

and it is of such character and extent that the great body of our people instinctively recognize it and reject the thought of assimilation.⁹¹

In the *Ozawa* and *Thind* cases, the Supreme Court articulated the relationship between ethnicity, race, and ideology. In *Ozawa*, the court held that while gradations of color might exist, gradations of race did not. European immigrants from “blond to swarthy brunette” could be amalgamated into a “Caucasian” race; Asian immigrants, however assimilated, could not. Ethnology had its limits, however: despite any common ancestor that he may have shared with modern Caucasians in the “dim reaches of antiquity,” Bhagat Thind was declared ineligible for citizenship on the grounds that, although Caucasian, he was not white. The court held that the ultimate arbiter of whiteness is not science but popular ideology. The *Ozawa* and *Thind* rulings established “common understanding” as the popular standard on which “race” was to be defined, impervious to cultural assimilation or science. In cases where the bright line of race might be crossed, as in the case of mixed-race individuals, the “one drop” rule of racial hypo-descent could be invoked. Thus science was brought back into the debate on race but within limits, as the handmaiden of popular ideology. In 1934, in *Morrison et al v. California*, a case involving a conspiracy to violate California’s Alien Land Law, which prohibited Asians (as aliens ineligible for citizenship) from purchasing or leasing agricultural land in California, Justice Cardozo, citing both the *Ozawa* and *Thind* decisions, declared that “men are not white if the strain of colored blood in them is a half or a quarter, or, not improbably even less, the governing test always . . . being that of *common understanding*.”⁹² [emphasis added].

The “common understanding” on which Justice Cardozo relied defined the “inner dikes” of racial purity necessary for the protection of the national family and the reproduction of the race. The cases of Takao Ozawa and Bhagat Thind reflected the judgment of ordinary Americans fully awakened to the Yellow Peril that the “common hurtage” which could bring together Saxon and Celt, Polish, French, Slavs and Italians, African and Armenian, could not admit the Oriental.

5

The Cold War Origins of the Model Minority Myth

Racist Love

In 1974, the writer Frank Chin expressed it this way: “Whites love us because we’re not black.”¹ The elevation of Asian Americans to the position of model minority had less to do with the actual success of Asian Americans than to the perceived failure—or worse, refusal—of African Americans to assimilate. Asian Americans were “not black” in two significant ways: They were both politically silent and ethnically assimilable.

The Cold War construction of Asian America as a model minority that could become ethnically assimilated, despite what *U.S. News and World Report* euphemistically called its “racial disadvantage,” reveals the contradiction between the continuing reproduction of racial difference and the process of ethnic assimilation. The representation of Asian Americans as a *racial* minority whose apparently successful *ethnic* assimilation was a result of stoic patience, political obedience, and self-improvement was a critically important narrative of ethnic liberalism that simultaneously promoted racial equality and sought to contain demands for social transformation. The representation of the Asian American as the paragon of ethnic virtue, who the *U.S. News and World Report* editors thought should be emulated by “Negroes and other minorities,” reflected not so much Asian success as the triumph of an emergent discourse of race in which cultural difference replaced biological difference as the new determinant of social outcomes. Although the deployment of Asian Americans

as a model minority was made explicit in the mid 1960s, its origins lay in the triumph of liberalism and the racial logic of the Cold War.

The narrative of Asian ethnic assimilation fit the requirements of Cold War containment perfectly. Three specters haunted Cold War America in the 1950s: the red menace of communism, the black menace of race mixing, and the white menace of homosexuality. On the international front, the narrative of ethnic assimilation sent a message to the Third World, especially to Asia where the United States was engaged in increasingly fierce struggles with nationalist and communist insurgencies, that the United States was a liberal democratic state where people of color could enjoy equal rights and upward mobility. On the home front, it sent a message to “Negroes and other minorities” that accommodation would be rewarded while militancy would be contained or crushed.

The successful transformation of the Oriental from the exotic to the acceptable was a narrative of Americanization, a sort of latter-day *Pilgrim's Progress*, through which America's anxieties about communism, race mixing, and transgressive sexuality might be contained and eventually tamed. The narrative of Asian ethnic assimilation helped construct a new national narrative for the atomic age that Walter Lippman had dubbed the American Century.

World War II as Prelude

Ironically, it was Japan's attack on Pearl Harbor and America's entry into the Second World War that began the unraveling of the Yellow Peril myth. The Second World War was a watershed event for Asian Americans. The treatment of Asian American ethnic groups brought into sharp focus the contradiction between their exclusion as racial subjects and the promise of their assimilation as ethnic citizens.

America's entry into the war against Nazi Germany and Imperial Japan made it increasingly difficult to sustain national policies based on theories of white racial supremacy. After Dunkirk, the United States and its allies depended on support from their colonial subjects in India, China (not, strictly speaking, a colony), southeast Asia, and north Africa. The very nationalist movements whose representatives had been summarily dismissed by Woodrow Wilson at Versailles were now actively courted by the United States as allies against the Axis powers. In August 1941, four months before the United States entered the war, Roosevelt and Churchill signed the Atlantic Charter recognizing the right of “peoples” to decide their own form of government. Later that year, in response to the threat by civil rights leader A. Phillip Randolph to lead a massive protest march on Washington, Roosevelt signed an Executive Order outlawing

racial discrimination by companies doing business with the federal government and established a Committee on Fair Employment Practices.

Official pronouncements of racial equality notwithstanding, the wholesale and brutal incarceration of the Japanese American population on the west coast underscored, in no uncertain terms, the willingness of the U.S. government to invoke race as a category of subordination to achieve its goals.² This willingness to use racial categories would result in physical hardship, economic ruin, family disintegration, and psychological trauma for more than 120,000 Japanese Americans, men and women, elderly and infant, citizen and immigrant.

After Pearl Harbor, the United States found itself allied with a weak and divided China. The Yellow Peril, that alliance of Japanese brains and Chinese bodies that had fired the racial nightmares of turn-of-the-century strategists of empire from Kaiser Wilhelm to Sax Rohmer, had remained imaginary. Japan's plans for empire, though couched in Pan-Asian anticolonial rhetoric, met with resistance in China and elsewhere in Asia. For the first time, being able to tell one Asian group apart from another seemed important to white Americans. Two weeks after the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor brought the United States into the War, *Life* magazine ran a two-page pictorial entitled “How to Tell Japs from the Chinese.” The reporter for *Life* magazine wrote:

U.S. citizens have been demonstrating a distressing ignorance on the delicate question of how to tell a Chinese from a Jap. Innocent victims in cities all over the country are many of the 75,000 U.S. Chinese, whose homeland is our stanch [sic] ally. . . .

To dispel some of this confusion, *Life* here adduces a rule of thumb from the anthropomorphic conformations that distinguish friendly Chinese from enemy alien Japs.³

On the right side of the article, two facial portraits of Orientals are juxtaposed one above the other. The top picture (of the Minister of Economic Affairs of the Chinese Nationalist government) is captioned “Chinese public servant” while the one below (of Admiral Tojo, the Japanese Prime Minister) is captioned “Japanese Warrior.” Although the pictures are the same size and the proportions of the facial features virtually identical, the notes tell a vastly different story. The Chinese, *Life* told its readers, has “parchment yellow complexion, more frequent epicanthic fold, higher bridge, never has rosy cheeks, lighter facial bones, longer narrower face and scant beard.” Tojo, “representative of the Japanese people as whole . . . betrays aboriginal antecedents, has an earthy yellow complexion, less frequent epicanthic fold, flatter nose, sometimes rosy cheeks, heavy beard, broader shorter face and massive cheek and jawbone.”

In addition, the *Life* article showed two pictures whose captions read, respectively, "Tall Chinese Brothers" and "Short Japanese Admirals." *Life*, taking no chances with its racial taxonomy, supplied the following "field" notes: The Chinese brothers were "tall and slender" with "long legs" while the admirals were "short and squat" with "shorter legs and longer torso." Had *Life* only added blonde hair and blue eyes, it might have created the perfect Aryan Chinaman.

Not wanting to appear unlearned in the matter of racial anthropology, *Life* pointed out that its illustrations were drawn from Northern Chinese. Southern Chinese (at that time, the overwhelming majority of Chinese residents of the United States) the magazine noted, were short, and "when middle aged and fat, they look more like Japs." The *Life* editors went on to tell the reader that

Southern Chinese have round, broad faces, not as massively boned as the Japanese. Except that their skin is darker, this description fits the Filipinos who are [also] often mistaken for Japs. Chinese sometimes pass for Europeans, but Japs more often approach the Western types.⁴

Lest this confusing racial taxonomy fail Americans in this time of crisis, *Life* reassured its audience that cultural difference could also be identified visually. "An often sounder clue is facial expression, shaped by cultural, not anthropological, factors. Chinese wear the rational calm of tolerant realists. Japs, like General Tojo, show the humorless intensity of ruthless mystics."⁵

Aware that readers might be suspicious that this exercise in racial cataloguing was similar to that being practiced by Nazi social scientists, *Life* assured its audience that American physical anthropologists were "devoted debunkers of race myths." Debunking notwithstanding, *Life* asserted that the ability to measure the difference between the Chinese and Japanese "in millimeters" enabled American scientists to "set apart the special types of each national group." To lend an air of precision, scientific objectivity, and authority to the photos and the accompanying text, *Life's* editors festooned the pictures with handwritten captions and arrows simulating anthropological field notes.

The same disjuncture between the newly articulated ideals of racial egalitarianism and the practice of racial discrimination can be seen in the Supreme Court's decisions in the Japanese American internment cases. In the case of Gordon Hirabayashi, a student at the University of Washington who had challenged the right of military authorities to establish a curfew applicable only to persons of Japanese ancestry, the court stated that discrimination on the sole basis of race was "odious to a free people." Nevertheless, the court refused to curb the authority of the

military in times of national emergency and upheld Hirabayashi's conviction (he had refused to leave the university library at the hour appointed for Japanese Americans to be in their homes). Likewise in the case of Fred Korematsu, a house painter from Oakland who had evaded relocation, the court held that while race was an "inherently invidious" category for discrimination by the state and subject to "strict scrutiny," the court accepted the state's claim of military necessity for the incarceration of Japanese Americans.⁶

Despite its massive mistreatment of Japanese Americans, the still rigidly enforced segregation of African Americans throughout most of American society (not least in the Armed Forces), and the deadly anti-Semitic policy of denying refuge to Europe's Jews, the U.S. government condemned the Nazi's doctrine of racial superiority and identified the defeat of racism as one of the reasons "Why We Fight." While Japanese Americans were singled out on the basis of their "race," other Asian American ethnic groups began to receive favorable treatment from the federal government.

In 1943, Congress voted to repeal the Chinese Exclusion Act, which had for sixty years forbidden Chinese, with few exceptions, to enter the United States. Repeal of exclusion had been a foreign policy goal of successive Chinese governments for more than half a century. Repeal was pushed through the U.S. Congress on the grounds that it would keep the wavering Nationalist Chinese government of Chiang Kai-shek in the war against Japan.⁷

In the next year, two bills were introduced in Congress to establish immigration quotas for India and the Philippines. These two bills were passed in 1946, on the eve of Philippine independence. The repeal of Chinese Exclusion and the effective dismantling of the Asiatic Barred Zone of 1917 had greater symbolic value than immediate demographic effect, since the number of visas issued to Asian countries was still severely restricted. Nevertheless, the ideological statement implied by the dismantling of racially specific barriers signaled an erosion of white supremacy as a national doctrine.⁸

Making the Model Minority Myth

In January 1966, the *New York Times Magazine* published an article with the title "Success Story: Japanese-American Style," and in December *U.S. News and World Report* published an article focusing on Chinese Americans, "Success Story of One Minority in the US."⁹ As their titles suggest, both articles told the story of Asians in America as a narrative of triumphant ethnic assimilation.

This new popular representation of Asian Americans as the model of successful “ethnic assimilation” was created in the crisis of racial policy that had surfaced at the highest levels of the federal government the previous year. The policy debate that emerged in 1965 reflected deep ideological division over responses to the demands for racial equality that had developed in the two decades since the end of the Second World War.

The Watts riot in the summer of 1964 and the growing demands of African Americans for economic equity as well as formal political rights, along with the gradual dismantling of Jim Crow segregation in the South, plunged racial policy into crisis. The contours of the crisis can be seen in the conflicting responses of the Johnson Administration to black demands for racial equality. In March 1965, Lyndon Johnson’s assistant secretary of Labor, Daniel Patrick Moynihan, published a *Report on the Black Family* which laid much of the blame for black poverty on the “tangle of pathology” of the black family. He admonished African Americans to rehabilitate their dysfunctional families in order to achieve economic and social assimilation. In June, at commencement exercises at all-black Howard University in Washington, D.C., the president articulated a vision of racial equality through sweeping social reconstruction in a massive War on Poverty. Both men genuinely claimed to support racial equality and civil rights, but their two documents could not have been further apart in their analysis and proposed solutions. The conflict between Johnson’s response and Moynihan’s response forms the ideological context in which the Asian Americans emerged as the model minority.

Johnson’s speech emphasized the historical reality of race in America as compelling logic for extending civil rights into the economic sphere. Referring to the disadvantaged position of many blacks in the American economic structure, Johnson declared, “You do not take a person who for years has been hobbled by chains and liberate him, bring him up to the starting line of a race and then say, ‘You are free to compete with all the others,’ and still justly believe that you have been completely fair.”¹⁰ The president went on to lay the principal responsibility for black poverty on white racism, both historical and present, and he outlined an agenda of government-sponsored social change to ameliorate discrimination and poverty.

Moynihan took a radically different political tack. Quoting his former Harvard colleague, sociologist Nathan Glazer, Moynihan complained that “the demand for economic equality is now not the demand for equal opportunities for the equally qualified; it is now the demand for equality of economic results. . . . The demand for equality in education . . . has also become a demand for equality of results, of outcomes.”¹¹

Moynihan left implicit Glazer’s ominous threat that American society, despite a commitment toward the former, would be “ruthless” in suppressing the latter. Moynihan went on to describe a black culture of poverty as a “tangle of pathology” born in slavery but “capable of perpetuating itself without assistance from the white world.”¹² In particular, Moynihan identified the prevalence of female-headed households as a barrier to economic success. For Moynihan, the key to both racial integration and economic mobility was not in structural changes or social reorganization that might correct past injustice, but in the rehabilitation of “culturally deprived” black families.

The *U.S. News* article was quite explicit about the political context of its report when it asserted, “At a time when it is being proposed that hundreds of billions be spent on uplifting Negroes and other minorities, the nation’s 300,000 Chinese Americans are moving ahead on their own with no help from anyone else.” Foreshadowing an obsession that was to shape Richard Nixon’s campaign rhetoric a year later, the writer of the *U.S. News* article described America’s Chinatowns as “havens for law and order” and made no fewer than six references to low rates of delinquency among Chinese American youth.¹³

Making the Silent Minority

The construction of the model minority was based on the political silence of Asian America. An often cited example of Asian American self-reliance was the underutilization of welfare programs in 1970. Despite the fact that 15 percent of Chinese families in New York city had incomes below the federal poverty level, only 3.4 percent had enrolled to receive public assistance. This statistic has often been used as an example of a cultural trait of self-reliance and family cohesion. An alternative explanation, grounded in recent Asian American history, would stress apprehension and mistrust of the state’s intentions toward them.

Wartime incarceration had left deep wounds in the Japanese American communities. The removal to fairgrounds and racetracks, the relocation to remote, barbed-wired camps, the uncertainty of loyalty oaths, the separation of family members, all traumatized the Japanese American community. The Japanese American Citizens League’s policy of accommodation with the War Relocation Authority and its role in suppressing dissent within the camps had left bitter divisions among many Japanese Americans. Japanese Americans, for the most part, were anxious to rebuild their lives and livelihoods and reluctant to relive their experience. In particular, the American-born Nisei generation remained remarkably silent about its camp experience until the emergence of the Asian American movement in the 1970s and the Redress Movement of

the 1980s. Social psychologists have likened the response of Japanese Americans who had been unjustly incarcerated to that of victims of rape or other physical violation. They demonstrated anger, resentment, self-doubt, and guilt, all symptoms of post-traumatic stress syndrome.¹⁴

While postwar Japan became America's junior partner, the People's Republic of China became its principal enemy. After the Korean War broke out in 1950, and especially after China entered the war in 1951, the United States made every effort to isolate communist China, economically and diplomatically, and embarked on a military policy of confrontation aimed at "containing" the expansion of Chinese influence throughout Asia and the Third World.

The fear of Red China extended to the Chinese American community. In 1949, Chinese communities in the United States were divided in their attitudes toward the communist revolution. Although the number of communists in Chinese American communities was tiny, many who were not communist or even leftist nonetheless found some satisfaction in the fact that a genuinely nationalist, reputedly honest, and apparently more democratic government had finally united China after a century of political chaos, weakness, and humiliation. On the other hand, Chiang Kai-shek's Kuomintang Party had long enjoyed the support of the traditional elites in the larger Chinatowns.¹⁵

When the Korean War broke out in 1950, Congress passed the Emergency Detention Act, which vested the U.S. Attorney General with the authority to establish concentration camps for any who might be deemed a domestic threat in a national emergency. The mere authorization of such sweeping powers of detention served as a stark warning to Chinese Americans that what had been done to Japanese Americans a decade earlier could also be done to them without effort.

The pro-Chiang Kai-shek Chinatown elite, working with the FBI, launched a systematic attempt to suppress any expression of support for the new communist regime in China. The Trading with the Enemy Act, which prohibited any currency transfers to the Peoples Republic of China, including remittances to family, was used as a tool to attempt to deport suspected communist sympathizers. Although only a few leftists and labor leaders were actually deported, the threat of deportation had a deeply chilling effect, since many hundreds of Chinese had come to the United States as "paper sons" during the long decades of exclusion and were in the United States under false pretenses.

In 1952 Congress passed the McCarran-Walter Immigration and Nationality Act, which dismantled racial prohibitions on immigration and established an Asian-Pacific Triangle with an immigration quota cap of two thousand visas. Even though McCarran-Walter still strictly limited Asian immigration, the red scare that was its impetus was contagious.

In 1955, Everett F. Drumwright, the U.S. consul in Hong Kong, issued a report warning that Communist China was making use of "massive" fraud and deception to infiltrate agents into the United States under cover as immigrants. Drumwright's hysterical and largely unsubstantiated report provided the rationale for massive FBI and INS raids into Chinatowns around the country to search out pro-China subversives. Chinatowns were flooded with public notices and street flyers warning of potential spies and subversives, while "innocent residents" were encouraged to report suspected subversives to the FBI.

In 1957 Congress authorized the Chinese Confession Program. Chinese Americans who had come as paper sons were encouraged to confess their illegal entry. In return for consideration for an appropriate (but not guaranteed) adjustment of their status, the applicant had also to make a full disclosure on every relative and friend. The information gathered in the Chinese Confession Program was used to try to deport those who were identified by the FBI's informants as supporters of China or as domestic troublemakers. Membership in leftist support organizations, in labor unions, in "pro-China" organizations melted away in the face of the sustained harassment and attack from the conservative elite within Chinatowns, and the FBI and INS from without.¹⁶

Containing The Red Menace: The Fordist Compromise

At the close of the Second World War, American labor was infused with a renewed militancy. During the war years union membership had grown from nine million in 1940 to about fifteen million in 1945. This represented almost thirty six percent of the non-agricultural work force, the highest proportion of unionized labor in the country's history. During the war years, organized labor had agreed to a no strike policy and to curb wage demands as a patriotic obligation to the war effort. However, at the war's end pent-up wage demands and the problems of reabsorption of millions of men leaving the service led to a resurgence of demands for wages and a reassertion of control over work conditions. Labor strife soon boiled over at General Motors and in the oil industry. In 1945 forty-five hundred work stoppages, mainly wildcat strikes and sit-downs, involved five million workers. Some of these work stoppages took the form of hate strikes aimed at driving women and black workers from the factory positions they had earned during the war.¹⁷

In 1946, the steelworkers went on strike, then the miners. Strike fever spread when a general strike was called in Stamford, Connecticut. In 1947 militant labor called general strikes to shut down business in Houston, Rochester, Pittsburgh and Oakland.

In May 1946, President Truman seized the railroads to prevent a strike.

Altogether Truman would seize and operate nine industries under powers granted the executive branch by the War Labor Disputes Act. Management launched a massive attack on radical, particularly Communist Party, leadership within the labor movement. Their most effective tool was the Taft-Hartley Act, passed in 1948, which outlawed the closed shop, secondary boycotts, and jurisdictional strikes in violation of decisions of the National Labor Relations Board; jointly administered welfare funds; and made unions subject to suit in federal courts for violation of contracts. The Taft-Hartley law stripped collective bargaining rights from unions having communists among their leadership and resulted in successive purges of the labor movement. Employers and employees could petition for decertification elections, and federal employees were forbidden to strike. State right-to-work laws were legalized, and the president was given power to enforce eighty-day cooling off periods during which labor would be compelled to return to work.

The long period of economic growth that sustained America's rise to hegemonic power depended on a sustained accord between labor and management. This pattern of cooperation has been called the Fordist Compromise, since it seemed to usher in that stage of capitalism which Henry Ford had envisioned, in which working-class demand for durable consumer goods would drive economic growth. The Fordist Compromise permanently institutionalized many of the features of "scientific management" that had been introduced during the war. Under the new production-oriented union leadership, labor contracts developed a pattern of close collaboration between labor leadership and management on issues of supervision, productivity, and work rules.¹⁸ In return, management and the state worked together to create a working class that had the social characteristics of a middle class. Real income rose by 30 percent between 1945 and 1960. The Fordist Compromise also called for a relatively high degree of state intervention, from the mediation of labor relations through the National Labor Relations Board, to the regulation of working conditions through agencies such as the Occupational Safety and Health Administration, to the organization of a "welfare state" of permanent entitlements for the new "middle" class, such as social security, subsidized housing, educational financing, unemployment insurance, and increased public higher education. The state also took on an expanded role in intervening in the economy through an ever-wider range of fiscal control policies and by exercising its economic power as the purchaser of last resort.

The sustained economic growth on which the Fordist Compromise depended was fueled by several sources, but initially it was \$40 billion in wartime personal savings and a pent-up demand for durable consumer

products that drove production. This required the reinvigoration of the patriarchal nuclear family. Wartime production had increased the number of women in the labor force from just under fourteen million in 1940 to just over nineteen million in 1945.¹⁹ Both management and federal agencies worked to encourage and sometimes force women back into the home while work assignments in many plants were resegregated along racial lines.²⁰ As men returned from war and started families, the birth rate in the United States grew for the first time in several decades, leading to the sustained growth of a domestic market for housing, education, and durable consumer goods. The nuclear family was the necessary social unit of consumption for durable goods—the automobiles (fifty-eight million sold in the 1950s), refrigerators, toasters, and televisions whose production drove the economy.

The realization of the Fordist Compromise could only be imagined in a world in which the United States had reconstructed a sphere of influence based on free trade and open markets. In the late 1930s and '40s, American policy planners in the State Department and the Council on Foreign Relations had initially imagined a "Grand Area" of American influence, to include the Western Hemisphere and the Asia-Pacific area. By the of the war, the United States was in position to supplant Britain, France, and the Netherlands in many, if not all, of their colonial territories.²¹ The American postwar project of global transformation supplanted European colonial administrations in Asia with nationalist elites whose economic interests and political allegiances were aligned with American interests. By the end of the 1940s, one-third of all manufactured goods in the world were made in America, and U.S. officials emphasized a high level of exports as a critical factor in avoiding a postwar depression.²² American policymakers therefore took it as an article of faith that the reconstruction of a stable, multilateral, capitalist economic system would rely on the unobstructed movement of capital and labor.

America's strategy for global reconstruction required the reconstruction of both western Europe and Japan as major industrialized trading partners. In Europe, the Marshall Plan funneled millions of dollars into the rebuilding of western Europe. Financing the reconstruction of Europe could not be funded solely through European-American trade, however; imports from Europe only amounted to one third of one percent of the U.S. gross national product. The United States therefore looked to Asia and the Pacific to close the "dollar gap."

The development of a Pacific Rim economic strategy therefore became a central requirement for American policy planners directly at the war's end. Although MacArthur had begun to dismantle prewar cartels such as Mitsui and Mitsubishi as a means of democratizing the Japanese

economy along with its political system, by 1947 the reverse decision was made to reconstruct Japan's prewar economic machine as a foil to a possible revolutionary China. Japanese manufacturing was to become what the Council on Foreign Relations called "the workshop of the American lake." Japan was to play a critical role as a junior partner in the Pacific Rim strategy. After the "loss" of China, Japan, with American encouragement, focused its economic attention on southeast Asia. In its report on Asian economic development in 1952, the Institute for Pacific Relations spelled out the role that Japan was to play between the United States and the Southeast Asian market.

There can be little question that . . . the best area for Japanese economic expansion is in Southeast Asia, with its demands for capital and consumer goods, its raw materials and rice surplus. . . . It would seem that Japan should be encouraged to develop trading outlets there in the interest of the overall structure of Pacific security. Japan has herself shown keen interest in these trade possibilities, especially in Thailand, Malaysia, Indonesia, and India.²³

The Pacific Rim was not only a crucial market for American goods but also a highly profitable region for export of capital. In addition to the redeployment of Japanese capital, direct U.S. investment in the Pacific Rim was a major source of profits for American corporations. While overseas investments grew at about 10 percent per annum—twice the growth rate of domestic investment—American investment in the Pacific Rim outside Japan brought a 25.5 percent return on investment, and investment in the Japanese economy brought in 11.3 percent. Between 1951 and 1976, the book value of American investments in the Pacific Rim grew from \$16 billion to \$80.3 billion.²⁴

Containing The Black Menace: Ethnic Assimilation

In 1944, the same year in which the Supreme Court heard the Japanese internment cases, Gunnar Myrdal published *An American Dilemma: The Negro Problem and Modern Democracy*, a massive collaborative study of American race relations. Drawing on the work of a generation of American liberal social scientists, notably sociologist Robert E. Park and his students, *An American Dilemma* signaled the intellectual discrediting of biological theories of racial superiority and the triumph of the concept of ethnicity as the dominant paradigm for explaining and transforming race relations. Myrdal's report to the Carnegie Foundation focused on the disparity between the egalitarian ethos articulated in the nation's

founding documents and the practice of racial discrimination in American society. Myrdal was clear about the implications of the "American dilemma" for America's role as the principal organizer of the postwar world order: "If America in actual practice could show the world a progressive trend by which the Negro finally became integrated into modern democracy, all mankind would have reason to believe that peace, progress, and order are feasible."²⁵

Myrdal's hope was a statement of liberal faith. The triumph of liberalism, including ethnic liberalism, was made possible by the victory of the United States and its allies over the Axis powers and necessary to the rise of a *Pax Americana* in the postwar era.

The Cold War provided a national security dimension to the "race problem." Although Soviet communism was perceived as the greatest threat to the established order, after the Soviet Union exploded its own atomic bomb in 1949 the struggle against the Soviet Union was limited to a war of containment.²⁶ Since the establishment of relatively stable opposing blocs in Europe in the mid-1950s, the struggle between the U.S. and the Soviet Union was played out principally in Asia, Africa, and Latin America. In 1954, the term "Third World" was coined as India, the People's Republic of China, and Indonesia (with the tacit support of the Soviet Union) sponsored a conference of non-aligned nations at Bandung, Indonesia. The demands of the Third World nations, largely peoples of color, for independence, self-determination, and economic development became the ideological arena in the contest between the Soviet Union and the United States.

It is not surprising, then, to find federal intervention on behalf of civil rights expressed in the language and logic of the Cold War. As early as 1948, in *Shelley v. Kraemer*, a case involving restrictive covenants in real estate, the federal government's brief supporting the dismantling of racial restrictions on housing "relied" on the State Department's view that "the United States has been embarrassed in the conduct of foreign relations by acts of [racial] discrimination in this country."²⁷ In the most significant postwar desegregation case, *Brown v. Board of Education*, both the Justice Department and the NAACP briefs emphasized the important foreign policy implications of the case. The Justice Department's *amicus* brief stated the foreign policy case explicitly:

The existence of discrimination against minority groups in the U.S. has an adverse effect upon our relations with other countries. . . . Racial discrimination furnishes grist for the Communist propaganda mills and it raises doubts even among friendly nations as to the intensity of our devotion to the democratic faith.²⁸

A decade later, in the aftermath of the Watts riots, both Johnson's Howard University speech and the preface to Moynihan's *Report* referred to this ideological struggle and framed the problem of civil rights and social justice in the United States within the global context of the Cold War. Both initially emphasized the need to provide the world with a model of the "true American revolution" as an alternative to communism. The president opened his speech by declaring,

Our earth is the home of revolution. . . . Our enemies may occasionally seize the day of change. But it is the banner of our movement which they take. And our own future is linked to this process of change in many lands in the world. But nothing in any country touches us more profoundly, nothing is freighted with meaning for our own destiny, than the revolution of the Negro American.²⁹

Moynihan opened his report with the observation that "the [Black] movement has profound international implications, . . . [and that] it was not a matter of chance that the Negro movement caught fire in America at just that moment when the nations of Africa were gaining their freedom."³⁰ He went on to invoke the threat of perceived separatist Black Muslim doctrines or the "attractiveness of Chinese communism" to American blacks.

Anxious to replace the invidious category of race, for which there was little scientific justification and significant political cost, liberal theorists subsumed race relations to ethnicity. Ethnicity theory was grounded in the belief that while certain historically anachronistic patterns of racial segregation persisted, modern American society was open to the full participation of all who were willing to participate. Liberal social scientists who promoted the ethnicity paradigm argued that the desired assimilation of blacks into modern American society could be achieved in two steps. The barriers of Jim Crow segregation had to be dismantled (over the objections of "pre-modern" segregationists like the Klan, the White Citizens Councils, and an entrenched Southern power structure), and non-whites had to accommodate themselves to the "universal" demands of modernity.

The blueprint for ethnic assimilation was Robert Park's theory of a four-stage ethnic or race relations cycle. Park identified four stages in a natural and irreversible process of ethnic assimilation: initial contact between the outsider and the host society, economic and political competition, economic and cultural accommodation of the ethnic to the host society, and finally, assimilation into the host society. These patterns of cultural assimilation and integration were assumed to be universally applicable to all "newcomers" into the modern city and applicable to ra-

cial as well as ethnic relations. This was a narrative of modernization drawn from studies of the historical experiences of European immigrant groups in American cities. The ethnic component of cultural identity was identified with the Old World. Seen as pre-modern and dysfunctional, ethnic differences of language, custom, and religion were transcended as the immigrant became modern and American.

Since the stages of assimilation were based on a narrative of universal modernization and not on a theory of subordination, the burden was on the latecomer to modernization to accommodate the host society. It did not occur to assimilation theorists that racially subordinated people might be reluctant to abandon cultures of survival that had been developed over centuries of oppression. The black sociologist E. Franklin Frazier, a student of Park and one of the most important contributors to *The American Dilemma*, wrote:

Since the institutions, the social stratification, and the culture of the Negro community are essentially the same as those of the larger community, it is not strange that the Negro minority belongs among the assimilationist rather than the pluralist, secessionist, or militant minorities. It is seldom that one finds Negroes who think of themselves as possessing a different culture from whites and that their culture should be preserved.³¹

Assimilationists supported the civil rights movement in the dismantling of Southern Jim Crow segregation and encouraged voting rights and electoral political participation. Assimilation theory, however, suggested that the duty of the state was limited to the dismantling of formal, legislated barriers to participation. Since the greater part of assimilation rested on the accommodation of the minority to the host society, state regulation of private activity in the interest of equal condition was seen to have little positive and possibly greater negative effect. The sociologist Milton Gordon, who in the early 1960s elaborated and refined Park's race relations cycle into a seven-stage theory of ethnic assimilation, warned explicitly:

The government *must not* use racial criteria positively in order to impose desegregation upon public facilities in an institutional area where such segregation is not a function of racial discrimination directly, but results from discrimination operating in another institutional area or from some other causes.³² [Emphasis added.]

In the 1950s and early 1960s, liberalism, with its universalist claims on science and progress, became the hegemonic ideology of the American imperium. The political requirements of the Cold War and the logic of liberal universalism required an adherence to a doctrine of racial equality. Liberal social scientists articulated a theory of modernization that

could be deployed as an ideological alternative to communism in resolving the problem of the Third World. Its domestic version, ethnic assimilation, would provide a similar nonradical solution to the “Negro problem.”

Ethnicity theory met the requirements of liberalism by articulating a doctrine of individual competition in a “colorblind” society or, in Milton Gordon’s view, a society in which the state played a neutral role. Ethnicity theory articulated a vision of the colorblind society but evaded a critique of the historical category of race altogether. Ethnicity theory offered a promise of equality that could be achieved, not through political organization and community empowerment, but only through individual effort, cultural assimilation, and political accommodation. For liberals who sought both to develop the Negro and to contain black demands for the systematic and structural dismantling of racial discrimination, the representation of Asian-American communities as self-contained, safe, and politically acquiescent became a powerful example of the success of the American creed in resolving the problems of race.

In 1955, less than a year after the Supreme Court had shocked the system of Southern segregation by declaring separate but equal education inherently unequal and unconstitutional, the torture, lynching, and mutilation of Emmett Till, a black fourteen-year-old who was accused of flirting with a white woman, shocked the world. The exoneration of Till’s killers by a jury of their white peers signaled a strategy of “massive resistance” to racial equality in the South. The murder of Emmett Till served as the counternarrative of racial intolerance and violence that threatened to undermine the liberal narrative of Myrdal’s American creed so painstakingly assembled and elaborately articulated.

Containing The White Menace: The Nuclear Family as Civil Defense

In 1948, Alfred Kinsey shocked America by reporting that a third of American men had engaged in some homosexual activity during the course of their lives and that a majority had experienced homoerotic desire. The news should not have come as a surprise. The 1940s had witnessed a marked expansion of sexual freedom and experimentation with new definitions of gender relations. During the war years, millions of young men went into the armed forces and millions of young women went into the factories. These young people established new patterns of dating and had a more relaxed attitude toward premarital sex than did their parents. During the same period, gay and lesbian public cultures emerged in cities around the country.³³

Kinsey’s study, *The Sexual Behavior of the Human Male*, a dry sociological

survey of 12,000 respondents, became an immediate best seller. It also drew the ire of conservative churchmen and politicians. For reporting these activities of Americans, Kinsey was accused of aiding and abetting the communist cause and was investigated by the House Committee on Un-American Activities.

In the Cold War search for traitors and subversives, homophobia and anticommunism went hand in hand. Following on the heels of Senator Joe McCarthy’s search for communist agents, the Senate launched investigations to root out homosexuals in the federal government. Nonreproductive sexuality, homosexuality in particular, was seen as a threat to the national security. Anticommunist crusaders warned that homosexuality weakened the nation’s “moral fiber,” making it susceptible to both sexual and political seduction. Just as communism was considered a perversion of the natural economic order, homosexuality was considered a perversion of the natural biological order. When the sudden turn from American triumph in the Second World War to the high anxiety of the Cold War could only be explained by treason, homosexuals were seen to have secret lives much like spies or foreign agents. Shortly after his inauguration as president in 1953, Dwight Eisenhower issued an executive order barring gay men and lesbians from Federal employment.³⁴

The link between anticommunism and homophobia was not merely psychological or metaphorical; in the atomic age, reproducing the nuclear family was understood to be the key to national survival. In the 1950s and early 1960s, seeking to take advantage of America’s advantage in nuclear weapons, strategic planners stressed survivability in nuclear war. This strategic doctrine relied on a program of civil defense, the mass mobilization and education of the civilian population regarding their duties during nuclear war. At the heart of civil defense was the belief that the nuclear family was the primary social unit through which the American way of life could be preserved or resurrected.³⁵ Talcott Parsons, perhaps the most influential American sociologist between 1940 and the 1960s, argued that the middle-class family, with its “natural” division of labor between the sexes, was the most efficient and implicitly the highest form of social organization. In the absence of a state apparatus that might be obliterated or cut off from its people by nuclear war, the nuclear family was a natural social unit that would reproduce America.

Sayonara: War Bride as Pocahontas

Sayonara, a 1956 film directed by Joshua Logan, is a drama about the trials of interracial romance in the Cold War era. The movie, based on James Michener’s novel of the same title (published in 1953), is a narrative in which “modern” interracial love triumphs over anachronistic

racial bigotry. *Sayonara* establishes the anticommunist necessity of ethnic liberalism and presents the war bride as a model of ethnic assimilation. This triumph of ethnic liberalism opens up the way for the rebirth of a nation, America as protector of the postwar global order.

The War Brides Act of 1945 had made it possible for American military personnel to bring their spouses and dependent children to the United States as nonquota immigrants. In the five years between 1947 (when the War Brides Act was amended to include Chinese and Japanese wives of American citizens) and 1952 (when its provisions ended), some 6,000 Chinese women came to the United States. Between 1945 and 1975, some 45,000 Japanese wives of American servicemen immigrated to the United States.³⁶ Only a few Japanese women came to the U.S. under the War Brides Act itself. It was only after the McCarran-Walters Immigration and Nationality Act of 1952, which allowed the naturalization of Japanese and Korean immigrants and provided nonquota visas for spouses and children of American citizens, that many Japanese spouses of American service personnel began to arrive.³⁷ Japanese “war brides” were among thousands of women from Asia who took advantage of the dismantling of immigration laws that had restricted their entry into the United States since the Page Act of 1870. Thousands of Filipino wives accompanied American servicemen to the United States or joined husbands who had immigrated earlier. In the 1950s and ’60s women made up the great majority of immigrants from Asia.³⁸

The relationship of gender and sexuality to the process of ethnic assimilation and racial segregation has always been a troubled one. In *An American Dilemma*, Myrdal identified the preservation of a taboo on marriage and sexual relations between black men and white women as the single highest priority of white Southerners. A decade later, Emmett Till paid with his life after being accused of breaking that taboo. The Americanization of the Asian war bride—Orientalism domesticated—was the Cold War narrative of ethnic assimilation and domesticity that could restore credibility to the “American creed” that reconstructed the American family as modern, universal, and multi-ethnic, if not exactly multi-racial. In this tale of Americanization, the Oriental woman was transformed from dangerously transgressive into a symbol of domesticity and a stalwart of a restored postwar patriarchy. Meanwhile Asian men remained outside the American family, marginalized, invisible, and racially Other.

Shot against the serene background of a lush Japanese garden, with gracefully arched footbridges and a watercourse, *Sayonara*’s title sequence establishes the tension between the modern West and the pre-modern East. The classically Orientalist image of Japan—aestheticized,

unchanging, pastoral, and ahistorical—is immediately displaced by the opening scene, which sets up the historical context for *Sayonara*’s narrative of Cold War modernization. The opening shot shows a fighter jet landing on an airstrip in Korea (the caption tells us the year is 1951), signaling the arrival of the active, masculine, and modern American Century. The scene is careful to underscore the fact that the Korean War is not the Second World War and that the relationship between Asia and America has changed. The Sabrejet lands in front of two ground crewmen working on an older, propeller-driven plane, an obsolete reminder of the Second World War and an earlier era. When Major “Ace” Gruver (Marlon Brando) opens his hatch, his war weariness is immediately apparent. He admits to moral fatigue. Gruver comments to his ground crewman, Airman Kelly (Red Buttons), that this time “there was a guy with a face in that [enemy] plane.” Gruver’s admission articulates his ambivalence about the war in Korea, which, though it is a war against communism, is merely a “police action,” a war of containment and not a total war.

Although the Korean War occasions the *Sayonara* story, apart from the introductory scenes virtually no further mention is made of the war itself. *Sayonara* is a garrison drama, as such its themes are domestic. The struggle against Soviet communism is not only on the battlefield in Korea but also, perhaps principally, within the American empire. Racial attitudes are critical to the way in which the conduct of Americans in Japan and elsewhere in the Free World are judged.

Gruver is told by his commanding officer that he must dissuade Kelly from marrying Katsumi (Miyoshi Umeki), the Japanese woman with whom he is in love. While it winks at casual sexual relations between American service personnel and Japanese women, the military establishment strongly discourages marriage between Americans and Japanese and forbids servicemen from bringing their wives to the United States. When Kelly enthusiastically shows Gruver a photo of Katsumi, Gruver—a West Pointer, the son of a general, and a Southerner—responds with blunt racism. “I don’t understand how a normal American can marry a Japanese. . . . Go ahead and marry this slant-eyed runt if you like.” Gruver shows Kelly a picture of his fiancée, Eileen Webster (Patricia Owens), the daughter of another general, and catalogues the qualities that make her a good potential wife for a “normal” American. Eileen is “an American girl [with] fine character, with good background, good education, good family, [and] good blood.” If not precisely an Aryan superwoman, Eileen is the white middle-class ideal of its social elite. The racial and class differences between Katsumi and Eileen are marked immediately on the body. When they exchange pictures of their respective objects of desire,

Gruver remains silent on Katsumi while Kelly comments enthusiastically on Eileen's figure in a swimsuit.

In response to Gruver's racist slur, Kelly's sharp retort, "Don't ever talk to me like that again," signals his independence and principled fearlessness in the face of a superior. It establishes Kelly's role as representative of the working class in this film. Class differences, coded as military rank, are underscored by the revelation that Kelly, a forthright but devoted and hardworking soldier, has been promoted and demoted four times for insubordination. Kelly shows Gruver the military's pamphlets warning about "the dangers" of intermarriage. Kelly defies the military bureaucracy by writing his congressman to get permission to marry. His class analysis is straightforward and populist: "There's the generals for the officers and congressmen for the peasants." This secures Kelly's position as spokesman for the workingman and helps to mobilize populist legitimacy for his desire to marry Katsumi.

In what seems an absurd irony, after forcing Gruver to apologize for his racist slur toward his intended, Kelly asks him to serve as best man at his wedding. This is where the film's liberal individualism exerts itself as a containment of a more radical structural critique. While Airman Kelly is measured both by his principled stand against the undemocratic state (represented by the military authorities) and by his personal fealty to his superior officer, Gruver is measured by his personal loyalty to his men over and above his obedience to the rules. Kelly and Gruver share a possessive individualism that is offended by the state's intervention in the (private) decision to take a wife. At the same time, this reliance on individualism safely contains the radical potential of Kelly's protests, both against racism and against the privilege of class or rank.

Japan is presented as a sexual wonderland, beginning with Kelly's first description of an all-male Kabuki theater and an all-female Matsubayara dance troupe (based, presumably, on Tokyo's famous Takarazuka Theater). The exoticism of Japan is ironically underscored by the surprise arrival of Gruver's fiancée, Eileen, the daughter of his new commanding general. Eileen Webster represents the conventional white middle-class ideal of sexual attractiveness. Yet it soon becomes apparent that Eileen is dissatisfied with the prospect of a conventional family life shaped by the demands of a shared military career "like our parents have." However Eileen's rebelliousness is contained by her intense romanticism; she can identify her own pleasure and fulfillment only through a husband. She explains to a somewhat befuddled Gruver, "No woman wants to live any way except body and soul with the man she loves."

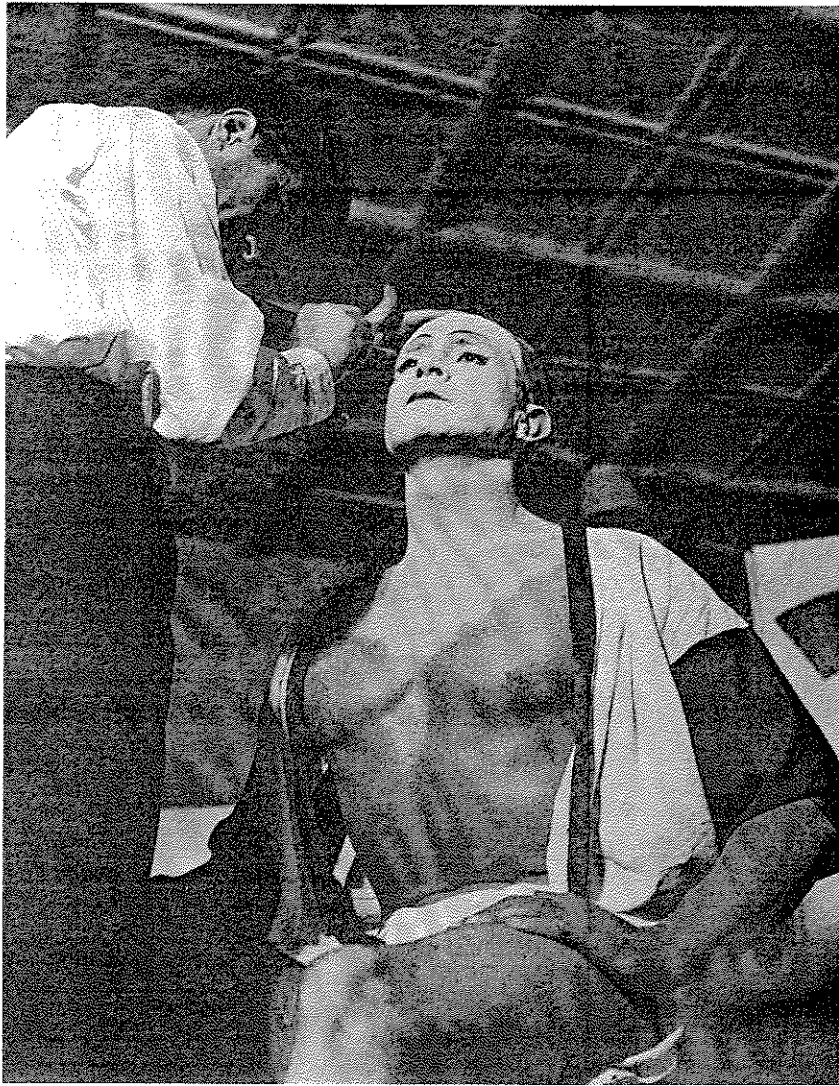
Gruver's first introduction into Japanese high culture is a trip to the Kabuki Theater arranged by Eileen. Kabuki is a classical and highly ritu-

alized theater in which male actors play both male and female roles ("Just like they do at Princeton," chirps Eileen's mother). While Gruver appears discomfited by the idea, Eileen seems clearly titillated and enthusiastic about the exotic and potentially transgressive nature of the performance; she reads aloud from a brochure that the Kabuki actors combine "the grace of a woman and the power of a man" in one body. Gruver becomes clearly uncomfortable with the homoerotic potential in the Kabuki performance and, in what appears to be a homophobic panic, insists on a disruptive public display of heterosexual affection. Eileen, on the other hand, uses the performance to prod Gruver's sexual anxiety. When Nakamura turns the character of the lady into a lion in a powerful dance, Eileen twits Gruver, "Is he man enough for you now, Lloyd?"³⁹

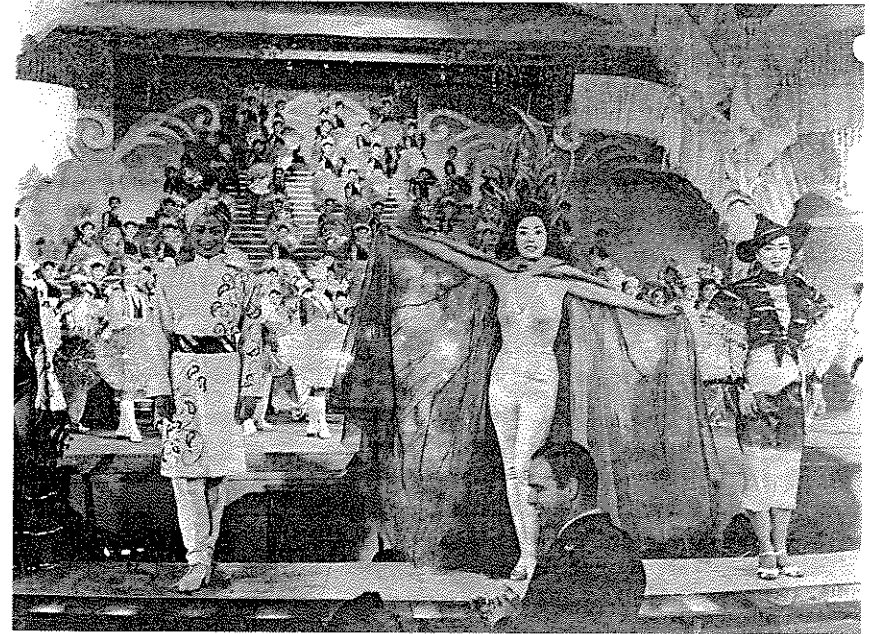
The first view of the Kabuki actor Nakamura (Ricardo Montalban) is an elaborate costuming scene that interjects an extraordinarily disruptive moment into what, until this point, has been a densely heterosexual discourse focusing on the exchange values of Japanese and American women. In the course of putting on his heavy white face and body paint, and his female costume, Nakamura's race and sex are simultaneously transformed and deconstructed. As a male actor playing a female role, Nakamura's sex is temporarily obscured. Nevertheless, when Nakamura is displayed in a direct frontal shot wearing a codpiece, there remains little doubt as to his physical sexual identity as a male.

Preparing for the stage, Nakamura applies a heavy white greasepaint that obscures his visual identification as Asian, although the ritual underscores his cultural identity as Japanese. The whiteness of the Kabuki makeup also marks Nakamura as potentially racially transgressive. This is a double masquerade, since Nakamura is played by Ricardo Montalban in yellowface. The casting of Montalban in this role achieves a number of purposes. It uses the Cuban-born actor's image as a romantic sophisticate (based on another ethnic stereotype) to create an ethnically exotic yet racially acceptable potential rival to Gruver. The audience is thus reassured that if Nakamura *née* Montalban does have an affair with Eileen Webster, no racial taboo will have been broken, since beneath the white paint and the yellow paint there is a white man.

The film next turns to its second spectacle of Japanese sexuality, the dance of the Matsubayara showgirls. The dancers first appear dressed in prim kimonos marching from their dormitory to their theater like school girls. The single exception to this display of demure femininity is their chief dancer, Hana Ogi, who is dressed in pants, turtleneck sweater, and feathered hat. Hana Ogi, a transvestite woman, is the mirror image of Nakamura. Gruver is told that "the tall ones play men's parts."



White face on yellow face:
Ricardo Montalban as Nakamura in *Sayonara*.
Still courtesy of the Museum of Modern Art Film Archives



Postwar spectacles:
The Matsubayara Dancing Girls with Hana Ogi (Miko Tara) center stage in *Sayonara*.
Still courtesy of the Museum of Modern Art Film Archives

The Matsubayara performance displays an virtual buffet of imagined Japanese sexuality. Against a line of dancers in lamé tights, Hana Ogi first appears in a sheer kimono as a Geisha; then, in short succession, in top hat and tails, a western-style ball gown, a formal kimono, the costume of a Shinto priest, in Samurai costume, and finally as a princess. The sexual fantasy that she represents and appears to offer crosses gender, racial, and cultural boundaries. Although she refuses to meet him, over the course of the next few months, Hana Ogi parades in front of Gruver on her way to and from the dormitory. This parade reproduces the male drag fantasy of her dance performance as she wears a variety of sexually signifying men's hats: a brown fedora, a golfing cap, a straw hat, and a gaucho hat.

Contrasted to the rigidly heterosexual gender and family codes of the United States, represented by General and Mrs. Webster, Japan is polymorphous, transgressive, and exotic. Both Nakamura and Hana Ogi represent a sexuality that is transgendered and unpredictably dangerous.



“The tall ones play the men’s parts”: Hana Ogi in male drag meets Gruver (Marlon Brando).

Still courtesy of the Museum of Modern Art Film Archives

The homosocial tension between Gruver and Nakamura in a potential rivalry over Eileen (whose fascination with Nakamura is made evident) is overwhelmed by the homoerotic tension between the two characters. Gruver and Nakamura mirror each other visually and narratively. The scene that introduces Nakamura pays close attention to makeup and robing as an elaborate transgending ritual. In this scene, Nakamura sits erect and appears energized by the erotic power expressed in his acting. This astounding fetishization of the “Japanese” male body stands in stark contrast to a parallel introduction of Gruver. In that scene—Gruver’s post-flight medical examination—Gruver sits on examination table, also naked from the waist up. But his body, in contrast to the erect Nakamura, is slouched, flaccid with physical and moral fatigue. In a later scene, Gruver confides to a Marine Corps officer (James Garner) that an acting experience in high school had “changed [his] world” but that he had repressed his youthful desire to be an actor (like Nakamura) in favor of West Point and the military career chosen for him by this father.

The scene in which Hana Ogi and Gruver are finally introduced is an exercise in Orientalist shtick. The meeting is arranged to take place in Kelly’s small Japanese-style house. There is the traditional bumping of Western heads on low ceilings; much is made of the ritualized etiquette of sake drinking (in contrast to the two-fisted whisky drinker that Gruver is presumed to be—signified by the bottle of whiskey he brings as a gift). Hana Ogi is presented in formal kimono; predictably the introductions take place over the mutual pouring of sake. Despite her former aloofness, Hana Ogi immediately and unconditionally assumes the subordinate Orientalized position. She asks Gruver’s forgiveness for hating Americans because she has held them responsible for the deaths of her family. To this reminder of America’s still recent encounter with Japan, it must have been unsettling for audiences to hear Gruver reply simply, “there were a whole lot of Americans killed too and it’s best we forget.”⁴⁰

In the West, the gaze is traditionally appropriated to masculine power. Therefore, when Hana Ogi says, “I have been watching you, too, and you have not looked like a savage,” and adds, “Katsumi-san [whom Gruver has kissed, somewhat reluctantly, at her wedding] has told me how gently you kiss,” it is a startling moment for Gruver. The admission by the Native Woman of looking and inquiring captures the eroticism of the exotic. On one hand, the admission seems to betray innocence; Hana Ogi appears not to know better than to reveal her interest in Gruver. On the other hand, it reveals her appropriation of the gaze; she can exercise the power of surveillance. She can categorize him as “not a savage.” Hana Ogi goes on to spin a fantasy of innocence, danger, and devotion that would make *Madame Butterfly* blush: “I have never been in love, though I have dreamed and thought about it. . . . There is danger of discovery for both of us, danger of weakness when it is over. . . . I will never fall in love again, but I will love you, Lloyd-san, if that is your desire.” This combination of submissive innocence and assertive sexuality is the epitome of Orientalist fantasy.

The gauzy romanticism of the affair between Gruver and Hana Ogi is sharply contrasted to the Kellys’ marriage and subsequent double suicide. Kelly and Katsumi settle into a small house off base in what appears to be a working-class neighborhood. Kelly makes an attempt to learn Japanese and takes great pride in knowing about Japan and things Japanese. Katsumi is portrayed as an ideally devoted Japanese wife—submissive, docile, and obedient. It is not out of any gesture of independence or individuality on Katsumi’s part, but precisely out of her obsequiousness, that the only occasion for Kelly’s anger with his “model” wife arises. Kelly is angered by Katsumi’s suggestion that she wants to have an

operation to remove the epicanthic folds from her eyelids, a literal self-effacement to make herself acceptably "white."

Kelly takes great umbrage at this self-denying and naive idea and commands that she remain as she is. Kelly's objection and command reveal the disparate power relations between the white American husband and the Japanese wife. First, it underscores Kelly's complete domination over the supine Katsumi, who is willing to undergo mutilation to please him and then meekly accepts his decision to veto the idea. Second, although it signals Kelly's resistance to racist assumptions about beauty, Kelly's refusal of permission can also be read as a sign of his desire for Katsumi to remain exotically "Japanese." Third, Kelly accepts Katsumi for who she is, or at least how he, and not others, has created her. Katsumi's aborted plan to have her eyelids "fixed" and Kelly's difficulty in learning to speak Japanese are meant to suggest that the utopian dream of "going native" or "passing" is not a viable alternative.

The Kellys, and all the other interracial couples under military command, are made to endure increasing harassment ordered by a bigoted Southern colonel who is the executive officer under General Webster. Symbolic of this pressure and representative of the ostracism that may face interracial couples on their return to the States, the colonel places their homes off-limits to other American personnel.

Faced with sudden orders to return to the States, and unable to bring Katsumi with him, Kelly commits suicide with Katsumi. Their suicide is literally foreshadowed in *bunraku*, a shadow puppet performance that ends with a romantic double suicide. Short of having the couples attend *Madame Butterfly*, the audience could be given no clearer notice of the inevitable. Suicide is Kelly's final utopian, Butterfly-like gesture. Kelly, who has been portrayed as rigidly principled, cannot now think of any pragmatic response that will preserve his sense of honor and justice. Kelly must make some final gesture, however futile and romantic, of resistance. Of course, he takes a stereotypically Japanese course of action.

It is only in the wake of the Kellys' suicide that the anticommunist logic of ethnic liberalism explicitly reveals itself. After Gruver's initial racist comment in Korea, he is gradually transformed from a Southern racial bigot to a national racial liberal. Racism is clearly identified as a Southern pathology; the racist villains of the film are General Webster's executive officer, a colonel, and Eileen's self-serving and status-conscious mother. Both are Southerners who represent an anachronistic, if still persistent, racial bigotry. In an early scene, where the marine officer played by James Garner and his Japanese date are turned away from the officers' club by the colonel at Mrs. Webster's insistence, it is made clear

that her bigotry is damaging to the political alliance between the United States and Japan.

The colonel then orchestrates the harassment of interracial families and the sudden transfer of Kelly to the States, making the Kellys' suicide inevitable. The Kellys' suicide touches off anti-American demonstrations and a near riot (assumed to be communist-inspired). Witnessing this, Gruver is given to understand the global importance of ethnic liberalism. Racial bigotry of the old Southern variety is thus revealed to provide "grist for the communist propaganda mills." It is the Kellys' suicide and the subsequent recognition of the political significance of their own relationship that finally brings Gruver and Hana Ogi together permanently. Despite her embarrassingly obsequious professions of selfless and undying love and devotion, Hana Ogi is more Pocahontas than Madame Butterfly.

The Pocahontas legend, repeated and embellished over three centuries, has assumed the status of a myth of national origins.⁴¹ Pocahontas could be viewed as the sexual, maternal, self-sacrificing, fertile native woman who symbolizes the fruit of conquest. She can serve as a triumphal metaphor for the assimilation of the "ethnic" woman into the benevolent paternalism of American society.⁴² In these narratives, the native woman, the princess of a defeated or soon-to-be defeated nation, falls in love with the white conquering hero and realizes the moral superiority and liberation of American society. The native woman becomes a true woman through her love of the white man. Having become a true woman via this transformative love, she becomes a candidate for the motherhood of the new nation.

As in the legend of Pocahontas and John Smith, Hana Ogi "saves" Gruver. Hana Ogi saves Gruver from himself, from his own exhaustion, self-doubt, and "Southern" racism, and from his crisis of masculinity, through his heterosexual affair with her. Since Hana Ogi's dance has assured us of her desirability as a heterosexual object of desire, her apparent transvestitism allows Gruver to simultaneously express and contain his repressed desire for Nakamura. The triumph of Gruver's "natural" heterosexuality is realized in the domestication of Hana Ogi's previously transgendered sexuality. When Hana Ogi declares finally that Gruver's love has made her, as she says, a "real woman," it signals the triumph over his own suppressed homoerotic desire for Nakamura. In declaring that Gruver has made her a real woman, Hana Ogi has made him a real man.

If Eileen is the conventional definition of the ideal American woman, Hana Ogi is her opposite. Eileen demands a romantic break from



In a love scene in *Sayonara*, Hana Ogi is dressed in a traditional kimono. Still courtesy of the Museum of Modern Art Film Archives

middle-class family life and an escape into the exotic (although her flirtatious relationship with Nakamura is deflected). On the other hand, Hana Ogi (for whom the theater has been family and the source of order since the death of her father and brother) breaks from the exotic to reconstruct a familial life with Gruver. Ultimately Hana Ogi, like Pocahontas, will give up status and prestige in her native land to live in the imperial metropole, where she will represent the domesticated exotic. Assimilated, with her transgressive sexuality in check, she is now a real woman. In the last scene of the film, when Hana Ogi and Gruver decide that love will conquer all, they resolve the question of their (future) multiracial children by making them America's future. Like Pocahontas portrayed as a lady of the Elizabethan court, Hana Ogi, with Gruver as husband, is now portrayed as the mother of a new nation.⁴³

"I Enjoy Being A Girl": *Flower Drum Song*

In 1960, four years after *Sayonara* was released, the film *Flower Drum Song* showed Asians in America as, if not yet a model minority, at least perfectly suitable candidates for ethnic assimilation. The musical comedy—

about romantic misalliances among a group of young Chinese Americans and the conflicts that arise when their hopes for romance confront the traditional expectations of their immigrant parents—promoted a popular vision of the universal possibilities of ethnic assimilation.

The Rodgers and Hammerstein musical was loosely based on the novel of the same title by the Chinese American author C. Y. Lee. Lee's novel was a more dark-humored exploration of the difficulties of assimilation and generational conflict among American-born Chinese and their immigrant parents. When *Flower Drum Song* opened on Broadway as a light-hearted musical, the reviewer for *Time* magazine said that the theme of romantic triumph over cultural conflict had already become hackneyed after *South Pacific* and *The King and I*, both Rodgers and Hammerstein productions. Besides, the *Times* reviewer noted, San Francisco's Chinatown was less genuinely exotic than the "real" Asians of *The King and I*.⁴⁴ *Commonweal*, a liberal journal that had long actively promoted ethnic assimilation and racial harmony, praised the musical's emphasis on virtue and its civility.⁴⁵ The reviewer for the *New Yorker* was less kind when she wrote,

The authors' attitude toward exotic peoples in general seems to have changed hardly at all since they wrote "South Pacific" and "The King and I." If friendly, the natives have a simple, primitive, childlike sweetness. If girls, they do not know how to kiss, but once they have been taught they are wild about it. They also beg to inquire, please, just what it is that is said with flowers. In their conversation, as you may have gleaned, there is more than a smidgen of pidgin. . . . It seems to have worried neither Mr. Rodgers nor Mr. Hammerstein very much that the behavior of war-torn Pacific islanders and nineteenth-century Siamese might be slightly different from that of Chinese residents of present-day California, where "Flower Drum Song" is fictionally sung.⁴⁶

Flower Drum Song's Chinatown is a yellowface version of *State Fair's* small-town America. Set down on San Francisco Bay, Chinese America is representative of ethnic Americans generally. Ironically, in a film in which ethnicity displaces race and cultural transformation is a measure of assimilation, it is race—and the tradition of not being able to tell one Asian from another—that lends the film its supposed authenticity.

Although the all-Asian casting of *Flower Drum Song* represented a breakthrough for Asian American performers (with the exception of Juanita Hall, a veteran African-American singer cast as Auntie Liang); none of the actors, except Benson Fong, who played the patriarch of the Wang clan, was actually Chinese American. The cast included Miyoshi Umeki (from Japan) as Mei Li, a recent arrival from China; James Shigeta (Japanese from Hawaii) as Wang Ta, the serious and sincere eldest

son of the Wang clan; Patrick Adiarte (Filipino American) as Wang San, the hyperassimilated teenage son of the Wang family; Jack Soo (Korean American) as Sammy Fong, a somewhat sleazy, somewhat hip nightclub owner; and Nancy Kwan (Scots-Irish and Chinese from Hong Kong) as Linda Low, the femme fatale nightclub dancer. The complete reliance on the racial appearance of the actors in establishing the show's ethnic credentials is underscored by the use of stage sets. In the opening number, when Mei Li sings "One Hundred Million Miracles" in a "Chinatown" park, the Asian passers-by who gather are, without exception, dressed as middle-class white Americans of the period; men in suits and ties, women wearing sensible Republican cloth coats. The crowd in Chinatown includes an apparently Chinese policeman who gives them directions to the Fong household.

The film's premise is set by the arrival in San Francisco of Mei Li and her father (Kam Tong) as undocumented immigrants. They have come to the United States so that Mei Li can be married to Sammy Fong, a somewhat spoiled nightclub owner whose mother has arranged their betrothal. Sammy, however, is not ready to get married and has a girlfriend besides, the exotic dancer Linda Low. He tries to pawn off Mei Li on the wealthy Wang family. Master Wang, or Wang Chi-yang, who is looking for an appropriately traditional wife for his eldest son Wang Ta, approves of the obedient and respectful Mei Li. However since Sammy has resisted a commitment to marriage, Linda Low, with an eye to the main chance, has been going out with Wang Ta. Resolving the plot complications is a matter of appropriately matching up the marriage pairs.

With the hope of introducing Mei Li and Wang Ta, Master Wang invites the girl to a party to celebrate Wang Ta's college graduation and Auntie Liang's American citizenship. Much to everyone's surprise, Wang Ta announces his engagement to Linda Low. Sammy Fong sabotages the engagement by inviting the Wang family to the nightclub, where they discover that Linda is an exotic dancer. Scandalized, Wang Chi-yang forces Wang Ta to break their engagement. Meantime, Mei Li has fallen in love with Wang Ta at first sight, but believing that he loves his devoted friend Helen (Reiko Sato), Mei Li forces Sammy to honor his contract of marriage to her.

Wang Ta now realizes that he really does love Mei Li, despite the fact that she is his father's choice for him. Finally, all is resolved when Mei Li announces that she must release Sammy from his obligation to marry her because she has deceived him by coming to America as an illegal "wet-back." This allows Wang Ta to marry her voluntarily and with full knowledge of her immigration status. In a double wedding ceremony, Wang Ta

then marries Mei Li and Sammy Fong marries Linda Low. All's well that ends well.

These alliances set up a universal generational confrontation in ethnic families between the modern American-born second generation and the traditional immigrant generation. In *Flower Drum Song* the musical comedy, the theme of an ethnic generation gap is substituted for the interrogation of racial exclusion that organizes the novel. *Flower Drum Song* creates a paper tiger conflict between an anachronistic (if quaint), stultifying (if wise), oppressive (if loving), traditional world view held by the immigrant generation of Chinese parents versus the shallow (yet glamorous), modern (yet materialist), romantic (yet rootless) world view of American-born Chinese kids. This is played out in a song and dance routine, "What Are We Going to Do About the Other Generation."

Flower Drum Song's generation-gap depiction of ethnic assimilation is weak tea, however. It provides neither space for Wang Ta to negotiate between the sterile traditionalism of his father and the vacuous rootlessness of his younger brother, nor the racial history which might enable him to critique Chinese America. At the graduation/citizenship party in which the Wang family celebrates its entry into American society, the family organizes a square dance to a song titled "Chop Suey." Not only is the square dance, like the quilting bee or barn raising, a nostalgic icon of American culture, it is popularly identified with a specifically white American rural community. Chop suey, the hash invented in San Francisco and served in Chinese restaurants throughout the country, is emblematic of the inventedness of ethnic identity. Performed together, song and dance simultaneously celebrate the absorptive capacity of the American melting pot and underscore its rootlessness. America is a vast chop suey joint in which anyone can consume an ethnic identity. Chop suey ethnicity erases from memory the history of the Chinese in America as a racialized minority, a history that makes Mei Li and her father illegal immigrants and constructs Chinatown as an Oriental fantasy world in the first place. Chinese Americanness is reduced to little more than paper lanterns and chopstick hairsticks.⁴⁷

In *Flower Drum Song's* world of assimilation, it is the women who know the way out. Linda Low, Mei Li, and Auntie Liang, despite their obvious differences, are all liberal pragmatists. They hold the keys to successful ethnic assimilation. Like Hana Ogi in *Sayonara*, Linda Low represents the desired exotic. It is no accident that Nancy Kwan, who had just made her movie debut as a Hong Kong bar hostess in the *World of Suzie Wong* (1960, also directed by Joshua Logan), was brought in to replace the exuberant but considerably less sultry Pat Suzuki, who had played the



“Chop Suey” square dance: the naturalization/graduation party at the Wangs’ in *Flower Drum Song*.

part on Broadway. Despite the fact that Miyoshi Umeki had won an Academy Award for her earlier role as Katsumi in *Sayonara*, it was Nancy Kwan and her image as Suzie Wong that was featured prominently in all of the billboards and promotionals for *Flower Drum Song*.

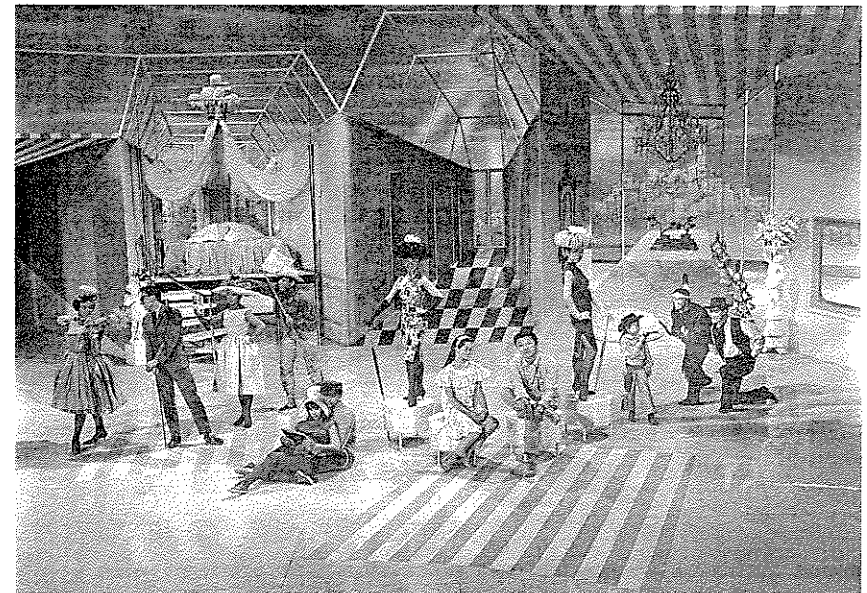
Like Hana Ogi, Linda Low is the personification of sexual fantasy; indeed the fact that both are dancers allows the use of the dance to display the exotic. The dance scene at the nightclub is similar to that of the Matsubayara review in *Sayonara*; it presents a pastiche of international sexual commodification. The song and dance that defines Linda Low, however, is not transgendered in the way that Hana Ogi’s dance was. “I Enjoy Being a Girl” is uncompromisingly—and, to its presumed audience, reassuringly—heterosexual. Linda Low’s sexuality is contained and domesticated by its transformation into consumption. The song fetishizes the female body, which the Barbie doll (a new hit on the toy market that year) was making into a new vehicle of consumption. Like Barbie, which had started out as an “adult novelty” in Germany but had been cleaned up for her debut in the United States, Linda Low is sexy but not dangerous. Like those of the American Barbie, Linda Low’s desires are transparent, understandable, and (for the middle-class male

wage earner) readily satisfied. Being a “girl” means being a consumer of furs, perfume, a sporty car, and a nice house.

To be sure, Linda Low represents a modern girl. She is independent and sexually assertive, but what she wants is a husband. For Linda Low, it is less “a man to share her life with” than a man with whom to share a lifestyle. In the dream sequence “Sunday” [picture here], Linda and Sammy lounge in nightclothes, surrounded by the luxuries of middle-class life, including children playing cowboys and Indians. In *Sayonara*, Hana Ogi must be domesticated before she is allowed entry into the American family, and her sexual domestication is itself a sign of American triumph. In *Flower Drum Song*, Linda Low is already safely domesticated; in her we see what Hana Ogi can become.

On the surface, Miyoshi Umeki’s Mei Li is a reprise of her role as Katsumi in *Sayonara*: a “traditional” Asian immigrant woman, self-effacing and self-denying. Like Katsumi, who thinks that an eyelid operation will fool her oppressors, Mei Li is always positive, willing, and innocent in the face of adversity. Her theme song is, after all, “One Hundred Million Miracles.”

While Mei Li is portrayed throughout the film as traditional and



Sunday morning in the American dream: Linda Low (Nancy Kwan) and Sammy Fong (Jack Soo) daydream of assimilation into 1950’s suburbia in *Flower Drum Song*.

respectful of her elders, the wealthy, and men in general, her story suggests more agency than is conveyed on the surface. It is she who has brought her aging and somewhat ineffectual father to the United States, stowing away in a ship. She demands that Sammy Fong uphold his agreement to marry her, and she decides to break off the impending wedding ceremony.

While Mei Li and Linda Low are played as opposites, they ultimately share many of the same characteristics. Both Mei Li and Linda Low demonstrate the same instrumental need for husbands. In 1960, finding a husband is the expected route into the world of middle-class consumption and assimilation. A husband is required for a life in the United States.

For Mei Li, like Linda, it is the consumption of American popular culture that makes her American. Linda's status as an All-American girl is measured by her clothes, perfume, jewelry, and cars, items that transform the Asian body into an American body. Mei Li is transformed into an American by television. The solution that Mei Li comes up with to free herself (to marry Wang Ta) and Sammy (to marry Linda) comes from a TV show. Mei Li, it is revealed, has been an inveterate consumer of television since her arrival in the United States. Through television, she has absorbed the plain language (the ironic reference to wetbacks) and pragmatic values and solutions of American liberalism.

Auntie Liang is the liberal pragmatist and paragon of ethnic assimilation who mediates between older and younger generations. Unlike Wang Chi-yang, who hides his money under his bed, she is not afraid of modernity. She shares Wang Chi-yang's conservative goals (the marriage of Wang Ta and Mei Li), but she recognizes the need for new modes of behavior to achieve them. She admonishes the elder Wang to let the children decide for themselves whom they will marry, just as she scolds him for not trusting in banks. Marriage for love, and savings accounts, are part of the modern world with which one must come to terms.

The liberal pragmatism represented in these women is critical to *Flower Drum Song's* narrative of ethnic assimilation. Unlike the men who struggle over the meaning of tradition, the women use it or ignore it as it suits their purpose. Mei Li invokes traditional forms of deference and television, as the situation dictates. Tradition is good only as it is useful; it is only the individual freed of the burden of history who can successfully negotiate modernity. Nevertheless, *Flower Drum Song's* liberal pragmatism is only instrumental; the ends of its ethnic assimilation saga are conservative. The musical's Oriental women have become American without making a sound in American society.

Sayonara in 1956 and *Flower Drum Song* in 1960 were Hollywood's new

liberal narratives of national origin. Liberalism was the ideological core of the decentralized political structure of American imperialism. Less a national ideology than a world view, liberalism is the ideology of modernity, deeply identified and aligned with science and, like Marxism, universalist.⁴⁸ As a science of modernity, liberalism could be deployed domestically as a progressive but moderate response to the demand for racial equality and internationally as an alternative to the anticolonialist critique and socialist promise of Lenin and Marx.

Sayonara and *Flower Drum Song* both celebrate American liberalism. In these films, ethnic assimilation is the vehicle through which the social identities of race, class, sex, and nationality can be displaced by the individual embrace of the modern. The "naturalized" (heterosexual and Americanized) nuclear families simultaneously fetishize ethnicity as cultural artifact and render race invisible as a social relationship of power. The nuclear family, the end result of both these films, is expected to produce a new American: a liberal individualist who transcends social origin. Before they can become the mothers of the new American nation, Hana Ogi and Linda Low must be domesticated, naturalized, transformed from exotics into American girls suitable for marriage and motherhood.

Sayonara and *Flower Drum Song* follow in the Pocahontas tradition as narratives in which the woman of color becomes mother of the nation through a process of ethnic assimilation; the history of race relations is effaced in favor of romance and individual transformation. The Oriental woman is assimilated through the domestication of her exotic (racialized) sexuality. In *Sayonara* as in the Pocahontas legend, marriage between the woman of color and white man embodies the highest stage of assimilation. Hana Ogi is the native daughter of a conquered tribe whose erotic difference is domesticated by her devotion to her white man. In *Flower Drum Song*, the Oriental woman is assimilated through the consumption of American culture and marriage. Linda Low's all-American sexuality is revealed to be only an expression of her safe (satisfiable) desire for durable consumer goods. In both cases, the domestication of exotic sexuality re-creates the Oriental woman as a naturalized woman, ready to assume the mantle of mother of a new American empire.