, the opposition from the public and the negative intervention of state agents such as the NYPD, FBI, politicians, and courts made the demands of Black boycotters for the radical change of an existing social relationship

unsuccessful. The Korean fish retailers demanded only a minor change in the practices of one fish wholesaler at a time. However, the results of the two different boycotts were similar: improved and fairer treatment from those who are in a better position.

#### The Social Dilemma of Korean Shopkeepers

In this dissertation, I focused on the relationship between the Korean shopkeeper and poor Black customers. Through the use of their economic position, Korean shopkeepers tried to establish a racial hierarchy. In the case of the conflict between White wholesalers and Korean shopkeepers, the White wholesalers used their class and racial power to create and stabilize hierarchical differences by victimizing Korean shopkeepers. Thus, Korean shopkeepers organized boycotts against White wholesalers.

In fact, the racism of intermediary Whites or Koreans should be contextualized in the whole American social structure. Intermediaries face great status anxiety and pressure from the pervasive racism in America. Although Korean racism conforms to the existing racism of the dominant, their actions are partially efforts to avoid further victimization or degradation by stepping on the shoulder of Blacks, thus creating their social distance from Blacks. Often, those in direct contact with the most degraded groups are the most violent racists.

I do not want to excuse the racism of intermediate groups here. I merely want to point out that the racism of the intermediate and lower status groups is well-connected to the racism of the dominant groups. In this sense, whether they accept or reject the moral leadership of the dominant groups or not, they reproduce the racism in their own way and act within the boundaries of cultural norms supported by the dominant groups. While the intermediate status groups resent and often envy the privileges of the dominant and their discrimination against the intermediate groups, these intermediate groups also try to expand their own privileges and discriminate against easily degraded people.

White wholesalers abused and taken advantage of Korean shopkeepers; Korean shopkeepers abused and taken advantage of Black consumers. As an intermediate class between capital and labor, as well as between White wholesalers and Black consumers, Korean shopkeepers are the victims of racism and simultaneously racist victimizers.

#### Final Words

By describing Blacks, Koreans, or Whites as a unit of ethnicity or race, I have falsely created bounded ethnic and racial units. Even though I qualified their class positions by using terms such as "poor," "shopkeeper," and "wholesaler," the complexity of the fluid and contradictory

phenomena cannot be fully described in this presentation. In reality, ethnic or racial boundaries are based on "imagined communities" (Anderson 1983) rather than real communities. Imagined communities are often more apparent than real communities, for through the imagination of human beings, imagined communities are considered tangible and people act accordingly.

The creation of an identity based on an imagined community is also an effort by people to understand their ethnic and racial reality within their political-economic and cultural environment. Thus, the simplified hierarchy of imagined communities is also a conceptual effort to find order in reality. This attempt often falls into the false image of separate and distinct boundaries for racial and ethnic units. Blacks, Koreans, or Whites are so diverse that it is almost impossible to understand the diversity with simple racial or ethnic terms.

I used Blacks, Koreans, or Whites as conceptual tools which allow to approach reality. Conceptual tools are not precise reflection of reality. Conceptual tools usually simplify and put reality in order. They are useful in analyzing reality. If the conceptual tools cannot efficiently explain and analyze reality, the tools can be discarded or modified. However, I hope I conveyed some of the complexity of social reality by using conceptual tools of race and class. Because conceptual tools are in tension

(as all words are in social tension [Volosinov 1986]) and also limit and structure our possibility of understanding reality, my understanding of reality is also limited and structured by the continuous tension of my conceptual tools.

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