

Friends or Enemies?: Generational Politics in the Korean American Community in Los Angeles

Edward J.W. Park

This paper examines generational politics in the Korean American community in Los Angeles. After outlining how the Immigration Act of 1965 led to the acceleration of generational transition in the contemporary immigrant experience, the paper focuses its attention on the entry of the post-immigrant generation into Korean American community politics. Relying on interviews and case studies, the entry of the post-immigrant generation is examined both as a source of new political resources for community mobilization as well as a new source of intra-community conflict. As greater numbers of the post-immigrant generation reach adulthood and become active in political affairs, the issue of generational politics will play an increasingly important role for shaping not only the political developments in immigrant communities but also the broader politics of the American society.

KEY WORDS: Korean Americans; immigrant politics; generational conflict.

IMMIGRANT POLITICS AND GENERATIONAL TRANSITIONS

The purpose of this paper is to examine the role of generational politics in the broader political formation of Korean Americans in Los Angeles. For Korean Americans, the Los Angeles Civil Unrest of 1992 served as a powerful wake up call to engage the mainstream political system and to seek their American political incorporation (Abelmann and Lie, 1995; Min, 1996; Park, 1998). While their political formation has taken on a sense of urgency due to the extraordinary crisis brought on by the civil unrest, Korean Americans are joined by millions of other immigrants in search of mainstream political inclusion and empowerment. Indeed, within the past decade, there has been a renewed interest on immigrant

Direct correspondence to Edward J.W. Park, Department of Sociology, University of Southern California, Los Angeles, California 90089-2539 (e-mail: ejpark@rcf.usc.edu).

political formation. As the U.S. absorbed more than 17 million immigrants in the three decades since the passage of the Immigration Act of 1965, sociologists and political scientists alike have explored how this newest group of Americans have fared in the American political system (Portes and Rumbaut, 1996; Jones-Correa, 1998; Skerry, 1993; Nakanishi, 1991; Brackman and Erie, 1995).

The issue of generations has been one of the central issues in the contemporary literature on immigrant political formation. At the symbolic level, the emergence of an American-born generation has been viewed as one of the central mechanisms to motivate immigrants to break their ties to homeland politics and to participate more fully in the American mainstream political system. Based on his study of Latino political formation in New York City, Jones-Correa (1998) finds that the creation of an American-born generation plays a powerful role in reorienting Latino immigrant political consciousness away from the politics of Mexico and Central America and towards American politics where the future of their children lie. Likewise, Abelmann and Lie (1995) and Min (1996) argue that the creation of *eesae* ("second generation") consolidates the transition of Korean American political priorities from following "homeland" politics in South Korea to pursuing American politics in the U.S. In addition, others have pointed out that the post-immigrant generations can serve as powerful advocates on behalf of their immigrant parents who struggle with structural barriers—in particular the lack of U.S. citizenship and English fluency—to mainstream political participation and who remain unfamiliar with American political culture. At this more practical level, discussing the political formation of Asian Americans, Ong and Nakanishi (1996) have pointed to the post-immigrant generation's greater electoral participation while Espiritu (1992) has underscored the sociocultural resources that they can bring to bear on immigrant politics, including their greater willingness to engage in pan-ethnic and multi-racial coalition building. However, these same studies have also raised the issue of generational conflict in immigrant political formation. Not surprisingly, immigrant generations often view the political rise of post-immigrant generations as a major threat to their political leadership and legitimacy, while the post-immigrant generation has charged the immigrant generation for being unwilling to share the responsibility of community leadership and for being too reticent in their shift from homeland to U.S.-based politics (Jones-Correa, 1998; Park, 1998).

The experience of Korean Americans in Los Angeles can serve as an important case study of examining the role of generational transition in the broader process of immigrant political formation. Since the Los Angeles Civil Unrest of 1992, Korean Americans in the city have been actively engaged in political mobilization (Park, 1994; Park, 1996; Chang, 1994). Initially motivated by their sense of victimization and the urgency to participate in the rebuilding process, Korean Americans have made tremendous inroads into the mainstream political process, including electing a Korean American Congressman and securing a position in the Advisory Panel of the Presidential Initiative on Race (Park, 1998). Their

search for political empowerment has profoundly transformed the community's political leadership. Among the changes, one of the most striking and significant has been the increasing participation of post-immigrant Korean Americans (Park, 1994; Min, 1996). While post-immigrant Korean American political leaders have brought much needed and welcomed political resources, their entry has also created tension and conflict within the community. As the nation approaches the 35th anniversary of the landmark Immigration Act of 1965, millions of post-immigrant generation Americans are coming of age and are poised to enter the political arena, transforming the political dynamics of both their immigrant communities and the rest of the nation.

A NEW VISION OF THE POST-IMMIGRANT GENERATION

For Asian and Latino immigrants, who constitute the vast majority of U.S. immigrants since the 1960s, the shift from a largely adult male migration to migration that heavily includes women and children represents a striking departure from historical patterns (Portes and Rumbaut, 1996). The change in immigrant composition for Korean Americans is typical of major Asian American and Latino migration flows. During the 1980s, of the 338,880 Koreans who migrated to the U.S., 54% were women and 22% were under the age of fifteen (Shinagawa, 1996; Immigration and Naturalization Service, 1998). As a point of comparison, of the 6048 first wave of Korean migrants into Hawaii, only 11% were women and 9% were children (Takaki, 1989). This shift in the composition of migration has two direct effects on the generation change in the contemporary Korean American and other similarly situated immigrant communities.

First, with the near parity between the genders and the migration of married couples, the pace of second generation (i.e., those who are born in the U.S. of immigrant parents) formation has greatly increased. Second, the migration of children has created a large 1.5 ("one point five") generation. A term that has become widely used in the Korean American community, "1.5 generation" refers to those who were born in the country of their origin but went through their formative socialization process within the U.S. For those who immigrated at the earliest ages, their experiences do not substantively differ at all with the second generation with the exception of the citizenship status associated with their place of birth. For those who immigrated at a later age, their American socialization and educational experiences along with their English fluency mark the difference with their immigrant generation parents, while the memory of their country of birth and a greater familiarity with its culture and language mark the difference with their second generation counterparts. Obviously, the 1.5 generation category spans a wide spectrum of experiences and identities. Nevertheless, the importance of the 1.5 generation in all aspects of immigrant community life—including political life—undermines

viewing the generation change simply from the more common perspective of first and second generations. Within Korean American community politics, the current debate regarding "generation change" refers to the entry of both U.S.-born and 1.5 generations (Min, 1996). An important consequence of the 1.5 generation's involvement in community politics is that they increase the pace of generation shift within immigrant communities since they are, by definition, older than the second generation. To capture this complexity brought on by the 1.5 generation, this article uses the term "post-immigrant" generation to refer to both the U.S.-born and the 1.5 generations of Korean Americans. While the term 1.5 generation has found its widest use in the Korean American community, it clearly captures an important generation dynamic in contemporary immigrant flows that includes large numbers of children.

DATA AND METHODS

The primary data for this study was collected from 50 taped interviews with Korean Americans in Los Angeles conducted from May, 1996 to August, 1997. The interviewees consisted of 40 individuals who were politically active in the Korean American community. Of these 40 individuals, 15 were first generation and 25 were post-immigrant generation (18 1.5 generation and 7 second generation) and included 8 respondents who were members of explicit political organizations (such as Korean American Democratic Committee, Korean American Republican Association, and Korean American Coalition). More numerous were individuals who had positions in social service, ethnic/cultural, civic, and business organizations that are active in community politics. Also, 10 individuals who were not formally participating in community affairs were interviewed to gain insights into their perceptions of Korean American politics. They included students (4), entrepreneurs (4), and religious leaders (2). These interviews are supplemented with newspaper articles and published studies as well as written notes of the author's fieldwork in the community from 1992 to the present.

"THEY ARE OUR SAVIORS"

The participation of the post-immigrant generation in community politics can be approached from two complementary perspectives. On the one hand, the inclusion of the post-immigrant generation can be viewed from the perspective of additional resources that they bring to an immigrant community's political mobilization. On the other hand, the political emergence of the post-immigrant generation can be viewed from the perspective of a new source of intra-community conflict, giving attention to inter-generation competition over leadership and scarce

resources. Rather than oppositional, these perspectives highlight the complexities and the tensions behind generational transition in immigrant political formation. This section of the paper will examine the resources that the post-immigrant generation brings to community political mobilization.

The first and the most obvious resource that the post-immigrant generation brings is their greater English fluency. This *linguistic resource* is profoundly important for immigrant communities as they attempt to participate in mainstream politics. In addition to effectively participating in the formal political process, English fluency is a critical resource in the contemporary political environment where mass media has become such an important political arena. Second, the post-immigrant generation can bring greater familiarity with the American political culture to a community whose political framework and mindset is often based in homeland politics. This *cultural resource* can range from drawing historical knowledge of American political experiences that can be marshaled for contemporary politicking to having greater racial sensitivity to effectively engage in inter-racial dialogue and coalition building. Third, the post-immigrant generation can bring their greater personal linkages to the mainstream society—derived from their professional and social life—to advocate on behalf of the immigrant community's political interests. Examples of *personal resources* that someone might bring to the community include a journalist who works for a mainstream newspaper and can use her/his position to provide more sympathetic coverage for the community or a person who maintains a friendship with an elected politician and can bring explicitly political access on behalf of the community. Insofar as post-immigrant generations have relatively greater access to mainstream institutions and social networks, they are more likely than their immigrant parents to possess personal resources that can be mobilized for political purposes. Collectively, these post-immigrant generation resources represent a potentially valuable addition to the political development of immigrant communities as they seek to engage the mainstream political system.

For the Korean American community in Los Angeles, all of these resources played crucial roles in the emergence of the post-immigrant generation political leadership. In the immediate aftermath of the civil unrest, one of the first areas of direct political mobilization within the community was the mainstream media coverage of the event. While the community was generally unsatisfied with the depiction of Korean Americans as alternatively an important cause of the civil unrest ("Korean-Black Conflict") and as gun-toting vigilantes, a specific mobilizing event occurred on May 4, 1992, when ABC-TV's influential *Nightline* invited only African American community leaders to address the Korean-Black Conflict (Min, 1996; Park, 1994). The exclusion of Korean Americans led to a nationwide campaign to demand a Korean American voice. The task of finding a Korean American spokesperson fell on the immigrant generation-led Korean Federation of Los Angeles (KFLA). Unable to find a spokesperson who could speak "fluent English" within its own ranks, KFLA, in coordination with other community

organizations, turned to Angela Oh, a 1.5 generation Korean American attorney who was largely an unknown within the entrenched community leadership (Park, 1994). With enormous poise and conviction, Angela Oh appeared on the May 6th broadcast of *Nightline* and articulated a Korean American response to the civil unrest and the media coverage. As Min (1996, p. 165) points out, her appearance, coming at the most desperate hour in the community, initially received universal support from the community. Perhaps more importantly, Angela Oh's entry created an important space for other 1.5 and second generation individuals who likewise became important spokespersons for the community, articulating the Korean American perspective and subjectivity to the mainstream media and the political system (Park, 1996). One of the officers of the KFLA states:

Angela Oh and other new generation of Korean Americans were the saviors of our community. People like me were baffled as to what to do about the media. All of us felt uncomfortable about our ability to speak English, and we were fearful of what would happen if we went under the spotlight and faltered in front of the American public who were glued to the TV set. It would have made the community look terrible. American people would say, "these Koreans can't even speak English, no wonder black people are angry with them." This is why I call Angela a "savior."

While the politics surrounding the media provided an entry for the post-immigrant generation leadership, the politics of rebuilding created an institutional framework for their greater involvement (Freer, 1994; Regalado, 1994). In the aftermath of the civil unrest, the politics of rebuilding in Los Angeles placed a premium on racial consolidation. Within the city hall, the sole official response was to create "Rebuild Los Angeles" (RLA) to bring private corporate investments and resources into the affected communities (Park, 1996; Regalado, 1994). After intense criticism of the appointment of Peter Uberroth as the chair, RLA quickly diversified the leadership by appointing four co-chairs—each representing white, Latino, African American, and Asian American communities. This sent a powerful message to the Korean American community that their political demands must go through a process of racial consolidation by channelling their demands as Asian Americans (Park, 1996). Likewise, at the community grassroots level, the organization that emerged to play a crucial part in the politics of rebuilding became Asian Pacific Americans for a New Los Angeles (APANLA). A pan-Asian American organization that brought together mostly ethnic-specific social service and community advocacy organizations, the formation of APANLA clearly reflected the need for coalition building among Asian Americans so that they can get greater leverage in the broader politics of the city (see Espiritu, 1992).

As racial consolidation became a requirement for participation, the politics of rebuilding quickly privileged emerging Korean American community leaders who had the linguistic and the cultural resources to go beyond their ethnic boundaries and work with other Asian American leaders in a multi-racial setting. In this process, post-immigrant Korean American leaders such as Angela Oh, Bong Hwan Kim (Executive Director of Korean Youth and Community Center), and Roy Hong

(Executive Director of Korean Immigrant Workers Advocates) became active participants in APANLA and gained important legitimacy within community politics (Park, 1996). Most of the post-immigrant political leaders had long personal experience with pan-Asian American and multi-racial political activities, and they became important “contact points” for first generation Korean Americans. In part to help bridge the generation divide between the post-immigrant generation that were represented in the coalition building efforts and the immigrant generation that were not, Korean American Inter-Agency Council (KAIAC) was founded in December of 1992 (Park, 1994). A first generation head of a social service organization reflects:

When Linda Wong (a Chinese American) became the Asian American co-chair of Rebuild Los Angeles and APANLA became an important source in providing relief for the victims, I tried to attend some of the meetings along with fellow Korean leaders. But it was very difficult for us who were not used to participating in a non-Korean setting. We had tough time following the discussion and even tougher time speaking our minds. Also, we could not understand why we had to sit in the same meeting with other groups such as Japanese and Filipinos who were not even affected by the riots. But we were all Asians and had to operate in that environment. So we figured that we let the second generation be at these meetings to make our case and then use KAIAC to tell us how things went and what we can do to support them.

Another first generation church leader remarks, “it’s not easy to deal with different kinds of people. In one of the APANLA meetings, I used the term ‘Oriental,’ and I got a lot of dirty looks. But when I came to America in the early 70s, that is what everyone called Asians.”

Finally, post-immigrant generation Korean Americans brought personal resources to bear on Korean American community politics. While liberals such as Tong Soo Chung (a 1.5 generation appointee to the Department of Commerce) and Angela Oh brought political connections to the Democratic Party and professional networks as attorneys (both were instrumental in providing legal advocacy for Korean American “victim associations”), conservatives such as Michelle Park-Steel (wife of California Republican activist Shawn Steel and a coordinator of Korean American Coalition’s Youth Leadership Conference) and Ryan Song (Director of the Korean American Grocers Association (KAGRO)) brought close ties to the Republican Party and contacts to mainstream business associations. On this front, the “Liquor Store Controversy” highlights how the post-immigrant generation’s resources were brought to bear on a community issue and elevated its politics.

When 200 liquor stores were destroyed during the civil unrest, the City of Los Angeles decided to implement a conditional use variance process to effectively prevent their rebuilding (Park, 1996). Since 175 of the 200 stores were owned by Korean Americans, the liquor store controversy became yet another Korean American political issue in the city. A small number of liberal post-immigrant generation political leaders—led by Bong Hwan Kim of KYCC—decided to support the city’s conditional use variance process as an act of inter-racial solidarity and justice (see Kim and Yu, 1996). To address the economic losses of the

merchants, KYCC launched a “conversion program” that would seek public resources to convert liquor stores to other types of businesses (such as coin laundries) (Sonenshein, 1996; Chavez, 1994). With mounting pressures from the merchants who firmly rejected the conversion program and wanted to reopen their liquor stores as soon as possible, KAGRO decided to overturn the city’s policy by going directly to the California state legislature in Sacramento. Working with both the newly established Korean American Republican Association (whose founding membership is nearly all post-immigrant generation) and the newly elected Congressman Jay Kim (R-Diamond Bar), KAGRO recruited Paul Horcher, then a conservative Assemblyman from East San Gabriel Valley that overlaps Jay Kim’s district, to sponsor A.B. 1974 which would have overturned the city’s policy. However, local African-American political leaders out-maneuvered their efforts by defeating the bill in the Local Government Committee of the Assembly before it could come up for a full vote (Sonenshein, 1996). This was met with profound outrage in the Korean American community with various conservative and business leaders charging African Americans with “black racism” and “legislative terror” (Steel and Park-Steel, 1994). While the post-immigrant generation conservatives lost a highly visible policy battle, they nonetheless showed the rest of the community that they can move the mainstream political institution—in this case, no less than the state legislature—on the community’s behalf and elevate the political visibility of Korean Americans. A Korean American liquor store owner and an active member of KAGRO observes:

The new generation really showed something in that whole incident. I could not believe how far they got and how many people they involved. Before, KAGRO only worked with local politicians. Maybe members of the Los Angeles City Council who we would give some contribution to. But when those politicians turned their backs on us, the new generation brought in big people—like Horcher and Governor Pete Wilson—who wanted to help our community. With the new generation, there is better chance for us to make a bigger impact.

“WITH FRIENDS LIKE YOU, WHO NEEDS ENEMIES”

While the post-immigrant generation has contributed new resources to community politics, their entry has been laden with conflict. The sources for conflict can also be grouped into three general areas. First, the post-immigrant generation’s firm grounding in American society and its political issues often clashed with the homeland political orientation of the immigrant generation. The emergence of post-immigrant generation political leadership has been viewed by some in the immigrant generation as a way to cut off the community’s ties to Korean society—a transition that is fraught with psychological and emotional difficulties. For some individuals and organizations whose primary political legitimacy is derived through their connection with Korean politics, they have a more direct vested interest since the shifting focus of the immigrant community from homeland to

U.S.-based politics undermines their political base and legitimacy (Chang, 1988). Second, some members of the immigrant generation have directly questioned the *Korean Americanness* of the post-immigrant generation leadership. This question of ethnic authenticity stems from the argument that the defining qualities of *Korean American* political leadership must be grounded in the day-to-day struggles of adult immigrant life and in narrowly advocating on behalf of a Korean American political agenda. On this note, individual post-immigrant generation political leaders have been roundly criticized for both being too dismissive of the struggles of the immigrant generation and for being too willing to work with other ethnic and racial groups to address the community's problems rather than pursuing an ethnic-specific advocacy. Finally, conflicts have also arisen from the less symbolic issue of resource sharing. On this front, the fear on the part of the immigrant generation is that the post-immigrant political activities will bring additional resources that will be channeled to support organizations and activities that are controlled by the post-immigrant generation rather than to meet the needs of the immigrant community. This issue is exacerbated by the clear generation division in the social service and political organizations in the community. Of particular outrage from the immigrant generation's point of view has been the perception that the post-immigrant generation "uses" the "pains and sufferings" of the immigrant generation to bring resources into the community but refuses to share these resources with immigrant generation organizations.

The rise and the fall of KFLA (Korean Federation of Los Angeles) highlights the issues underlying the transition from homeland to U.S. politics and provides some historical context. Prior to the civil unrest, KFLA was the most influential organization in the community (Chang, 1988; Park, 1996). Although it has its roots as a mutual assistance organization, KFLA—along with its national network of Korean Federations in most American cities with a sizable Korean American population—claimed to politically represent all "Koreans living in America," including informally calling the president of KFLA in Los Angeles the "Mayor of Koreatown." It viewed Korean Americans as an overseas extension of Koreans and saw its mission to safeguard the interests of Koreans living in a foreign society. Given this perspective, the leadership of KFLA derived most of its political legitimacy through its ties to homeland politics and through its connection with the Korean Consulate in Los Angeles (Chang, 1988). While KFLA did engage in mainstream politics, it was largely limited to symbolic politics, including receiving official recognition of "Koreatown" from the city and ensuring the participation of local political leaders in the annual "Koreatown Parade." One of the former officials of KFLA states, "we did not have any political vision *per se*. We just wanted to create a positive image of Koreans for the American public—that we were good and hard working people." As the civil unrest unfolded in Los Angeles, KFLA was in a poor position to participate in the mainstream political process. Lacking ties to mainstream political institutions and hindered by language and cultural barriers,

KFLA and its leadership saw its power slip to other organizations and individuals within the community. By the middle of 1993, KFLA recognized its diminishing role by changing its mission from “representing the collective interest of Koreans living in America” to “supporting the effort of Korean Americans for political representation” (Park, 1998).

Despite KFLA’s decline, the Korean American community in Los Angeles remains ambivalent about its ties to South Korea and the Korean peninsula. Recent news regarding the famine in North Korea, the financial crisis in South Korea, and the on-again and off-again discussion between the two regarding the reunification of the Korean peninsula permeate the ethnic media (which are still controlled by the South Korean government and corporations) and grab the political attention of Korean Americans. Within this context, the post-immigrant generation has ran into difficulties—and sometimes hostilities—in their attempt to turn the community’s attention entirely to American politics. A second generation political activist states:

When I went to a Korean American senior citizen center to help them sign up for naturalization, I was really taken aback by some of the reactions. I had one elderly man say that all of the young people are turning their backs on Korea. When I explained to him that the new welfare policy would deny legal immigrants benefits, he told me that he would rather go back to Korea than become an American. Another man told me that Koreans, because we are not whites, will never be accepted as fully American and, therefore, we need to have an interest in what is going on in Korea to keep our options open.

These sentiments toward homeland issues have pervasively impacted Korean American political formation. When the National Association of Korean Americans (NAKA) was formed in 1993 as a national response to the civil unrest, most of the post-immigrant generation leaders sought to make sure that all of the NAKA’s political platform exclusively addressed American concerns, in part to signal a shift in Korean American political consciousness but also to avoid the potential divisiveness that attention to Korean political issues might bring. However, their efforts were thwarted and NAKA’s vision statement included issues of peaceful Korean reunification and democratic reforms in South Korea along with issues of Korean American political empowerment and improving American race relations. In defending the vision statement, the immigrant generation founding director states:

As Korean Americans, we can’t forget our motherland. When there are so much terrible tragedies in Korea, how can we forget them and just seek our rights here. That is just selfish. Also, Korean Americans have the best chance at equality in America when Korea is strong and unified. Just like the first generation should not pull the second generation too hard to remain locked up in Korean concerns, the second generation should not push the first generation too hard in abandoning their concerns for Korea.

Ultimately, the inclusion of homeland politics kept many of the post-immigrant generation from serving on NAKA’s positions of leadership, depriving it of the post-immigrant generation support.

The simmering generational conflict within the community became a full-blown, public spectacle in April 1997 as the community prepared to commemorate the fifth anniversary of the civil unrest. Even though this article has shown that the post-immigrant generation political leadership is represented across the political spectrum, the high visibility of Angela Oh and Bong Hwan Kim has created a perception that the new generation is ideologically liberal and are eager to please the “entrenched” African-American political power in the city. In a scathing editorial that was timed with a conference organized by the community’s leading liberal and progressive organizations (KYCC, Korean Immigrant Workers Advocates, and UCLA’s Asian American Studies Center), Lee (1997), the English Editor of Korea Times, openly charged “English-speaking” community leaders and intellectuals of “(continuing) to make fame and money on the backs of nameless victims, whose knowledge of English is limited” and using the community’s “tragedy to enhance their personal and organizational agendas.” She reserved her harshest criticism for Bong Hwan Kim and the work of KYCC during the liquor store controversy by arguing that they “were on the other side, holding hands with black leaders.” The intensity of her anger was reflected in the conclusion of her editorial with the following advice to the new generation: “Stay away from us. With friends like (you), who needs enemies.”

This open attack on post-immigrant generation political leadership was met head-on by Angela Oh at the conference itself. In an emotionally charged speech that began with her claiming her own and other post-immigrant generation’s membership to the “us” in Lee’s editorial, she declared that her politics would not be compromised by the specious claims of ethnic authenticity and charges of opportunism. She concluded with a promise that she, and the thousands of new generation of Korean Americans, would not go away but would continue to participate in the community’s political process, including representing its interests to the mainstream political system. By not making primary the defense of liberal politics, but rather broadly defending the right of 1.5 and second generation to participate in community’s politics, she was able to take the moral high ground of inclusion rather than appearing as either a community gatekeeper or a partisan advocate. While her defense of inclusion left even the 1.5 and second generation conservative activists cheering, this exchange served a powerful message that generation politics would not go away. Rather, the exchange affirmed that the Korean American political leaders and their actions—in whatever forms they may take—must first find their political legitimacy from the community, including the day-to-day lives of newer immigrants who are least able to hold leadership accountable. In this way, Lee’s editorial has had the effect of disciplining political activities of the post-immigrant generation. A 1.5 generation Korean American conservative activist observes:

Even though Mrs. Lee failed to see that not all young Korean Americans are liberals trying our best to appease blacks, her attack was very significant. She made it clear that the first generation will not simply play dead while the young people run circles around them. She essentially stated that the first generation will hold us accountable. In some ways, I agree

with her. If we are not accountable to the first generation, how can we claim to represent the Korean American community?

Another second generation Korean American who works at KYCC states,

The day after the editorial was published, I was very angry and went into the office and wrote down how KYCC's resources were spent on programs that helped the first generation. I wanted to prove that we weren't so selfish as Kapson suggested in her piece. While I was doing this, I realized that she had made her point: we need to think about generation equity, and we need to be fair.

Lee's editorial and the discussion it generated serve as a powerful statement that generational conflict will play an important role in the continuing development of Korean American politics.

LESSONS FROM KOREATOWN

This article has presented the two sides of the entry of the post-immigrant generation in Korean American community politics. While the new resources brought to community politics by the post-immigrant generation has made Korean Americans more effective in the mainstream political arena, they have also exacted a profound political cost for the community. For the first time in its relatively short history, the community is confronting a new divide that pits the first- and the post-immigrant generations. While it is too early to tell how the generation politics will work itself out, three clear lessons can be drawn.

First, contemporary immigrant communities are undergoing generational transition in their politics at a much more rapid pace than those of the past. This is clearly reflective of changing immigration patterns in light of the Immigration Reforms of 1965; in contrast to the historical past, the massive migration of women make possible the immediate formation of the second generation, and the massive migration of children has created a large 1.5 generation. Along with the changes in immigration laws, legal reforms in political participation have also opened the door for immigrant political mobilization. In particular, the Voting Rights Act of 1965—along with supporting legislation and court cases—has allowed Asian Americans and Latinos unprecedented access to the mainstream political system (Hing, 1993; Pachon and DeSipio, 1994). Taken together, these demographic factors and legal changes raise the *potential* for a more rapid pattern of immigrant political incorporation. Recent studies of Asian American and Latino political incorporation suggest that this potential is rapidly becoming reality. As length of U.S. residence for the immigrant generation increases and the post-immigrant generation comes of age, Asian Americans and Latinos are now the fastest growing segments of the electorate (Ong and Nakanishi, 1996; Pachon, 1998).

Second, the increasing participation of the post-immigrant generation will clearly increase the political impact of immigrant communities on the mainstream

political system. In terms of electoral politics, the post-immigrant generation will no longer be legally hindered in their participation given their citizenship status—the single most important barrier for immigrant political participation (Brackman and Erie, 1995, 1998; Hing, 1993; Sonenshein, 1993). In addition, their English fluency, familiarity with the American political system, and greater ties to mainstream economic and social resources will raise the political presence of the immigrant communities to a new level. What remains to be seen is to what degree their increasing political participation will alter the fundamental features of the mainstream political system, including the important and sensitive areas of racial and immigrant politics (Marable, 1995; Jones-Correa, 1998). In a different light, it is too early to tell whether the increasing political mobilization on the part of recent immigrants and their children signal a revival of ethnic nationalism or their path toward eventual assimilation (see Omi and Winant, 1994; Gordon, 1964). While mainstream political participation is suggestive of *identification assimilation* under Gordon's (1964, pp. 72–73) classic model, it is clear that much of contemporary political formation is unfolding within the context of growing political hostility aimed at immigrants. The political mobilization of Korean Americans in the aftermath of the Los Angeles Civil Unrest or the Latino mobilization in California during and after the politics surrounding Proposition 187 which banned undocumented immigrants from public education and social services suggest that this round of immigrant political mobilization is closer to *reactive solidarity* that reinforces—rather than ameliorates—ethnic difference (see Bonacich, 1972; Omi and Winant, 1994).

Finally, the entry of the post-immigrant generation poses a major challenge to the existing immigrant generation leadership. While the Korean American experience in Los Angeles is striking in the openness and the degree of conflict, all immigrant communities will encounter some degree of friction. The change in the political orientation from homeland politics to American politics demanded by the post-immigrant generation is perhaps most difficult for groups with strong refugee migration flows—including Cuban Americans, Southeast Asians, and Central Americans—where there is a strong sense of “exile” political consciousness (Portes and Stepick, 1993; Portes and Rumbaut, 1996; Gold, 1992). However, even in non-refugee immigrant groups, the rising pace of globalization, the continuing migration flows, and compelling homeland political events all pose a challenge to making the change in political orientation happen (Rodriguez, 1995). In this way, transnationalism—as both a component of immigrant identity and immigrant social life—complicates immigrant political formation (Abelmann and Lie, 1996; Jones-Correa, 1998). Likewise, generation transition brings uncertainty to the immigrant generation whose hold on the American society is already tenuous. Given their precarious and vulnerable position, they look to the political leadership of the post-immigrant generation with a mix of hope and suspicion. Anxieties over whether the immigrant community's interest will be “sold out” to more

powerful, established groups often get articulated in terms of ethnic authenticity as they question the “Koreanness” and the ethnic loyalty of post-immigrant political leaders. One observer of Korean American politics fears that to the first generation, “coalition politics” looks and sounds too much like “collaborator politics.” The symbolic aspects of generation transition are also complicated by the issue of resource sharing across generation lines. Within the Korean American community, these issues are far from being resolved. However, what remains clear is that the community has seen a new generation enter the political arena, and its politics will never be the same.

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