Chapter Six

Black/Korean conflict in Los Angeles

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The theory of middleman minorities is a middle-range theory of ethnic conflict (Light and Karageorgis, 1994; Sowell, 1993; Landa, 1991; Zenner, 1991: ch. 1; Light and Bonacich, 1988: 17–20; Bonacich and Modell, 1981: ch. 1). Middleman theory orients us to the tense and conflict-ridden relationships between customers and merchants of different ethnic backgrounds, a special but not uncommon situation. These commercial relationships have eventuated in or encouraged some of the most destructive ethnic conflicts of the 20th century including the Hitler Holocaust, the Armenian genocide, the expulsion of Asians from Uganda, Japanese–American relocation and incarceration, the Vietnamese boat refugees (Viviani, 1984: 30), the ouster of Singapore from Malaysia, and, most recently, the burning and looting of Korean-owned businesses in Los Angeles in 1992. In all these cases, host societies or elements therein dealt harshly with commercially prominent ethno-religious minorities. In enabling us to conceptualize common features of these different conflicts, middleman theory has brilliantly fulfilled the most humane mandate of social science.

However, as Zenner (1991: ch. 3) has recently indicated, a deficiency of existing middleman theory is inattention to the anti-middleman ideologies. Because of its philosophical realism and naive economism, middleman theory has thus far ignored ideology's role in the mobilization of anti-middleman social movements. Admittedly, middleman theory has developed a plausible and often accurate depiction of the mental life of middleman-hating consumers. The middleman theory expects customers to characterize outsider merchants as cheating, clannish, and devious, but these are only symptoms of an underlying cause (Bonacich, 1973). The underlying cause of customer resentment is accumulated frustrations with the social and economic system that customers unreasonably project upon merchants. In middleman theory, the misbehavior of the merchants is not the real cause of their conflict with their customers. The approach of middleman theory is situational. When the exploited workers run out of money, they most keenly savor their economic deprivation while standing in front of the alien merchants' well-stocked counters. At that moment, prior underpayment becomes the inability of the underpaid to induce alien merchants to meet their material needs without

requiring payment. No matter that the merchant did not underpay them; someone else did that. The underpaid and exploited workers are angry and frustrated. They channel their resentments toward the alien merchants whose capital stock, when stolen or looted, represents to them the forcible restitution of material value the social system lawfully but unjustly denied them. Logically false, this conclusion is sociologically true (Bonacich, 1993: 689).

Although essentially correct, this situational interpretation of the beliefs of the middleman-hating consumer overlooks the possibility that, as Zenner (1991: 49) puts it, "the importation of anti-middleman ideology from abroad" can exacerbate the local hostility toward a local middleman minority. Thus, by providing a package in which to understand their problem, anti-semitism imported from Europe intensified Thai hostility toward Chinese in Thailand (Zenner, 1991: 53-59). But, it is equally possible that long-term experience with alien merchants may produce or eventuate in an *indigenous* anti-middleman ideology, which replaces and complicates the hapless consumers' spontaneous frustration. In such a case, intellectuals articulate and justify the spontaneous but thoughtless anger of the masses, conferring thereby a new legitimacy to middleman hatred.

Ideologies are complicated belief systems that obtain adherence through persuasion. When an anti-middleman ideology comes into existence, it justifies attacks upon alien merchants, their expulsion or murder, the seizure of their property and damage to their business premises. Under these circumstances, anti-middleman violence can take much more coherent and organized forms than it does when thoughtless mobs vent accumulated frustrations upon alien merchants. For example, on *Kristallnacht*, November 9, 1938, Adolf Hitler's followers smashed Jewish storefronts, looted their contents, burned many businesses, and shot and beat the helpless proprietors. Well organized from the top, the Hitlerites' anti-Jewish mobs actually consisted of off-duty police and indoctrinated storm troopers, Hitler's private army; but Hitler's propaganda minister, Josef Goebbels, falsely depicted the rioters as 'ordinary German citizens' righteously outraged by Jewish misdeeds (Varga, 1981: 259; Domarus, 1992, vol. 2: 1243). In the terrifying aftermath, the same ethnonationalist ideology, called National Socialism by its adherents, went on to legitimate a genocide of Jews, not just an anti-Jewish riot. Because of the enhanced organizing capacity they offer, ideologies like National Socialism require close intellectual scrutiny from middleman minority theory which cannot naively assume that anti-middleman rioters are only venting spontaneous frustrations.

Black/Korean conflict in Los Angeles

With these caveats in mind, middleman minority theory offers a convenient handle for approaching the continuing black/Korean conflict in American cities (Light and Bonacich, 1988: 318–320). Around 1979 immigrant Koreans emerged as an alien merchant class in African American neighborhoods in

several major American cities including New York City, Philadelphia, Atlanta, Chicago, Washington DC, and Los Angeles. Serious and chronic conflicts soon developed between the resident blacks and the Korean merchants who ran many of the grocery stores, liquor stores, and other small businesses in their neighborhoods (Specter, 1990; Olen, 1991). Yoon (1993) concludes that blacks' charges against Korean business "boil down to" the claim that "Korean businesses drain resources out of black neighborhoods". We cannot quite agree. In actuality, blacks raised two kinds of complaints about the Korean merchants. Some complaints evoked a perceived conflict of economic interest, but others referenced Korean misconduct. On the side of misconduct, blacks complained about Korean business practices. The Koreans, they said, spoke broken English, behaved rudely, refused credit to the credit-worthy, and assumed that all blacks were shoplifting thieves who required surveillance (Moon, 1992: 398).

On the side of economic conflict of interest, blacks complained that Korean merchants further impoverished the already impoverished black communities. They accused Koreans of overcharging customers, not hiring black workers, and of failure to 'put anything back into the community' (Kim, 1984; Katz, 1991; MacFarquahar, 1992; Sims, 1990; Moon, 1992: 404–405; Mabalon, 1993; Wilkerson, 1993). 'Taking our money out of the community' meant that Korean merchants exported the profits of their business firms rather than re-spending them in the African American communities as presumably did African American merchants, their business competitors. For this reason, so it was urged, the African American communities lost the multiplier effect of dollars spent in Korean stores, and suffered long-term economic damage to their development prospects. In the representative opinion of one African American critic, "They are taking our money out of the community and treating us like animals" (Specter, 1990), a formula that does justice to the blacks' economic and non-economic complaints.

In order to protect co-ethnics from Korean abuse, black nationalist groups organized boycotts of Korean stores in major cities (Min, 1992; Moon, 1992; Kim, B., 1992).[1] Boycotters picketed and passed out leaflets in front of Korean stores. Some leaflets urged blacks not to buy from Korean 'vampires' who sucked the economic blood from their communities (Moon, 1992: 407). A boycott organizer in New York City declared that his ultimate goal was to drive all Korean stores out of the black community (Yoon, 1993). Anti-Korean boycotts occurred in many American cities, but those in New York City were the longest, the most numerous, and the most acrimonious of any (Karwath, 1990; Roberts, 1990).

Boycotters justified the economic sanction as an effort to compel Korean merchants to treat blacks more politely, a status goal, but the boycotted Koreans were often offered the chance to escape the sanction by selling their store to an African American. The boycotts also exposed an underlying sense that, whatever else was wrong with them, Korean stores injured the economic development prospects of the African American communities in which they

were located (Stolberg, 1991). Min (1992) found that the minority of blacks who supported the anti-Korean boycotts agreed significantly more with economic nationalist criticism of Korean stores than did the majority of blacks who did not support the boycott.

In this tense inter-group atmosphere, burglaries of Korean stores and armed robberies of Korean merchants were everyday occurrences in African American communities (Light and Bonacich, 1988: 310–11, 318–320). In a way, the black nationalist ideology that later justified the burning and looting of Korean stores also justified individual and team robberies of the same stores. After all, thieves were only repatriating property that ought to have been theirs in the first place. Eleven Korean merchants actually died in robberies between 1989 and 1991, and 14 others were wounded.[2]

On the Korean side, determined merchants armed themselves behind their counters, and began to shoot back (Kim, 1992; Mydans, 1992). This spiral of hostility permitted hostile confrontations to turn into lethal ones. When Latasha Harlins, 15, was wrongfully accused of stealing a container of orange juice, she knocked Soon Ja Du, her Korean accuser, to the ground. The accuser, acting in fear, seized a concealed pistol under the counter, and killed the departing Harlins (Ford and Lee, 1991a, 1991b). The case became a *cause célèbre*. In 1991, a judge convicted Soon Ja Du of manslaughter, but suspended sentence on grounds that the merchant fired in fear of her own life (Tong, 1992: 25; Ong and Hee, 1993: 8). Blacks reacted angrily to the Soon Ja Du decision, declaring that the judicial system did not protect blacks. The blacks also attempted unsuccessfully to recall the offending judge from her bench. When on April 29, 1992, a jury declared police not guilty of beating a black prisoner, Rodney King, blacks still smoldered with anger from the earlier Soon Ja Du decision (Ellis, 1992).[3]

The black/Korean conflict in Los Angeles came to the world's attention on April 29, 1992 when rioting and looting broke out in the South Central Los Angeles (Church, 1992; Hammer, Foote, and Manley, 1992). In three nights of rioting, the worst in American history since 1863, mobs damaged 2,073 stores of which nearly three-quarters were Korean-owned (Johnson *et al.*, 1992; Ong and Hee, 1993: 9; Mydans and Marriott, 1992). Of looted stores, 788 (38%) were also deliberately burned. In the stunned aftermath of the rioting, press coverage focussed upon the prior and longstanding black/Korean conflict they had ignored earlier (Morganthau, 1992a, 1992b). The American media took the reassuring view that Korean/black conflict arose from cultural misunderstanding, a formula with some basis in anthropology (Moon, 1992: 399; Tong, 1992: 23–24; Njeri, 1991; Kwon, 1992; Hagendoorn, 1993: 27). According to the press, blacks did not understand Korean culture, nor vice-versa. For example, Koreans avoided physical contact and eye contact with customers from a cultural sense of propriety, but blacks understood this treatment as rudeness (White, 1993).[4] A taciturn people, Koreans do not say 'hello' and 'have a nice day' to customers, but black Americans expected friendliness. A dour people, Koreans do not smile at customers, but blacks

expected pleasantness. Angered by what they mistakenly understood as Korean rudeness, the press claimed, blacks looted and burned the Korean stores in frustration. This press treatment of black/Korean conflict simply ignored blacks' ideological criticism of Korean merchants. These grievances had no substance, and the three-days riot was only a product of cultural misunderstanding.

Ethno-nationalist underpinnings of the conflict

We agree that cultural misunderstandings contributed to the black/Korean conflict, but cannot agree that nothing else mattered. For different reasons, neither the American prêss nor the middleman theory acknowledges the ideological basis of black hostility toward Korean merchants. The name of this ideology is black nationalism. This umbrella term covers a variety of cultural, political, and economic strategies intended to advance the interest of African Americans in the pluralistic American society. However, strictly as an economic program, black nationalism refers to the idea that blacks must own the businesses in their communities so that they can recapture the multiplier effect of black consumer spending for the further economic development of the African American communities. Framed in the light of decades of experience with outsider ('middleman') control of the black economies, black nationalism rejects the assimilationist counter-claim that so long as blacks can obtain good jobs in the general labor market, it is a matter of indifference who owns the local businesses in their community.[5] Following the doctrines of Booker T. Washington and Marcus Garvey, rejected by mainstream civil rights organizations, black nationalism has long insisted that entrepreneurship is a tool that blacks must use to improve their material circumstances (Light, 1972: ch. 3; Clark, 1974: 394).

To this end, blacks must patronize businesses owned by co-ethnics.[6] In the opinion of Courtland Malloy (1990; see also Durcanin, 1990), an influential African American newspaper columnist, blacks "spend almost 95 per cent of their income with non-blacks, and therefore export 1.7 million jobs annually from black neighborhoods, and import unemployment, welfare dependency, and a defeatist attitude." To remedy this loss, Malloy proposes that blacks should buy more goods and services from co-ethnics. Another popular nostrum is the call to patronize black-owned banks. Many black voluntary organizations echo these nationalist ideas (Min, 1993; Rose, 1992).[7] Recycling Black Dollars declares itself "a vehicle of self-determination generating self-help toward Black empowerment through Economic Development" (Hill, 1993). President of Recycling Black Dollars, Muhammed Nasardeen, claims that of the money black Americans have on deposit in banks, only three per cent is on deposit in black-owned banks. "Just think" what the black banks could do if black Americans deposited even one-quarter of their liquid assets in them, proclaims Nasardeen (Dungee, 1992a).

Another nationalist organization, the Brotherhood Crusade, opened a 'convenience store' in South Central Los Angeles to "show that we can run something on our own" (Wright, 1992; Dungee, 1992b). President of the Brotherhood Crusade, Danny Bakewell, declares that "Koreans working and operating businesses is not going to help black people with jobs, and it's not going to feed our senior citizens" (Bakewell, 1992). Therefore, Bakewell demands that Korean firms in the black community hire at least one black and develop a "pool of capital to help African American entrepreneurs get started in business" (Hyun and Kim, 1992). A supporter of anti-Korean boycotts, Bakewell did *not* declare that Korean stores should be burned (Stolberg and Clifford, 1991). Extreme nationalists go farther. From the point of view of extreme economic nationalism, outsider businesses obstruct the economic development of black communities by siphoning away their economic surplus. An appropriate remedy is the mobilization of political and consumer power to expel the outsider merchants, freeing their vacated niches for African American entrepreneurs (Stolberg, 1991). In a formulation of this idea, trumpeted by Ice Cube, a rap-singing superstar, even arson legitimately accomplishes this goal (Breindel, 1991).

Few blacks are nationalist ideologues, much less extreme ones. However, the ideology of economic nationalism contributed to the anti-Korean outlook in the African American communities. Min (1992) found that 23 per cent of black respondents in Brooklyn, New York agreed that Koreans were generally 'rude and nasty people'. Forty-five per cent thought Koreans 'overly concerned' with making money, a classic anti-middleman view (Bonacich, 1973). These two objections to Koreans do not bespeak a nationalist ideology. But Min *also* found that the African Americans' economic objection to Korean merchants was as strong or stronger than their dislike of perceived Korean rudeness and miserliness. Forty per cent of blacks agreed that Korean merchants in their neighborhoods had 'become rich by exploiting black people'. Fifty-five per cent agreed that Korean merchants drained economic resources by 'taking money out of the black community.' Forty-six per cent thought that Korean businesses in black neighborhoods reduced 'the opportunity for blacks to open their own businesses.' Finally, 36 per cent of blacks thought that Korean business firms amounted to 'an economic invasion' of the black community.

Examining these findings, Min (1993) declares "the ideology of black nationalism" of equal importance in provoking black/Korean conflict along with cultural misunderstanding and "frustration-produced aggression", the two established explanations. Although Min was right to bring black nationalism into the discussion, a pioneering insight, we cannot agree with his evaluation of its importance. In collective behavior theory, whatever cause is older is more basic. Black nationalism antedates by many decades the arrival of Korean immigrant merchants in the black communities. Indeed, scholarly books were written about this subject before the Korean immigration began (Carmichael and Hamilton, 1967; Cross, 1969; Turner, 1973). Since black nationalism

antedates the arrival of the Koreans in the United States, it also antedates the frustration blacks feel in dealing with them and the cultural misunderstandings that contributed to the inter-group conflict. More basic than the other causes, black nationalism is arguably more important as well.

In the late 19th century, American blacks already believed that immigrants were "usurping opportunities that might otherwise have gone to them", and expressing this view with strident nativist rhetoric (Steinberg, 1981: 201–202). The economic ideology of black nationalism is carefully described in Chapter 12 of St. Clair Drake and Horace R. Cayton's *Black Metropolis.* Originally published in 1938, this immortal book declared the "doctrine of the double-duty dollar" the fundamental economic belief of blacks in Chicago. Preached from every pulpit in Chicago, this doctrine proclaimed that a dollar spent in a black-owned store did 'double duty' whereas a dollar spent in an outsider-owned store did single duty. The double-duty dollar was re-spent in Chicago's South Side, the black neighborhood, where it created more employment and prosperity among the blacks. A dollar spent in a white outsider's store followed the outsider home to his white neighborhood where, when re-spent, it created employment and prosperity for whites. For this reason, pastors enjoined upon their congregants the solemn responsibility for spending their money in stores owned by co-ethnics. The objection to the outsider white merchants was not just their rudeness, although that was mentioned. The objection was the disadvantageous economic consequences that ensued when black consumers awarded whites their patronage.

This popular economic ethno-nationalist program never attained the agendas of the mainstream civil rights organizations which have always represented the assimilationist mainstream of African American social thought (Rustin, 1970). However, economic ethno-nationalism survived as a countercurrent among non-establishment, often self-educated African American intellectuals and musicians. In the 1960s, its foremost representative was Malcolm X. Self-educated in prison, Malcolm X embraced the notion that entrepreneurship was indispensable to black pride as well as to the long-range economic development of separatist black communities. Economic ethnonationalism still remains the official ideology of the Nation of Islam, a black Muslim organization more influential than its slender membership roster. The popularity of Malcolm X, reflected in the recent movie about him, supports and reflects the continued popularity of his ethno-nationalist ideas which are also heard in the lyrics of Ice Cube's 'Black Korea,' a musical endorsement of arson (Kim, B., 1992; Breindel, 1991).

So don't follow me up and down your market
Or your little chop suey ass will be a target
Of the nation-wide boycott.
So pay your respect to the black fist
Or we'll burn your store right down to a crisp.
And then we'll see you
'Cause you can't turn the ghetto into Black Korea.

Analyzing the riots

The injection of a political ideology, black nationalism, into the analysis permits us to explain many otherwise puzzling features of the Los Angeles riot and arson. First, American blacks have a prior history of looting and burning the stores of outsider merchants in their neighborhoods urging against them the same complaints of racism and disrespect which they now bring against Koreans (Clark, 1958; Moon, 1992). In 1935 and 1943, blacks in New York City's Harlem district attacked and burned white-owned stores (Grimshaw, 1969: ch. 6). Detroit blacks burned stores owned by white merchants in 1943 (Grimshaw, 1969: ch. 7). Between 1965 and 1968, blacks attacked and burned the stores of white-owned merchants in 128 American cities (Report of the National Advisory Commission, 1968: 115; Light, 1967; Morgan and Clark, 1973). This historic experience shows that the Koreans were only the latest outsider merchants to feel the wrath of black communities. By implication, complaints about Korean rudeness were inessential, and any outsider group doing business in the black communities will feel this wrath (Cho, 1993). If so, the riot response derives from a preexisting and persistent tendency for African Americans to resent and reject the presence of alien merchants. In effect, this response is part of their political culture.

Second, if the middleman theory's situational explanation of anti-alien hostility were correct, we would expect that the numerous Korean merchants in Mexican and Central American neighborhoods would have evoked as much hostility as did the Korean merchants in black neighborhoods (Miles, 1992). Liquor stores were as numerous in the Latino tracts of South Central as they were in the black tracts.[8] Because of the dominant Korean presence in the retail liquor industry, liquor stores probably mean Korean stores. In fact, as Cheng and Espiritu (1989) first observed, the Hispanic neighborhoods were free of anti-Korean hostility in the period preceding the riots even though these neighborhoods contained many Korean merchants too. Cheng and Espiritu (1989: 523–524) argued that "Mexicans and Koreans may well harbor racial prejudice against each other, but as yet no public demonstrations of such prejudice has been reported in Los Angeles by any media or community leaders." To verify that observation, we surveyed *La Opinión*, the most circulated Spanish-language newspaper of Los Angeles. We manually sifted through the first and third Sunday edition of every month in the three years preceding the riot of April, 1992 and used extensively 'Ethnic Newswatch', a computer database service. Ethnic Newswatch permitted key-word searches of *La Opinión*. We targeted articles that might express Hispanic attitudes toward Koreans before and after the riots. The only articles we found concerned the conflict between blacks and Korean merchants. We found no articles about conflict between Korean merchants and Mexicans or between Koreans and Central Americans. This sharp disparity between black and Hispanic response to Korean merchants suggests that the response owed something to the political culture through which the blacks approached the

Koreans. That is, their ethno-nationalist economic ideology predisposed African Americans to react with hostility to Korean merchants.

Third, the conduct and interpretation of the riot was different in black and in Hispanic areas of Los Angeles. Although blacks were most over-represented in their ranks, the rioters were by no means all blacks.[9] Those arrested were 30 per cent black, 51 per cent Hispanic, and the rest Asian and white (Los Angeles Board of Police Commissioners, 1992). These statistics prove that the riot's precipitating conditions included more than the conflict between blacks and Koreans. However, black and Hispanic rioters behaved differently. The non-black rioters torched a lower proportion of looted stores than did the black rioters. Table 1 compares riot damage attributable to fire and looting in three sections of Los Angeles. South Central is a solidly black neighborhood that abuts Koreatown to the south. Koreatown is only one third Korean in population. The other residents are blacks and Hispanics. In South Central Los Angeles, 48 per cent of Korean stores sustained fire damage. This percentage is 50 per cent higher than the rate (32 per cent) of fire damage to Korean stores in Los Angeles outside of the South Central area. The Korean stores in South Central also suffered more fire damage than Korean stores elsewhere in Los Angeles. The median fire damage in South Central was $85,000 per store. In Los Angeles outside South Central, the median fire damage was $61,300.

Table 1 Korean stores damaged by area (in percentages)

	Total	Korea-town	South Central	All Other
Fire Damage	38	37	48	29
Looted	52	56	43	58
Unknown	10	7	9	13
Total	100	100	100	100
Low Damage*	59	63	53	63
High Damage	41	37	47	37
Total	100	100	100	100
Median Damage	$70,000	$60,000	$85,000	$60,000
N	2,073	460	761	852

Source: Ong and Hee, 1993: 12

* Low damage means less than $100,000 in damage. High damage is more than $100,001.

The motive for looting is basically acquisition, but the motive for arson is hatred or revenge (Berk and Aldrich, 1972). Therefore, the contrasting patterns of looting and arson inside and outside South Central Los Angeles

offer a clue to the different motives inside and outside the black community. In the black community of South Central Los Angeles, the rioters evidently had a stronger component of hatred of and revenge against Korean merchants than did rioters elsewhere in Los Angeles where acquisitiveness generally prevailed. Outside the black neighborhoods, rioters stole the Koreans' capital stocks but, their acquisitiveness slated, they did not hate the Koreans so they spared their premises. The motive of hatred and revenge in South Central reflects the embittered state of Korean/black relations that preceded the riot there. If our previous conclusions are correct, that state of advanced and exasperated hostility was importantly the product of the political culture in terms of which black Americans approach alien merchants, Korean or white, and that culture is itself the product of their long prior experience with such people.

Fourth, survey data on public attitudes tell the same story. When asked to impute motives to the rioters, post-riot respondents offered their explanation of the riot. Among black respondents, two-thirds thought that rioters were motivated by a sense of outraged justice, and only one-third thought the rioters' motives were strictly acquisitive. However, among non-black respondents, the weights were reversed. A majority of non-black respondents understood the rioters as acquisitive materialists and only a minority attributed to them the nobler motive of social protest. This difference between blacks and non-blacks probably reflects the frame of reference in which black respondents viewed the whole situation. From the black point of view, now as in the 1960s, the rioters' motives were *ideological* (Tomlinson, 1969; Paige, 1971; Rogers and Bullock, 1974). In contrast, non-black respondents thought the rioters were simply acquiring material goods. Both groups of respondents expressed the perspective of their communities, but the survey results show that the black community viewed these events in a more ideological framework than did non-blacks (Table 2).

Table 2 Non-rioters' explanation of rioters' motives (in percentages)

	Asians	Blacks	Hispanics	Whites
Mainly Protest	42.9	67.5	38.7	37.4
Mixed	6.6	9.7	9.4	6.9
Mainly Looting	50.5	22.8	51.9	55.8
Total	100	100	100	100
N	196	412	470	364

Source: Lawrence D. Bobo *et al.* (1992). *Public Opinion Before and After a Spring of Discontent.* Los Angeles: University of California Center for the Study of Urban Poverty, Table C14

Conclusion

Middleman minority theory has ignored anti-middleman ideologies, accepting instead a simplistic, situational interpretation of anti-middleman complaints. On this interpretation, anti-middleman consumers project their accumulated frustrations from the socio-economic system upon the middleman shopkeepers who are, in effect, scapegoats for the system's failures.[10] The black/Korean conflict in Los Angeles fits the middleman minority scenario quite well in many ways, but a close look at the conflict shows that the blacks' anti-Korean views have been shaped by previous decades of conflict with other middlemen. Certainly many ordinary blacks operate at the simplistic psychological level that middleman theory projects, but a significant portion of the African American intelligentsia has embraced versions of black nationalism, an ethno-nationalist ideology.

This ideology explains the opposition to Koreans in terms of the Koreans' adverse, long-term effect upon African American economic development. Black nationalism perceives Koreans as the latest of a succession of external merchants who re-spend black dollars outside of the African American communities, thus stripping African Americans of the multiplier effect of their consumer dollars and retarding their economic development. Thus construed, black nationalist opposition to Koreans is not so much cultural as economic. That is, the Korean presence is deemed repugnant to long-term economic interests of the African American communities. Political agitation is, therefore, an appropriate tactic to utilize in order to expel the Koreans from the African American communities. Thus conceived, arson and looting are extreme but effective means to rid the black communities of external merchants.

The injection of black nationalism into the debate explains many features of the black/Korean conflict that cannot otherwise be explained within middleman minority theory. First, the long history of blacks with external merchants, and their numerous previous anti-middleman riots suggest that the black/Korean conflict is only an episode in an on-going struggle. Second, the blacks' ideological investment in the issue tends to explain why Central Americans and Mexicans, who also have Korean merchants in their communities, did not develop conflicts with those merchants. Middleman theory cannot explain this inter-group discrepancy because middleman theory operates with a situational psychology. Third, the quite different patterns of arson and looting inside and outside the black area of Los Angeles, South Central, make sense if we understand the blacks as uniquely invested in hatred of Koreans and desirous of ridding their communities of the Korean stores, not just looting the contents. Finally, black and non-black attitudes toward the rioting and looting differ a lot with blacks taking a more ideological view of why looters misbehaved. Non-blacks were more likely to attribute looting to greed whereas blacks thought looters were seeking justice.

Middleman theory must pay closer attention to anti-middleman views which are, at least some of the time, articulated into ideologies that legitimate violence and destruction against the middlemen. Even those who reject these ideologies must pay close attention to the actual content of the anti-middleman view if they wish to do justice to the reality. Although our data only treats and deals with the African American/Korean conflict in the United States and in Los Angeles, we suspect that the issue of anti-middleman ideology is worth reexamining in many cases of middleman/host society in the existing literature.

Notes

1. "A coalition of African-American organizations and merchants of a mini-mall... declared war on Sunday, charging that Korean–American merchants were trying to dominate the shopping center located in the predominately black South Side community." 'Korean Americans anger black groups', *Chicago Tribune* March 30, 1992: 2C.
2. 'Koreans say conflict is economic, not racial', *Los Angeles Sentinel* October 17, 1991: A17.
3. "The peace of Los Angeles continues to hang upon judicial decisions in racially-charged assault cases. Two of the police who beat Rodney King, a black, received a two year sentence, but the five black men who beat Reginald Denny, a white, may receive life imprisonment. If so, black leaders say, they may be unable to restrain the anger of their people." Feldman, 1993.
4. Conversely, African Americans laugh and talk loudly in public, normal behavior that Koreans understood as uncouth and threatening.
5. This argument is outlined in Kinzer and Sagarin, 1950: 153–154.
6. "While raging at Korean merchants, we ignore the most obvious solution to the problem: we can patronize our own businesses." 'A time for reason and calm', *Los Angeles Times* April 10, 1991: 7.
7. Recycling Black Dollars organizes "buy black" campaigns that target particular black-owned business firms. Selected firms obtain a week's high-profile patronage. See 'Recycling black dollars boosts black business', *Los Angeles Sentinel* January 29, 1992: B9.
8. We draw this inference from a visual comparison of maps showing Korean stores in black and Latino neighborhoods of Los Angeles at the time of the riot. See Anderson *et al.*, 1992.
9. Oliver, Johnson and Farrell (1992) point out that Latinos clashed with Koreans in Koreatown itself. Non-Koreans were two-thirds of the residents of Koreatown, and many complained that the Korean commercial invasion adversely changed their neighborhood (Light and Bonacich, 1988: 308–310). This territorial conflict must, however, be distinguished from the conflict of merchants and customers
10. "Although Asian Americans are not likely to be the true causes of the multifarious economic and social problems plaguing America, they have nevertheless become convenient targets of displaced frustration. This scapegoating response is mediated by stereotypes of Asian Americans as unfair competitors and model minorities." 'Note: racial violence against Asian Americans', *Harvard Law Review* 106 (1993): 1934.

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