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Shame and Self-Revision in Asian American Assimilation

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This essay offers a political phenomenology of some of the underlying structures of Asian American identity practices. Specifically, I focus on anti-Asian stigmatization and some of the self-evaluative emotions and self-making strategies with which Asian Americans respond in forming or maintaining their identities. I begin by situating Asian American experiences within the wider political framework. U.S. society is configured by a kind of orientalist liberalism in which Asian Americans are marked by a distinctive form of racism and xenophobia while at the same time their civic-cultural practices have been characterized as benignly assimilative and hailed as a model for other racial minorities. In contrast to much public discourse as well as some of the assimilation literature in the social sciences, I examine the problematic racialization of various kinds of self-consciousness among Asian Americans, particularly the self-regard of those who try to deracialize themselves in order to assimilate into the mainstream. To better understand the values and worldly engagements involved here, I consider emotion and self-evaluative emotion, and particularly the lived experience of shame, self-contempt, and the affective validation frameworks they presuppose. I then unite the discussion of political context and of emotive experience to give an account of various kinds of Asian American responses to anti-Asian stigmata and the conditions that give rise to them. Though I believe my account pertains to many kinds of Asian American, and even non-Asian American, identity practices, I recognize that some identity practices lie outside of the discussion that follows.

If this essay is plausible, it may contribute to three kinds of projects. First, the essay may add another voice to the chorus that critiques the use of Asian American assimilation practices as a sign of democratic progress or of a post-racial America. Second, in philosophy, there is so little discussion about Asian American lived experience and politics, so the essay may shed a little light, at least in philosophy, on some aspects of Asian American civic and racial conditions. Finally, the essay may add to efforts that show how affectivity and politics can be deeply linked, and thus how philosophy of emotion and political philosophy can be mutually illuminating. Relatedly, unlike some sectors of political philosophy, affectivity is never excluded from phenomenological analyses of racial experience and identity. Nevertheless, more can be done to show how affectivity can be productively foregrounded, and I hope to have offered a reasonable account in this vein.

The Politics of Assimilation: Preliminary Thoughts

Assimilation is remarkably complex. So, at the start, four context-setting ideas are briefly discussed. The aim here is primarily to clarify the general approach I take to the matter and delimit the scope of inquiry.

First, following the primary meanings of the term "assimilate," there are two very general ways of thinking about assimilation, and they need integration. According to one way, the framing idea is of an entity or collective absorbing an external element.

Successful absorption requires the incorporated element to be rendered, if it is not already, sufficiently compatible with the absorbing entity. Thus, the absorbed element is placed under modifying or reconstituting pressures. On the other, the focus is on the same relation going in the other direction: to assimilate is for an exterior element to modify or convert itself into something compatible with the absorbing entity. For our purposes, the first way of talking is essentially sociological and about polity-maintenance, and we might call the process in question "incorporative assimilation." Specifically, this sense of assimilation will be understood to focus primarily on racial groups and secondarily the members that compose them, and its concern is the extent to which racial groups have been incorporated into or marginalized from the societal mainstream. The second sense, then, is essentially about an agent's self-formation and thus the agent's identity, values, abilities, and projects, and we might call this process "identity assimilation."

Clearly, the latter does not transpire in a vacuum. We must understand the former, in particular the polity's incorporation-facilitating pressures and conditions of exclusion, to adequately understand the latter, an agent's aspirations and strategies for identity-formation. In understanding incorporative assimilation, profoundly significant are power, ideology, coercion, and hegemony. For the state and authoritative groups demand, covertly and openly, various kinds of norm valuation and norm compliance from the populace at large, and they have the soft and hard power to make good on these demands. But it is also true that an understanding of incorporative assimilation requires at some point an account of agent structures and their contingent and varied patterns of instantiation. We cannot in rote fashion read an agent's identity off of an understanding of the macro-structures of incorporative assimilation. At some point, moral or political psychological capacities and practices at the heart of a theory of identity assimilation must be also be invoked.[1]

Second, since the main concern here is with experiences of racial conditions, a merely cross-cultural analysis of assimilation is inadequate. In making sense of the civic struggles of, say, Puerto Rican or Chinese Americans, it would be largely unhelpful to think through the experience of Swedish immigration to the U.S., except perhaps as a foil for the former. Political subordination must be at the center of our analysis. Much of the hype, controversy, and sometimes agony over race and assimilation would be difficult to grasp were it not for the distinctive concern over an extensive history of oppression against people of color. And in the last couple decades, the empirical and theoretical work on the history, structure, and legacy of white supremacy as a political system in the U.S. has become rich, wide, and variegated.[2] While I think many acknowledge the

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[1] Consider, for example, the works of two widely different political philosophers, Herbert Marcuse and John Rawls. The former connects critical theory with psychoanalytic psychology – see, for example, *One Dimensional Man: Studies in the Ideology of Advanced Industrial Society* [2nd ed.] (Boston: Beacon Press, 1991). The latter connects liberal contract theory with Aristotelian moral psychology – see his *A Theory of Justice* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1971). Whether their connective work is plausible is of course another issue.

[2] Political white supremacy, whether or not this title has been adopted, has been conceived as one of the major political traditions of the U.S. And some go further to argue that it has been at the core of the U.S. polity. For just a sampling, consider Michael Omi and Howard Winant, *Racial Formation in the United States: From the 1960s to the 1990s* [2nd ed.] (New York: Routledge Press, 1994); Charles Mills, *The Racial Contract* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1997); Rogers M. Smith, *Civic Ideals: Conflicting Visions of Citizenship in U.S. History* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1997); Gary Gerstle, *American Crucible: Race and Nation in the Twentieth Century* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001); Gary

presence of political white supremacy, even if some balk at this particular naming of the system, the acknowledgement sometimes does not get incorporated deeply enough into relevant theoretical structures. As a general point, I think culture is politicized and politics enculturated. In the case at hand, I conceptualize the transmission of language, folkways, lifestyles, group affiliation, and other cultural elements relevant to assimilation as entangled with processes of (white supremacist) racial stratification. I have already noted that an account of identity assimilation must be integrated with an account of incorporative assimilation and, specifically, that attention should be paid to the compatibility-rendering pressures of incorporative assimilation placed upon an agent's efforts to form an identity. If we combine this idea with the considerations just given, then not only an asocial but an apolitical instance of identity assimilation would be exceptional. Consequently, an apolitical *account* of identity assimilation would be deficient. As I shall argue later in this essay, Asian American assimilation dynamics must be understood in the context of anti-Asian racism and xenophobia as well as correlatively conditional forms of polity incorporation.

Third, Asian American cultural retention and mainstream assimilation are conceptualized here in a broad fashion and without losing sight of political hierarchy. I am uncertain if there is any kind of Asian culture that unifies the many ethnicities that fall under that continental rubric. But since the Asian American Movement of the 1960s and 70s, various regions of the U.S. have tried to develop an Asian American culture through some combination of political solidarity, ethical connection, and a broad range of aesthetic efforts. I believe the kind of culture in question here is one that aspires to make resonant some *common* structures within the American experience, broadly and sociopolitically conceived, had by a significant proportion of a significant number of the various ethnicities represented under the heading of "Asia".[3] As described in the short autobiographies of Asian American Movement activists compiled in *Asian Americans: The Movement and the Moment* and the compelling memoir by Helen Zia in *Asian American Dreams*, an Asian American social entity has been formed since the 1960s and a corresponding Asian American culture has been in formation since then.[4] In reality, this culture is aspirational in good part, but it is far more than nothing.[5] In any case, more

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Okihiro, *The Columbia Guide to Asian American History* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2001), Evelyn Nakano Glenn, *Unequal Freedom: How Race and Gender Shaped American Citizenship and Labor* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2002), and Dylan Rodriguez, *Suspended Apocalypse: White Supremacy, Genocide, and the Filipino Condition* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2010).

[3] There is good deal of complexity and controversy here. I offer a fuller discussion in my essay "What Is Asian American Philosophy?" in George Yancey, ed., *Philosophy in Multiple Voices* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 2007). For another account, see David Palumbo-Liu, *Asian/American: Historical Crossings of a Racial Frontier* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1999).

[4] See Steven Louie and Glenn Omatsu, eds., *Asian Americans: The Movement and the Moment* (Los Angeles: UCLA Asian American Studies Center Press, 2006) and Helen Zia, *Asian American Dreams: The Emergence of an American People* (New York: Farrar, Strauss, and Giroux, 2000).

[5] It has had limits, to be sure. For example, it seems to have been paradigmatically about Chinese, Japanese, and Filipino American experiences since these were the groups most heavily represented in the Asian American Movement. But in recent decades, Koreans Americans, Vietnamese Americans, and Indian Americans have been increasingly included and, lately, other Southeast Asian Americans and Pacific Islander Americans as well. So the limits do not seem to be principled, and there seem to be efforts at expansion or inclusion. I think the great challenge for the making and maintenance of Asian American culture is the combination of two broad processes, namely resistance by an orientalist polity against

typically, Asian American culture is understood *disjunctively*, where we simply gather the cultures of the various ethnicities that comprise Asian America and understand any of these cultures as both ethnic and Asian American. Sometimes, this is marked by pluralization, as when we speak of Asian American *cultures*. In this essay, cultural retention makes reference to either sense of Asian American culture – the historicized common culture and the disjunctively gathered ethnic cultures – since all of these have been politically subordinated in the U.S.

Mainstream culture has clearly become more multicultural since the 1960s.[6] Much of this multiculturalism seems superficial since it has a strongly consumerist configuration or can be characterized as a kind of "feel good" boutique nicety.[7] But given the agency and ingenuity of minority groups as well as some contemporary liberal accommodationist efforts, the mainstream also involves some less superficial forms of multiculturalism. Importantly, whether superficially multicutural or not, the mainstream seems to be largely, even if imperfectly, White-configured. Here I refer not just to a privileged heterogeneous set of White folkways and affiliations, but also to the political phenomenon of white polity legitimation processes. Regarding the latter, what forms of multiculturalism emerge in the mainstream will often have the sanction of the White polity generally or its elite members, though this warranting power is eroding with the demographic transformations that are making many parts of the U.S. a minority majority. I think that the prevalence of sushi restaurants, martial arts studios, Zen references, and the like, which is by no means bad in itself, is perfectly compatible with and can obscure substantial Anti-Asian racism and xenophobia. In fact, as I shall argue later, it is precisely this sort of problematic inclusion – conditional acceptance that conceals or mystifies subordination – that characterizes the accommodation of Asian Americans themselves in the mainstream.

Fourth, since choice is understood in terms of the options involved and the difficulty of their selection, we need to consider, even if only briefly, the nature of the alternatives to assimilation to better understand the decision to assimilate. As noted above, the topic of racial assimilation requires attention to the political organization of social life, its compatibility-rendering forces, and how these forces shape and influence an assimilation choice. So what set of options exists alongside assimilation in a racially stratified society like ours? Typically, assimilation is conceived as rejecting, abandoning, or substituting one's home or native cultural ways and affiliations for generally white mainstream cultural ways and affiliations.[8] The alternative commonly discussed is refusal

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meaningful and critical Asian American culture-making and sustained immigration from Asia since racial blockades were removed in 1965.

[6] For some interesting documentation with regard to Asian or Asian American influences, see Jeff Yang, Dina Gan, Terry Hong, and the staff of *A. Magazine*, eds., *Eastern Standard Time: A Guide to Asian Influence on American Culture: From Astro Boy to Zen Buddhism* (New York: Metro East Publications, Inc., 1997).

[7] On the notion of boutique multiculturalism, see Stanley Fish, "Boutique Multiculturalism, or Why Liberals are Incapable of Thinking about Hate Speech," *Critical Inquiry* vol.23, no.2, Winter 1997. Thanks go to Yoko Arisaka for this reference.

[8] For two sophisticated accounts of the normativity of assimilation (e.g. whether it is morally permissible for people of color to assimilate to the mainstream), see Tommie Shelby, *We Who Are Dark: The Philosophical Foundations of Black Solidarity* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2005) and Eamonn Callan, "The Ethics of Assimilation," *Ethics*, vol.115, no. 3, 2005, p.471-500. I should note here that how one characterizes real-world assimilation dynamics can make a difference for normative assessment, and

to assimilate.[9] Importantly, we can clarify other real options between complete substitution and total refusal, even if these two poles are understood to be imperfectly instantiated ideal-types.

One is biculturalism by means of what is sometimes called "additive acculturation," which as the name suggests, is the process of acquiring new cultural ways without losing an original cultural capacity.[10] Many children of immigrants learn to "flip a switch" as context demands, moving, with varying degrees of ease, between ethnic culture and mainstream culture. Potentially, this could produce the feeling that one has some sort of cultural schizophrenia. At any rate, some instances of biculturalism may be a genuine alternative to assimilation, but I think the culture-switching capability by itself, even if culturally impressive and socially valuable, does not necessarily yield a politically significant alternative to assimilation. Crucial here is whether in important mainstream contexts, perhaps especially in public life or the civic sphere (as opposed to the privacy of one's home), non-mainstream cultural forms can be systematically enacted and found acceptable by the mainstream. If a bicultural person typically or always acts in a mainstream manner in mainstream contexts, then the person is assimilated in the ways that count, politically speaking. The biculturalism is largely dichotomous in this respect. However, if a bicultural person, with some frequency and perhaps in a somewhat systematic way, enacted non-mainstream cultural forms in certain types of important mainstream contexts, then a politically significant alternative to assimilation (and its refusal) may exist in such a non-dichotomous or cross-over form of biculturalism.

Another is hybrid culturalism. At a trivial level, a Korean American might eat salad and spaghetti with chopsticks, and at a more serious level, she may in public spheres complexly blend Korean Confucian forms of deference, expressed through specifically Korean forms of body comportment, with American forms of self-assertion. She may also be bilingual and enjoy being able to switch between languages and thus particularly enjoy the company of similarly bilingual people. Perhaps hybrid culturalism is simply a more systematically integrated type of cross-over biculturalism, or maybe cross-over biculturalism is a species of hybrid culturalism, where the hybridity has been

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my account of this differs in some respects from what we find in Callan's important essay. For example, he notes the potential relevance of state-imposed assimilationism for the moral assessment of assimilation and asserts that such a condition does not exist currently in the U.S. He is right, but there can be substantial forms of polity-preserving assimilationism that are not state-imposed in any explicit way. Would these alternative forms of assimilationism make a difference for moral assessment? One way to think of this essay is to see it as offering the beginnings of a case for the existence of one such form of assimilationism.

[9] In empirical psychology, there is more attention to alternatives. The work of John Berry has been particularly influential in ethnic psychology, including Asian American psychology. See John W. Berry, "Conceptual Approaches to Acculturation," in Kevin Chun, Pamela Balls-Organista, and Gerardo Marin, eds., *Acculturation: Advances in Theory, Measurement, and Applied Research* (American Psychological Association, 2003). I think his account is insufficiently informed by political theory and even takes as the paradigm scenario of analysis the free encounter of two people from different cultures. On his account, then, racism is primarily about discrimination, and discrimination is but an obstacle to multicultural integration. But I believe racial stratification deeply configures polity and subjectivity and thus the underlying context in which discrimination is raised as an issue. I think some of the work of Asian American psychologists reveals subtle tensions due to the use of critical history derived from Asian American studies, which powerfully articulates American orientalism, and their inheritance of the Berry model. Obviously, adequate treatment of this matter extends beyond the confines of this essay.

[10] On the idea of acculturation, see Kevin Chun, Pamela Balls-Organista, and Gerardo Marin, eds., *Acculturation: Advances in Theory, Measurement, and Applied Research*.

thinned out significantly. Either way, they offer further options beyond the dilemma of to-assimilate-or-not-to-assimilate. In fact, many seem to choose them as life paths.

In light of these considerations, when a home or neighborhood environment supports (or insists upon) a non-mainstream culture, one can with relative ease (or with felt necessity) express oneself in terms of the non-mainstream culture at least in the home or neighborhood environment. Moving against this subject-forming undertow would require active resistance. Therefore, a decision to mostly or completely reject one's native or home culture when both biculturalism and hybrid culturalism are realistic options requires commitment, a principled narrowness, an unwillingness to compromise in the direction of duality or hybridity. Importantly, such a decision and correlated commitment to assimilate should be differentiated from cases in which biculturalism and hybridity are not real options. For example, a Korean adoptee in Minnesota, whose parents are white, simply would not have the right sorts of support, if any at all, to develop Korean cultural capacities. Not dissimilar would be the Filipino American child of, say, 5th or 6th generation Filipino Americans who have themselves lost nearly every connection to Filipino or Filipino American cultures. In these types of cases, it is biculturalism or hybrid culturalism that would require commitment.

I turn now to a fuller account of the political context of identity assimilation.

Incorporative Assimilation and Liberal Orientalism

Crucial to the popular discourse of incorporative assimilation is a set of indices that gives substance to the idea of minority group incorporation. Nearly every index is understood to be configured by a standard set by Whites or Euro-Americans. They typically include: intermarriage with Whites; residential integration with Whites; achieving a socioeconomic status comparable to Whites (i.e. middle-class status), attaining a level of education comparable to Whites, English language acquisition, and the declining significance of racial or ethnic self-identification, which is to say self-deracialization. Within the scholarly discourse of incorporative assimilation, there seem to be two general approaches, the so-called "straight-line" model and the "segmented" model, and they are not always neatly separable. On the classic conception, the straight-line model, all or most racial or ethnic groups should and will eventually assimilate to mainstream Whiteness according to most or all of the measures noted in the popular discourse, and many have added that just as Eastern and Southern Europeans so assimilated in the early 20th century, Asians, especially East Asians, will follow suit in the 21st century, and so presumably will other non-White groups eventually.[11]

The widely accepted critique of the straight-line model is that it ignores the strength and pervasiveness of racism and the size and impact of its effects. Also, whether or not racism is the cause, some subgroups significantly retain ethnic cultural affiliations. So a rival model that more fully accommodates this critique, sometimes called the "segmented assimilation model," contends that only some groups, particularly European ones, follow the single-track trajectory of the classic conception, whereas non-White groups, in virtue of racism and cultural retention, follow different paths – for example,

[11] The Chicago School of Sociology was an early and influential advocate of this view. See, for example, Robert E. Park, *Old World Traits Transplanted* (NY: Harper and Brothers, 1921). For perhaps the most sophisticated resuscitation of this type of account, see Richard Alba and Victor Nee, *Remaking the American Mainstream: Assimilation and Contemporary Immigration* (Cambridge: Harvard U. Press, 2003).

relative incorporation into the mainstream without loss of racial/ethnic identity or, more soberly, indefinite continuation in an underclass.[12]

I think it is not always clear that the segmented model is truly an advance upon its theoretical predecessor. Some versions seem to harbor many of the problematic mainstream norms and ideals of the straight-line model and differentiate themselves from the straight-line model only by an empirically-based cautionary note about predicting how far or how soon non-White groups will enter the mainstream. In any case, any assimilation account that takes racism seriously as social stratification, not just as individual prejudice, will have made some advance on the straight-line model.

Perhaps one indication of such political sobriety is how the account handles the notorious Model Minority Myth. This is the ideology that Asians as a group have earned a kind of near-Whiteness in virtue of achieving many of the social and economic standards typically attained by Whites, and that they serve, therefore, as a model for other non-Whites and vindication of the reality of American democracy. Almost the entirety of what is called "Asian American Studies" rails against this ideology. Very briefly, this myth is criticized for being insulting to other non-White groups, ignoring systemic racism against other non-White groups, ignoring almost entirely many significant subgroups within Asian America that continue to suffer socioeconomically, ignoring the working poor within valorized subgroups of Asian America, leading people away from remedial, preventative, or compensatory measures towards the aforementioned groups or subgroups, and subtly (or not) valorizing Whites as the essential normative ideal.[13] I will not belabor the point, but let me just quickly note that its problems can be summed up this way: the Model Minority Myth is too inaccurate to be a truth and too harmful to be an error; rather, it is a tool of social stratification or political domination. In fact, it may be one of the greatest of the most recent inventions of white supremacy as a political system.[14] The model minority myth offers the polity a way to maintain racial hierarchy by partially incorporating Asians while deftly normatively containing them in ways that make them seem unthreatening. But don't take my word for it. Consider the outlook of William McGurn, who was a long-time conservative writer for The Wall Street Journal and The National Review, and a speechwriter for former President George W. Bush. He marks out a distinctively anti-Black pathway for what we might call the "Americanization" of Asian Americans:

> Precisely because Asian Americans are making it in their adoptive land, they hold the potential not only to add to Republican rolls but to define a bona-fide American language of civil rights. Today we have only one language of civil rights, and it is inextricably linked to government intervention, from racial quotas

[12] See, for example, "Segmented Assimilation: Issues, Controversies, and Recent Research on the New Second Generation." *International Migration Review* 31 (4): 825-858, 1997.

[13] There are many works that explain and critique this myth. Here are just a few: Edward J.W. Park and John S.W. Park, *Probationary Americans: Contemporary Immigration Policies and the Shaping of Asian American Communities* (New York: Routledge Press, 2005); Don T. Nakanishi & Tina Yamano Nishida, eds., *The Asian American Education Experience: A Source Book for Teachers and Students* (New York: Routledge, 1995); Rosalind Chou & Joe Feagin, *The Myth of the Model Minority: Asian Americans Facing Racism* (Boulder: Paradigm Publishers, 2008); and Min Zhou & James V. Gatewood, eds., *Contemporary Asian America: A Multidisciplinary Reader* (New York: New York University Press, 2000), chs. 19-21.

[14] On the notion of white supremacy as a political system, see Charles Mills, *The Racial Contract* (Ithaca: Cornell U. Press, 1999).

to set-aside government contracts. It is also an exclusively black-establishment language, where America's myriad other minorities are relegated to second-class citizenship.[15]

One of the upshots of the Model Minority Myth is the spread of public and even scholarly opinion that Asian Americans "have made it" and that they are "honorary whites," which is to say that they constitute a model for incorporative assimilation. Against this view, various Asian Americanist scholars have argued not simply that Asian Americans continue to be victimized by classic forms of racism, but that they are subjected to a distinctive type of racism that prevents them from being extensively incorporated into the mainstream and that they cannot truly be "honorary whites." Specifically, many have argued that Asians in America have and continue to be conceived in terms of a distinctly xenophobic racism and that their political fate is as tenuous as U.S-Asia relations, which we know have been troubled by U.S. imperialism, anti-Asian immigration legislation, catastrophic wars across the 20th century, and now tense relations with the Koreas, China, and most conspicuously with South Asian peoples that are rendered suspect by our recent wars in Iraq and Afghanistan and the so-called War on Terror.[16] On political scientist Claire Jean Kim's account, the extensive history of anti-Asian racism is configured largely by what she calls "civic ostracism."[17] In a similar vein, legal theorist Neil Gotanda contends that a critical legal history demonstrates that Asians in America are specially vulnerable to what he calls "citizenship nullification."[18] And legal theorist David Cole and political philosopher Falguni Sheth argue that the current incarceration and disappearings of South Asian Americans and Muslims in the U.S. is normatively continuous with the notorious incarceration of Japanese Americans during WWII.[19] From a diverse array of fields, then, we find over and over again that Asian Americans have been rendered rightless or distinctly vulnerable in ways that are profoundly linked to how they are racialized as inferior and how they have been deemed to be a xenos, cultural alien, or civic outsider. And yet, as noted, the model minority myth is an important emergent discourse. The combination, then, of civic exclusion and racism, on the one hand, and the model minority myth, on the other, has led sociologist Mia Tuan to describe Asian Americans as trapped by the double bind of being an "honorary white"

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[15] William McGurn, "The Silent Minority," *National Review* June 24, 1991, p.19. Cited from Glenn Omatsu, "The 'Four Prisons' and the Movements of Liberation: Asian American Activism from the 1960s to the 1990s," in Karin Aguilar-San Juan, ed., *The State of Asian America: Activism and Resistance in the 1990s* (Boston: South End Press, 1994), p.49.

[16] Racism and xenophobia are clearly related, but they are separable. Asians, among others, have been classically subjected to both and in very evident ways. Some of these ideas are being worked out in Ron Sundstrom and David Kim, "Xenophobia and Racism," ms.

[17] Claire Jean Kim, "The Racial Triangulation of Asian Americans," in Gordon H. Chang, ed., *Asian Americans and Politics* (Stanford: Stanford U. Press, 2001), ch.2.

[18] Neil Gotanda, "Citizenship Nullification: The Impossibility of Asian American Politics," in Gordon Chang, ed., *Asian Americans and Politics*, ch.3.

[19] David Cole, *Enemy Aliens* (New York: New Press, 2003), and Falguni Sheth, *Toward a Political Philosophy of Race* (Albany: SUNY Press, 2009). Sheth's account has a broader focus and a more radical assessment of race and liberal societies. It is an important contribution to political philosophical treatments of race.

and a "forever foreigner."[20] Or, as sociologist Edward Park and political scientist John Park suggest, Asian Americans have been longtime "probationary Americans."[21]

In spite of these works and the phenomena they point to, many scholars continue to speak favorably about the so-called Whitening of Asian Americans. Nadia Kim, one of the important sociologists working to critique the new versions of the straight-line model and some versions of the segmented model, voices critical concern this way:

> I … question the methodologies that racial assimilation theses employ to forecast the racial future of the United States. … most predictive studies do not empirically interview or systematically observe Asian Americans (or Latinos) in the United States to capture if and how "race" might matter; nor do they draw on the many qualitative/historical studies that have already done so … Additionally, predictive studies do not draw on data from representative surveys which tap Asian Americans' experiences with racial bias and discrimination, especially pertaining to global inequalities, immigration and social citizenship.[22]

I could not agree more. And if, as Nadia Kim contends, race *matters* for Asian Americans and we must tap Asian American *experiences*, then we do well to consider the politics of self-evaluative emotions. For without our feelings, nothing matters. Without our feelings, our experiences fail to engage. And we find that Whiteness matters in a variety of problematic ways for the Asian Americans who are so often glibly or perfunctorily presented as models of incorporative assimilation and thereby cited as a reason to hail the progress of American democracy. Before turning to this, I offer some general considerations on emotion and self-evaluative emotion.

Emotion, Self-Evaluative Emotion, and Phenomenology

In the last couple decades, philosophy of emotion has become an active and productive area of research. A general consensus in this subfield is that emotion, and affectivity more generally, is not a brute sensation, like an itch or tickle, and that it pervades virtually every aspect of human life and plays a variety of positive and important roles.[23] Here I follow the lead of Michael Stocker, Peter Goldie, and like-minded philosophers.

On Stocker's view, what is important about emotion or affectivity is not simply that they are needed for reason and for disclosing or understanding the world, but also that they richly and necessarily color and constitute life itself. Emotion or affectivity can be variously ends or goods, essential constituents, or added perfections of activities or

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[20] Mia Tuan, *Forever Foreigners or Honorary Whites: The Asian Ethnic Experience Today* (Brunswick: Rutgers U. Press, 1999).

[21] Edward Park and John Park, *Probationary Americans*.

[22] Nadia Kim, "Critical Thoughts on Asian American Assimilation in the Whitening Literature," *Social Forces*, vol 86, no.2, December 2007, p.562. See, as well, her excellent book, *Imperial Citizens: Koreans and Race from Seoul to L.A.* (Stanford: Stanford U. Press, 2008).

[23] For a range of views historically presented, see Robert Solomon, ed., *What is an Emotion? Classic and Contemporary Readings* [2nd ed.] (New York: Oxford U. Press, 2002). And for book-length treatments, it is interesting to compare the different approaches and emphases of such fine work as, Michael Stocker with Elizabeth Hegeman, *Valuing Emotion* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1996); Sue Campbell, *Interpreting the Personal: Expression and the Formation of Feelings* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1998); Martha Nussbaum, *Upheavals of Thought: The Intelligence of Emotion* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2003); Jesse Prinz, *Gut Reactions: A Perceptual Theory of Emotion* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004); and Matthew Ratcliffe, *Feelings of Being: Phenomenology, Psychiatry, and the Sense of Reality* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008).

relations, as when, respectively, one has fun in playing, cares in a relationship, or takes pride in finishing a book long in the making.[24] Living a life, then, is being widely and variously emotionally engaged in activities and relations, and living well is being so engaged in the right ways.

Any plausible theory of the nature of emotion will construct an explanatory niche that is sensitive to these realities or, simply, to human reality. However, many such theories end up filling the niche with an account that reduces emotion to belief or judgment or sometimes to desire. Such cognitivist or conative accounts divest emotion of affect or feeling, which is the heart of emotion. This is because beliefs and judgments can be held without feeling, as when one believes or judges that weaving through highway traffic at 90 mph is dangerous but is too distracted to feel fear. And desires too can be had without affectivity as when one desires to help many in need, and even does so out of that desire, but all the while is too exhausted to feel care. As Stocker contends, emotion may well be characterized as a *mode* of belief, judgment, or desire, when these are held feelingfully. Thus, emotion cannot be reduced to any one or complex of these.[25] Stocker, and Goldie as well, contend that whatever else emotion may be, our lived experience shows that it is fundamentally a feelingful form of intentionality or an affective mode of awareness. And on Stocker's account, this intentionality must be understood not merely as an informing or disclosive state but as a participatory capacity, one that enables and constitutes activities and meaningful relations. Emotion is living intentionality.

In characterizing feeling or affectivity, Stocker notes that we come to a base-level phenomenon that can be triangulated by notions like care, interest, and concern. When I feel fear – actually *feel* fear – I do not merely, or perhaps at all, judge that something is threatening or dangerous, which I can do perfectly well in a very intellectual or ratiocinative way without any sense of charge or valence. Rather, I experience concern about or interest in this thing as threatening: I am *enlivened* to the danger; the threat *matters* to me. Thus, no care or interest, no affectivity or feeling. And without affectivity, we have no emotion. Moreover, since care or interest ushers us into the relevant aspects of the world, or since care or interest is how things matter to us, it follows that without emotion, the relevant kinds of mattering would be lost to us.

Peter Goldie contends that one of the features of emotion's intentionality is that it is a *feeling toward* some relevant feature of the world. In the end, I do not think this phrase, which suggests outward projection, describes our phenomenology adequately. Our experience is better described in terms of disclosures or presentings.[27] But it does usefully highlight the transcendental feature of intentionality while making essential reference to feelings. On his account, then, fear is a feeling toward danger; contempt a feeling toward inferiority or lowliness; and shame a feeling toward one's dishonored state or failure to realize an ideal. I think the importance of this general idea cannot be overstated. Something matters or has import in a dangerous way, offensive way, or an intriguing way precisely because of the types of feeling found in fear, resentment, or

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[24] See Stocker, *Valuing Emotions*, especially chs. 5-6.

[25] Stocker, *Valuing Emotions*, ch. 1.

[27] Interestingly, a similar concern can be raised with the phenomenologist, Charles Taylor, in his essay, "Self-Interpreting Animals," where he characterizes emotion not only as an affective mode of awareness, which seems fine, but also in terms of import *ascriptions*. I would have thought that a phenomenologist would have talked in terms of import disclosures or disclosings. This essay is chapter two of his *Human Agency and Language: Philosophical Papers 1* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1985).

curiosity. If there was no feeling, nothing would matter to us. We could aptly be conceptualized strictly in terms of beliefs and desires, and arguably we would no longer be considering real human beings. In fact, if we divested human beings of feeling and thus of emotion, we would in the same act be divesting the world of the offensive, the exhilarating, the threatening, the lowly, the repulsive, the intriguing, the adorable, and all the other attributes that exist in virtue of their mattering to us or being important to us. Feeling and worldly import are facets of the same structure.[28] And this is why feelings are almost never "merely" feelings and, as we shall see, why consideration of them is so important for political philosophy.

I think it is important to emphasize, whether or not Goldie or Stocker would agree, that the feeling involved in feeling toward is a feeling *of* the body. Here I do not mean the feeling involved in a bodily sensation, like a pounding heart or a constricting throat, though that can be a part of the feeling in question.[29] I mean, rather, a feeling had or possessed by the body and specifically the living phenomenal body.

One of the significant contributions of Merleau-Ponty is a way of understanding how the body is not a sophisticated mechanism that the mind skillfully uses, but rather a sentient, sensitive, living, animate entity and absolutely essential to understanding our kind of being in the world. In a famous passage about a subject's two hands touching each other, Merleau-Ponty notes that we do not have the experience of touching and the experience of being touched side by side, completely separate from each other, as when one sees an object next to another object. Rather, a distinctive ambiguity descends upon the experiences in question because we can and do alternate between feeling one's hand and one's other hand being felt. And so, throughout, we have the enactments of an animate entity, not the manipulations of a mere mechanism.[30] Also, he gives remarkable articulation to the idea that perception is always perception from a particular bodily point of view or angle of emanation or postural stance and that with finesse and nuance, the motor functions of our body are in constant coordination with perception enabling us to strengthen our "grip on the world" as when we, *without reflection or effort*, focus our eyes, tilt our heads, sit up, stand, or walk around an object to enable, maintain, or improve perception. Indeed, as phenomenologists often point out, the body is our opening onto the world, and correlatively our sense of possibilities in the world is embodied. Importantly, this living body can have this animated responsiveness and dynamic

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[28] See Charles Taylor, "Self-Interpreting Animals," for another take on this idea.

[29] On Stocker's account, feelings often involve bodily feelings in the sense of felt sensations of the body, as in the obvious case of fear churning in the stomach or anger heating one's collar. But, contrary to a position like William James', Stocker contends that not all feelings are bodily in this way. Some of the subtler passions, like hope or curiosity, or instances of them, are felt more in the soul, as it were. So he is only committed to the notion that the feelings or affectivity at the core of emotion are *psychic feelings*. Though emotion typically involves bodily feeling in the sense of recruiting bodily sensations, such sensations are not necessary for emotion. Stocker's case for emotions as psychic, not bodily, feelings is phenomenological. Goldie adds to this account. He argues that the world-directed intentionality crucial to emotion can only be discerned in psychic feelings, not bodily feelings. See Peter Goldie, *The Emotions: A Philosophical Exploration* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), p.58.

[30] Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception* (New York: Routledge, 1989), p.92-3. For valuable discussion of this, see M.C. Dillon, *Merleau-Ponty's Ontology* [2nd ed.] (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1997), ch.8.

attunement at a tacit or pre-conscious level, and this preconscious responsivenss is *crucial* to our explicitly reflective activities.[31]

In the account of emotion discussed above, I noted how Stocker and Goldie insist upon the affective intentionality of emotion and thus concern or interest in salient elements of the world. If we accommodate the insights of Merleau-Ponty, then this link between the subject's concern and the world's imports is mediated through the living phenomenal body. Part of the sentience or animation of the phenomenal body is sensory perception intimately linked to motor intentionality in such a way that we can effectively intelligently engage with the world, but feeling what is significant in the world is also part of this condition. And these aspects of the phenomenal body come together in a variety of ways. One of the most obvious is when perception and body comportment is guided by affective awareness of special features of the world. For example, a tourist afraid of theft may visually scan the faces or movements of an encroaching crowd for potential thieves or constantly feel for the presence of a wallet or the tautness of a purse strap.

If we return to some of Goldie's language, we might say that emotions are feelings toward only because they are *feelings of* the phenomenal body, by which again I mean a feeling had by the lived body, not a sensation of the body. Thus "feeling toward" is shorthand for "feeling-of-thus-feeling-toward." Ultimately, the focus of emotion is worldly imports, and the phenomenal body is often transparent or backgrounded in the experience. So it might also be said that emotion is a feeling *through* the body *to* what matters in the world. Shifting away from Goldie's projective language to classic phenomenological locutions, emotions are feelingful disclosures or presentings of what matters to us. But they are more than this. Returning to the earlier discussion, emotions in their myriad forms and occurrences are world-constituting in addition to being world-disclosing. In having emotion, we deeply participate in the world.[32]

In light of this brief account of emotion, I offer now a few words on self-evaluative emotions. The classic trinity is shame, guilt, and pride. Sometimes, embarrassment is included. But I think it is clear that if we look at our actual emotional lives, we find that the spectrum of self-evaluative emotion is much more expansive. Many of our paradigmatically other-directed feelings can be rendered reflexive, in both interesting and mundane ways. One can experience self-respect, self-love, self-hate, self-

[31] On this foundational topic, I have found helpful: M.C. Dillon, *Merleau-Ponty's Ontology* [2nd ed.]; Shaun Gallagher, *How the Body Shapes the Mind* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006); and Hubert Dreyfus, "Intelligence without Representation – Merleau-Ponty's Critique of Mental Representation: The Relevance of Phenomenology to Scientific Explanation," *Phenomenology and the Cognitive Sciences*, vol.1, no.4, p.367-383.

[32] I think it is not a stretch to read some of Stocker's work as running parallel to Heidegger's. As Matthew Ratcliffe has argued in *Feelings of Being*, ch.2, an emended Heideggerian account of mood can help us understand that there is a type of feeling, which he calls "existential feeling," that is not an in-world experience but forms a basic way of relating to the world itself, giving us a fundamental sense of the world's reality or our belongingness within it. Some aspects of Stocker's work resonate with this idea. But apart from the deliverance of the world as a totality, other elements of Stocker's work can be understood as positing feelings as the myriad forms of meaning that saturate the world immanently. Heidegger's totality and Stocker's myriad – are they the same?

disgust, self-contempt, and self-directed forms of adoration, disappointment, anger, rage, and so on. But for my purposes, I briefly discuss shame and self-contempt.[33]

Though difficult to define, shame admits of general characterization.[34] To begin, it is commonly observed that shame involves a painful apprehension of the self or its attributes as diminished, lowered, or lessened somehow, attended often by a hiding impulse. This lowered regard can result from noting that one has failed to live up to certain cherished ideals. But this cannot be the whole story of the onset of shame, for at least three reasons. First, as is common, people can undergo shame against their considered judgment, which here may be the belief that one has fared well morally or in life at the particular time in question. The fact that one can feel shame in spite of such a belief suggests that the intra-psychic authority behind the condemning force in shame can ignore features of reality, like the fact that one has *not* failed to live up to one's ideals.[35] As psychoanalytic accounts of shame clarify, a prime candidate for the internal authority is an imago, an internalization of, typically, one's parents, which is often modified into a demanding psychic structure, sometimes of a very severe kind.[36] Second, without oneself failing, one may feel a kind of associational shame through strong identification with another person or a group that the agent deems to have failed in some respect. Third, as John Deigh and Sandra Bartky have emphasized, the sense of diminution need not even concern failure in the voluntaristic or accountability sense, whether in regards to ideals the agent explicitly sanctions or to ideals that constitute the imago.[37] For it might be a result of coming into a world in which one is in some sense a failed or diminished subject well before arriving in it, precisely like the situation faced by the racially stigmatized. When this is the case, the lowered view of the self is not the result of considerations of flawed agency but of flawed being. In the now familiar story, which has a variety of theoretical articulations, the agent internalizes demeaning images and messages in the course of learning social reality. Importantly, these images and messages do not simply float around in culture. They are politically organized, and the discussion of the prior

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[33] In this subsection, I draw heavily from my earlier essay "Self-Contempt and Color-Blind Liberalism in *The Accidental Asian* in E. Ann Kaplan and Susan Schekel, eds., *The Boundaries of Affect: Ethnicity and Emotion* (Stony Brook: Stony Brook University and The Humanities Institute at Stony Brook, 2007), p.39-70.

[34] On the topic of shame and self-evaluative emotions, I have learned from many. See Helen Block Lewis, *Shame and Guilt in Neurosis* (New York: International Universities Press, 1971); Gabrielle Taylor, *Pride, Shame, and Guilt: Emotions of Self-Assessment* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985); Andrew Morrison, *Shame: The Underside of Narcissism* (Hillsdale, NJ: Analytic Press, 1989); Sandra Bartky, *Femininity and Domination* (New York: Routledge, 1990), ch.6; Bernard Williams, *Shame and Necessity*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993); Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick and Adam Frank, eds., *Shame and its Sisters: A Silvan Tomkins Reader* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1995), ch.6; John Deigh, *The Sources of Moral Agency: Essays in Moral Psychology and Freudian Theory* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1996), ch.11; Richard Wollheim, *On the Emotions* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1999), ch.3; Martha Nussbaum, *Hiding from Humanity: Shame and Disgust in the Law* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2004); Daniel Haggerty, "White Shame: Responsibility and Moral Emotions," *Philosophy Today*, vol.53, 2009; and especially, Michael Stocker with Elizabeth Hegeman, *Valuing Emotion* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1996), chs.8-9.

[35] For a particularly deep account of this and related matters of shame, see Michael Stocker with Elizabeth Hegeman, *Valuing Emotions*, p.217-229.

[36] Helen Block Lewis, *Shame and Guilt in Neurosis*.

[37] For very helpful discussion here, see Sandra Lee Bartky, *Femininity and Domination*, ch.6; John Deigh, *The Sources of Moral Agency*, ch.11; and Martha Nussbaum, *Hiding from Humanity*, chs.4-7.

section shows that anti-Asian messages deriving from American orientalism is a case in point. Therefore, this sort of shame is not the result of failed agency but the *inward resonance of a suppressive social order*. And, of course, these three forms of shame are not mutually exclusive.

Self-contempt, though often collapsed under the category of shame, has a different dynamic. My readings of psychic doubling in Du Bois (i.e. double consciousness) and Fanon (i.e. corporeal malediction) lead me to think that they were onto this distinction between shame and self-contempt, even if neither elaborated on it.[38] In any case, the paradigm of contempt is other-directed.[39] One feels negative affect, perhaps some sense of offense, at somebody's or some thing's perceived inferior nature or qualities. More than this, however, one's feeling is phenomenologically hierarchical: with varying degrees of intensity or clarity, one feels in the affective backdrop one's own superior status relative to the target whose perceived inferior qualities occasioned the negative feelings or sense of offense. Also, in typical cases, there is a desiderative element wherein the agent seeks intra-psychically and sometimes more literally and outwardly some sort of detachment from the "unworthy" or "sullying" target. This seems to indicate the basic psychological function of the emotion: status-conservation. And contempt may have this function, at least typically, within a psychic esteem economy, which is why contemptuous agents often feel some sense of pleasure or pride over their demeaned target. Given this basic function and the highly interpersonal character of contempt, the primary (though not exclusive) role of contempt in the wider social ecology would seem to be the preservation of social hierarchies. So self-contempt will be characterized by negative affect, maybe involving a sense of offense, felt toward one's own perceived inferior nature or qualities along with a sense of vertical detachment, perhaps tinged with pleasure, from one's own self. Depending on one's situation, history, and personality structures, this could be felt in a cool or hot way, experienced episodically or pervasively, mingled with pity or with anger, followed by shame or by defensive other-contempt, accompanied with chiding of oneself or with violence toward oneself, and so on and so forth. And as with shame, certain kinds of intransigent self-contempt can indicate the inward resonance of a suppressive social order, rather than accountability for failed agency.

Having briefly described shame and self-contempt, it will be useful to bring them together in a comparative frame. There are many forms of activity and passivity in emotion. In one respect, self-contempt is phenomenologically active in a way that shame is not. In shame, one realizes, concedes, acknowledges, bows before, or otherwise passively accepts within the parameters of the emotion's phenomenology the painful conception of the self constitutive of the emotion. By contrast, in self-contempt, one judges, belittles, pokes at, mocks, sneers, or otherwise actively asserts or pushes a

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[38] The work of Sylvan Tomkins does elaborate on the distinction between shame and self-contempt. A discussion of it is beyond the confines of this essay. See Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick and Adam Frank, eds., *Shame and its Sisters: A Silvan Tomkins Reader*.

[39] The brief characterization of other-directed contempt in this essay draws from some of what I still take to be plausible in an earlier account of mine: "Contempt and Ordinary Inequality," in Susan Babbitt and Sue Campbell, eds., *Racism and Philosophy* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1999). For a recent and developed philosophical account of other-directed contempt, one that differs in some important respects from the one I give, see Michele Mason, "Contempt as a Moral Attitude," *Ethics* 113:2 (2003), p.234-72.

disparaging conception of the self upon the self. So if shame centrally involves realizing, self-contempt centrally involves judging or contemning.

Another comparative point to consider, a significant one, is the kinds of intra-psychic identification and proximity involved in the two emotions. It seems clear that in shame one is intimately connected, indeed fully identified, with one's own self, which is why the ashamed agent can receive the condemning givens in a deeply personal manner. But in self-contempt, one looks down upon one's shame-able self and, hence, is distinctly detached from one's own self. The case of shame seems relatively straightforward in this respect, whereas the case of self-contempt does not. The agent-self, that is the contemning self, in the process of detaching from the object-self, that is the contemned self, disaffiliates from the main self, as it were, because that object-self is the main self, which is to say the self with whom one is ordinarily identified and with whom one ordinarily self-identifies. Therefore, who is the agent- or contemning self that is looking down upon her own self, or main self, in contempt? Part of the unclarity here results from the fact that the contemning self, though real in agency, is in some sense illusory from the standpoint of its identification structure. The contemning self takes on the perspective, and intra-psychically assumes the position, of the superior in the specific or general respects in which the main self is deemed inferior. But since in actuality the contemned self is the main self, the contemning self is fabricated from the materials of *an other's identity*, specific or general, accurate or distorted. The materials for this fabrication of the contemning self are gathered and framed by a process of imaginative identification. And the imaginative affiliation or projection is, of course, directed upon those perceived to be relevantly superior to the disparagingly perceived main self. This attachment to, and alignment with, perceived superiority is typically a precondition for the production of self-contempt. Since the preconditional attachment and alignment can remain mostly in the phenomenological backdrop, and sometimes receive support from the social order, the source of self-contempt can remain largely hidden and the production of self-contempt relatively easy.

> As a final note, consider Sartre's provocative depiction of the assimilated Jew. Like the timid person, like the scrupulous person, the Jew is not content to act or think; he sees himself act, he sees himself think... It is not the man but the *Jew* whom the Jews seek to know in themselves through introspection; and they wish to know him *in order to deny him*… The Jew, because he knows he is under observation, takes the initiative and attempts to look at himself through the eyes of others. This objectivity toward himself is still another ruse of inauthenticity; while he contemplates himself with the "detachment" of another; he becomes another person, a pure witness.
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> However, he knows that this detachment from himself will be effective only if it is ratified by others. That is why one finds in him so often the faculty of assimilation. … He hopes to become "a man," nothing but a man, a man like other men, by taking in all thoughts of man and acquiring a human point of view of the universe. (italics his)[40]

Sartre notes that in a certain type of Jewish person, the detachment from and negation of one's own self is not free-floating. Rather, these issue from the standpoint of the imagined, presumably superior, normal, or normative Gentile. In addition, this doubling

[40] Jean-Paul Sartre, *Anti-Semite and Jew* (New York: Schocken Books, 1948), p.96-98.

of the self and affiliation with the Gentile is deemed to be tenuous without the social support of Gentiles and that this helps to explain some types of Jewish assimilation. What I've described above, then, can be understood as providing some of the affective dynamics of this sort of activity. Some version of this phenomenon can be seen in some of the cases to be discussed.

Identity Assimilation, and Emotions and Strategies of Self-Making

As noted in the early sections of this essay, conceptions of identity assimilation shift the focus from large-scale group processes to an agent's self-conception, ethical life, and engagement with the world. So why is an examination of self-evaluative emotions relevant here? Generally speaking, assimilation or its alternatives *is* a self-evaluative project since it is a self-directed normative shaping of one's own identity. And insofar as anything matters in this project, the emotions are already involved – not just discrete emotions but a whole affective constellation. One of the most conspicuous involvements of emotion concerns the stigma of Asianness or Orientalness in a polity that continues to be stratified by race. As discussed earlier, classic forms of anti-Asian racism endure and the xenophobic or civically ostracizing forms of racism retain a deep and wide configuring structure in the U.S polity. And here it is interesting to consider John Rawls' classic statement that a people's self-respect is among the *primary goods* of a just society.[41] In a similar vein, recently, Martha Nussbaum has argued at length that shame should never play a role in law or public policy. The effects of shame are overly undermining when they derive from the issuances of power.[42] Although anti-Asian stigmata are not a part of public policy in any direct sense, they are nevertheless features of the public order, and presumably Nussbaum's forceful criticisms against legal shaming would apply to cultural and political shaming as well.

Among the various forms of anti-Asian stigma, at least three seem to have some real weight in our culture: 1) the aesthetic devaluation of Asian faces and bodies, 2) the derogation of alleged Asian personality traits, especially in terms of passivity, non-individuality, or social ineptness, and 3) the derogation of alleged Asian foreignness, alienness, or being an FOB (Fresh Off the Boat). Each of these, and still others, are potentially shaming or productive of self-contempt. These are among the worldly imports that are the counterparts of Asian American shame and self-contempt. And, as noted, these emotions may be experienced as intransigent inner resonances of the social hierarchy. Consequently, one must deal or cope with a world in which one's identity is already, seemingly everywhere jeopardized.[43]

Here, my claim is not that in virtue of the stigmata, all Asians feel shame or self-contempt and still less that all Asians are characterologically shame-prone or shame-ridden. Rather, my point is that in virtue of these entrenched public stigmata and the

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[41] John Rawls, *Theory of Justice*.

[42] Martha Nussbaum, *Hiding from Humanity: Disgust, Shame, and the Law* (Princeton: Princeton U. Press, 2004).

[43] In bringing a phenomenological analysis to Asian American identity concerns, I take inspiration from Linda Martin Alcoff's *Visible Identities: Race, Gender, and the Self* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006) and Emily Lee, "The Meaning of Visible Differences of the Body," *American Philosophical Association Newsletter on the Status of Asian/Asian Americans* v. 2, no. 2 (Spring 2003): 34-37, and "A Phenomenology for Homi Bhabha's Postcolonial Metropolitan Subject," *The Southern Journal of Philosophy* v. xlvi, no. 4 (Winter 2008): 537-557.

conditions that sustain them, they all potentially experience, to make up some words, "shameability" and "self-contemnability," that is to say, a distinctive vulnerability to being shamed or undergoing self-contempt. Also, my concern here is not to brand all cases of assimilation. My concern is with the how and why of identity assimilation, especially when biculturalism and hybridity are options. So given the particularities of certain cases, perhaps there can be a genuinely unproblematic preference to disidentify with one's ethnic group. In addition, Korean adoptees in Minnesota, for example, may have very few opportunities to do anything other than assimilate, and no blame is laid upon them. But these sorts of cases aside, there are plenty of others, the majority of them surely, where the issue of stigma and shameability emerge as non-trivial considerations. And so in virtue of the capacity to be shamed or undergo self-contempt, most Asians must devise a psychic strategy to contend with or manage this sort of vulnerability in the world. Forgiveness and courage may offer analogues. Just as forgiveness is effective normative management of resentment or hatred, and courage is the effective normative management of fear, Asians Americans must develop efficacious normative structures of esteem or stigma management.

But what sorts of effects have been produced by anti-Asian stigmata in our polity? Have Asian Americans successfully produced effective anti-racist forms of managing shame and self-contempt? Since the 1960's Asian American Movement, a strong sense of group pride has been formed as a way of dealing with anti-Asian stigmata and other forms of racism. This would seem to offer one effective coping structure. Alternatively, perhaps Asian Americans could follow a path of genuine democratic deracination and thus strive to repel anti-Asian stigmata and any form of racism without any sense of racial identity. I have my doubts about this as a general course of group action at this moment in time. In any case, the assimilation studies discussed at the start of the essay do not ask these sorts of questions. They only see the satisfaction of exterior indices of mainstream incorporation. The exception of course is the measure of declining racial self-identification. But they do not take seriously the possibility that some Asian Americans may have a declining sense of Asian self-identification in virtue of an inclining sense of White self-identification. And surely White self-identification is not deracination! Assimilation of this sort cannot be heralded as proof of "getting beyond race" or entering a "post-racial America."

Consider here a recent Harvard University student honors thesis featured in a Washington Post article.[44] Jennifer Tsai, while a senior at Harvard, sought to examine the racial attitudes of her Asian American Harvard peers. In her thesis, she notes,

> Among blacks, 'acting white' is socially stigmatized, but Asian students who 'act white' usually occupy the more socially prestigious positions. Because 'acting Asian' is equated with acting foreign or like a nerd, 'acting white' among Asian people becomes a source of pride, and is valued as the ability to assimilate into American society. While both performances are frequently practiced, the Asian students who 'acted white' are more likely to achieve extracurricular activity status within the school, which often led to admissions into more prestigious colleges.[45]

[44] Jay Matthews, "Asian American Students and School Stereotypes," Washington Post, Jan. 8, 2008. I accessed it online at: http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2008/01/08/AR2008010802038_pf.html.

[45] Cited in Jay Matthews, "Asian American Students and School Stereotypes."

And the reporter noted that Tsai told him that "One of the most alarming features of my research was how Asian students who went to Harvard were very aware of and often shied away from having too many Asian friends. They saw having only White friends as sort of a badge of honor."[46] Tsai also mentions that at Harvard, there is a 34-member Facebook group, called "Twinkies," that aims to gather people who are "yellow" on the outside and "White" on the inside.

Earlier, I mentioned shame vulnerability and the need for effective and proper ways of dealing with it. Jennifer Tsai's research illustrates two kinds of coping. First, those Asian Americans who sought to emulate whiteness and even go as far as to avoid Asian friends – they like to be the lone Asian within a White group – seem to manifest a strategy consistent with what Erving Goffman calls a "normal deviant." On his account, a normal deviant is one who accepts the normative force of the relevant stigma but seeks to be "unobtrusive" in the right sorts of ways to receive conditional acceptance by the dominant group.[47] The shame- or self-contempt-inducing vulnerability in question is a disposition, and the "Lone Asian" has through a certain type of assimilation not eliminated the disposition but reduced the number of ways in which it can be triggered. Though Goffman doesn't put it this way, the Lone Asian's strategy is a tenuous form of shame repression, not shame elimination. This strategy may also be expressive of self-contempt given the very strong identification with Whites and the apparent disdain directed upon other Asians.

Second, the so-called Twinkies at Harvard seem so unabashed about their White-valuation – recall they actually formed a group and thus are *not* the Asian loners just discussed – that they seem to have achieved something extraordinary: White-identified *shamelessness*. They appear to have moved beyond "shameability" in virtue of a peculiarly ironic disconnection from Asianness. The former type of person, the Lone Asian, partly accepts his Asian identity because he values being and, importantly, *being seen* as an atypical or exceptional Asian who can "hang" with Whites. They value themselves as a kind of "credit to the race."[48] But the Harvard Twinkies do not seem to have the same anxieties about being accorded the status of exceptional Asian. Conspicuously, neither do they seem to care about being or being seen as so-called White-wannabes.[49] For them, Asianness is purely external, and their ability to negotiate or play with this externality makes their rationale for forming the Twinkie collective primarily instrumental. Presumably, their shared outlook offers a networking opportunity or perhaps they can get together for comic relief. So if the Twinkie collective disbanded, these Harvard students would not grieve the loss of one of their last ties to Asianness. Nor would they worry about their unabashed White-identification.

In contrast, if completely separated from Asians, the Harvard Lone Asian would lose something very meaningful: a group that he inferiorizes in order to have a contrast class against which he shines as an exception. Returning to Sartre's discussion of the self-

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[46] Ibid.

[47] Erving Goffman, *Stigma: Notes on the Management of Spoiled Identity* (New York: Simon & Shuster, 1963), ch.4.

[48] I discuss this in greater detail in "Self-Contempt and Color-Blind Liberalism in *The Accidental Asian*". Eric Lui, the author of *The Accidental Asian*, at least when he was younger, seems to have shared the outlook of the Harvard "lone Asian" who values being an atypical Asian.

[49] Indeed, the accountability structure of self-hatred discourse, even if flawed, seems to have no hold on them at all.

contemptuous Jew, the Lone Asian seems to roughly instantiate the character type Sartre delineates. But the members of the Twinkie collective seem to have "perfected" their White-identified assimilation, for they no longer have the devaluing kind of self-monitoring and need for ratification that Sartre attributes to the Lone Jew, as it were. It seems possible that some of them arrived at that condition in unproblematic ways. Perhaps they truly have an "innocent" aesthetic disinclination toward Asian or Asian American culture or identity where this somehow has no connection to anti-Asian pressures in the wider public. But given the foregoing, for the majority of them, the completion of White-affirmation habits seems a plausible explanation. In any case, neither form of coping is deracination, and arguably neither of them is unproblematic assimilation.

To fill out the scene further, consider some of the qualitative research conducted by sociologists Rosalind Chou and Joe Feagin on the lived experience of a variety of Asian Americans.[50] In examining "the sociopsychological costs of white hostility and discrimination," Chou and Feagin summarize their findings thus:

> some respondents report having gotten openly angry about racist events, or have worked collectively to respond, but such overt responses are relatively rare. Instead, our respondents mostly seem to manage discriminatory incidents internally and individually. The personal battle with hostility and discrimination often leads to feelings of isolation, sadness, disillusionment, or hopelessness. Serious consequences flow from such emotional withdrawal, and/or suppression of memories of racial hostility and discrimination. Seeking out professional assistance appears to be relatively rare for these respondents or their families. Moreover, when a few have tried to find help, they usually have not known where to turn or have been misunderstood or rejected by those whom they contacted."[51]

Unlike the presumably privileged Harvard students, these Asian American respondents seem to be both more trapped by their "shameability" and have less material and status-related resources for dealing with anti-Asian stigmata and racism. In fact, as I read the interviews, many of the subjects were perfectly willing to talk about their "objective" problems but seemed to be unable or unwilling to discuss their shame or shame vulnerability in any real detail, which is of course consistent with the hiding or covering impulse in shame. When one is ashamed, one is typically ill at ease announcing this fact. But the largely inferred nature of their shame or "shameability" was itself revealing and important for a study concerned with the dynamics of self-evaluative emotion. In fact, it is interesting to note that Helen Block Lewis, in her classic treatment of shame, also found that in a very large number of the clinical cases out of which she produced her book, shame was rarely cited by the subjects as part of the problem for which they sought clinical help. She points out that the overall pattern in these subjects was the presence of "overt but unnamed" shame. And precisely this seems to be a recurring element in the interviews conducted by Chou and Feagin of ordinary Asian Americans. What is more,

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[50] Rosalind Chou and Joe Feagin, *The Myth of the Model Minority: Asian Americans Facing Racism* (Boulder: Paradigm Publishers, 2008). For insightful discussion about the variety of Asian American experiences of racism and coping with racism, I thank Jonathan Leung, my commentator for an earlier oral address of this essay. As well, I would like to thank various members of the audience at CSU Fullerton for their very helpful comments, including Craig Ihara, Emily Lee, and JeeLoo Liu.

[51] Rosalind Chou and Joe Feagin, *The Myth of the Model Minority: Asian Americans Facing Racism* (Boulder: Paradigm Publishers, 2008), p.101.

some of the subjects indicated that they felt a certain helplessness with regard to their stigmatization and the way it oppressed them. I can think of few psychosocial phenomena that exacerbate shame more than the sense of helplessness.

As I noted earlier, I do not think that all Asians suffer from racial shame or self-contempt. Interestingly, many contend that California Asians, especially in San Francisco and Los Angeles, have overcome anti-Asian stigmata. There is surely something to this. I now live in the San Francisco area, so I see this phenomenon in contrast to Asian Americans I knew when growing up in various parts of the Northeast and Midwest. But I have noticed that many Asian American young adults in the San Francisco area nevertheless feel distinctly uncomfortable about the stigma of being a FOB (Fresh Off the Boat). This is not necessarily shame or self-contempt since it may be fear of the consequences of other people's benighted views about recent immigrants. But I have also found it curious that many of these same people find it difficult to make friends with recently arrived Asian immigrants and strenuously emphasize the American aspect of their being Asian Americans. In fact, I often hear of sub-Asian American student organizations – like clubs for Korean Americans or Filipino Americans – in various universities in California struggle with the issue of relations between, for example, Korean immigrants and 2nd or 3rd generation Korean Americans or Filipino immigrants and 2nd, 3rd, or 4th generation Pinoys/Pinays. On my campus, I have known Asian immigrants who have felt more comfortable in the International Student Association than in their respective ethnic student clubs, not because of language barriers but the stigma of being an FOB foisted on them by people who claim the same ethnicity. Perhaps this is all merely incidental. But if the foregoing holds, then we have just as good an explanation, if not a better one, in terms of residual struggles with the xenophobic elements of anti-Asian stigmata. Correlatively, in such communities, the modest ability to modify the relevant worldly imports is telling.

If the foregoing holds, then insofar as Asians are the focal point of celebrations of a "post-racial" America, the strategy of Asian American valorization backfires to a large extent. Psychic forms of White supremacy persist with vitality, even if not universally, in the Asian American community. Arguably, healthy forms of Asian American self-identification retain their normative appeal, in contrast to complete deracination and to White-identification, because they enable Asian Americans to more effectively engage with the world they have been given. But that argument must be left for another occasion.