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Middleman Minorities and Sojourning in Black America: The Case of Korean Entrepreneurs on the South Side of Chicago

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This article argues that Korean entrepreneurs on the South Side of Chicago have a sojourning orientation similar to the type described by middleman minority theory. At first, this orientation is based on negative stereotypes that Korean entrepreneurs bring to the black community, and later, as these stereotyping becomes less prevalent, the sojourning orientation of Korean merchants is reconstituted in response to their perceptions of unstable relations between blacks and whites in American society. The findings of this article are based on a series of in-person interviews with Korean immigrants who own beauty supply stores on the South Side of Chicago. Although this article focuses on a single market niche, its conclusions indicate that greater attention needs to be paid to the relationship between general economic conditions and intra-ethnic relations.

Introduction

Sojourning, or the intention to temporarily pursue economic activity in one community or market setting in order to raise capital for future economic activity elsewhere, is identified as a characteristic of middleman minorities. However, few studies have systematically examined the attitudes and perceptions that produce such economic behavior. In the absence of such analysis, a growing dispute has emerged concerning the extent to which middleman minorities can be described as sojourners. In particular, this issue is increasingly debated among scholars when contemporary middleman groups, such as Korean and Arab entrepreneurs, are discussed. This debate has also become the focus of popular discourse, notably when interracial tension in minority communities is the subject of discussion. For instance, the belief that middleman minorities sojourn has become a flash point during periods of heightened social tension in black America. In fact, a number of recent studies have described how tensions between blacks and Koreans are

heightened when Korean merchants are perceived as sojourners in the black community (Kim et. al. 1997; Light et al. 1994; Min 1996).

In light of this scholarly and popular debate, a closer examination of sojourning among middleman entrepreneurs in the black community is warranted. Of particular interest, are the issues related to whether middleman minorities initially enter the black community with a sojourning orientation, how that orientation is shaped by societal factors and changing circumstances over time, and the degree to which such a sojourning orientation is reinforced or dissipates as time elapses. With those issues in mind, this article examines the manifestation of sojourning behavior among Korean merchants in the black community. The central argument of this article is that Korean entrepreneurs on the South Side of Chicago have a sojourning orientation similar to the type described by middleman minority theory. As a result, Korean entrepreneurs initially view their businesses in the black community as transitional businesses, or stepping stones, leading to their later entry into the mainstream economy. Yet, as time passes, Korean entrepreneurs find their access to the mainstream economy blocked by economic and social barriers, and their business activities in the black community are prolonged. Despite these circumstances, Korean merchants maintain their sojourning orientation in the black community, viewing it as an undesirable place to do business in the long-term. However, the underlying rationale for the maintenance and reproduction of a sojourning orientation changes over time. Initially, this orientation is based on negative stereotypes that Korean entrepreneurs bring to the black community, but later, as these stereotypes are softened, the sojourning orientation of Korean merchants is reconstituted in response to their perceptions of unstable relations between blacks and whites in American society. In essence, a sojourning orientation is perpetuated among Korean entrepreneurs in the black community, since they expect to be used as scapegoats during periods of heightened tension between blacks and white America.

This article is divided into two main sections. The first serves as a theoretical overview for the examination of Korean entrepreneurs on the South Side of Chicago. In this section the central concepts of middleman minority theory are elaborated upon. In particular, prior theoretical and empirical findings concerning the concepts of scapegoating and sojourning are examined in order to generate a new conceptual synthesis. In this synthesis it is argued that scapegoating and sojourning behavior are interrelated, and strongly influence middleman businesses found in market settings outside of the mainstream economy. This conceptualization is critical

to understanding the relationship between the institutional context in which Korean-owned businesses are found, and the manifestation of sojourning among middleman minorities in black America.

The second section of this article applies these theoretical arguments to the analysis of the attitudes and perceptions of Korean beauty supply store owners on the South Side of Chicago. Several aspects of their views about doing business in black America are of interest. The barriers Korean entrepreneurs face to entering the mainstream economy and the advantages they associate with doing business in the black community are discussed. Factors influencing the attitudes of Korean entrepreneurs concerning business in black America are identified. And, the effects of perceived white-black conflict on the business orientation of Korean entrepreneurs in black America are examined.

This article's theoretical discussion of middleman minority theory and its examination of Korean merchants on the South Side of Chicago provides clarification to the debate surrounding sojourning in black America. As a result, the relationship between sojourning and middleman minorities is highlighted. More importantly, by focusing on the institutional context in which sojourning behavior is embedded, this article emphasizes the relationship between mainstream society and the manifestation of middleman entrepreneurship at the parochial level.

Methodology and Sample Characteristics

The data used in this article comes from a series of formal interviews with Korean owners of beauty supply stores on the South Side of Chicago. These interviews were conducted between January 1996 and August 1996. When contacted for interviews, informants were asked to be part of an academic study of minority-owned businesses in the ethnic beauty aids industry. During the interviews informants were asked a series of open-ended questions about the organization and operation of their businesses. The questions were drawn from an interview guide that was prepared in advance. The interview guide consisted of fourteen items and thirty-eight probes. This research instrument focused on a core set of questions which related to the theoretical issues under examination. In particular, the research instrument focused on examining issues concerning the business goals of Korean entrepreneurs in the black community, the business networks they had access to, the role of race in their businesses, and the attitudes that they held about black consumers and the black community. The interviews were tape

recorded, and the tapes were transcribed verbatim. Each interview was administered at the given informant's beauty supply store during normal business hours. The interviews ranged from one to two hours in length.

At the end of the interviews, informants were asked to respond to a twenty-five item survey. The survey contained closed-ended questions focusing on the general characteristics of a merchant's store, his or her perceptions of the business climate in which it was embedded, and related issues that paralleled the questions and probes contained in the interview guide. The surveys took approximately five minutes to complete. The sampling strategies used in conjunction with the research instruments, and the characteristics of the entrepreneurs who were interviewed and surveyed, are discussed later in this methodology. However, before moving on to these topics, further discussion of the role of using both the interview guide as a primary research instrument and the closed-ended survey as a secondary research instrument is necessary.

The adoption of an ethnographic data collection strategy based on dual instrumentation served many purposes. First, a low response rate was anticipated due to the characteristics or the informant's businesses and time constraints that they operated under, so dual instruments were used to expand the amount of data collected. Second, if an informant refused to commit to a formal interview, or was unable to finish an interview in progress, the option of completing a brief survey was available. Third, upon the completion of an interview, informants were given surveys to return at a later date. The survey was used to check for consistency in the interview, and as a mechanism to maintain contact with the informant in the event that additional information was desired. Interestingly, although the survey and interview were designed to protect the anonymity of informants, many circulated business cards at the completion of an interview, or attached them to the survey with invitations to contact them with future questions. In many ways, research instruments were developed to accommodate the informants and create opportunities that maximize data collection within the constraints of the research setting. Dual instrumentation allowed for data to be collected immediately during an interview, and incrementally through the survey and the informal contact that it generated.

The nature of this study also demanded that the research instruments be concise and flexible. It was anticipated that informants would only be available for short periods of time, since they were involved in the operation of businesses. As a result, the interview was designed to be administered in one hour, and the survey was designed to take five minutes. Of course, in

some instances interviews went beyond one hour, but the placement of questions and themes in the text of the interview guides allowed for the acceleration of interviews when informants became anxious to resume their work. This emphasis on remaining nonintrusive helped facilitate rapport with informants, since they were reassured that the interview would not interfere with their daily routine. The ability to administer the interview within the general time frame that was promised also made informants more willing to offer additional information informally, and to provide the names of other business owners to contact for interviews.

This study focused on Korean-owned beauty supply stores for several reasons. Businesses selling ethnic beauty aids have historically been one of the more prevalent on the South Side of Chicago. Also, Korean merchants have clustered in such businesses since the early 1970s. In addition, the customer base of Korean-owned beauty supply stores on the South Side of Chicago is exclusively black. For instance, most of the respondents in this study reported that ninety-nine percent of their customers were black. These characteristics made an examination of Korean-owned beauty supply stores a critical case study of the relationship between sojourning behavior and middleman minority groups. In fact, other scholarly works identify similar business settings, making this study an important contribution to the general literature on middleman business in minority communities. For instance, Drake and Cayton (1993) and Wirth (1956) discuss the role of Jewish merchants in Chicago's black neighborhoods during the early and mid-1900s. Similarly, Wong describes the role of Chinese grocers in Los Angeles's black neighborhoods during the 1970s. In the contemporary period, the concentration of Korean-owned businesses in black and Latino communities is also well documented (Cheng and Espiritu 1989; Kim and Hurh 1985; Light and Bonacich 1988; Min 1988, 1996; Park 1995; Yoon 1991a). Therefore, although the conclusions drawn from this case study deal with issues specific to Korean-owned beauty supply stores in Chicago's black community, they also have implications for broader questions related to sojourning behavior among middleman groups in other sectors of the economy.

Given the small population under examination, a number of methodological steps were taken to insure that the informants in the sample were representative. One of the issues that was addressed was the absence of a comprehensive list of Korean-owned beauty supply stores on the South Side of Chicago. The lack of a comprehensive list of businesses was further complicated by the rate of business failure and changes in ownership in this

industry. Because of these issues, numerous sources were used to identify businesses. One of the more important sources were local business organizations in the Korean community. These organizations were extremely helpful in supplying the names of businesses, and in the provision of references to gain access to the research site. Another source included businesses directories published by ethnic organizations, such as the *Chicago Korean Business Directory*. Through discussions with other scholars, it was found that these two sources were the most widely used in studies of this nature. Nonetheless, a number of other sources were also used, which helped to ensure that a representative sample of businesses was identified for this study.

In some instances, discussions with other scholars working in Chicago led to the identification of informants. However, some less conventional techniques were also employed. One of these was archival material. On occasion, the names of business owners and individuals to contact were found in old newspaper clippings. These sources often led to interviews or other referrals. A number of businesses were also identified through respondents, who not only recommended that I interview some of their acquaintances, but in some cases personally introduced me. In other instances, informants identified the names of their competitors inadvertently during interviews. In fact, some of the sources of business names were truly unique. Religious organizations in Chicago's Korean community serve as one example. However, one of the most important ways in which businesses were identified for this study was by simply walking through the various shopping areas on the South Side of Chicago.

In total, 13 (32.5%) of the known Korean beauty supply store owners on the South Side of Chicago (N=40) were interviewed. The remaining 27 Korean merchants in the population declined to be interviewed when contacted. The principal reason for declining an interview was that the merchant was unable to free up enough time to participate in the study. Importantly, seven of the Korean merchants who were interviewed reported that they owned more than one business on the South Side of Chicago: four owned two businesses, two owned three businesses, and one owned four businesses. The presence of multiple business owners was common in both the sample and the population at large. In fact, the Korean merchants who were interviewed indicated that these patterns of multiple business ownership were common in the population of Korean-owned beauty supply stores. Therefore, the economic and social impact of this population of entrepreneurs on the South Side of Chicago was greater than their numbers may suggest.

The characteristics of the neighborhoods where the Korean-owned beauty supply stores in the sample were located were also consistent with those of the population as a whole. In fact, the sample included Korean-owned stores located in middle-income, working class, and poor black neighborhoods on the South Side of Chicago. The distribution of these informants by neighborhood type was representative of the distribution of all Korean-owned stores by neighborhood type. In addition, the characteristics of the Korean merchants identified in the sample were consistent with those described in other studies of Korean entrepreneurs in the black community (Kim and Hurh 1985; Light and Bonacich 1988; Min 1988, 1996; Min and Jaret 1985; Stewart 1989; Yoon 1991b, 1995).

The Korean merchants in the sample represented a diverse cross-section of the population. They captured the breath of characteristics found among Korean-owned beauty supply stores throughout the South Side of Chicago. For instance, their stores varied in size. Two of the Korean merchants ran small stores with no employees. Six of the Korean merchants ran medium sized stores with three to five employees. Five of the Korean merchants ran large stores with six to ten employees. The composition of the workers in the Korean-owned stores also varied along several dimensions. Family members worked in nine of the Korean-owned stores; however, this was usually limited to the spouse of a given Korean merchant, and in three cases an extended family member. In contrast, black workers were highly visible in Korean-owned stores. Eleven of the Korean owned stores had black employees, and seven of these stores had at least three or more black employees. In fact, the proportion of black employees corresponded with Yoon's finding that 70% of the employees in Korean-owned store on the South Side of Chicago were black (Yoon 1991a: 200).

The Korean merchants in the sample varied in several additional respects. Eleven of the Korean merchants were men and two were women. In terms of age, two of the Korean merchants were in their thirties, five were in their forties, four were in their fifties, and two were over sixty. With regard to education, all of the Korean merchants had a high school education or more. One of the Korean store owners had a high school diploma, four had some college education, seven had completed their bachelors degrees, and one had earned a masters degree. Also, although all of the Korean merchants were immigrants, they had immigrated to the United States at different times. Two had been in the United States for less than ten years, six between ten and twenty years, and five for twenty or more years. In addition, the Korean merchants had businesses in the black community for different periods of

time. Two of them had been in business for less than three years, one operated a business for four to six years, and ten were in business for seven or more years.

Central Concepts of Middleman Minority Theory

Scapegoating and Middleman Minorities

Many of the commercial functions in black America are not provided by black entrepreneurs and mainstream institutions. Because of this, there is a need for third parties to assume an economic role in minority markets. This role is often referred to as a middleman minority role. A number of authors have discussed middleman groups and the role they fill in the economy (Blalock 1967; Bonacich 1973; Bonacich and Modell 1980; Min 1988; Min and Kolodny 1994; Sway 1988; Zenner 1991). However, the general characteristics associated with middleman minorities have their foundation in Weber's (1952, 1978) analysis of "pariah people" and "pariah capitalism," and in Simmel's examination of "the stranger" (Levine 1971). As the terms imply, middleman minorities are perceived as outsiders who serve as go-betweens for dominant and subordinate groups in society. The middleman role is facilitated by outsider status, which initially makes middleman minorities appear impartial to the dominant-subordinate relationship that exists in society. However, the initial perception of impartiality gives middleman minorities a false sense of security, since the material benefits that they accrue from their economic role makes dominant and subordinate groups in society resent them.

Because of the existence of resentment, middleman minorities function as mediators in the economy and they fill an additional role. They buffer mainstream institutions from the criticisms of subordinated groups. Blalock (1967) and Zenner (1991) attributes this social outcome to two characteristics of middleman minorities: they tend to be concentrated in peripheral areas of the economy where they have a relatively high degree of economic influence, and they are politically detached from mainstream institutions because of their outsider status. These conditions contribute to the stigmatization of middleman minorities. Blalock (1967) stresses that the existence of an economic role for middleman groups grows out of social polarization, and it remains intact as long as mainstream institutions continue to benefit from existing social inequalities. Because of this role, Blalock identifies middleman minorities as "natural scapegoats" serving "as a buffer which can

often absorb any major strains the system may undergo short of complete rebellion by the subordinate group" (1967: 81).

These points are central to understanding the role of middleman minorities in the black community. First, their economic role is an outgrowth of institutional structures in mainstream society that generate inequality. Second, their role as natural scapegoats buffers mainstream institutions from social conflict. Together, these two roles serve an important social control function, which allows economic and social conflict to transpire an alteration in the system of ethnic stratification. In addition, the middleman minority role can be conceptualized as a somewhat permanent fixture of black America, which is generated by forces in mainstream society.

The precarious situation that the economic role of middleman minorities entails virtually ensures that they will remain alienated in society. Middleman minorities maintain an outsider status in white and black America, they are the target of resentment by both whites and blacks, and they periodically become scapegoats for inequality in society. Because they are embedded in an institutional context that they find foreign, middleman minorities have a limited ability to control the environmental constraints that they face. However, in a limited sense, they are able to buffer themselves from anti-middleman antagonism. For instance, they attempt to minimize their exposure to polarized groups in society through sojourning.

Sojourning and Middleman Minorities

The adoption of a sojourning orientation is characteristic of middleman minorities. Yet, this point has been disputed by some scholars, particularly in discussions of contemporary Korean middleman minorities. For instance, in his study of Korean businesses in New York and Los Angeles, Min (1996: 20) argues that sojourning is not common among Koreans. Min bases this conclusion on his observation that Korean migrants intend to remain in the United States permanently. However, the desire among Korean merchants to establish their permanent residence in America, does not necessarily mean that they abstain from sojourning activities in sub-populations of the United States. In fact, sojourning in the black community may often be viewed as a means to establishing a permanent home in the broader American society. This sentiment is found when Korean merchants describe the structure of American society. For instance, they readily differentiate between black and white America, particularly where their attitudes and perceptions of the black community and the broader society are concerned. In a real sense, Korean

merchants view black America as separate from the broader society. Recognizing the inherent inequality between black and white America, they seek to eventually integrate into the broader society. In fact, the presence of such a distinction is an inherent component of the middleman minority role, as well as the sojourning orientation which is an extension of this role.

In order to understand why sojourning is intimately linked to the economic role of middleman minorities, it is useful to review the literature on sojourning behavior. Siu (1952) undertook the first significant analysis of sojourning behavior, and established a foundation for later refinements in its conceptualization. He offers the following description of the sojourner:

> The "sojourner" is treated as a deviant type of the sociological form of the "stranger," one who clings to the cultural heritage of his own ethnic group and tends to live in isolation, hindering his assimilation to the society in which he resides, often for many years. The sojourn is conceived by the sojourner as a "job" which is to be finished in the shortest possible time (p. 34).

This early conceptualization of sojourning behavior, describes it as an adaptive strategy where an individual enters an economic setting with the intention of accumulating capital and exiting in the shortest possible time. It also reflects the perception that a given economic setting is not considered a desirable place for permanent settlement, but rather it is seen as a means to ultimately settling in the location where the sojourner strives to be.

These characteristics of sojourning are elaborated upon by Lee (1960: 69-85). Her analysis furthers the development of the contemporary conceptualization of sojourning. Lee enters into an extensive discussion of sojourning behavior among the Chinese in America, illustrating Siu's points and stressing that "Chinese sojourners maintain a psychological and social separateness from the larger society and insulate themselves against the full impact of the dominant society's values, norms, attitudes, and behavior patterns" (1960: 70). From this perspective sojourning can be viewed not simply as economic opportunism, but as a defensive form of agency exercised by individuals or groups who fill an economic role in a volatile social environment. The most important characteristic of sojourning is the intention of the sojourner to remain in a given economic setting temporarily, and the resistance to establish any roots to that setting. Clearly, it is not necessary for a sojourner to have any realistic intention to return to his or her nation of

origin; the minimum requirement is the intention to leave the place of sojourning and not to settle there permanently.

Sway (1988: 21-23, 125-127) illustrates this point well in her discussion of sojourning by both Jews and Gypsies. She points out that although Jews practice sojourning behavior, they have demonstrated ambivalence towards a return to their homeland. In the case of Gypsies, the practice of sojourning is well documented, despite their status as a wandering people with no definitive homeland. Sway's perspective concerning sojourning is closely aligned with Bonacich's (1973). She points out that sojourners maintain a mental image of their ancestral homeland as, "somewhere to go if things get too bad in the host country" (Bonacich 1973: 593). In this light, references made to one's homeland are actually a defensive reaction to host hostility experienced by middleman groups, and not a true desire to return to their country of origin. This is a reflection of a sojourner's perception of a given location as a place for transitional economic activity, which leads one to conclude that a sojourner's final resting place, upon the completion of a particular economic endeavor, is not of primary importance. The only element critical to sojourning is the initial intention to leave. Therefore, in its most generalized form, sojourning can be defined as the intention to temporarily pursue economic activity in one community or market setting in order to raise capital for future economic activity elsewhere.

This conceptualization of sojourning is characteristic of Korean entrepreneurship in the black community. Kim and Hurh (1985) illuminate this point when they discuss the manner in which Korean entrepreneurs envision their businesses on the South Side of Chicago as stepping stones to entry in the mainstream economy. The portrayal of their businesses as stepping stones and the intention among Korean merchants to eventually cease doing business in the black community is a reflection of their sojourning orientation. This is the case regardless of whether Korean entrepreneurs plan to eventually move into the mainstream American economy or back to Korea.

Sojourning and Korean Entrepreneurship on the South Side of Chicago

A Temporary Place of Business: Korean Attitudes Toward the Black Community

A sojourning orientation grows out of the institutional context in which sojourners are embedded. For example, the Korean merchants who were interviewed had similar attitudes about doing business in the black community. They perceived it as a place where incomes were low, businesses were underdeveloped, and where there was a high demand for consumer goods. The Korean merchants also saw the black community as separate and remote from mainstream society. The isolation of the black community from mainstream society opened economic opportunities for them. These opportunities were furthered since economic competition was limited in the black community. In part, this was because Korean merchants had fewer large white-owned companies to compete with in such market settings, and also because they did not view black entrepreneurs in them as serious competitors.

In addition, Korean merchants perceived the black community as being economically dependent on mainstream institutions. This led to a number of schisms between blacks and whites in society. The Korean entrepreneurs were aware of cleavages existing between blacks and whites in society, and attributed many of them to various form of racism and racial discrimination in society. They also reflected upon their own experiences with discrimination in mainstream society, and feelings of disenfranchisement from it. Because of this, they understood the markets they did business in were volatile, and that they could become scapegoats during periods of conflict between blacks and whites.

The perception that economic instability might lead to scapegoating contributed to the adoption of a sojourning orientation among Korean merchants. However, a sojourning orientation is not simply adopted in response to conditions that Korean merchants find once they have opened businesses in the black community, it grows out of the experiences they have in mainstream society prior to pursuing entrepreneurship in black America. These experiences have an important effect on the attitudes and perceptions of Korean entrepreneurs. The Korean merchants who were interviewed were socialized as middleman minorities through interactions in mainstream society. This is how they acquired the attitudes and perceptions necessary to assume a middleman role.

The Korean merchants' attitudes and perceptions were affected in two important ways by mainstream institutions. First, when they originally immigrated to the United States, they found it difficult to access jobs in the mainstream economy. This experience generated feelings of animosity toward mainstream society, since, in part, many of the Korean merchants attributed their difficulties in the economy to discrimination in mainstream society. Second, the Korean merchants learned about the black community through mainstream institutions. Through this process they internalized many of white America's stereotypes and prejudices about black America. Because of the stigma attached to the black community, the vast majority of the businesses opened by Korean entrepreneurs on the South Side of Chicago were intended to be transitional businesses. This sentiment was expressed in various ways by the Korean merchants who were interviewed. Some intended to operate a business in the black community until they saved enough money to open a business in the Korean community and serve co-ethnic customers. Others opened businesses in the black community to raise capital so they could later enter the import-export business. Still others opened businesses in the black community to earn an income while pursuing jobs and establishing businesses in mainstream society. For instance, one Korean merchant discussed plans to open a dry cleaning establishment in a white neighborhood, another had recently purchased a motel near downtown Chicago, and another Korean merchant was scaling down his store since he had recently been hired by an engineering firm in a suburb of Chicago.

Although the Korean merchants who were interviewed had different goals for their businesses, they all held similar views of their economic role in the black community. They initially viewed the South Side of Chicago as a temporary place to do business. Even though ten of the Korean merchants operated businesses in the black community for seven or more years, to varying degrees, each retained the desire to pursue economic activity elsewhere in the future.

Immigrant Status and Barriers to Entering the Mainstream Economy

The Korean merchants who were interviewed cited a number of barriers they faced to entering the mainstream economy. Many of these barriers have been identified in the past by other scholars (Kim and Hurh 1985; Light and Bonacich 1988; Min 1988; Min and Jaret 1985; Yoon 1991, 1995). However, others have not, and require further elaboration. For instance, many of the Korean merchants identified language as an obstacle to entering the

mainstream economy. They discussed how language barriers hampered their ability to find jobs in white America, and how a limited proficiency in English made it difficult for them to communicate with potential employers and inform them about their work history. These issues were compounded for the six Korean merchants who held advanced degrees from foreign universities, since these credentials were not fully recognized by employers in the United States. The inability to transfer records and credentials to the United States was a common problem for the Korean merchants and extended beyond issues related to employment and education.

About one-fourth of the Korean merchants pointed out that when they immigrated they had no records to verify their financial status. For instance, they had no credit history and no record of paying taxes in the United States. Also, they described this as a common problem among Korean immigrants. In fact, one Korean store owner reported that several years transpired between the time he immigrated to the United States and when he obtained a Social Security card. Because of similar problems, about half of the Korean merchants reported that they initially found it difficult to obtain credit in America. One merchant pointed out that he could not get a credit card in the United States for years, so he had to use one from a bank in Korea. Although he paid his bills regularly, this did not help him build a credit history in the United States. Subsequently, the lack of a credit history made it difficult for new immigrants to borrow money from large financial institutions in America.

The inability to borrow money from banks in the mainstream economy affected Korean immigrants in several ways. About half of the Koreans who were interviewed reported that they were forced to pay cash for all of their purchases after arriving in America. They paid cash for daily purchases such as food and clothing. In addition, they paid cash for larger purchases such as automobiles and homes. One Korean merchant on the South Side of Chicago commented in detail about his financial situation when he first came to America:

> I bought my house in Madison, Wisconsin for cash because I don't have any credit in the United States. And the bank, they never gave me a loan, and only from bringing all the money from Korea, I bought the house in Madison, Wisconsin. First, I rent the apartment, but some apartment, they don't approve my credit, because I don't have any credit. So, I'm looking for the house, because I have a lot of money only. I bought the owned house in Madison, Wisconsin.

> Only cash. Five or six years I only spend money I bring from Korea, I need almost five thousand dollars cash a month. I don't have any mortgage for my house or payment for my car I bought by cash.

This highlights an important characteristic of the Korean merchants who were interviewed. About three-fourths of the Korean merchants who were interviewed on the South Side of Chicago had achieved a middle-class lifestyle before coming to America. However, once arriving in America, they found it difficult to maintain that lifestyle. They spent their savings, but could not find jobs similar to those they left behind in Korea. This situation caused them to consider entrepreneurship in the black community, since the costs of opening a business there was lower than in the white community. In the black community, Korean entrepreneurs could invest their personal savings and money borrowed from family members in a small business. While operating that business, they could establish a credit history and save money for the future. For the vast majority of the Korean merchants who were interviewed, businesses in the black community were initially seen as stepping stones.

Racial Discrimination as a Barrier to Entering the Mainstream Economy

In addition to language barriers, issues surrounding credentials, and barriers to obtaining credit, about half of the Korean merchants also discussed racial barriers to entering the mainstream economy. In fact, the Korean merchants' perceptions of anti-Korean sentiment in white American were a reflection of what scholars have identified as "host hostility" (Blalock 1967; Bonacich 1973; Bonacich and Modell 1980; Sway 1988; Zenner 1991). The belief among some Korean merchants that racism existed in white America, and that this created additional barriers to entry in the mainstream economy, limited the scope of economic alternatives available to them. When the issue of host hostility was taken into consideration, the social benefits of doing business in the black community were congruent with the financial benefits.

The Korean merchants who were interviewed focused on business activities in the black community, with most of them claiming that ninety-nine percent of their customers were black. About one-fourth of the Korean merchants indicated that they felt more comfortable doing business with blacks than with whites. A comment made by a Korean merchant, who was

asked if white-owned businesses discriminate against minority-owned businesses, illustrates how this issue manifests itself:

> I think they do. I think, I think more, actually I firmly believe, that we get more respect from the Afro-American distributors than a Caucasian company. I think the Caucasian manufacturers, I don't know, they sort of look down on you. I know they don't want to, but that's the feeling we get. Where, the ethnic distributor, they know they need us to distribute the item. Where with the Caucasian, they know the industry, they know the Koreans are the South Side, and they have Afro-American products they need to sell. So they know that we are imperative in their company. Ethnic, they would treat us better, with more respect, saying please take this. But I think when you deal with more like a _____(name of large white-owned company), or a company in the Caucasian market, they look at you as if they're doing you a favor. Like I have my general market, and your market's only ahh, but I'll still sell it to you kinda thing. I can tell when I try to open up accounts, I get totally different treatment from them.

This informant went on to explain that the differential treatment he received from white-owned, as opposed to black-owned, companies in the ethnic beauty aids industry, grew out of the stigma that whites attached to the industry and the black community. Because his business was located on the South Side of Chicago, this Korean merchant believed that white-owned companies were reluctant to do business with him.

Other Korean merchants indicated that white-owned companies attached little status to businesses in the black community. These businesses were considered to be small, unstable, and remote from the mainstream economy. However, a few of the Korean merchants were concerned that as their businesses grew in size, whites would become more interested in entering the ethnic beauty aids market. One Korean merchant thought that "white people" would become "afraid" if his business grew too quickly, and they would use "some other government power to reduce competition" from minority businesses. He explained how whites might mobilize institutional resources to reduce competition from minority-owned businesses:

> White people doing the other competition own big company, and they afraid minority company growing up. They do cut, don't give more, extend the lease, something. For example, somebody leases a building and they open the store, they growing up their business, and their business is very good. Some other company push the building owner, they don't extend the lease.

Concerns about whites taking actions to limit the economic activities of minorities grow out of prior experiences that Korean merchants had with host hostility. These attitudes affected later interactions between Korean merchants and mainstream institutions. For instance, some of the Korean merchants were not enthusiastic about local government, finding it to be unresponsive. Such feelings of alienation from mainstream society pushed Korean merchants to insulate themselves from white America, and locate their businesses in the black community. However, the Korean merchants who were interviewed did not consider the black community to be their permanent home.

Early Acculturation: Learning Stereotypes from Whites

Although host hostility drives Koreans entrepreneurs out of the mainstream economy, the exposure that Korean immigrants have to mainstream institutions infused stereotypes about blacks in their minds. Stereotypes and mainstream characterizations of black Americans are learned by Korean immigrants, and this encourages them to adopt a sojourning orientation. There are a number of ways that the Korean merchants who were interviewed learned about the black community before coming to America. About one-fourth of the Korean merchants reported that they had seen black soldiers during the Korean War. However, the wartime experiences that Koreans had with black soldiers was not always positive. One Korean merchant commented that, "Some of the Korean lady marry with the black soldier, and they immigrate to the United States, almost all divorced." In fact, he attributed this to a lack of commitment on the part of blacks, stating that, "Most of the black people, they don't like the married life." Jo's research (1992) indicates that the stereotypes that Koreans internalized about black Americans during the Korean War were reinforced through later contact that Koreans had with mainstream institutions.

In fact, a number of mainstream institutions were identified as sources of information about black Americans. About three-fourths of the Korean

merchants reported that they learned a great deal about the black community through the media before they decided to open their businesses. Korean immigrants learned about black Americans by watching popular movies, American televisions shows, and thorough stories on the evening news and in the mainstream press. Korean immigrants also found information about the black community in the Korean American media. More recent immigrants also learned about the black community while still in Korea, since the American media is increasingly accessible overseas. One Korean merchant pointed out that the growing presence of news stories about the black community was discouraging some Koreans from immigrating to the United States. He went on to say that more recent Korean immigrants were less willing to open businesses in the black community because of negative press coverage in the mainstream media. He described how some people in Korea perceived the black community as an extremely dangerous place to do business. They thought of the black community as a place where Korean merchants wear "flack jackets and carrying guns every day."

Mainstream institutions had a powerful influence on how Korean immigrants perceived the black community. Some Korean retailers discussed how they came to the black community with negative perceptions of blacks, and later moderated these attitudes as they learned more about the neighborhoods where their businesses were located. One Korean merchant commented on how his views of black America had changed:

> Right now my wife and I, I think very good coming to the South Side of Chicago, because at first my wife and I hate all black people, but right now I like the black people. Before I open _____ (store's name) in South Side area, I never like black people. I never know about the black people. But, right now I know the black society, the black people. And, a couple times I went to black people church, and prayed. We prayed and sing song together. Usually, the black people don't like the other skin color. The white people they are afraid, the oriental and some other skin color they don't like.

As they spent time in the black community, each of the Korean merchants became increasingly sensitized to the subtleties of racial discrimination in America society, and their initial stereotypes about black Americans moderated somewhat. As time passed, they developed a deeper understanding of the nature of black-white cleavages in society, as well as

Korean-white cleavages. Such cross-cutting issues increased the potential for greater social cohesion between Korean merchants and black consumers. However, the development of increased solidarity between Korean merchants and the black community was hampered by the maintenance of a sojourning orientation among Korean merchants. Although the initial stereotypes about black America that contributed to a sojourning orientation moderated over time, the possibility of becoming a scapegoat when social and economic tensions grow between blacks and whites reinforced the tendency of Korean merchants to adopt a sojourning orientation.

The Presence of Scapegoating: From the Assassination of Martin Luther King, Jr., to O.J. Simpson

When asked about their future business plans, a number of the Korean retailers expressed an interest in doing something different, outside of the black community. About three-fourths of the Korean merchants who were interviewed expressed concern about the unpredictable nature of black-white relations in society and the possible effect that social cleavages would have on their businesses. One Korean merchant commented that he was hesitant to purchase property in the black community and make other long term investments. In the following statement, it is clear that he was mainly concerned about racial tension in mainstream society:

> But buildings, I cannot invest in it down here. I don't know when we are gonna move out. That's bad business. You know in California, sometimes trouble and we have to move out if something go wrong.

Other Korean merchants made reference to the 1992 Los Angeles riot when they discussed the risks of doing business in the black community. However, they also spoke in general terms about their perception that the racial climate in America was deteriorating in the 1990s. Subsequently, they perceived a continual risk of becoming scapegoats as conflicts surrounding racial inequality in the broader society emerged.

In fact, the perceived threat of riots occurring in Chicago was, in part, based on prior history. For example, rioting on the South Side of Chicago occurred after the assassination of Martin Luther King, Jr., in 1968; it also occurred after the Chicago Bulls won the NBA championship in 1992 (Aldrich and Reiss 1970; Berkow 1977: 523-532; Min 1996: 94; Yoon 1997:

176-179). One Korean merchant described how the perceived threat of rioting affects the business climate on the South Side of Chicago:

> Everyone is somewhat scared about that type of problem. Trying to take as much caution as possible. Typically those kind of things happen at night. Hopefully, those things happen at night so nobody will be there. Once the initial shock is done and over with, nobody's gonna come back out again and do the same thing again. For example, when O.J. Simpson verdict came out, everybody was ready to fly. I shit you not. Everybody was literally one step out before cars were out there. And, they said if the verdict came out they were gonna just shut the door and get the hell out of here.

Conflicts between blacks and whites at the societal level are inherently linked to tensions that emerge between blacks and Koreans at the parochial level. Even issues that seem to be independent of mainstream institutions, such as differences in cultural traits and communication styles between blacks and Koreans, are tainted by the stereotypes of blacks and Koreans which emanate from white America (Stewart 1989). The net effect of these stereotypes, and the social tensions they produce, is the continuance of scapegoating and sojourning behavior. All are essential components of the middleman role that Korean merchants fill in black America.

Conclusion

In this article, the effects of stereotypes and other institutional factors in mainstream society were explored in relation to sojourning among middleman minorities in the black community. The first major section of this article examined middleman minority theory. It was argued that the concepts of scapegoating and sojourning were central to understanding middleman theory. The importance of these two issues was illustrated in the second section, through a discussion of the attitudes and perceptions of Korean merchants on the South Side of Chicago.

Mainstream institutions played an important role in shaping these attitudes and the sojourning orientation of Korean merchants in the black community. Korean merchants learned stereotypes about the black community through their exposure to white America. However, these attitudes were moderated as barriers to entering the mainstream economy prolonged the stay of Korean merchants in the black community. In essence,

prejudices Koreans learned from mainstream American society were tempered by their own experiences with discrimination and host hostility. In addition, Korean merchants were aware of black-white conflict in American society and the potential for scapegoating that it generated. As a result, Korean merchants adopted a sojourning orientation as a form of agency. In other words, they retained a sojourner's outlook in response to the potential of becoming a scapegoat in the wake of strife between blacks and whites.

The findings of this article have important implications for middleman minority theory. In part, they emphasize the pivotal role of sojourning behavior. Additionally, they provide a revised interpretation of sojourning behavior. In this revision, sojourning is seen as an orientation that is generated initially by a middleman minority's adoption of stereotypes about a subordinate group that are prevalent in the dominant culture, and later this orientation is reproduced when middleman minorities fear becoming scapegoats as a result of dominant-subordinate group conflict in the broader society. Critical to this conceptualization of sojourning is that the intention to temporarily pursue economic activity in one community or market setting in order to raise capital for future economic activity elsewhere is driven, in many respects, by factors inherently linked to a society's broader system of inequality. This indicated that black-Korean conflicts, which emerge and are played out at the parochial level, will ultimately be resolved when the societal forms of inequality producing them are reduced significantly.

Consequently, the manifestation of sojourning behavior among contemporary middleman minorities is evidence of the overarching effects of inequality in mainstream society. This realization obliges those serious about addressing interracial conflict to think of such issues locally, while acting upon them globally. To this end, future research should focus on other forms of societal, or even global, inequality which fuel local conflict.

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Postmodernism and *The Sociological Imagination*

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C. Wright Mills' timeless work, The Sociological Imagination, *is probably more popular and widely read today than ever before. At least three factors contribute to the book's current popularity: (1) its stature as a sociological classic; (2) a feeling among sociologists that sociology has become too fragmented and specialized, and needs to return to its roots (Sjoberg and Vaughn 1993; Tilman 1989; Vaughn 1993); and (3) the reading of the book by postmodern social scientists and students (e.g., Pfohl 1993a, 1993b; Richardson 1988, 1990, 1992a, 1992b, 1993; Tarter 1991). This article is concerned with the third reason for the book's recent success. It explores why postmodernists are drawn to* The Sociological Imagination, *what specific portions of the book are quoted by such scholars, and what kinds of arguments the postmodernists build out of these citations. It also considers how Mills, if he were alive today, would respond to various postmodern interpretations of his classic book.*

Why *The Sociological Imagination* Is Important to Postmodernists

Mills was among the first sociologists to use the term "postmodern" (1959: 166 and 183) and was one of the first to recognize that the Modern Age was giving way to a new era. Mills believed the new era was characterized by the unprecedented centralization of power and decision making (i.e., a centralization of economics, politics, and violence) in the hands of big corporations and the military. It was also the first time in American history that an increase in rationality and efficiency did not lead to an increase in personal freedom. According to Mills, these changes were disorienting to the general public, and without constructs or referents to guide them, ordinary people in the postmodern era would feel great unease: "Nowadays men often feel that their private lives are a series of traps. They sense that within their everyday worlds, they cannot overcome their troubles, and in this feeling, they are often quite correct" (1959: 3).