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**Race in
America
Beyond
Black and
White**

FRANK H. WU

Y E L L O W

*Race in America Beyond
Black and White*

BASIC

BOOKS

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Contents

1	East Is East, East Is West: Asians as Americans	1
2	The Model Minority: Asian American "Success" as a Race Relations Failure	39
3	The Perpetual Foreigner: Yellow Peril in the Pacific Century	79
4	Neither Black Nor White: Affirmative Action and Asian Americans	131
5	True But Wrong: New Arguments Against New Discrimination	173
6	The Best "Chink" Food: Dog-Eating and the Dilemma of Diversity	215
7	The Changing Face of America: Intermarriage and the Mixed Race Movement	261
8	The Power of Coalitions: Why I Teach at Howard	301
	Epilogue: Deep Springs	343
	<i>References</i>	349
	<i>Notes</i>	355
	<i>Acknowledgments</i>	383
	<i>Index</i>	385
	<i>About the Author</i>	399

East Is East, East Is West

Asians as Americans

The problem of the twentieth century is the problem of the color-line,—the relation of the darker to the lighter races of men in Asia and Africa, in America and the islands of the sea.

—W. E. B. DU BOIS, *The Souls of Black Folk*

When I Was Johnny Sokko

I remember when I was Johnny Sokko.

Johnny Sokko was the Asian boy who shared title billing with his Giant Flying Robot on an old black-and-white television series. He was the star of one of many science fiction shows imported from Japan. I was a devoted fan growing up in the early 1970s when mine was the only “Oriental” family in our suburban neighborhood outside Detroit.

Every afternoon, I walked home from school. My parents were pleased that, after they had picked the just-opened suburb and then their empty lot, Winchester Elementary was built right across Sunnysdale Lane. They had bought a brand-new, two-story colonial based on the model, virtually identical with many of the other units in the subdivision development. The neighborhood children used to play inside the wooden shells of the new

houses. The kid who lived behind us once suggested that we dig our way down to China. We started on the project, only to tire after shoveling a hole a few feet deep.

I was among the first students to attend the new school when it opened its doors. Our driveway practically lined up with its driveway. I liked being so close to school that I could feel it was mine. I have fond memories of school days: the red-headed girl who helped me tie my shoelaces; cupcakes mothers would bring to class to celebrate their children's birthdays; the smell of crayons, paste, and construction paper in art class, the materials used to make turkey silhouettes and Pilgrim hats for Thanksgiving; the cacophony of a dozen children trying to draw out harmonies on plastic recorders in music class while others sang off-key; the bustling "hot dog day" in the cafeteria, with steam coming out of the paper packaging of the frankfurters and an assortment of condiments, a break from the usual fare that our mothers had packed in lunchboxes, and the miniature cartons of milk we bought for a nickel; scrapes from falling off the monkey bars or flying from the swingsets; swimming lessons at the high school pool in the summer, until the movie *Jaws* made it unsafe to set foot in the water; holistic reading and new math; and field trips downtown to an automobile manufacturing plant and a shop that sold supplies for magicians.

Within a minute of the end of class, I would dash home, pausing just long enough to look both ways before crossing the street. After saying hello to my mother, who was in the kitchen preparing dinner—usually a steamed whole fish garnished with ginger and immersed in soy sauce—I would close the curtains in the family room, settle into my red beanbag chair, and turn on the television.

I was allowed an hour of entertainment. Then I had to sit down at the piano with a kitchen timer serving as an excruciatingly slow metronome to guarantee I practiced for the allotted half hour. I also had to do extra homework consisting mainly of long division problems my mother made up on scrap computer printout paper, extra-long, fan-folded sheets with green and white stripes, which my father had brought back from the office. I always tried to finish too quickly, and double-checking would show my careless mistakes. My hobbies were building model cars from kits, the type you glued piece by piece painstakingly, not the type that could be snapped together, and collecting baseball cards, which came in those wax packages with their cardboard-like chewing gum.

After a commercial break and station identification, I was focused on *Johnny Sokko*, which was in a limited run before he was replaced by the

Three Stooges. In the premiere, viewers learned that Johnny had been a passenger on a cruise ship, which sank after being attacked by the sea monster Dracolon. Along with Jerry Monno, a secret agent who belonged to Unicorn, an international peacekeeping force, he washed up on the shore of a deserted island. Spider, a criminal mastermind, and his Gargoyle Gang kept their headquarters there. Emperor Guillotine from outer space had landed there, too. While the bad guys collaborated on nefarious plans, having kidnapped the scientist who designed the towering robot, Johnny chanced upon this creation that became his companion. Because the robot fortuitously heard Johnny's voice before any other when his electronic brain was activated, he had to obey the boy. Johnny wore a wristwatch that doubled as his radio link with the robot. He summoned the robot whenever there was trouble.

In the first episode, a nuclear explosion brought the machine to life to fight for justice. His face was fixed, with glowing eyes beneath a mock Egyptian headdress. His movements were haltingly mechanical martial arts gestures, the clanking armor a hint of his strength. He was able to take to the air, with the wind visibly rushing by. He would carry Johnny in his hands, shielding him and following his directions. He would set Johnny down in a safe place while he defeated one after another of their archenemies: the gigantic claw; the starfish; the sand creature; Opticon the humongous eyeball; Torozonn the space mummy; and Drakulan, a vampire leading the undead.

Over the course of a month, I enjoyed all two dozen installments of the serial. I could imagine myself as Johnny. I could not do that with the stars of any other rerun, even though I liked the *Brady Bunch* well enough. I could hum our theme song; I knew the weapons at our disposal. I choked up when in the melodramatic finale the robot sank beneath the sea as a martyr for humankind.

There were other Asian characters on the television networks. None of them was as real as Johnny. Ultra Man was less thrilling than the Giant Flying Robot, because anybody could tell he was just an actor wearing a glittering jumpsuit and a bug-eyed helmet. Like all superheroes, he had an origin story. He was born when Science Patrol officer Hayata crashed into Ultra Man's space craft. Hayata was killed, and Ultra Man felt guilty. He revived Hayata by becoming a single being with him. By holding up the Beta Capsule, Hayata would undergo a metamorphosis into Ultra Man. The light on his chest would blink as his powers were expended, bringing him close to death again. I used to watch him with a freckled tomboy of a girl. I even kissed her before her parents said we couldn't be friends anymore.

The animated figures from *Speed Racer*, including Speed seated behind the wheel of his Mach 5, his father Pops in the garage, his girlfriend Trixie cheering him on, and even their pet monkey Chim Chim with his antics, were all ambiguously Asian. I wondered about their constantly wide-eyed expressions and upturned noses. Only the enigmatic Racer X was an exception. His features were hidden behind a black mask.

The only Asian woman who was a regular cast member of an American show was Mrs. Livingston, played by Miyoshi Umeki, of the old Bill Bixby program, *The Courtship of Eddie's Father*. One of my earliest memories is of tuning in to it with my parents. I can still whistle the theme song about "my best friend."

The Asians on the silver screen were even less appealing to a first-grader. The whole cast of the *Godzilla* movies, which were featured in a marathon "monster" weekend, consisted of panicking Asians fleeing Tokyo before the rampage. Our adversaries in war epics such as *Tora! Tora! Tora!* were both Asian and yet foreign. My father told my brothers and me that it wasn't good to yell, "Kill the Japs!" He wasn't able to explain why.

Johnny Sokko may have been my hero, but my classmates did not welcome him. They must have known Johnny, to be able to pick out his reasonable facsimile in the daily games of dodgeball in the gym. At home, I watched Johnny, failing to notice the bad editing, poor dubbing, and obvious special effects that marked the show. At school, I wondered why I was called "Johnny," oblivious to the looks, manners, and eccentricities that marked me.

Even though I understood soon enough that I could not help but turn into Johnny during recess, I never understood what was wrong about being him. As Johnny, I was a child with greater wisdom than adults. All of us six-year-olds could relate to that predicament. I was a hero, even if my powers came from my control over a metal automaton. My life was full of adventure as I battled the forces of evil that were threatening world conquest, even though I was allowed to ride my bike only around the block and not beyond to the busy roads that ran through the nearby fields toward the city.

My hero was the other children's enemy. Even if I did not consciously see him—or myself—as Asian, they saw it clearly. They saw me as both more and less than Johnny. To my surprise, I learned I was not white. By birth, I was yellow. My aliases included Chinaman, chink, jap, gook, or even wog in the worldly epithet spoken by the naughty student visiting from France. (I found out later that "wog" was the derogatory acronym used by the British Foreign Office for "Westernized Oriental Gentleman.") I was a joke, the object of a ubiquitous sing-song chant that meant everything and nothing, "Chinese,

Japanese, dirty knees, what are these?" It was shouted with fingers pulling back eyes into slits by classmates running in a circle around me, laughing so hard that they would fall down, as their parents supervised the playground. They dared me to fight in kung fu matches, hissing and scowling more than punching and kicking. They asked me, "How can you see with eyes like that?" My babysitter asked me if my parents were communists. My teacher looked at me expectantly when she played a documentary about China. My parents could not answer my question satisfactorily: "Why are we Chinese?"

I was unable to disguise myself. Standing there in a polyester print shirt my mother had sewn together to save money, discount store bell-bottom blue jeans, and sneakers that were a knockoff of the popular brands, with straight black hair cut at home though not with a bowl, thick glasses, and buck teeth, I was repeatedly recognized as one of many. Alongside Johnny, I could turn around and find myself transformed into Genghis Khan, Tojo, Charlie Chan, Fu Manchu, Hop Sing, Mr. Sulu, Kato, Bruce Lee, Arnold on *Happy Days*, Sam on *Quincy, M.E.* I was the Number One Son, intoning "Ah so," bending at the waist and shuffling backwards out of the room, with opium smoking, incense burning, and ancestor worshipping, the regular goings-on in the background, accompanied by an obedient wife, helpless with her bound feet. I could deliberately mishear the lyrics of Johnny Rivers's television theme song, "Secret Agent Man" as "Secret Asian Man"—"who leads a life of danger" and who "to everyone he meets . . . stays a stranger"—but I knew there could be no such mysterious hero.

As I became older, I was given many masks to wear. I could be a laborer laying railroad tracks across the continent, with long hair in a queue to be pulled by pranksters; a gardener trimming the shrubs while secretly planting a bomb; a saboteur before the day of infamy at Pearl Harbor, signaling the Imperial Fleet; a kamikaze pilot donning his headband somberly, screaming "Banzai" on my way to my death; a peasant with a broad-brimmed straw hat in a rice paddy on the other side of the world, stooped over to toil in the water; an obedient servant in the parlor, a houseboy too dignified for my own good; a washerman in the basement laundry, removing stains using an ancient secret; a tyrant intent on imposing my despotism on the democratic world, opposed by the free and the brave; a party cadre alongside many others, all of us clad in coordinated Mao jackets; a sniper camouflaged in the trees of the jungle, training my gunsights on G.I. Joe; a child running with a body burning from napalm, captured in an unforgettable photo; an enemy shot in the head or slaughtered by the villageful; one of the grooms in a mass wedding of couples, having met my mate the day before through our cult

leader; an orphan in the last airlift out of a collapsed capital, ready to be adopted into the good life; a black belt martial artist breaking cinderblocks with his head, in an advertisement for Ginsu brand knives with the slogan "but wait—there's more" as the commercial segued to show another free gift; a chef serving up dog stew, a trick on the unsuspecting diner; a bad driver swerving into the next lane, exactly as could be expected; a horny exchange student here for a year, eager to date the blonde cheerleaders; a tourist visiting, clicking away with his camera, posing my family in front of the monuments and statues; a ping pong champion, wearing white tube socks pulled up too high and batting the ball with a wicked spin; a violin prodigy impressing the audience at Carnegie Hall, before taking a polite bow; a teen computer scientist, ready to make millions on an initial public offering before the company stock crashes; a gangster in sunglasses and a tight suit, embroiled in a turf war with the Sicilian mob; an urban greengrocer selling lunch by the pound, rudely returning change over the counter to the black patrons; a businessman with a briefcase of cash bribing a congressman, a corrupting influence on the electoral process; a salaryman on my way to work, crammed into the commuter train and loyal to the company; a shady doctor, trained in a foreign tradition with anatomical diagrams of the human body mapping the flow of life energy through a multitude of colored points; a calculus graduate student with thick glasses and a bad haircut, serving as a teaching assistant with an incomprehensible accent, scribbling on the chalkboard; an automobile enthusiast who customizes an imported car with a supercharged engine and Japanese decals in the rear window, cruising the boulevard looking for a drag race; an illegal alien crowded into the cargo hold of a smuggler's ship, defying death only to crowd into a New York City tenement and work as a slave in a sweatshop.

My mother and my girl cousins were Madame Butterfly from the mail order bride catalog, dying in their service to the masculinity of the West, and the dragon lady in a kimono, taking vengeance for her sisters. They became the television newscaster, look-alikes with their flawlessly permed hair.

Through these indelible images, I grew up. But when I looked in the mirror, I could not believe my own reflection because it was not like what I saw around me. Over the years, the world opened up. It has become a dizzying kaleidoscope of cultural fragments, arranged and rearranged without plan or order.

Asian-ness comes and goes as fad and fashion.¹ Tattoos of dragons entangled around Chinese ideograms are all the rage. Feng-shui consultants divine the best arrangements of furniture inside a house and plantings outside for

design magazines. Miniature Zen gardens and bonsai from no-fuss kits adorn offices. Acupuncturists stick their profusion of delicate needles into even the family pet. Japanese animation becomes a staple of mainstream children's television and Japanese *anime* gains a following among more mature viewers. Imported goods from Asia develop into high-quality competition, whether toys, cars, stereos, appliances, computers, or anything else digital and miniaturized. Readers are mesmerized by Arthur Golden's 1997 best-seller, the faux *Memoirs of a Geisha*.² Spiritualist Deepak Chopra dispenses advice for stressed-out Westerners. Indian body painting with henna (mehndi) is copied by rock stars such as Madonna, who are then copied by adolescent white girls. Children are captivated by the home-grown Barney and the British Teletubbies only until they are old enough to learn about Pokemon, Nintendo, and Playstation.

Today, the UHF channel that broadcast *Johnny Sokko* is off the air; the series is not in syndication anywhere else; and video stores that specialize in cult classics do not carry any of the tapes, although there is a glossy magazine catering to a younger generation of hip Asian Americans that pays homage to the Giant Flying Robot by taking his name as its title. The other day, a newspaper reader wrote to the local question-and-answer columnist to ask if the show had ever existed or if he had dreamed it up during his youth.

Yes, Virginia, there was a Johnny Sokko.

I was Johnny Sokko well before I had any other personality. I have missed Johnny in the quarter century since then. The robot is long gone. I remain not only a stranger in a familiar land but also a sojourner through my own life.

Writing Race

I'd like to be as honest as possible in explaining why and how race matters, because it shapes every aspect of my life—and everyone else's. I'd like to do so in a manner that allows my white relatives and my white friends to understand and empathize.

I have learned how naïve I was to have supposed that children grew out of their race and to have expected that adults could not possibly be racist. The lives of people of color are materially different than the lives of whites, but in the abiding American spirit we all prefer to believe that our individualism is most important.

As a member of a minority group everywhere in my country except among family or through the self-conscious effort to find other Asian Amer-

icans, I alternate between being conspicuous and vanishing, being stared at or looked through. Although the conditions may seem contradictory, they have in common the loss of control. In most instances, I am who others perceive me to be rather than how I perceive myself to be. Considered by the strong sense of individualism inherent to American society, the inability to define one's self is the greatest loss of liberty possible. We Americans believe in an heroic myth from the nineteenth century, whereby moving to the frontier gives a person a new identity. Even if they do not find gold, silver, or oil, men who migrate to the West can remake their reputations. But moving to California works only for white men. Others cannot invent themselves by sheer will, because no matter how idiosyncratic one's individual identity, one cannot overcome the stereotype of group identity.

Sometimes I have an encounter that demonstrates how easily people can be transfixed by a racial stereotype. In a casual aside, a business colleague, who I thought knew me well enough to know better, may make an earnest remark revealing that his attempt to connect with me can come only through race. Although they rarely mention their personal lives, people always will make it a point to tell me about the hit movie they saw last night or the museum exhibit they toured over the weekend if it had a vaguely Asian theme, whether Chinese, Japanese, Korean, Vietnamese, or whatever, because, "It reminded me of you." They tell me I resemble the cellist Yo-Yo Ma or their five-year-old son's friend in school. Or in a passing instant, a white boy or a black boy, whom I would credit with childhood innocence, can rekindle my memory of the ordinary intolerance of days past. At an airport or riding on a subway, boys will see me and suddenly strike a karate pose, chop at the air, throw a kick, and utter some sing-song gibberish, before turning around and running away. Martin Luther King Jr. asked to be judged by the content of his character rather than the color of his skin, but in these surreal episodes I am not judged by the content of my character because the dealings have no content except for the racial image. Worse, it is as trivial for others as it is traumatic to me. I may as well be a stage prop. University of California at Berkeley literature professor Elaine Kim has recounted being told by a white friend who'd read Maxine Hong Kingston's *The Woman Warrior*, one of the earliest works of Asian American fiction to become a staple of literature courses, that only through the book did she come to understand Kim.³ The fictional character becomes more believable than a real person, as though it is easier to know Asian Americans through the representation than through the reality.

At other times, I will have another type of encounter in the anonymous rush of contemporary life, one that confirms that people can be oblivious to folks who don't resemble them.⁴ To present an analogy, most motorcyclists and bicyclists who ride regularly on city streets are accustomed to the situation in which they will make prolonged eye contact with a driver, who then blithely proceeds to cut off the bike or turn directly in front of it. The person behind the wheel may have seen the rider but responds only to vehicles like her own; anything else doesn't register. Likewise, waiting in line, I am amazed when a white person, sometimes well-dressed and distinguished looking and sometimes not, cuts in front of me or expects to be given VIP treatment. I am galled by not only the action but also the sense of entitlement that this person radiates. I want to say, "Hello? Did you not see the rest of us back here, or did you take it for granted that you were more important?" Of course, sometimes people are momentarily distracted or generally impolite. It happens often enough, however, in cases where it is fair to surmise that race and gender are involved. When whites are disrespected by other whites—for example, when they are ushered to a deserted area of the restaurant near the kitchen—they generally are not plagued by the suspicion that it is for racial reasons. It is easier for them to write off an incident as the consequence of incivility rather than another indication of something worse. Even if people of color are spurned for reasons other than race, the maltreatment harkens back to race because of the uncertainty of the matter. People of color are held to a double standard. Asian Americans are impudent if we presume to behave as others have done without doubting their right; what is assertive and commanding when it comes from a white male is bossy and presumptuous from an Asian American female. Ralph Ellison's grand novel *Invisible Man* is based on this phenomenon. Radical writer bell hooks speaks of being overtaken by a "killing rage" during these moments.⁵

I suspect I have it much easier than many others. Asian Americans are stereotyped in a manner that is at least superficially positive. I enjoy a life of the mind. I realize how much worse the problems I see must become if they are magnified by the daily difficulties of less fortunate circumstances. I do not go hungry at night.

I'd like to give some examples of our race problem. They are vexing exactly because they are minor. They are revealing and they point toward much more. In Ellis Cose's *The Rage of a Privileged Class: Why Are Middle Class Blacks Angry? Why Should America Care?* and Lena Williams's *It's the Little Things: The Everyday Interactions that Get Under the Skin of Blacks and Whites*,⁶ the two journalists explain how many middle-class African Americans, who are most

like white Americans, are infuriated by what seem to be petty slights. As race becomes less significant socioeconomically, it can become more important symbolically and politically. The more two individuals are alike in other respects, the more are glaring any race-based differences in the treatment accorded them. Social psychologists have established again and again that in these matters everything is relative, across and within racial groupings. During World War II, on average African American soldiers stationed in the North had lower morale than those stationed in the South. The effect could be documented regardless of whether individual servicemen had come from the North or the South. The cause was the point of comparison. Even though segregation laws and practices were far better in the North than in the South at the time, the black GIs in the North could see that black civilians were doing much better than they were, but black GIs in the South felt that black civilians under Jim Crow racial segregation were doing much worse than they were.⁷ Race also is asymmetrical. What seems like benign childish jokes to the majority can seem like an endlessly recurring nightmare to a minority.

In 2001, two different military accidents each provoked a diplomatic crisis between the United States and an Asian nation. In February, an American nuclear submarine inadvertently sank a Japanese fishing boat during a drill. Nine of the 35 passengers on the boat died. In April, an American surveillance plane flying in international airspace collided with a Chinese jet fighter that had been tailing it belligerently. The American plane made an emergency landing on a Chinese island, where the crew was held hostage. The Chinese pilot was presumed dead.

In each case, as politicians on both sides demanded apologies and became increasingly hostile, the anti-Asian emotions of the public flared up. In isolated instances, commentators used racial terms such as “chink” and argued that loyal Americans should stop eating at Chinese restaurants. At least one radio deejay reportedly proposed that Chinese in the United States be rounded up for internment camps and another suggested that Chinese be deported⁸; none of the people involved seemed to realize that their comments affected and appeared to include loyal Americans. The internment camp supporter and others called up people with Chinese names and harassed them on the air.

Author John Derbyshire, who wrote the critically acclaimed novel *Seeing Calvin Coolidge in a Dream*, published an essay in *Chronicles* magazine in which he argues sincerely for internment of Chinese Americans “in the increasingly thinkable event of a war between China and the United

States.” He dismisses the critiques of the Japanese American internment, saying, “I must say, I never thought it was a very deplorable thing to do.” Using anecdotes about beauty parlors and Kabuki theaters in the camps and Japanese loyalists who muttered about Japan winning, he echoes the internment supporters of the past: “The interned Japanese-Americans argued that they were not security threats. I am sure that most of them were not; I am equally sure that some of them were.” He “guarantees” that the new camps for Chinese Americans will be established, “whatever the ACLU—or even the Supreme Court—thinks about it.” Declaring “a responsible U.S. government really has no choice in the matter,” he notes that he—an Englishman who has not applied to naturalize as an American “partly from a lingering sentimental attachment to my own country”—will accompany his Chinese-born wife and their two children as they are herded into such a camp.

The antagonism toward Asians may be excusable. Asian Americans cannot seem to convince non-Asian Americans that when we ask not to be blamed for what Asians have done, we are not even discussing the substance of any dissension between Americans and Asians. Foreign governments and foreign companies may well be wrong and deserving of censure, for all sorts of reasons. But conflict with Asia makes Asian Americans vulnerable, because there has been a history of anti-Asian moods leading to anti-Asian American actions. If ordinary people were to act out their aggressions toward Asia, they would hurt not Asians but Asian Americans. They cannot reach Asia, but they can easily hit Asian Americans. Other than race, there is no relationship between a Japanese American living in the United States and the Japanese clamoring for prosecution of the submarine commander. Without racial reasoning, there is no cause for presuming that a Chinese immigrant restaurateur supports China over the United States. (China took the opposite tack of assuming that Asian Americans were loyal to the United States, detaining several Chinese-born American citizens and permanent residents on trumped-up charges of espionage just after its spy plane disgrace.¹⁰)

Even without misfortune overseas, Asian Americans are associated with one another. Every month or so, I find myself waiting in line behind or in front of another Asian American or an Asian family. Half the time, when my turn comes the clerk or the salesperson will treat us as if we were all together and will be startled to find out that we have nothing to do with one another. By itself, this racial coincidence causes a second of confusion or embarrassment and nothing more than that. However, it means that I can disregard other Asian Americans only at my peril. I may pride myself on being

an independent American, but I am inextricably bound to people with whom I have nothing in common except skin color.

I don't hear it often anymore—I am too much a “race man,” to borrow the phrase—but from time to time I have been told, “Oh, I think of you as white,” or “Oh, I don't think of you as Asian.”¹¹ The white people who say these things may intend them as the ultimate compliment, but the more admiring they are the worse their way of thinking. They are trying to reach out, but they are implying that it is better to be white than Asian American and they like best the Asian Americans who are most like whites. They are distinguishing between the good minority individual, at the expense of the bad minority group.

Nor need I pay any attention to race for others to show they are obsessed with it. The ordinary encounters of daily life, which should have nothing to do with race, can easily turn into unnerving incidents that are racially charged. Many Asian Americans are familiar with those awful moments when, in a dispute over who was in line first at the cash register, where dogs can be walked, who bumped into whom, or in declining to give money to a panhandler, a person who is white or black suddenly shouts something about “go back to where you came from” or mutters an aside meant to be overheard about “all these damn foreigners.” In these instances, Asian Americans must decide whether they can and should disregard the racial tone. I find that when I respond, even if I try to reason with someone, people sometimes become implacable, and the effort to engage them is futile. They insist more hotly that they are right, not racist. They were merely claiming the parking space they saw first, and even if they said “you know, this is the way we do it in America” or asked “how long have you been in this country, anyway,” it wasn't a veiled racial reference and I shouldn't take it as such.

In May 2001, a major study¹² that included a national telephone survey and focus groups of highly educated individuals in New York City, Los Angeles, and Chicago showed that about one-third of all Americans agree that Chinese Americans probably have too much influence in high technology and are more loyal to China than the United States. Almost half believed that Chinese Americans passing secret information to China was a problem, and one-quarter thought that Chinese Americans were taking too many jobs from other Americans. They balked at the idea of an Asian American president, corporate CEO, or boss more than they did at someone African American, Jewish, or female in any of those roles. More than two-thirds forecast that China would be a menace to the United States. Their views about China correlated with their views of Chinese Americans. The findings can be

generalized, because it turns out that few Americans distinguish between Chinese Americans and other Asian Americans.

The study was sponsored by the Committee of 100, a nonpartisan group of Chinese American leaders such as the Pritzker-Prize winning architect I. M. Pei, which has sought to increase the political participation of Chinese Americans and foster cooperation between China and the United States. It hired independent firms that have done corresponding work for the Anti-Defamation League over the years. The survey and focus groups were conducted before the spy plane crisis, so the negative results also cannot be attributed to any specific tensions. At the Committee of 100's annual conference, where it released the results, many observers were perplexed by the negative figures. Other surveys, however, have shown the same patterns of other Americans disliking or feeling threatened by Asian Americans.

Almost imperceptibly something strange has happened. As a nation, we have become so seemingly triumphant at vilifying racists that we have induced denial about racism.¹³ Regarding racism, before the civil rights revolution many whites believed that what was, should be; now, in a post-civil rights era, they believe that what should be, already is. This profound change makes it harder than ever to communicate. What was once overt and thought to be right is now thought to be wrong but has become covert. Most people have become what social scientists John F. Dovidio and Samuel L. Gaertner have dubbed "aversive racists," conditioned to regard racism as reprehensible but also reflexively following racial impulses.¹⁴ We also forget that white society used to subjugate African Americans and other people of color quite openly. In the segregated South, many whites were forthright and unabashed in articulating and acting on their conviction that blacks were a lesser breed of human being. In the North, some whites would have conceded that whites below the Mason-Dixon line or those afflicted by ignorance were enthralled by racism even if they would not admit it of themselves.

The evidence of such racism is expunged. Novelist Jack London, whose dispatches from Asia for the Hearst newspapers helped popularize the term "yellow peril," also wrote an essay of that title warning of the "menace" to the Western world from "millions of yellow men" (Chinese) under the management of "the little brown man" (Japanese).¹⁵ His rejoinder to fellow socialists who admonished him for these attitudes toward Asians was "What the Devil! I am first of all a white man and only then a Socialist."¹⁶ His belief in Anglo-Saxon supremacy was fervent and formed "a dominant note throughout all his writing," according to his daughter, as was his conviction that "the