

## The Japanese American “Success Story” and the Intersection of Ethnicity, Race, and Class in the Post–Civil Rights Era

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### I. ETHNICITY THEORY AND A MINORITY’S SUCCESS STORY

In 1963, the year when Martin Luther King Jr. spoke of his dream at the height of the civil rights revolution, Nathan Glazer and Daniel Patrick Moynihan published a groundbreaking book titled *Beyond the Melting Pot*. This seminal work popularized a new sociological concept of ethnicity. It proclaimed a new era of ethnic diversity in the United States in which minority groups had neither to assimilate into one dominant culture nor melt into a crucible at the expense of their ethnic origin.<sup>1</sup>

The underlying theme of the book was an explanation of the different levels of achievement of several ethnoracial groups: Irish, Italians, Jews, Puerto Ricans, and blacks in New York City. Some groups had shown good performance in education and gained stable occupational statuses, while others were still suffering from low-level education, poverty, and a high crime rate. In *Beyond the Melting Pot*, Glazer and Moynihan defined “ethnic groups” in New York City as “interest groups,” with specific reference to the economic patterns of the ethnic communities. For example, they characterized blacks and Puerto Ricans as “unorganized and unskilled workers” and Jews as “small shopkeepers, professionals, [and] better-paid skilled workers.” They

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saw these economic positions as resulting from “inextricable” links between “rational” choices and “irrational” factors, such as family ties, fellow feeling, and historical contingencies.

They emphasized the “heterogeneity” of the city and the process by which “the assimilating power of American society and culture operated on immigrant groups in different ways, to make them, it is true, something they had not been, but still something distinct and identifiable.” The American society the book described consisted of ethnic groups that transformed under the influence of the American way of life but still maintained their distinct identity as ethnicities.<sup>2</sup> The book was a watershed in narrative histories of minorities in the United States.

Issues of affluence and poverty in the United States have combined with arguments over race and ethnicity. The story of immigrants who entered the United States with no money and were able to move into the middle-class through diligence and hard work has been regarded as evidence of the affluence of American society. This affluence is not only material success. It includes an American ideal that immigrants have contributed to the moral and cultural characteristics of the nation.<sup>3</sup> Thus, the discourse on the success and failure of minority groups has been one of the central components of the picture of the United States as a land of opportunity.

This article centers on the act of telling a minority’s success story in the post-civil rights era, that is, the period after the civil right movement abolished legal discrimination against people of color. The question of why some minority groups succeed and some groups fail has involved stories about the American dream—or nightmare—in a time of cultural diversity and full recognition of ethnicity. Stories about the success and failure of minority groups have defined an interlocking relationship among ethnicity, race, and class, and carved out a new conceptual field in the study of American affluence and poverty.

The ethnicity theory proposed by Glazer and Moynihan in 1963 was a sociological answer to the question of why some groups succeed and some do not. It has led to intense arguments about the achievements and problems of ethnoracial groups in the post-civil rights era. In section 2 of this article, I review the essential elements of ethnicity theory and counterarguments from two other theoretical positions, namely those of race and class. In reacting against ethnicity theory, race and class have shaped a familiar dichotomy in the discussion of urban poverty of African Americans. Then in section 3, I analyze the “success story” of Japanese Americans as a typical discourse on minority achievement. This analysis is based on ethnoracial formation the-

ory, which deals with the conceptual relationship of ethnicity and race in a particular historical context. It explores how sociological explanations about one ethnic group do not simply describe a particular case but also constitute a normative model of intergroup relations in the United States after the civil rights movement. Finally, in section 4, I discuss theoretical implications of the Japanese American minority's success story in consideration of the relationship of ethnicity, race, and class in twenty-first-century America.

## II. ETHNICITY VERSUS RACE VERSUS CLASS

### A. Ethnicity Theory and Its Discontents

The essential feature of ethnicity theory, as Glazer and Moynihan note, is the combination of "rational" choice and "irrational" ties to a collectivity. Ethnicity is one of the strong resources for minority groups to mobilize around economic survival and development in an American social structure that offers limited opportunities for social mobility. But what makes ethnicity effective is emotional attachment to family, relatives, friends, and members of the ethnic group. In the first half of the twentieth century, sociologists thought that bureaucratic and individualized relations would replace emotional ties to local groups. But ethnicity theorists in the late twentieth century emphasized that emotional attachment makes ethnic identity solid and promotes collective action based on shared ethnic identity.<sup>4</sup>

All ethnoracial groups, however, do not take advantage of ethnicity at the same level. Ethnicity theorists assume that the effectiveness of irrational factors depends on the characteristics of a group's culture. They observe how effective family structure, social networking, communal organizations, and cultural behaviors among group members account for survival and achievement. In the sociological study of immigrants' success, voluntary immigration, rather than forced displacement, is thought to be the key. Voluntary immigrants are often thought to be in a more advantaged position than the descendants of enslaved African Americans because the former keep useful links with their homeland, which the latter have long lost. For example, Ivan H. Light in 1972 proposed that the higher rate of self-employment by black immigrants from West Indian islands is a result of their voluntariness as immigrants. West Indians would be more diligent and productive in their efforts toward socioeconomic advancement than African Americans because of their strong motivation for survival and success in the foreign country and communal ties with fellow immigrants.<sup>5</sup> From the perspective of ethnicity, success or failure depends on such social and cultural backgrounds of mi-

nority groups.

The rationality of irrational ties, however, has two sides in racial relations in the United States. It proposes a new vision of a plural America. Ethnicity theorists have collected considerable evidence that ethnic groups can integrate into American society with their own ethnic identity intact. At the same time, their analysis often falls into an “immigrant analogy” that underestimates the difference between African Americans and more recent immigrants.<sup>6</sup> It expects racial minorities to overcome their difficulties by themselves. This expectation of “immigrant analogy,” however, actually bolsters the differentiation between immigrant groups and racial minorities rather than helping to realize a new pluralist vision.

According to sociologist Stephen Steinberg, ethnicity theory fashions a popular “myth” about “ethnic heroes” who have “the cultural values and moral fiber” that “racial villains” are lacking. Such a myth obscures the fact that “successful” immigrant minorities such as Asians and West Indians move to the United States selectively. Their success could be explained by neither “genes” nor “culture.” The privileged class positions in education, skills, and other human capitals obtained before migration lead them to be in advantageous positions in the destination country.<sup>7</sup> In addition, the “immigrant analogy” and the “ethnic myth” treat racial oppression of people of color as no different than that faced by white ethnic groups. In this myth, ethnic minorities should be able to overcome the legacies of slavery, segregation, economic deprivation, and second-class citizenship through collective community effort, just as white ethnic groups have done successfully.

Thus, class and race provide two versions of a fundamental criticism of ethnicity theory. Both reveal that its optimism has easily served as a means to blame unsuccessful minorities because of their “dysfunctional” community. Class theorists highlight how immigrants and racial minorities are locked into the segmented labor market and how ethnicity causes conflicts and tensions among minority workers in low-paid and unskilled labor.<sup>8</sup> The race approach also states that the racialized experience of people of color must not be reduced to a flat and nonhistorical belief in an “ethnic pattern.”<sup>9</sup> From the perspective of class and race, social constraints are the most important explanation of the success and failure of ethnoracial minorities. They challenge the standardization of the middle-class white ethnic experience for evaluating all ethnoracial issues in the United States.

## B. Race versus Class: The “Underclass” Debate

Although race and class share in their criticism of ethnicity theorists, they

clash with each other on the issues of poverty in inner cities and the social policy toward racial minorities. Although civil rights legislation abolished most legal discriminatory measures and promoted affirmative action for racial minorities in education and employment, poverty in urban ghettos and unfair treatment of the "underclass" have largely remained unsolved and controversial problems. African American sociologist William Julius Wilson in 1978 concluded that "race-specific" affirmative policies did not reach "the truly disadvantaged" in impoverished inner-city neighborhoods. He proposed a "universal" approach based on class beyond color lines. His sensational rhetoric about the "declining significance of race" triggered a controversy over which is more central to urban ghetto problems, race or class.<sup>10</sup>

The counterargument to Wilson's universalism demonstrates that residential segregation and discrimination based on race still exist in urban America and that it has been detrimental to African Americans in their efforts to achieve upward mobility. Race theorists have insisted that institutional racism in housing, employment, and education has reinforced the gap between white and nonwhite racial groups, despite the achievements of the civil rights movements.<sup>11</sup> At the same time, conservatives who attribute inner-city poverty to the breakdown of black families interpret Wilson's argument as supporting political backlash against civil rights legislation and welfare policy. They believe that civil rights legislation has reinforced the dependency mentality of racial groups and even promotes "reverse discrimination" against lower- and middle-class white males. The "underclass" debate has created a clear divide between a "universal" class approach and its race-specific criticism.<sup>12</sup>

Interestingly, ethnicity theorists also turned against race-specific policies in the 1970s. In their long 1970 introduction to the second edition of *Beyond the Melting Pot* the authors acknowledged that their ethnicity hypothesis was too optimistic about the future of African Americans in New York City. However, their revision did not lead to a reflective reconsideration about their underestimation of race and class factors. Focusing on the rise of a black and other minority middle-class as a result of policy changes in the 1960s, they criticized "militant" identity politics based on the illusion that "all blacks were poor and all whites were affluent." They opposed "public action on the basis of group membership" and instead favored it on the basis of "individual human qualities."<sup>13</sup> Subsequently, firmly based on his belief in individualism, Nathan Glazer became a powerful opponent of affirmative action in the 1970s and made a counterargument to multiculturalism in the 1980s and 1990s.<sup>14</sup>

Ethnicity, race, and class as sociological concepts have gotten entangled with political discourse on social policy in the post-civil rights era. Briefly, while race and class face off on the issue of an urban “underclass,” ethnicity theory has formularized an explanation of how minority groups “make it” in the United States. In considering the affluence and poverty of ethnoracial groups, however, it is necessary to unravel the triangular relationship among ethnicity, race, and class and rethink the segmentation between poverty problems of “racial villains” and success stories of “ethnic heroes.”

### C. Ethnoracial Formation Theory

To pursue this challenging task, I examine the success story of Japanese Americans as a nonwhite group. Steinberg refers to Asian Americans, including Japanese, as a new case of “ethnic heroes” following the path of European immigrants. Social scientists also refer to Japanese Americans as a “model minority,” whom other disadvantaged minorities such as blacks and Latinos should emulate.<sup>15</sup> The purpose of this article is not to judge whether the Japanese American “success” is true or not, or whether the model minority theory is valid or not.<sup>16</sup> Rather, I aim to place the Japanese American “success story” in the broader discourse of ethnicity, race, and class in the post-civil rights era.

The point is that Japanese Americans are thought to be an ethnic group as well as a racial group. Thus, an integrated theoretical framework of ethnicity and race is necessary to examine their story. Ethnoracial formation theory is one attempt to tackle this theme. It comes from the racial formation theory proposed by Michael Omi and Howard Winant. Omi and Winant criticize ethnicity theory not only for its “immigrant analogy” but also as a discourse of *racialization* in the post-civil rights era. From the viewpoint of racial formation theory, ethnicity discourse is a social force that justifies the advantageous positions of white people and reinforces racial hierarchy. It tells a normative narrative about what American society should be like and how each ethnic group should behave in it. In the racial formation paradigm, race is redefined as a social power that formulates cultural representation and forces racial inequality into social structure.<sup>17</sup> We cannot deny the ubiquity of race in American history. Legacies of slavery, westward conquest, white supremacy, racial segregation, and exclusion of aliens remain salient in contemporary American society. Racism is still deeply inscribed in the daily lives and identities of racial minorities.

Racial formation, however, does not contemplate conceptual relations between race and ethnicity. While accepting criticism of the ethnicity para-

digm by racial formation theory, ethnoracial formation theory defines both ethnicity and race as social forces that rule two different kinds of group formation in the United States.<sup>18</sup> It is a comprehensive perspective that sees cultural representation of collectivity producing a broad social structure in which ethnicity and race intersect. Ethnicity is not merely the negative paraphrase of race. It expresses a different dimension of minority group experience in its own way. Ethnicity, as a technical term, is a relatively new concept, but its basic idea has already become embedded in the philosophical tradition of "*e pluribus unum*" (out of many, one). Ethnoracial formation theory underlines the simultaneity and contradiction of ethnicity and race as forces of social formation.

The basic principle of American ethnicity is that each ethnic group is treated as an equal member of a plural society. In the vision of ethnic pluralism, intergroup relations are imagined to be equal or *horizontal*.<sup>19</sup> *Ethnicization* is the process by which a group finds in-group solidarity based on collective identity and differentiates itself as one ethnic group on the same level with all other groups. This egalitarianism has not only driven Americans to abolish racial segregation and improve the situation of racial minorities, but it at times has denied special treatment to disadvantaged minorities, in such ways as through affirmative action.

On the other hand, the principle of race implies that each racial group defines itself within a *vertical* hierarchy in the United States. The view of a racial hierarchy is one in which, historically, "white" has been defined as a dominant, superior, and legitimate group and "colored" as a subordinate, inferior, and second-class group. In the process of *racialization*, a minority group identifies itself in terms of its rank in the racial ordering under the hegemonic American racial ideology. According to racial formation theory, even though the civil rights movement achieved legal abolition of racial discrimination, racial ordering dominated by "whiteness" has remained influential in employment, education, housing, and criminalization in urban America.<sup>20</sup>

Ethnoracial formation is a sociological perspective in understanding the making and remaking of groupness in the United States as an interaction of ethnicization and racialization. Ethnicization usually accompanies racialization and urges us to change the basic image of ethnicity and race.<sup>21</sup> Ethnoracial formation treats both ethnicity and race as principles of social formation as well as ways of collective identification.<sup>22</sup> The difference between ethnicity and race comes in the articulation of a social vision: horizontal egalitarianism and hierarchical ordering. The ethnoracial formation approach con-

siders that identity, cultural patterns, way of life, and state of community of a group may work as significant constituents of the normative rules in a larger multiethnic society.

In the next section, I analyze the so-called success story of Japanese Americans from the perspective of ethnoracial formation theory. Through the discourse of “ethnic heroes,” I look at the double process of ethnicization and racialization in inequality in the United States in the post-civil rights era.

### III. ETHNORACIAL FORMATION OF THE JAPANESE AMERICAN “SUCCESS STORY”

#### A. A Success Story and Model for American Ethnic Groups

In 1966 *the New York Times Magazine* published a significant essay, “Success Story, Japanese-American Style,” written by sociologist William Petersen.<sup>23</sup> The essay has become known as a typical version of a success story of an American ethnic group. The author was a prominent scholar in ethnicity studies who later contributed an article, “Concepts of Ethnicity,” to *the Harvard Encyclopedia of American Ethnic Groups*, a definitive collection of theoretical and empirical essays on ethnicity in the United States.<sup>24</sup> The *New York Times Magazine* is known to have a great influence on its nationwide intellectual and liberal readership. Success stories of nonwhite minority group were a hot topic in journalism and scholarship in the late 1960s and early 1970s.<sup>25</sup> Petersen’s essay broke new ground in the discourse about how a nonwhite minority could make it in the United States.

In “Success Story,” Petersen documented the historical and contemporary situation of Japanese Americans. He described Japanese American success as “good citizenship” and “a generally affluent and, for the most part, highly Americanized life” in “a country whose patron saint is the Horatio Alger hero.” The essay contrasted the success of Japanese Americans with the failure of African Americans, whose “self-defeating apathy” or “hatred” is “so all-consuming as to be self-destructive” because of the cumulative degradation under American racism.<sup>26</sup>

To emphasize the contrast between two groups, Petersen spent a certain part of his essay in describing the oppression of Japanese in the United States in the first half of the twentieth century. These included the “Yellow Peril” stereotype, discrimination in employment, denial of the right to own land, the 1924 ban on new immigration from Japan, and the forced evacuation to internment camps during the World War II.<sup>27</sup> Petersen stressed that even such terrible injustice did not destroy identity, community, and trust of

Japanese Americans in American civic culture:

Denied citizenship, the Japanese were exceptionally law-abiding alien residents . . . Denied access to many urban jobs, both white-collar and manual, they undertook menial tasks with such perseverance that they achieved a modest success. Denied ownership of the land, they acquired control through one or another subterfuge and by intensive cultivation of their small plots, helped convert the California desert into a fabulous agricultural land.<sup>28</sup>

According to Petersen, the remarkable aspect of the Japanese American success story is that the group has accomplished such an achievement *without* any governmental support and *despite* the hardships of American racism. The hardships never led Japanese in the United States to either self-desperation or dependence on welfare policies. Rather, their law-abiding spirit and loyalty to the American nation are seen as crucial assets that led to their survival and achievement. Although Petersen spent several paragraphs on racial oppression, he concluded that "the transcendental values of American middle-class life" brought "security and comfort" to Japanese Americans. He noted that Japanese immigrants sent their children to American colleges to acquire skills and degrees in "business administration, optometry, engineering, and other middle-level profession[s]" because of their trust in American middle-class values.<sup>29</sup>

Finally, Petersen placed the Japanese American success story within the historical narrative of the American nation. His view accorded with the cultural pluralism advocated by many American ethnicity theorists:

The history of the United States, it is sometimes forgotten, is the history of the diverse groups that make up our population, and thus of their frequent discord and usual eventual cooperation.<sup>30</sup>

As an example of "frequent discord and usual eventual cooperation," Petersen took up the historical experience of European immigrants who, at first, met hostility and eventually "climbed out of the slums" and "acquired social respect and dignity." According to him, the same kind of success story did not seem to hold true for "such nonwhites as Negroes, Indians, Mexicans, Chinese and Filipinos." The Japanese American success story, Petersen claimed, is the "outstanding exception." How did Japanese acquire a unique cultural attitude that is exceptionally favorable to American middle-class culture? As an enlightened sociologist, Petersen sought "persistent patterns" that Japanese cultural terms imply. Accordingly, he attempted a functionalist explanation of culture and religion by citing sociologist Robert

Bellah's famous thesis about the similarity between "Tokugawa religion" in Japan and "the Protestant ethic" in Western society.<sup>31</sup> In the discussion of Japanese culture, he came to a paradoxical conclusion. In general, a minority group embedded within the American culture takes the shortest possible route to adjustment and achievement in American society. But his conclusion is quite the opposite:

The Japanese, on the contrary, could climb over the highest barriers our racists were able to fashion in part because of their meaningful links with an alien culture. Pride in their heritage and shame for any reduction in its only partly legendary glory—these were sufficient to carry the group through its travail.<sup>32</sup>

The combination of "meaningful links" to homeland and trust in American middle-class culture appears to be the key to understanding the success story of this nonwhite minority. Petersen's sociological functionalism searches for similar cultural patterns between the "alien" culture and American middle-class culture. Such cultural patterns enable minorities to successfully adjust to American society. For Petersen and other ethnicity theorists, an ethnic culture that is compatible with the American middle-class is a foundation for the new American pluralism.

For Petersen, the Japanese American success was not only measured by economic upward mobility from low-paid farm labor to small entrepreneurship, and thence, to middle-class white-collar professions for the second and third generations. He emphasized that the achievement was accompanied by moral and cultural development as a member of multiethnic America. Petersen thought that Japanese Americans could be a "model" for other racial minority groups who sought to integrate into the American mainstream. The Japanese American success story proposes that a cultural attitude of self-reliance and independence from relying on welfare are what is required for the new Horatio Algiers, whatever their skin color and national origin. Ethnicity, rather than race, was the symbolic concept for this new national narrative.

#### B. Critique of the Japanese American "Success Story"

From the viewpoint of ethnoracial formation, the Japanese American "success story" is a performative statement of the ethnic pluralist ideal. Its principal appeal is that the high achievement demonstrated by Japanese Americans has been without any governmental aid. Japanese Americans are considered respectable because they have overcome immense obstacles by taking advantage of their cultural patterns. This statement is an implicit criticism of racial minorities who depend on welfare, seem to readily commit

crimes, and fall into other self-destructive activities. It celebrates a successful minority as a “model” of integration that other minorities ought to follow. The success story offers a basis for ranking groups that engage in self-help in a higher position than more dependent groups.

The success story contains two messages delivered to American society. One message is that the success of Japanese Americans is proof of the potential for American pluralism. The success story demonstrates that a minority that trusts in American values can fulfill their dream even if they are faced with racism and discrimination. The other is that there is a rule of ordering in the racial hierarchy. Ranking has shifted from skin color to a group’s ability to adopt American middle-class culture. This new rule has eventually maintained and reinforced racial hierarchy in the United States. The Japanese American success story pictured the new pluralism-cum-racism as a pattern of ethnoracial formation in the post-civil rights era.

Petersen’s story was also a discourse that the Japanese American community itself could identify with. Actually, the article was a result of collaboration by ethnicity theorists and Japanese American community leaders. Petersen owed the details in his article to information from community *insiders*. Harry H. Kitano, a social psychologist at the University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA), gave Petersen his basic framework for thinking about law-abidingness and low sociopathological phenomena among Japanese Americans. In addition, Frank Chuman, the lawyer and chairman of the Japanese American Citizens League (JACL), which was portrayed in the article as “the group’s main political voice,” also contributed insider details.<sup>33</sup> Chuman was one of the main organizers of a collaborative sociological and historical research project called the Japanese American Research Project (JARP) with UCLA that started in 1962. Through the JARP, JACL sought the “definitive history” of Japanese Americans, emphasizing achievement, loyalty, and contributions to American society, as well as their struggle against racism.<sup>34</sup> JACL’s cultural self-image was very close to Petersen’s model minority thesis. Thus, ethnicity scholars and Japanese American leaders shared similar interests and frameworks. While reinforcing the details provided by Japanese American insiders, Petersen incorporated the self-image constructed by JACL leaders into his sociological explanation of the remarkable success story.

Moreover, JACL leaders made an effort to spread the self-image represented in the “success story” to the broader Japanese American population. They reprinted Petersen’s *New York Times Magazine* article in *Pacific Citizen*, the organization’s official weekly newspaper, which had a large reader-

ship among Nisei.<sup>35</sup> Loyal JACLers who held political leadership positions in the community were willing to internalize the sociological interpretation of a model minority as an ethnic characteristic of Japanese Americans. This means that the Japanese American community accepted normative rules for gauging the level of success and failure of minority groups. In this way, they placed themselves at the upper level in a hierarchical racial pyramid that distinguished “self-help” and “dependence.”

Thus, ethnoracial formation theory grasps the dual process of ethnicization and racialization through a discourse about a group of people and its effect on resource distribution. The success story highlights how Japanese Americans have differentiated themselves from other racial groups. One implication of Petersen’s story about Japanese Americans is the offering of a normative discourse for a minority’s adaptation, one that also justifies intergroup inequality.

Even though this analysis clarifies simultaneousness of ethnicization and racialization, it misses an important dimension of social formation. The perspective of racialization as the identification in racial hierarchy provides a critical view to the vision of horizontal society as seen by ethnicity theorists. However, race is not the only categorical principle in a hierarchical society. Class, gender, and sexuality also impose cleavages and inequality among members of a society.<sup>36</sup> The ethnoracial phenomenon is a complex accumulation of differentiation and identification shaped by these different social categories. The study of ethnoracial group should take account of each of them.

For example, the critical perspective of class tells a different kind of Japanese American success story. Petersen’s success story says nothing about the class backgrounds of Japanese immigrants in the early twentieth century. Japanese immigrants who were self-employed in retailing and farming in Los Angeles were likely to have experienced self-employment in their homeland. Economic historian Masao Suzuki insists that the pattern of Japanese emigration to the United States after 1908 was “selective,” consisting mainly of people from professional, business, and skilled backgrounds. He also clarifies that the class advantages of the Japanese immigrant population was a by-product of the return migration of those previously engaged in labor in the United States. The Japanese American success story depicted by Petersen and JACLers rarely mentioned Japanese immigrants who returned to their homeland.<sup>37</sup>

The Japanese American success story also ignores class divisions among second-generation Japanese Americans. A telling example is the way the

proponents of the success story treat the "kibei" issue in the Japanese American community. Kibei were Nisei who were educated in Japan and returned to the United States. Japanese American studies since the 1990s have focused on segmentations between the JACLers and working-class Japanese Americans, including kibei. The JACLers were overwhelmingly college-educated professionals and entrepreneurs who were interested in the Americanization of the Japanese American community. On the other hand, many kibei were from less-educated, rural or agricultural backgrounds and refused to accept JACL cooperation with the wartime evacuation.<sup>38</sup> These analyses tell us that the Japanese American success story can be interpreted as JACL's class politics aiming to impose its self-image on the entire Japanese American population.

Thus, the Japanese American success story is not a narrative based on a neutral observation. From the perspective of race, it overtly dismisses the destructive influence of racism on people of color. In addition, examining class backgrounds and in-group inequality exposes the race-centered approach's failure to consider power relations and heterogeneity *within* the community. Both race and class theories refuse to accept a horizontal or egalitarian hypothesis in the ethnic success story.

However, there is a critical disagreement between race and class theorists over the nature of hierarchy in American society. Class theorists criticize the antiracism approach for tending to depict the Japanese community as a homogeneous victim of American racism. In contrast, critics using the race perspective argue that the Marxist approach degrades race as a "false consciousness" that makes minorities blind to the "real" politics based on class awareness. Race theories resist class reductionism just as class theorists deny ethnocentrism in race studies.

Three-sided arguments about ethnicity, race, and class in the Japanese American success story are embedded in the discursive structure of ethnoraacial formation in the post-civil rights era. There have been two types of divide. The first concerns the nature of group making and its consequent social images: *horizontal differentiation* in a plural egalitarian society versus *vertical ordering* in a hierarchical society. In this divide, race and class theorists share a criticism of ethnicity studies. The second conflict is about the principle of hierarchy. Debates on urban poverty since the 1970s have divided social scientists into *class universalists* and *race particularists*. Race and class have clashed over which principle is more central to inequality in the United States.

### C. How to Overcome Theoretical Divides in Japanese American Studies

Japanese American studies have challenged the divides along the lines of race, ethnicity, and class since the late twentieth century. For example, the main concern of race studies shifted from simple ethnocentrism to an approach that is more sensitive to complicated power relations within the Japanese American community. Since the late 1980s, especially after the success of the internment redress movement, many social historians and critical Asian American scholars have considered the complexities of race, class, and gender in Japanese American history.<sup>39</sup> They emphasize heterogeneity, difference, fluidity, mobility, and conflict among the Japanese population in American society. Race, class, and gender approaches have formed a united front against the sociological interpretation based on ethnicity and assimilation theories and their usage of the success story as a model. Finally, the Japanese American success story has been demythified by critical American Studies scholars.

However, there is still one theoretical cleavage within Japanese American studies. The first divide between the horizontal differentiation and the vertical hierarchies has deepened while critical scholars have concentrated on challenging the second divide and the model-minority image. Through the development of a social history of the Japanese American community, Japanese American Studies has moved away from the sociological theory of ethnicity. Since the criticism of the second divide has spread in the field, there have been few works that have seriously reexamined the “success story” of Japanese Americans.<sup>40</sup> But ethnoracial formation theory aims to shed light on both ethnicization as a horizontal differentiation and racialization in a vertical hierarchy. This theory attempts to take the issues of ethnicity back to Japanese Americans and to bridge the first divides. In this new project, the Japanese American success story will reappear as a subject of research on ethnoracial formation.

Thus, the Japanese American success story will be reinterpreted as an integrated effort of horizontal differentiation and vertical discrimination within American society. Horizontal differentiation is not only a discourse of camouflaging racial and class dominance as race and class theorists have unveiled. It also reflects the social reality of minority groupings, even though it contains biased interpretations, incorrect historical descriptions, and sociologically naïve functionalism and cultural reductionism.<sup>41</sup> The ethnoracial formation approach for Japanese American Studies focuses on the process by which Japanese Americans have embodied the success story as a form of identification with an ethnic and racial group and on the social con-

sequences. In fact, the success story did play a significant role in the redress movement of Japanese Americans in the 1970s and the 1980s. And through the movement, Japanese American second and third generations discovered their collective identity as a model minority of loyal citizens—*despite* government's denial of civil rights during the wartime internment—and as a successful, "hard-working" people—*despite* the destructive racism. Also, many third-generation Japanese Americans were born and raised at the time when the success story was popularized.<sup>42</sup> Ethnoracial formation studies should recognize that the success story is a powerful frame for identification as an American ethnic group as well as an academic description of a group of people.

The question concerning the Japanese American success story is contradictory. Analysts must uncover that the celebration of "ethnic heroes" inscribes the hierarchical order within the social structure. But the success story has already been incorporated into Japanese American ethnicity and has helped establish the social world in which they live. What Japanese American Studies needs is to affirm the fact of ethnicization while keeping a critical view of it.<sup>43</sup> Celebration and blaming, identification and discrimination, egalitarianism and hierarchy are all viable subjects in the new sociological study of ethnicity.

Finally, the reaffirmation of ethnicity in Japanese American Studies will lead us to look at the immigrant backgrounds of Japanese Americans. Ethnicity theorists have emphasized the immigrant backgrounds, including a mentality of hard work, ethnic solidarity, and distinctive cultural values, as the secret of success. Petersen adopted this hypothesis in his case study of Japanese Americans. However, this "immigrant analogy" has been criticized for regarding white immigrants' experiences in the same light as the oppression experienced by people of color and demanding that they follow the path as white immigrants. The emerging transnational approach requires us to reconsider the analogy by thinking of immigrants as agents who manage to live across national borders.<sup>44</sup>

The transnationalist approach offers a different story of their success. Masao Suzuki's transnational thesis is that Japanese immigrant high achievement is a result of return migration of many relatively low-class migrants.<sup>45</sup> And what Petersen called "cultural patterns" or "meaningful links to homeland" were actually constructed and reconstructed through these migrants' experience of movement and settlement in the United States. For example, ethnic solidarity among "fellow" Japanese immigrants before World War II was a by-product of competition and conflict among Japanese with different

occupations or with different prefectural origins but who were all under attack as “Japs” by American racists.<sup>46</sup> It was a historical construction rather than a “cultural trait” that had been shared before their migration.

Transnationalism explores the simultaneity of ethnicization and racialization of Japanese immigrants in the social world in which they have lived and their interpretation of the movement, community, and racism in the United States. It illuminates the complex struggle of immigrant groups to adapt to American society and their consequent placement into the racial hierarchy there. The racial hierarchy structures different immigrants’ experiences according to the rules of vertical ordering such as those for race, class, and gender. The “immigrant analogy” should be reinterpreted as one of the discourses of the ethnoracial formation of immigrant groups of color such as Japanese Americans.

#### IV. A MINORITY’S SUCCESS STORY IN THE TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY

In the twenty-first century, circumstances of ethnicity and race are dramatically changed from those in the 1960s when Glazer and Moynihan proposed their concept of ethnicity and their pluralist ideal. The massive influx of nonwhite immigrants from the Western Hemisphere and Asia has transformed the image of “mainstream” to something more diverse and heterogeneous.<sup>47</sup> Sociologists have reported that racial minorities still suffer from residential segregation, employment discrimination, economic instability, and low education.<sup>48</sup> Plus, globalization and economic restructuring have devastated inner-city neighborhoods and their black and Latino residents.<sup>49</sup>

In the middle of big change, a minority’s success story remains a powerful discourse of affluence and cultural diversity in the United States. With the color line and poverty still critical problems for racial minorities, conventional sociologists summons the Japanese American story to try to persuade that racial minorities can incorporate and overcome social problems on their own.<sup>50</sup>

However, the new nonwhite immigration is complicating the problems of the intersection of race, ethnicity, and class. Sociological works today find that the traditional black-white color line has transformed into a black-non-black line. It divides blacks and other nonwhites sharply as a result of the intersection of historical race relations and the changes brought by the influx of new immigrants.<sup>51</sup> Under such a shift, stories about success and failure among ethnoracial groups today are powerful methods of racialization. For example, middle-class West Indian immigrants often identify themselves

with their national origins rather than as blacks.<sup>52</sup> And the second generation follows differentiated paths along with the race-class positions. Minority and poor youth in inner-city areas are likely to be involved in "underclass" and gang "culture" in their neighborhoods. Sociologists call such downward mobility "segmented assimilation."<sup>53</sup> These findings tell us that ethnicization for new immigrants usually accompanies a differentiation or identification with "blackness" rooted in American racial history.

The critique of the Japanese American success story has some implications for grasping this ethnoracial formation in the twenty-first century. Minority success stories have been a precondition for the adaptation of post-1965 immigrants. New Americans are finding their place in the discursive formation intersecting horizontal differentiation of ethnicity and vertical hierarchy of race and class.<sup>54</sup> Success stories of nonwhite minority groups have become more pervasive in popular culture and daily conversations today than in the 1960s.<sup>55</sup> Despite the demythification of the Japanese American success story by critical Asian American scholars, it has still been a source of collective identity for members of a plural America and a powerful discourse for unequal social formation. What is needed is not only demythifying the story but placing it in the process of group-making in ethnoracial relations in the post-civil rights era.

Therefore, a sociological inquiry into ethnoracial relations in the new century should respond to the question of success and failure of minorities in a different way from the one proposed by conventional ethnicity theory in the 1960s. It should take account of immigrants' transnational lives, the power structure of collectivities including class and gender within and across the communities, and the burdens of American racism. Moreover it should not forget that telling success stories of minorities by social scientists affects unequal ethnoracial relations in the United States.<sup>56</sup> Today, ethnoracial minorities embody the discourse of success and failure as narratives for identification. Inquiry into the meaning of the storytelling opens a way for a new sociological examination of the state of ethnoracial formation. As a discourse of social formation, the question of success is sociologically valid even in twenty-first-century America, where the meaning of affluence and poverty are contested in multifaceted relations involving race, ethnicity, and class.

#### NOTES

<sup>1</sup> Nathan Glazer and Daniel Patrick Moynihan, *Beyond the Melting Pot: The Negroes, Puerto Ricans, Jews, Italians, and Irish of New York City*, 2nd ed. (Cambridge: MIT Press,

1970).

<sup>2</sup> Glazer and Moynihan, *Beyond the Melting Pot*, 11–19.

<sup>3</sup> John F. Kennedy, *A Nation of Immigrants*, rev. and enlarged ed. (New York: Harper and Row, 1964), 64–68.

<sup>4</sup> Robert E. Park and his fellow sociologists of the Chicago school in the early twentieth century developed the assimilationist hypothesis in which ethnic attachment would disappear as the group adapted to modern society. But liberal sociologists in the 1960s were more interested in the effectiveness of the emotional and affective dimension of ethnicity. See Daniel Bell, “Ethnicity and Social Change,” in *Ethnicity: Theory and Experience*, ed. Nathan Glazer and Daniel Patrick Moynihan (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1970), 169.

<sup>5</sup> Ivan H. Light, *Ethnic Enterprise in America: Business and Welfare among Japanese, Chinese, and Blacks* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1972).

<sup>6</sup> Robert Blauner, *Racial Oppression in America* (New York: Harper and Row, 1972), 10.

<sup>7</sup> Stephen Steinberg, *Ethnic Myth: Ethnicity, Race and Class in the United States* (1981; repr., Boston: Beacon Press, 2001), 263–80.

<sup>8</sup> Edna Bonacich, “A Theory of Ethnic Antagonism: The Split Labor Market,” *American Sociological Review* 37, no. 5 (1972): 547–59.

<sup>9</sup> Ronald Takaki, “Reflection on Racial Patterns in America: An Historical Perspective,” *Ethnicity and Public Policy* 1 (1982): 1–23.

<sup>10</sup> William Julius Wilson, *The Declining Significance of Race: Blacks and Changing American Institutions* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1978); William Julius Wilson, *The Truly Disadvantaged: The Inner City, the Underclass, and Public Policy* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987).

<sup>11</sup> Douglass S. Massey and Nancy A. Denton, *American Apartheid: Segregation and the Making of the Underclass* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1993); Joleen Kirschenman and Kathryn M. Neckerman, “‘We’d Love to Hire Them, But . . .’: The Meaning of Race for Employers,” in *The Urban Underclass*, ed. Christopher Jencks and Paul E. Peterson (Washington, DC: Brookings Institution Press, 1991), 203–32.

<sup>12</sup> Thomas J. Sugrue, *Not Even Past: Barack Obama and the Burden of Race* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2010), 77–78, 83–84.

<sup>13</sup> Glazer and Moynihan, *Beyond the Melting Pot*, lv, lxxxv.

<sup>14</sup> Nathan Glazer, *Affirmative Discrimination: Ethnic Inequality and Public Policy* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1975); Nathan Glazer, *We Are All Multiculturalists Now* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1997).

<sup>15</sup> Thomas Sowell, *Economics and Politics of Race: An International Perspective* (New York: Morrow, 1983).

<sup>16</sup> William Darity Jr. and his collaborators attribute the success of Japanese and Chinese immigrants to their high social status before migration. William Darity Jr., Jason Dietrich, and David K. Guilkey, “Racial and Ethnic Inequality in the United States: A Secular Perspective,” *American Economic Review* 87, no. 2 (1997): 301–5. On criticism of model-minority theory as an “ideological weapon against blacks,” see Vijay Prashad, *The Karma of Brown Folk* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2000), 168.

<sup>17</sup> Michael Omi and Howard Winant, *Racial Formation in the United States: From the 1960s to the 1990s* (New York: Routledge, 1994), 20–23, 56.

<sup>18</sup> About the basic concept and theoretical backgrounds of ethnoracial formation theory, see Fuminori Minamikawa, “*Nikkei Amerikajin*” no *Rekishu Shakaigaku: Esunishiti, Jinshu, Nashonarizumu* [Historical sociology of “Japanese Americans”: Ethnicity, race, and nationalism] (Tokyo: Sairyusha, 2007), chap. 1.

<sup>19</sup> The term “horizontal” comes from Benedict Anderson’s definition of the relationship among people who belong to the same nation as “horizontal comradeship.” Benedict Ander-

son, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origins and Spread of Nationalism* (1983; repr., London: Verso, 1991), 7.

<sup>20</sup> On the evidence of racial stratification today, see Alice O'Conner, Chris Tilly, and Lawrence D. Bobo, eds., *Urban Inequalities: Evidence from Four Cities* (New York: Russell Sage, 2001).

<sup>21</sup> On the conceptual difference between ethnicity and race, see Stephen Cornell and Douglas Hartmann, "Conceptual Confusions and Divides: Race, Ethnicity and the Study of Immigration," in *Not Just Black and White: Historical and Contemporary Perspectives on Immigration, Race, and Ethnicity in the United States*, ed. Nancy Foner and George M. Fredrickson (New York: Russell Sage, 2004): 31–32.

<sup>22</sup> Fuminori Minamikawa, "Shakai-hensei toshiteno Esunishiti: Esunikku Tagenshugi no Hihanteki-kento no tameni" [Ethnicity as social formation: A critique of ethnic pluralism in the United States], *Riron to Dotai* [Social theory and dynamics] 2 (2008): 3–17.

<sup>23</sup> William Petersen, "Success Story, Japanese-American Style," *New York Times Magazine*, January 9, 1966, 20–43.

<sup>24</sup> Nathan Glazer was also one of the contributors to the collection. Harry H. Kitano was in charge of a chapter on Japanese Americans. Stephen Thernstrom, Ann Orlov, and Oscar Handlin, eds., *Harvard Encyclopedia of American Ethnic Groups* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1980).

<sup>25</sup> "Success Story of One Minority Group in U.S.," *U.S. News and World Report*, December 26, 1966, 73–76; "Success Story: Outwhiting the White," *Newsweek*, June 21, 1971, 25; Light, *Ethnic Enterprise in America*.

<sup>26</sup> Petersen, "Success Story," 20–21.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, 21.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, 21, 33.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, 40.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, 40–41. Robert N. Bellah, *Tokugawa Religion: The Cultural Roots of Modern Japan* (New York: The Free Press, 1957).

<sup>32</sup> Petersen, "Success Story," 43.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, 40.

<sup>34</sup> Minamikawa, "Nikkei Amerikajin" no *Rekishi Shakaigaku*, chap. 7.

<sup>35</sup> *Pacific Citizen*, February 4, 1966, 1, 3, 5.

<sup>36</sup> Evelyn Nakano Glenn, *Unequal Freedom: How Race and Gender Shaped American Citizenship and Labor* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2004).

<sup>37</sup> Minamikawa, "Nikkei Amerikajin" no *Rekishi Shakaigaku*, 55–57; Masao Suzuki, "Selective Immigration and Ethnic Economic Achievement: Japanese Americans before World War II," *Explorations in Economic History* 39 (2002): 266; Masao Suzuki, "Success Story? Japanese Immigrant Economic Achievement and Return Migration, 1920–1930," *Journal of Economic History* 55, no. 4 (1995): 892.

<sup>38</sup> Lon Kurashige, *Japanese American Celebration and Conflict: A History of Ethnic Identity and Festival in Los Angeles, 1934–1990* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002), 30–31, 79.

<sup>39</sup> Yuji Ichioka, *The Issei: The World of the First Generation Japanese Immigrants, 1885–1924* (New York: The Free Press, 1988); Valerie Matsumoto, *Farming the Home Place: A Japanese American Community in California, 1919–1982* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1993); Jere Takahashi, *Nisei/Sansei: Shifting Japanese American Identities and Politics* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1997); Kurashige, *Japanese American Celebration and Conflict*; Eiichiro Azuma, *Between Two Empires: Race, History, and Transnationalism in Japanese America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005).

<sup>40</sup> By the early 1990s, there had been some significant writings from the perspective of ethnicity studies. Stephen S. Fujita and David J. O'Brien, *Japanese American Ethnicity: The Persistence of Community* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1991); Yasuko I. Takezawa, *Breaking the Silence: Redress and Japanese American Ethnicity* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1995). However, many explanations of Japanese American success have emphasized class factors. See Suzuki, "Success Story?" and "Selective Immigration."

<sup>41</sup> The Japanese American success story was influenced by the functionalist interpretation of culture, which explains its function and dysfunction in group achievement. Minamikawa, "Nikkei Amerikajin" no Rekishi Shakaigaku, 216–17.

<sup>42</sup> Takezawa, *Breaking the Silence*, 172, 186, 204.

<sup>43</sup> Lon Kurashige reaffirms a tradition of "universalism" long dismissed in Asian American studies. Harry H. Kitano's work, which analyzes the successful adaptation of Japanese Americans into American society, embodies this tradition. Kurashige insists that the historiography in Asian American Studies needs to connect such "universalism" and "particularism" emphasizing racial oppression and racial identity as yellow. Lon Kurashige, "Universalism and Particularism in Asian American Studies: Toward a Historiography," in *New Wave: Studies on Japanese Americans in the Twenty-first Century*, ed. Brian Masaru Hayashi and Yasuko Takezawa (Kyoto: Institute for Research in Humanities, Kyoto University, 2003), 21–35.

<sup>44</sup> Eiichiro Azuma's study clarifies that Japanese immigrants lived in their own transnational field both in reality and narratives and their racial identity was established on the basis of their in-betweenness. See Azuma, *Between Two Empires*.

<sup>45</sup> Suzuki, "Success Story?"

<sup>46</sup> Minamikawa, "Nikkei Amerikajin" no Rekishi Shakaigaku, chap. 3.

<sup>47</sup> Richard D. Alba and Victor Nee, *Remaking the American Mainstream: Assimilation and Contemporary Immigration* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2003).

<sup>48</sup> Lawrence D. Bobo and Camille Z. Charles, "Race in the American Mind: From the Moynihan Report to the Obama Candidacy," *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 621 (2009): 243–259.

<sup>49</sup> William Julius Wilson, *When Work Disappears: The World of the New Urban Poor* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1996).

<sup>50</sup> Stephen Thernstrom, "Recovering the Melting Pot: Still Going Strong," in *Reinventing the Melting Pot: The New Immigrants and What It Means to Be American*, ed. Tamar Jacoby (New York: Basic Books, 2004), 56.

<sup>51</sup> William Julius Wilson and Richard P. Taub, *There Goes the Neighborhood: Racial, Ethnic, and Class Tensions in Four Chicago Neighborhoods and Their Meaning for America* (New York: Random House, 2006); Jennifer Lee and Frank D. Bean, *The Diversity Paradox: Immigration and the Color Line in 21st Century America* (New York: Russell Sage, 2010).

<sup>52</sup> Mary C. Waters, *Black Identities: West Indian Immigrant Dreams and American Realities* (New York: Russell Sage, 1999).

<sup>53</sup> Alejandro Portes and Min Zhou, "The New Second Generation: Segmented Assimilation and Its Variants," *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 530 (1993): 74–96.

<sup>54</sup> William Julius Wilson is grappling with this issue in his current work. He insists on the necessity of a combined analysis of "structure" and "culture" for the study of poor blacks in the inner city. However, he seeks an integrated framework of ethnicity and class while setting the issue of racialization aside. William Julius Wilson, *More Than Just Race: Being Black and Poor in the Inner City* (New York: W.W. Norton, 2009).

<sup>55</sup> Steinberg, *Ethnic Myth*, 267–70; Robert G. Lee, *Orientalism: Asian Americans in Popular Culture* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1999), chap. 6.

<sup>56</sup> Minamikawa, "Shakai-hensei toshiteno Esunishiti," 13–14.