

TOWARD FIRST-RATE IDEAS

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“The test of a first-rate intelligence is the ability to hold two opposed ideas in the mind at the same time, and still have the ability to function. One should, for example, be able to see that things are hopeless and yet be determined to make them otherwise.”

–“The Crack-Up”

by F. Scott Fitzgerald

Recently, my 21 year old son and I returned to California to visit my father, sister and extended Shinagawa clan during the winter holiday season. Three months earlier, my mother had passed away after several years of illness fighting off the twin demons of tuberculosis and pneumonia. My father was recovering slowly from the loss of my mother and my sister was doing her best to keep up his spirits. During the illness and after my mother’s passage, a reverend of the local Japanese American Buddhist church helped enormously with the pain, sense of loss, and the need to let go. My father and sister were so impressed with the compassion and dedication of this reverend that they resolved to attend the Buddhist church services from there on out.

During our stay in California, we attended the services and participated in the traditional New Year activities of closing the old year by eating “long-life noodles” – hot noodles in fish broth with onion garnish and fish cake, followed by attending the reverend’s sermon the next day on New Years and eating o-mochi – rice cakes symbolizing a good new year and the potential of an excellent harvest. These services were attended mostly by Japanese American seniors. In spite of the beauty of the service and the camaraderie of the activities, there was a sadness in the air in the shared awareness of their impending death – both physical and cultural.

During our meals, several Japanese Americans approached me and shared their thoughts about my lecture on the future of Japanese Americans that I had presented at their Church several years earlier. In that lecture, I had suggested that the Japanese American community would not completely die but be transformed by several factors – the continuing rise in intermarriage among Japanese American women with white men and the role of their subsequent offspring, the growth of a new “Shin-Issei” (new recently-arrived first generation transnational Japanese) community that I surmised would be central to maintaining the larger Japanese American community, the dwindling number of Japanese Americans married to one another of the same generation and background, and what I have consistently observed as our greatest racial myopia – the almost completely ignored but largest phenomenon of Pan-Asian marriages and the key role of their offspring. The last factor involved primarily 3rd and later generation Japanese American men, but increasingly, among the 4th and later generations, Japanese American women were also participating in Pan-Asian relationships and marriages.

I argued that it would be impossible to maintain our old paradigms of a homogenous Japanese American community rooted in our immigration to the United States roughly a hundred years ago during the Meiji Era and Showa Era of Japan. Multiracial, multiethnic, multigenerational, and transnational – the Japanese American community would transform itself over time as an early precursor to a new vibrant culture that was in the making – a

pan-Asian American culture that would rise like a phoenix from the ashes of the former, and become a vital force, culture, and community in American life.

On New Year's Day, several of the elderly Nisei (second-generation Japanese Americans) said to me that the relationships of their children and grandchildren had proven me largely right. One Mr. Yasuda came up and introduced me to his son, who was engaged to a Korean American woman. Another Nisei, a widow, was now dating a Chinese American man. Yet another Sansei (third-generation Japanese American), who had brought her three Hapa children (half-Japanese and half-white) to the service, was relating to me her personal wish to impart Japanese values and have her children grow up with a sense of being Asian American.

For these Japanese American men and women, the cultural continuity of the homogenous Japanese American community of yesteryear is felt as largely hopeless. Although they reminisce and are nostalgic for the past, their actions of going to the church and participating with other Japanese Americans suggests their determination to hold on to aspects of their shared culture and identity. These Japanese Americans felt akin in spirit to what F. Scott Fitzgerald felt over 75 years ago, "One should, for example, be able to see that things are hopeless and yet be determined to make them otherwise." But out of the chaos and trepidation of the death of the old order, what rises in its place?

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As the Director of the Center for the Study of Culture, Race, and Ethnicity I feel similarly that race relations at the beginning of the 21st Century is undergoing death and transformation. Like Japanese Americans at the church service, Americans of the 21st Century hang on to the visions and vestiges of the race relations and civil rights revolution of the 1960s, but have yet to recognize its "death." Clinging to and cherishing what we hold as the great battles and clarity of the past, we have been unable to fashion a rhetoric or language to describe the changing realities of race relations in our present age.

Today, I feel that it is imperative to do what Carlos Bulosan, the great Filipino American writer of the 1940s, implored, "We must

destroy that which is dying, because it does not die by itself. . . . The old world is dying, but a new world is being born. It generates inspiration from the chaos that beats upon us all. . . . The old world will die so that the new world will be born with less sacrifice and agony on the living. . . .”

The rest of this short essay will focus upon what I mean by destroying that which is dying. I will describe five observations that, in my personal estimation and opinion, need to be acknowledged if we are to forge a new scholarship and movement for social justice and better race relations. There are any numbers of other observations that one can choose, but these are, in my mind, some of the ones that are central but largely ignored by current scholarship and not openly acknowledged in much of public discourse. Each of these observations is necessarily short here; they will probably be expanded in a later work. But the gist is here – and I hope that the ideas presented spark debate, controversy, and intellectual activity regarding race relations in the United States.

Immigrant and Colonized Minorities

One only needs to visit Flushing, Miami, Fremont, or Alhambra to notice the burgeoning new communities of recent immigrants of color who continue to be characterized as “racial minorities” within the color-coded designated labels of African Americans, Asian Americans, Latinos, and Muslim Americans. Yet when Robert Blauner and many of the 60s generation wrote of racial minorities in the U.S., they were described as peoples of color who had been historically objectified and dehumanized by the majority in order to provide access to cheap labor and/or natural resources for those in positions of authority and power. In a relationship akin to the colonialism of mother country and colony – these racial minorities were treated as “internal colonies.” They were unlike the white ethnic immigrants who came to the United States voluntarily, because racially “colonized” minorities had been subject to forced entry, unfree or unequal labor, and forced assimilation and cultural destruction for decades and centuries. Radicals and liberals alike argued for various forms of redress,

reparations, and affirmative action on behalf and in support of these historically aggrieved racial minority populations. Civil rights in the aftermath of the 1960s were initially largely conceived as an effort to combat racism and the historical legacy of racism.

Today, in many of the elite colleges and universities, immigrants of color are many times the preponderant or overwhelming proportion of the racial minority presence. Go to Ithaca College, Cornell University, Berkeley, or Stanford, and scratch beyond our surface notions of our color-coded consciousness – one can't help but notice this significant immigrant majority among the racial minority presence. Where are the historically aggrieved, generationally longstanding, populations of African Americans, Asian Americans, Latinos, and Native Americans originally to be served by much of civil rights and affirmative action legislation? Their significant presence is notably absent, by and large, despite the fact that among African Americans, Latinos, and Native Americans, they continue to be the overwhelming majority of these communities. They are invisible in the "visible" spectrum of our notions of racial categories that are utilized by corporations, governments, and educational institutions. To many institutions, it doesn't really matter whether they are working class or middle class or whether they are immigrant or long-time Californ' (referring to Chinese Americans who can trace their origins to the gold rush era). Regardless, they are racial minorities, and in our neoliberal and neoconservative age, we *should* have some, especially when they are qualified and aspiring.

But this begs the question, how will our society address our longstanding historically aggrieved populations? We can be quite cynical here, but many conservatives and liberals alike are very comfortable about avoiding the *diversity* within racial minorities. Unlike the Sixties, the distinctions between immigrant and minority are no longer so clear. Due to the selective consequences of U.S. immigration policy, racial minority immigrants are more likely to bring with them greater privileged class status, more education, and even capital than members of many longstanding racial minority communities. Yet, this does not mean that racial minority immigrants do not continue to suffer racial discrimination nor does it connote that longstanding racial minorities are all underprivileged.

Our fixation on race without significantly recognizing class and immigrant status will vex our efforts toward greater social justice and equity, and provides ammunition to those who oppose affirmative action and distributive justice. For the 21st century, we must recognize that race, immigrant status, and class are fluid yet distinct factors in the life chances of individuals.

The "Failure" of the Second and Subsequent Generations

Similarly, the higher one goes up the educational hierarchy, there are proportionately fewer racial minority individuals of second and subsequent generations who enroll in education. This tendency has been observed by many social scientists and social commentators, notably such public intellectuals as William Julius Wilson, Edward Murguia, Susan Chow, Alexandro Portes, and Ruben G. Rumbaut. Unlike whites, racial minorities do not exhibit maintained class or educational status or sustained class or educational upward mobility. While racial minority immigrants exhibit remarkable initial gains in education and occupation in the 1st and 1.5 generations, this is not necessarily true for the majority of the U.S.-born, especially among 3rd generation and subsequent generations.

So where are they? Many drop out. Some join the military, some are in prison, and many, especially among Asian Americans, complete degrees in lower status institutions or at lower levels of education. Associated with this tendency and exacerbating family dynamics is the much higher probability of racial minority women to attend colleges and universities. Among African Americans at the undergraduate level, for example, the current ratio is above 3 to 1.

Contrary to the myth of the model minority, Asian Americans are finding this set of general trends among racial minorities to be true for them as well. Susan Chow has observed that in family gatherings of Asian Americans who have been here for three generations or more, the educational and subsequent occupational achievements of the 1.5 generation and 2nd generation are greater than among the 3rd and 4th generation when they were of the same age. Among the later generations, they not only had less

education than the former, but when they did attend colleges, they attended schools of significantly lower stature than their parents and grandparents.

As we can see, this generational picture is associated with our observations on immigrant and colonized minorities. As Frank Wu has noted, racial minority immigrants do not tend to see themselves as racial minorities, yet are treated by American society and institutions as such. In a complex relationship of perception, treatment, and self-awareness, racial minority immigrants eventually become “racialized,” both by themselves and by others.

Ignoring Pan-Ethnicity: The “Racialization” of Ethnicity

Many years ago, I was a graduate student at Berkeley copy-editing the manuscript that would later be entitled *Racial Formation in the United States*. In that landmark book, Michael Omi and Howard Winant noted that racial formations develop that define and redefine racial and ethnic identities out of a complex process involving the racial state, its efforts to maintain racial hegemony and social order, and the competing interests of various racially based social movements. In the dialectical process of racial conflict and accommodation, races and racial categories are socially formed and reformed. Racial formation thus is the process by which socio-historical designations of race are created and manipulated.

Extending this argument, and following similar lines of thought expressed by Yen Le Espiritu, I believe that in the United States a pan-ethnicity forms primarily through such a racial formation process. Ethnic groups that were originally objectified by society, the state, and by other ethnic and racial groups as a part of a larger category of “race,” through a process of racial formation, coalesce and develop into self-actualizing and self-aware pan-ethnicities. Over time, their primary awareness and allegiance to ethnic identity diminishes, and commonly shared cultural and social features begin to reflect the constructed landscape of each “race.”

People are generally blithely unaware of the impact of pan-ethnicity. The racial formation process that led to Whiteness during the middle half of the 20th century led to interethnic marriages

among white ethnics that were largely unheard of in the 19th century. Today, according to Mary Waters, most whites who describe themselves as white can not ascertain a specific ethnic background with confidence. They are a mix of ethnic backgrounds that had been subsumed in the larger social category of Whiteness. Likewise, racial minorities are also recently undergoing a massive project of pan-ethnicization that is the result of the “racialization” of ethnic groups in the United States. Thus, for example, out of Mexican Americans, Cuban Americans, and Puerto Ricans, a shared Latino culture and diverse set of communities is born. Similarly, the same may be said of African Americans, Asian Americans, and Native Americans.

Pan-ethnicities in the U.S. formed primarily along the lines of socially constructed notions of race. Amorphous and indefinite, and largely invisible, pan-ethnicities correlate, overlap, coincide, and sometimes extend with racial formation. Yet, they have significant impact and are largely ignored by most scholarship. Very little research has so far been conducted on this topic, and yet all of the racial immigrant ethnic communities are undergoing such a process. What are the implications? As we noted earlier, pan-ethnicities are often immigrants as well as ethnicities, and also racially categorized. The scholarship of the 21st century requires us to delve further into pan-ethnicity and its interplay with ethnicity, nationality status, and race.

The Allure of Assimilation and Privilege

The continuing dominance of assimilation theory as the primary theoretical model depicting race relations in the United States is undisputable. Regardless of their politics, observers of race and ethnic relations such as Linda Chavez, Dinesh D’Souza, Bart Landry, Michael Omi, Richard Rorty, and Arthur Schlesinger have all alluded to the importance of assimilation in the lives of immigrants, minorities, and ethnicities. While specific definitions may differ, assimilation involves a process of incorporation of an out-group into the in-group. Generally, the in-group is the majority and the out-group is the minority, with the in-group possessing greater privilege, status, and opportunities, while the

out-group suffers from discrimination, disadvantage, and restricted opportunities. Members of the out-group assimilate because they want the rights and privileges that members of the in-group have.

To deposit all the books on the many variations of assimilation theory would fill all of the Center's space – they include such forms as Anglo-conformity, melting pot, cultural pluralism, two-way, and multicultural cosmopolitanism. Underlying these approaches, however, is the general liberal belief that American society is generally accepting of minorities and immigrants and strives toward egalitarianism and equal treatment, concomitant with an assumption that our society rewards those with merit who wish to participate with the mainstream.

Whether these assumptions hold merit may be questionable, but nevertheless the everyday person in the United States acts upon acculturation and assimilation as the primary vehicle for garnishing the rewards of our society. Implicitly, minorities are told that by attending integrated schools, learning English, living in the same neighborhoods, and participating in the same circle of workers, friends, and lovers as that of the majority, their actions will accord them higher status and better treatment.

Most immigrants and minorities do indeed strive in these directions, but the diversity amongst them indicates wide disparities in their socioeconomic outcome, as shown most notably in the works by Larry Bobo, Joe Feagin, Andrew Hacker, Douglas Massey, and Marta Tienda. According to this body of work, differential outcome continues to arise in large part due to differential treatment associated with their ascribed or prescribed race, ethnicity, and nationality status. In fact, their studies indicate *growing* racial residential segregation, *sustained* educational disparities regardless of generation, and *limits* to social integration at different levels for different groups. These findings suggest that American society continues to treat people differently on the basis of their race, ethnicity, and nationality status. Although I personally do not agree with either, Douglas Massey goes so far as to argue that there is an "American Apartheid," and Andrew Hacker talks of two divided nations and completely different experiences – one black and one white.

Regardless of the discriminatory behavior directed against a

group, individually people are drawn by the allure of assimilation and the privileges conferred by participating in the assimilation process, whether they are aware and conscious of their participation in assimilation or not. Many immigrants and minorities continue to individually strive for recognition and achievement, despite negative perceptions by the majority (and the minority), and land in different social locations in the racial, class, and gender hierarchy of our society. As the British rock band Queen quipped,

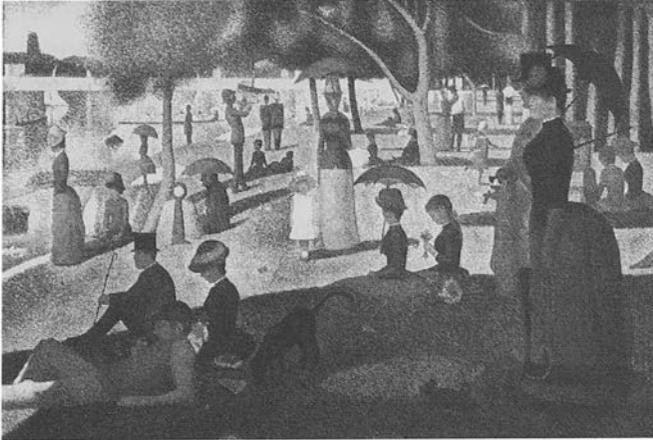
“If you can’t beat ‘em, join ‘em
It’s everyone for themselves
Move on out!”

Studying the dynamism of race, class, and gender in a hierarchical society that lauds and celebrates integration and assimilation is a daunting task, but there would be much to gain if we were to do so. One example would be to conduct a comparative systematic study of the marriage patterns of racial and ethnic groups in the United States across generations that can be informed by history, social policy, and reactions to assimilation. Intermarriage, passing, hybridity, intersectionality, communal and familial efforts to maintain culture by marital selection, and changing notions of identity formation can be gainfully studied by a grounded interpretation of this dynamism.

Multiple and Overlapping Identities and Allegiances

The bipolar world of the Cold War Era and the 1960s no longer describes the complex realities of race relations today. Race is no longer characterized by the stark black and white of some modernist painting. Rather, the increasing complexity of multiple and overlapping identities shaped in part by the aftermath of the civil rights revolution, the rise of the global economy, ever increasing migration, and emergence of a global marketplace have created a race relations which might best be evoked as similar to a pointillist painting by Georges Seurat – embodiments that are whole and substantive, which upon closer inspection are made of tiny detached strokes of color and hue that serve to make his paintings

shimmer with brilliance and depth. Similarly, such embodiments as self, ethnicity, nationality, pan-ethnicity, transnationality, and race all share elements with one another and influence each another, but yet they remain amorphously distinct.



The amorphous distinctiveness of multiple and overlapping identity formations is shown in the rising racial diversity of the United States. Our Nation, once largely white and black, is now multiracial. Regionally, as a result of largescale immigration and domestic migration, new areas have developed that have become regional cultural Meccas for identities that are agglomerations of associated ethnicities, nationalities, races, and panethnicities – Miami for the Latino communities, San Francisco for the Asian American communities, Atlanta for the African American communities, and Detroit for Muslim American communities. Yet within or adjacent to many of the largest of these New Meccas, there are significant and vital pockets of other immigrants, ethnicities, and races.

The growing heterogeneity of our society has also led to increasing intermarriage, both interracial and pan-ethnic. Interracial marriages, once less than one percent during the 1960s, increased five-fold by the year 2000 to almost five percent of all marriages. In some states, notably California and Hawaii, such marriages approached and surpassed 20 percent of the state's married couples. Pan-ethnic marriages and relationships also grew, as a consequence of the liberalization of civil rights and immigration

laws, the influence of the ethnic studies movement, and the rebirth and growth of ethnic and pan-ethnic enclaves brought about by the modern day bursts of global diasporas and migrations. Today, Asian Americans, for example, increasingly marry across ethnic lines within the social construction of Asian American in spite of the carry-over prejudices and residual enmity that was the legacy of World War II.

The rapid rise of people claiming multiracial and multiethnic identities are yet another indication of rapid social change. During the 1960s, less than half a percent of all individuals in the U.S. identified themselves as multiracial. By the year 2000, however, 2.4 percent claimed on the census form two or more races, and that did not include the large numbers of people who identified themselves as multiethnic (the offspring of parents of two differing ethnic groups within the same race). That population, hidden by the racial myopia I mentioned earlier, is still hidden from view because of our obsession with visual race.

Upon closer examination, this can be seen among Asian Americans very clearly, and similar patterns are to be found among all racial minority populations. According to the 2000 census, 11,898,828 (4.2 percent of the total population) identified themselves as Asian, either wholly or partially; 10,242,998 (3.6 percent of the total population; 86.1 percent of all Asians) as just Asian; and 1,655,830 (0.6 percent of the total population; 13.9 percent of all Asians) as part Asian mixed with one or more other races. Among the offspring of interethnic and interracial marriages, we find about 52 percent are of the combination of Asian and White, and 46 percent are the result of interethnic marriages among Asian Americans. Recent studies by the Census Bureau have shown that the latter figure is rapidly outpacing the growth of the former, and thus signifies a growing sense of pan-ethnic identity.

The global Diasporas from intermediate locations between the United States and the “mother” country such as former colonies and other areas of the developed nations, newly developing countries (NDCs), and the Third World also impact our diversity. In Queens, New York, for example, it is quite possible nowadays for a Dominican American to identify with being a Dominican

immigrant, to be characterized by the larger society as African American or Black, view themselves as Latina/o or Latin American, and adamantly correct others who would dare mistake them for African Americans. Yet their son or daughter, in little more than half or a full generation, will identify with much of African American culture (although at times ambivalently), consider themselves Hispanic, and be proud of their Dominican heritage. Multiple and overlapping identities brought about by such Diasporas, some of them confusing and conflicting, yet dynamic and creative, are part and parcel of the new 21st century American landscape of race relations.

Diaspora communities of color formed of exiles escaping forced and traumatic genocides and expulsions leave their own distinct mark in this variegated landscape. In what ways can one accurately describe a Southeast Asian refugee from Laos as a voluntary Asian immigrant? Would they not have very different lives than those who have come here voluntarily? Wouldn't their exile or pariah status not leave a feeling of consciousness similar to what was felt by Palestinian exile Edward Said?: "Most people are principally aware of one culture, one setting, one home; exiles are aware of at least two, and this plurality of vision gives rise to an awareness of simultaneous dimensions, an awareness that – to borrow a phrase from music – is contrapuntal. For an exile, habits of life, expression, or activity in the new environment inevitably occur against the memory of these things in another environment. Thus both the new and the old environment are vivid, actual, occurring together contrapuntally. ... There is a unique pleasure in this sort of apprehension." I believe Said talks from the perspective of an exile who had been disrupted and displaced, and his contrapuntal views are very different than that of an immigrant who has had a chance to make a planned closure and emigration from his home country or a longstanding racial minority who has never had such immediate memories of a lost homeland.

Adoptees also complicate the picture. Since World War II, the global disruptions of poverty, environmental and resource degradation, war, and genocide have led to many displaced children of color becoming adopted by Americans. The overwhelming majority of these Americans are white, and many

of these adoptees are either Asian or Latin American (89 percent) and female (81 percent in general, 91 and 97 percent for China and Korea). These adopted children – part of what we term transracial adoptees – number close to a million since World War II, according to some census research. Their identities are complex and difficult to characterize. Suffice it to say that the anomalies of proportionately few African or African American children being adopted, proportionately higher number of lighter-skinned children being adopted, and the overwhelming sex imbalance in favor of girls being adopted require us to examine the effects of assimilation, socialization, development, racism, patriarchy, paternalism, and colonialism in the selection and upbringing of these children.

Finally, there are the transnationals – people who are involved in and who stake claim to more than one nation. Some are clearly sojourners, who identify strongly only with one nation but do business, education, and tourism in other nations on a consistent basis. Last year, there were about 16 million of them here in the United States. Their stake may not be strong in the United States at first, but some change their minds and decide to stay in America either legally or illegally. Many visitors eventually bring along their children to attend American schools, colleges and universities. Currently, there are more than 350,000 international students attending high school in the United States, with the overwhelming majority of these coming from Asia. Among those who are attending colleges, there are over 570,000 international students attending colleges and universities in the United States. Most of these students are from nations of color. For over thirty years, international students of color have been the main source of scientific doctorates in the United States.

Transnationals who significantly stake their fortunes in more than one nation are increasingly common. What might have once been described as the international jet-set has morphed into a global transnational elite whose child may have been born in Hong Kong, educated at a boarding school in Switzerland, attended Cornell University as an undergraduate, graduated from Kings College in Great Britain for his or her doctorate, who has the acquired the ability to speak quadrilingually, and who now works in corporate finance at a multinational corporation whose holding

company is headquartered in Japan and where the workplace is at a company that appears to be “American” located in South Carolina. To characterize this person as Hong Kong-raised, Cantonese, Chinese, Asian, Chinese American, Asian American, British, or American would be difficult to do. He or she partakes in all of these identities and none of them completely. This individual is a global transnational who has multiple and overlapping identities and allegiances...

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What all of this diversity of identity formations have in common is the simple observation that identities are also shared communities, with their own codes of behavior and mores and their own set of social boundaries however tightly or loosely made about in-group and out-group. A person is a member and participant, and each person will have varying degrees of attachment in their participation of an identity. Strong attachments will carry with it feelings of allegiance and belonging, loose attachments may bring about conversion or straying away and feelings of alienation and disaffection.

When individuals experience multiple and overlapping identities, it would be natural to hold multiple allegiances that would ebb and flow with various stages of their life, their immediate situation and environment, and the political and social discourse prevalent in the ethos. As we progress into the 21st century, we must not shy away from a discussion of the social dynamics of identity and allegiance, even if there is a danger that it might play into the hands of some conservative interests who would question the loyalties of some individuals and groups as had happened in World War II. Times are different. In the previous era, the national narrative was strongly assimilationist and didn't allow for ambiguity regarding identity and allegiances. Times and circumstances have changed with the globalization of our economy and our participation in world events as the single remaining global superpower. These have brought about for many persons who are considered racial minorities a range of identities that for some would be choices and for others largely pre-chosen by the ascriptive nature of our society. Such identities carry with them coetaneous allegiances.

Perhaps to their peril, multiple identities and allegiances are no longer completely sanctioned to the degree as in the past, but neither are they completely voluntary and without sanction. Without recognizing the complexity of our current constructions of identities and allegiances, we do a disservice in understanding race relations today.

Let me provide several examples.

Richard Perle, currently a highly influential Pentagon policy advisor and leading neoconservative, holds dual citizenship in both the United States and in Israel. Although born in New York City, he has served for the Israeli government as a Likud policy advisor, been on the boards of numerous American corporations, government agencies, and think tanks, and continues to participate in the civic and non-profit activities of major Jewish American and Israeli organizations. During the 1970s and the 1980s, indisputable evidence was indeed garnered that he had passed on American governmental secrets to the Israeli government. However, because of his strong connections with the American government and corporate interests, and although he was indicted, he evaded sentencing and continues to serve both the United States and Israel at top echelons of their governments.

Another contrasting example is the sad case of Dr. Tsien Hsue-shen, who was born in China in 1911, who came to the United States during the 1930s, and later earned a doctorate at Caltech. He later achieved major scientific breakthroughs in aeronautics, rocketry, nuclear technology, and other fields at American government-sponsored research laboratories. After applying for U.S. citizenship in the 1950s, he became an innocent victim of the Red Scare, subjected to grueling interrogations regarding his loyalty, and put under house arrest. He was ultimately deported to Communist China. Instead of assuming the leadership role of America's missile and space programs that he was eminently qualified to hold, he became a victim of racist paranoia, red-baiting, the effects of the glass ceiling, and the Cold War. Out of this set of tragic experiences, he was quickly recruited into the scientific efforts of Communist China to modernize its military capabilities. He became one of the fathers of the Chinese missile

and space program that would develop the Silkworm missile and subsequently other more deadly nuclear missiles.

Forty years later, almost the same set of patterns occurred for Dr. Wen Ho Lee, a U.S. citizen and a former researcher who had worked at the Los Alamos National Laboratory. While employed, he was alleged by the FBI to be a spy passing on secrets about U.S. nuclear technology to the Communist Chinese. Eventually, after a thorough and contentious review forced upon the FBI by the Asian American communities, he was eventually released from his incarceration, absolved from the charges of espionage, and cleared of all wrong-doing. However, his fate contrasted sharply with that of Richard Perle. Today, he is no longer allowed to work in government agencies and was subsequently forced to retire. A shy and quiet elderly man, he currently remains at his home almost as if in house arrest.

Such examples as those above suggest that among those who have multiple and overlapping identities, there still remains different degrees of choice and different degrees of punishment resulting from the perceived choices made regarding their allegiance that continue to be shaped by domestic and international politics, race relations, and access to power.

As we close, let's ask a rhetorical question. What happens when some communities are more likely to have multiple and overlapping identities and allegiances and others remain largely perceiving themselves as monocultural and homogenous? The anti-semitic Palmer Raids of the 1920s, the detainment and incarceration of Japanese Americans during World War II, and the more recent roundup, detainment, and incarceration of Muslim Americans in post-9/11 America stand as testimony to the tragic consequences of ill-treatment of groups who through no fault of their own held or were perceived to have held multiple identities and allegiances. In each of these historic incidences, a large set of the American population, namely large segments of the white population, were the primary doubters of their loyalty and allegiances, and were able to impose racially and ethnically consequential policies that seriously hurt these particular communities as well as led to the erosion of the civil rights of all Americans.

Recognizing “First-Rate” Ideas

The first step toward creating a rhetoric or language that describes the changing realities of race relations in our present age is to acknowledge how our present age differs from that of the past. Although I could have chosen other features, I chose five observations that I believed would be helpful toward forging a new scholarship and movement for social justice and improved race relations: the conflation of immigrant and colonized minorities following the 1960s; the “failure” of second and subsequent generations among racial minorities; the rapid growth and consequences of pan-ethnicity among racial minorities; the continuing allure of assimilation in the context of hierarchies of privilege and power; and I ended with a focus on the real need of scholars, activists, policy analysts, and public intellectuals to grapple with the diversity of multiple and overlapping identities and allegiances.

I believe that ethnic studies must focus much of its research and academic activities toward investigating further these directions. I also contend that a language to describe these new changes needs further development that can only come about through concerted dialogic communication and scholarship.

To do so requires us to have first-rate ideas and the ability to hold two or more opposing ideas at the same time. Thinking critically and heterogeneously enables us to be able to grapple with the complexities of culture, race, and ethnicity as we proceed into the 21st century.

Moreover, as Frank Wu, the Dean of the School of Law at Wayne State University has so eloquently stated, “The necessary but not sufficient threshold is acknowledging that race operates in our lives, relentlessly and pervasively. . . . By becoming more conscious of our own perceptions (of race), as a society we will be able to neutralize racial prejudice.” Similarly, examining race is no longer a sufficient factor for understanding race relations, and examining diversity of identities and allegiances will be crucial to the task of social justice in the future.