Race Relations between
Asian Americans and African Americans

Race is definitely an inherent topic in American society. Most of the times, however, people will be most likely to address the race relations between the people of Color and White people. When issues of race are addressed in the classroom settings, it is very easily observable that the discussion circles around white people and the other, which indicates the colored people as the whole. Although, the fact that race is being addressed in educational arena should be appreciated, there needs more challenges and improvements to be made when addressing such issues.

There is a limitation, though, since the race relations between the Whites and colored people are so emphasized that we do not actually take time to think about the race relations between different groups within the category of colored people. Moreover, when such discussions about colored people take place, we tend to associate specifically African Americans as the representative of all colored people. However, it is important to think about different minority groups and their interactions with each other. In this paper, I will be addressing specifically the relations between Asian Americans and African Americans.

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It is very commonly perceived that African Americans and Asian Americans are very different cultural beings. African Americans and Asian Americans could be seen as culturally farther away from each other than between African Americans and white people, and Asian Americans and white people. It is also typically more difficult to find an Asian individual in an all African American setting and vice versa. Looking back at the recent American history, Asian Americans and African Americans have certain degree of animosity rooted between them. One of the most cogent evidence that indicates such hostility between these races is the 1992 L.A. Riots that followed the Rodney King incident. Even before the Rodney King incident, however, there was a case where a 15-year old black girl whose name was Latasha Harlins, was shot to death by a Korean grocery store owner engaging in a dispute over a bottle of orange juice (Wood, 2002). When the verdict decreed that the grocery owner should receive sentence of probation for the manslaughter, many African Americans were even more outraged and associated the incident with "what they considered the economic colonialism" (Wood, 2002) by Asian store owners who ran their business in the African Amercan neighborhood. Like this, the antagonism between African Americans and Asian Americans has been

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noticeable in a demographic scale in the recent history of America. Such incidence is possible to happen because both of these races have misconceived understandings of each other. In fact, these subconscious outlooks on other race that are based on stereotypes perpetuate the genuine harmony between African Americans and Asian Americans.

First of all, the stereotypes that exist against Asian Americans as well as African Americans were generated by the conspiracy of white people. For example, Asian Americans are thought of as the "model minority." Many people constantly bring up the question asking why Asian Americans are doing so well in comparison to blacks if racism were to be a big factor in American society. To this question, Tim Wise brings crucial point when he writes his responses:

> I thought about the Asian women working 12 hours a day in garment sweatshops both abroad and in places like L.A. to make clothes for people like this guy's kids; I thought about the Asian families whose members have to put in 80 hours a week just to keep their heads above water; I thought about the Indian, Pakistani, or Bangladeshi taxi drivers who endure crappy working conditions, customers who get pissy about their accents or "attitudes," and cops who are responsible for nearly 80% of all anti-South Asian attacks; and I wondered, in what sense were they "doing so well?"

The notion of "model minority" is allegedly initiated back in the 1950's

and 60's, which was at the height of the Civil Rights Movement, when well-known magazines published articles praising Asians for being hard-working and diligent whereas explicitly contrasting their achievements to the failure or blacks (Wise, 2002).   Therefore, the concept of "model minority" was used by the white people in order to persuade the public, especially telling the African Americans, to stop blaming racism but to work hard for the success.   Such stereotypes against Asians were created only to foster hatred between the two minority groups.

There are also racial stereotypes that are held against African Americans as well.   A study was done by the National Opinion Research Center to measure how both white people as well as black people view themselves in terms of being smart.   The study interestingly showed that the higher the level of education that an individual, the stronger he believed that whites are smarter than blacks.   The social change, then, is not a dire concern for most people. This mindset is also "learned" by all kinds of immigrants (Kearl, 2005). African Americans are also overrepresented in crime statistics.   Most people also acknowledge this and correlate it to the popular belief that Asians are most law-abiding where as Africans are the least (Philippe, 1995).   Such negative

stereotypes have been attached to the African American individuals that constantly bring them down to the bottom of the racial hierarchy.

Moreover, politics and media try to promote conflicts and racial tensions between these racially minority communities. In most cases, the interests of African Americans were "framed in popular discourse as counter to that of Latino, and to lesser extent Asian, immigrants (Omi, 2005)." At the same time, Asian American interests were in opposition to those of African Americans and Latinos as well. For example, the issue of immigration can be viewed as a way to promote the subordination of African Americans. Poor African Americans may view Asian immigrants as economic threats, feeling unnecessary competitiveness in the labor market, which will make them support anti-immigration sentiment. Another example can be education and affirmative action. Conflict over admissions to schools at the local as well as national level is a very heated topic of discussion. For example, the admission system at Lowell high School in San Francisco was challenged as it was accused of discriminating against Asian American students while favoring other minorities such as African Americans and Latin Americans (Johnson, 2004). In essence, political issues have been increasingly "racially coded and framed in a manner that uncritically

assumes a zero-sum game of race relations- where one group's gain is perceived to be another group's loss (Omi, 2005)." Moreover, journalists organize news reports in seemingly objective methods in order to keep the existing racial hierarchy and make it seem natural in this society (Thornton, 1999). Media coverage has served as a mean to extensively feature Asian success in comparison to African American's failure in order to introduce within public a certain way to perceive these races. The idea of African American males as being a threat and an uncouth kind in the society is well known across the media. Moreover, Asian Americans are still featured as 'foreigners' in American society. For example, Wen Ho Lee, who was naturally born U.S. citizen of Chinese ancestry, was falsely accused of revealing national secrets to Chinese government. Media featured him as a 'foreigner' who is a threat to national security. (Johnson, 2004) Like this, political issues and media coverage have been a great force producing negative emotions towards between these two races.

Next, the misconceptions about the Asian American population as well as African Americans increase as the differences between Asian Americans and African Americans are overlooked. While African American population "represents a cross-section of background and experience, the Asian Pacific

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America community is highly self-selected (Wise, 2002)." The immigration policies have favored Asians who have substantial amount of skills and education. Most of the Asian immigrants, thus, are highly educated upon arrival.

On the other hand, African Americans are the only group who immigrated to the United States involuntarily (Kearl, 2003). Therefore, they have a very different historical background compared to Asian Americans. African Americans were treated horribly in the past. They were slaves and were stripped of any kinds of human rights. They were lynched and murdered by the hands of white people. One of the many examples is seen in the life of Emmett Till, who was were shot to death for supposedly whistling to a white woman (Wikipedia, 2005). Therefore, it is imperative that we understand that these two races come from different historical backgrounds. A mere status of being a minority does not make them stand at the same place.

As it was discussed above, media has been one of the venues that were used to persuade people and advocate certain images of different racial groups. One of the features that is, considerably influential especially to the teen population in American society nowadays is the rap music. Since this particular genre of music is basically characterized by those "lyrical and performance

elements focusing on sex and defiance of authority strong enough to evoke a moral outcry (Binder, 1993)", the public is wary of the impact it has on people, especially children and the youth. Hard swear words, sexual graphics, and degradation of women are commonly featured theme in rap and its music videos. Media stands as the most feasible and easiest method for a group of people to be exposed while rap music and its elements are closely associated with African American identity. Therefore, as an outside race vicariously explores blacks through media especially through rap music, it is very likely that they will be very concerned about what rap music exhibits. Given the fact that most Asians have stricter standard of morals, ethics, and more conservative outlook on many issues, rap music is viewed even more controversial. The way rap music and its culture demonstrate African American people, in a sense, is not conducive at all to the correct understanding of black community by Asian Americans.

African Americans and Asian Americans, though both of these races belong to minority status, do not seem to come together within American society. There are many factors that are considered as the root causes of this phenomenon. Paying closer look at history provides accurate outlook on the issue; white men have used these two minority groups in order to bring up and

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maintain themselves at the top of the racial hierarchy to keep the benefits to themselves.   Also, politics and media have served as huge source of encouragement towards racial tension between African Americans and Asian Americans.   Moreover, these misconceptions are incessantly driven by overlooking the inherent differences between these two races that traces the origin way back in history.   Finally, it is vital to take a look at rap music and its culture that are in clash with ideals and moral standards of Asian Americans, which in turn makes Asian Americans to continue to form misconceptions about African American population and thus perpetuate the distant relationship between African Americans and Asian Americans.

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