Mapping the Terrain: Asian American Diversity and the Challenges of the Twenty-First Century

Min Zhou and James V. Gatewood

Diversity is the hallmark of the contemporary Asian American community. The influx of Asian immigrants in response to the 1965 Hart-Cellar Act and broader economic, social, and geopolitical factors has brought new challenges for the adaptation of new immigrants and their children to American society. As the community continues to grow in number, so too will their representation in the broader cultural, economic, and political milieu that we typify as "mainstream American society." In this article, the authors attempt to provide readers with a description of the profound changes that have taken place in the last three decades and a survey of the terrain that makes up contemporary Asian America. Specifically, they explore a number of pertinent questions: How has contemporary immigration reshaped Asian America? How do diverse waves of Asian immigrant groups pose challenges to the Asian American community? How do members of the second generation cope with the exigencies of American life? What are some of the undue pressures placed upon them as they confront the model minority stereotype? To what extent and on what occasions are different Asian American groups redefining ethnicity and forging pan-ethnic coalitions? As they delve into these issues, the authors attempt to locate their analysis as a mapping of the contemporary community: how the steady influx of Asian immigrants will continue to impact the Asian American community and what challenges the community currently faces as it is claiming America.

The problem of the twentieth century, as the eminent scholar W.E.B. DuBois asserted, was the problem of the color line (DuBois 1989); this remains as true in the year 2000 as it did then. New challenges, however, have emerged from the rapidly changing landscape of contemporary Asian America to test the limits of tolerance. In the new millennium, meaningful dialogue will be predicated upon the recognition of diversity not only among different racial groups within the United States and globally, but also the diversity from within. The contemporary Asian American

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community is emblematic of this condition and, in its diversity, will provide a unique model with which to test the sophistication of policy makers in ascribing to them a particular agency.

In our re-mapping of the Asian American terrain, we do not simply aim at providing our readers with a formulaic pattern that explains en toto the course that the community will collectively chart in the next several decades. Rather, we seek multiple abstractions based upon the notion that it is the diversity of the contemporary Asian American community that will prove to be its greatest strength, or conversely, its ultimate undoing.

**Trans-Pacific Movement: The Driving Forces Behind Contemporary Immigration from Asia**

Between 1971 and 1995, approximately 17.1 million immigrants came to the United States, almost matching the total numbers of those who arrived during the first quarter of the century (17.2 million admissions between 1901 and 1925) when immigration was at its peak. Unlike turn-of-the-century immigrants, however, today’s newcomers have come predominantly from non-European countries. Since the 1980s, 88 percent of the immigrants admitted to the United States have come from the Americas (excluding Canada) and Asia, and only 10 percent from Europe, compared to more than 90 percent at the earlier peak. The share of immigrants from Asia as a proportion of total admissions grew from a tiny 5 percent in the 1950s, to 11 percent in the 1960s and 33 percent the 1970s, and has remained at 35 percent since 1980. The Philippines, China, Taiwan, Korea, India, and Vietnam have been on the list of top-ten countries sending immigrants since 1980 (USINS 1997). What is the main source of this massive immigration in recent years, particularly from Asia? We consider the relaxation of U.S. immigrant policy and a complex array of economic, geopolitical, and social factors as the key contributors to the current state of Asian America.

**Immigration Policy**

The development of the Asian American community has been intrinsically intertwined with U.S. immigration policy. Beginning with the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882, various laws were passed by Congress to restrict immigrants from the Asia-Pacific Triangle and to single out Asian immigrants for exclusion on the basis of race. Asian immigrants were not only barred from re-entering the country, but also were considered “aliens ineligible to citizenship,” which precluded them from owning land, attaining professional occupations, sending for their family members, marrying, and becoming full and equal participants in American society.

It was only during World War II — a watershed in the history of the Asian American community — that changes were first introduced to immigration law. With the exception of Japan, the United States began to amend restrictive legislation by first repealing the Chinese Exclusion Act (in 1943) and subsequent measures barring Koreans and Asian Indians from citizenship. Later, the United States passed the War Brides Act (in 1945) that allowed American soldiers to reunite with their Asian brides in the United States. Meanwhile, the public’s perception of Asian Americans began to shift from one of “yellow peril” to “model minority.” Even Japanese Americans — more than 110,000 of whom were incarcerated in American concentration camps during World War II — underwent a public transformation in the postwar period from potential fifth-column participants to that of loyal Americans, thanks in no small part to the heroic efforts of the all-Nisei 442nd Regimental Combat Team and 100th Infantry Battalion (Duus 1987; Yoo 2000). In 1952, Congress passed the McCarran-Walter Act, making all national origin groups eligible for naturalization and eliminating race as a bar to immigration, but still keeping the national origins quota system. Despite legislative relaxation, the number of immigrants admitted legally from Asia to the United States, when measured as a proportion of the total admissions, was still extremely low: 3.6 percent in the 1940s and 6.1 percent in the 1950s (USINS 1997).

The United States entered the turbulent decade of the 1960s, when it became entangled in an unpopular war in Vietnam while also entering the height of the civil rights movement taking place at home. Both international and domestic crises forced Congress to address the remaining discriminatory immigration legislation. Meanwhile, labor market projections showed that an acute shortage of engineering and medical personnel would soon materialize unless the United States opened its door to foreign labor.

As a result, Congress passed the Hart-Cellar Act in 1965. This landmark piece of legislation abolished the national origins quota system and aimed at reuniting families as well as importing labor needed in the U.S. economy. Since the law went into effect in 1968, immigration from Asia and the Americas has accelerated rapidly, with little sign of slowing down. Between 1971 and 1996, a total of 5.8 million Asians were admitted into the United States as legal immigrants (not counting the thousands of refugees), the majority of whom were either family-sponsored migrants (more than two-thirds) or employer-sponsored skilled workers (about one-fifth).

Since World War II, immigration policy has reshaped the nature of the Asian American community, transforming it from bachelor societies into full-fledged family communities marked by drastic diversity in national origins, socioeconomic backgrounds, and settlement patterns. However, the driving forces behind Asian immigrant are beyond the scope of such formal immigration policies. The globalization of the U.S. economy since the 1960s has forged an extensive economic, cultural, and ideological link between the United States and developing countries in the Pacific Rim.

**Globalization**

Globalization perpetuates emigration in two significant ways. First, U.S. capital investments into Asian countries transform the economic and occupational structures in these countries by disproportionately targeting production for export, and
taking advantage of raw material and cheap labor. Such development, characterized by the robust growth of low-skilled jobs in export manufacturing, draws a large number of rural, and particularly female, workers into the urban labor markets. Increased rural-urban migration, in turn, causes underemployment and displacement of the urban work force, creating an enormous pool of potential emigrants (Sassen 1989). Second, economic development following the American model in many developing countries stimulates consumption and raises expectations regarding the standard of living. The widening gap between consumers’ expectations and the available standards of living in developing countries, combined with easy access to information and migration networks, creates tremendous pressure for emigration (Portes and Rumbaut 1996).

On the U.S. side, unprecedented growth in capital-intensive, high-tech industries and in professional services has created a severe shortage of qualified workers to fill positions in the primary labor market. Seeking a more immediate solution to this shortage, American corporations and policy-makers have actively recruited skilled workers in foreign labor markets. Since the 1980s, about one-third of the engineers and medical personnel in the U.S. labor market have come from abroad — mostly from India, China, Taiwan, and the Philippines.

The shortage of skilled labor, however, is not a sufficient explanation for the trends in highly skilled migration, since skilled immigration disproportionately originates from selected countries in Asia (almost 60 percent of the total skilled immigration in 1995). In many Asian homelands that disproportionately send their highly skilled emigrants, changing opportunity structures in conjunction with the global integration of higher education and advanced training in the United States contribute to this particular pattern of migration (Liu and Cheng 1994). The emergence of American universities as the premier training ground for international students has also been instrumental in supplying the U.S. economy with skilled labor. (Ong et al. 1992). Many foreign students have found permanent employment in the United States after completing their studies or practical training. In 1995 fiscal year alone, for example, close to 40 percent of the immigrants from mainland China were admitted under employment-based preferences, and almost all of them had received higher education or training in the United States (USINS 1997).

U.S. Military Involvement in Southeast Asia and Refugee Exodus

Refugee flight from Southeast Asia constitutes an important component of contemporary Asian immigration. The United States originally held little economic interest in the region, but was motivated by what it considered to be a pervasive communist threat to Asia during that period. The development of the communist bloc dominated by the former Soviet Union, the communist takeover in China in the late 1940s, and the direct confrontation with communist troops in the Korean War prompted a U.S. foreign policy aimed at "containing" communism, a response which ultimately prompted an American military presence in Indochina. The Vietnam War, its expansion into Southeast Asia, and political turmoil in the region left millions of people living in poverty, starvation, and constant fear, while forcing many others to flee from their homelands. An ironic result is that sizable parts of the populations of Vietnam, Laos, and Cambodia are now in America (Rumbaut 1995): as of 1996, more than 700,000 refugees from Vietnam, 210,000 from Laos, and 135,000 from Cambodia had been admitted to the United States (USINS 1997; Zhou and Bankston 2000).

Southeast Asian refugees fled their countries in different waves. Although Saigon, Vientiane, and Phnom Penh all fell to Communist forces at roughly the same time in 1975, only the Vietnamese and a small number of the Hmong resistance force had the privilege of being "paroled" (being allowed under special provision of the law) into the United States immediately after the war. Approximately 130,000 Vietnamese refugees and only 3,500 Hmong refugees landed on U.S. soil in 1975 (Chan 1994), while the majority of Hmong resistance forces, Laotian loyalists, and Cambodians sought refuge in Thailand. A large refugee exodus occurred at the end of the 1970s, during "the second wave," when thousands of refugees fled Vietnam by boat and created the "boat people" crisis, while many others fled to land on China and Thailand. It was reported that almost half of the "boat people" perished at sea, and the remaining half ended up in refugee camps in Thailand, Indonesia, the Philippines, and Hong Kong. Thousands of refugees also fled Laos and Kampuchea (formerly Cambodia) on land to seek refuge in crowded camps along the Thai border. Despite harsh repatriation efforts by the Thai government, about 600,000 Cambodians (15 percent of the country’s population) and some 100,000 Hmong and 200,000 lowland Laotians (10 percent of the country’s population) fled on land to Thailand, awaiting resettlement in a third country (Chan 1991).

Migration Networks

Extensive and institutionalized migration networks perpetuate international migration once set in motion. Networks are formed and sustained by ties of the family, kin, and friendship. Built through the process of migration, these networks facilitate international migration because they lower the costs and risks of movement and increase the expected net returns to such movement (Massey et al. 1987). U.S. immigration policy has been instrumental in sustaining and expanding family migration networks. The Hart-Cellar Act of 1965 and its subsequent amendments give preference to family reunification, providing immediate relatives of U.S. citizens with unlimited visa numbers and other relatives with the majority of visa allocations subject to the numerical cap. More than two-thirds of legal immigrants admitted to the United States since the 1970s have been sponsored by family members. Even among employer-sponsored migrants and hardship-traumatized refugees, the role of networking is crucial. Family, kin, and friendship networks also tend to expand exponentially, serving as a conduit to additional and thus potentially self-perpetuating migration. In the next decade or so, immigration from Asia is expected to continue at its high volume because many recent immigrants and refugees will have established citizenship status and will become eligible sponsors able to reunite in the United States.
Overall, contemporary immigration has been influenced and perpetuated not simply by the Hart-Cellar Act but also by the interplay of the complex set of macro- and micro-structural forces that we have just discussed. Understanding its dynamics requires a reconceptualized framework — one that takes into account the effects of globalization, uneven political and economic developments in developing countries, and the role of the United States in world affairs, as well as the social processes of international migration. The result of these processes are the high levels of immigration that remain an inseparable part of Asian American life, and the extraordinary diversity within the Asian American community.

TRANSFORMATION: THE CURRENT STATE OF ASIAN AMERICA

Population Dynamics

Immigration is transforming Asian America in ways unanticipated by long-time Asian immigrants and their American-born children. Although Asian Americans as a collective entity are few in number, comprising less than 4 percent of the U.S. population, they have aggressively asserted their presence in the American milieu, fighting their way with varied success into mainstream economic, social, and political institutions. Before the immigration surge that occurred in the late 1960s, the Asian American population was but a tiny fraction of the total U.S. population — about one-third of a percent in 1900 and 0.7 percent in 1970 — and was composed primarily of three national-origin groups — Japanese, Chinese, and Filipino. Figure 1 shows the percentage distribution of the Asian American population from 1900 to 1970 (Barringer et al. 1993). During the first three decades of the twentieth century, Asians in America were mainly either Chinese or Japanese adult immigrants. The next four decades saw a significant increase in the proportion of Filipinos, who were mostly brought into the United States to fill the labor shortage caused by anti-Asian legislation and the restrictive National Origins Act of 1924. By 1970, Japanese Americans were the largest national origin group, making up 41 percent of the Asian American population, followed by Chinese Americans (30 percent) and Filipino Americans (24 percent). Members of other national origin groups (mostly Koreans) represented less than 5 percent of the total.

Pre-World War II immigrants from Asia represented less than 5 percent of the total new arrivals admitted to the United States, a direct result of anti-Asian prejudice and various restrictive immigration laws. Most of the earlier Asian immigrants came from China and Japan, with a much smaller number from the Philippines, India, and Korea. These earlier immigrants, like “the tired, huddled masses” from Europe, were typically poor and uneducated peasants, and many of them intended to make a quick fortune to bring back to their homelands. Because of the drastic differences in migration histories among the earlier Asian-origin groups, only Japanese immigrants were able to develop family-based communities with a significant U.S.-born population in the pre-WWII period. Chinatowns, the rather dispersed Filipino American enclaves, and other Asian immigrant communities were primarily bachelor societies, with single adult males overrepresented and with few women, children, and families (Chan 1991; Takaki 1989; Zhou 1992).

Contemporary Asian immigration has reshaped Asian America. Since the 1970s, the Asian American population has grown rapidly and has become increasingly diverse. In sheer numbers, the Asian and Pacific Islander population grew from a total of 1.4 million in 1970, to 7.3 million in 1990, and to almost 9 million in 1997 (in contrast to 205,000 in 1900). This growth was an impressive five-fold increase in just two decades, and more than two-thirds of the total population growth is attributed to immigration. The ethnic populations of most of the new national-origin groups — Indians, Koreans, Vietnamese, Cambodians, Laotians, and the Hmong — grew at spectacular rates, almost entirely because of immigration. It is estimated that if the current levels of net immigration, intermarriage, and ethnic affiliation hold, the size of the Asian population will increase from 9 million in 1995 to 34 million in 2050, growing from 3 to 8 percent of the total U.S. population (Smith and Edmonston 1997). Such unprecedented growth suggests that the majority of Asian Americans today are either immigrants or children of immigrants. It also signifies a dramatic change in the nature of the Asian American community, whose most urgent issues will continue to be linked to immigration and immigrant adaptation.

Recent Asian immigration highlights two other distinct demographic characteristics of the Asian American population: a disproportionately large foreign-born
component and a disproportionately young native-born component. As indicated in the upper panel of Figure 2, the foreign-born component dominates all Asian American groups, except for Japanese Americans: 64 percent of Filipinos, and nearly 80 percent of Vietnamese and other Asians are foreign born. While many

**Figure 2. Asian American Population: Nativity and Age**

**Nativity: Proportion Foreign-Born, 1980 v. 1990**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Nativity</th>
<th>1980</th>
<th>1990</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Japanese</td>
<td>20%</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chinese</td>
<td>60%</td>
<td>50%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Filipino</td>
<td>80%</td>
<td>90%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Korean</td>
<td>50%</td>
<td>40%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Indian</td>
<td>20%</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vietnamese</td>
<td>80%</td>
<td>90%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Age: US Born Age Cohort 0-14, 1990**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age</th>
<th>1980</th>
<th>1990</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Japanese</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chinese</td>
<td>60%</td>
<td>50%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Filipino</td>
<td>80%</td>
<td>90%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Korean</td>
<td>20%</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Indian</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vietnamese</td>
<td>80%</td>
<td>90%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Immigrant children move with their parents, the great majority of the immigrant generation is of working age. By contrast, the native-born Asian American population — the new second generation — is an extremely young group. As shown in the lower panel of Figure 2, more than half of native-born Asian Americans are under 15 years of age; again, Japanese Americans are the one exception to this rule. Among the new groups, more than 75 percent are in this young age cohort. One implication of this emerging new second generation is that it will grow up in an era of continuously high immigration, joined by a sizeable foreign born cohort — the 1.5 generation (arriving in the U.S. prior to age 13) — whose members are far more diverse in ethnic backgrounds, timing of immigration, degree of acculturation, orientation, and outlook. This is a situation quite distinct from that which faced the second generation of immigrants in the 1950s and 1960s, because of restrictive immigration.

**Diverse National Origins**

The dramatic growth in absolute numbers of Asian immigrants has been accompanied by increasing ethnic diversity within the Asian American population itself. As of 1990, the U.S. Census recorded 17 national origin groups and eight Pacific Islander groups (see Table 1). Since 1980, no single group has accounted for more than one third of the Asian American population. While major national-origin groups were proportionally represented in 1990, other national-origin groups — among them, Cambodian, Laotian, and Hmong — marked their presence in Asian America for the very first time. Because of the unique migration patterns in each of the originating countries, national origins are strongly associated with the type of legal admission (family-sponsored, employer-sponsored, or refugees) and with the skill level of immigrants. For example, many Filipino immigrants to the United States are college graduates with transferable job skills; many are physicians and nurses sponsored by U.S. employers in the health care industry. Indian immigrants are mostly employed as physicians and computer programmers, as well as small entrepreneurs. Koreans are predominantly middle-class professionals but tend to be disproportionately self-employed in small-scale retail trade. Chinese immigrants are more mixed, including fairly even proportions of rural peasants, urban workers, and the highly skilled. Southeast Asian refugees, in contrast, were pushed out of their homelands by force and suffer tremendous post-war trauma and social displacement, compounded by a lack of education and professional skills.

**Diverse Socioeconomic Status**

Another distinguishing characteristic of contemporary immigrants from Asia is their diverse socioeconomic backgrounds. The 1990 U.S. Census attests to the vast differences in levels of education, occupation, and income by national origins. For example, more than 60 percent of immigrants (age 25 years or older) from India and Taiwan reported having attained college degrees, three times the proportion of average Americans, but fewer than 5 percent of those from Cambodia and Laos so reported. Among the employed workers (age 16 years or older), close to 45 percent
of immigrants from India and Taiwan held managerial or professional occupations, more than twice the proportion of average American workers, but fewer than 5 percent of those from Laos and only about 10 percent of those from Cambodia so reported. Further, immigrants from India, the Philippines, and Taiwan reported a median household income of about or above $45,000, compared to $30,000 for

### Table 1. Asian American Population: 1980–1990

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>1980 % Total</th>
<th>1990 % Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Chinese</td>
<td>812,178</td>
<td>1,645,472</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Filipino</td>
<td>781,894</td>
<td>1,406,770</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Japanese</td>
<td>716,331</td>
<td>847,652</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Indian</td>
<td>387,223</td>
<td>815,447</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Korean</td>
<td>357,393</td>
<td>798,849</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vietnamese</td>
<td>245,025</td>
<td>614,547</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cambodian</td>
<td>16,044</td>
<td>149,047</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Laotian</td>
<td>5,204</td>
<td>147,375</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hmong</td>
<td>47,683</td>
<td>94,439</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thai</td>
<td>45,279</td>
<td>91,360</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other Asian</td>
<td>97,585</td>
<td>265,436</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hawaiian</td>
<td>172,346</td>
<td>211,014</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Guamanian</td>
<td>39,520</td>
<td>49,345</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Samoan</td>
<td>30,695</td>
<td>62,904</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other Pacific Islander</td>
<td>8,040</td>
<td>27,269</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>TOTAL</strong></td>
<td><strong>3,762,440</strong></td>
<td><strong>7,226,986</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


### Table 2. Asian and Pacific Islander Population by U.S. Metropolitan Area

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Metropolitan Area</th>
<th>Population</th>
<th>Percent of Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Los Angeles-Long Beach, CA</td>
<td>925,561</td>
<td>12.72%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New York, NY</td>
<td>553,443</td>
<td>7.61%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Honolulu, HI</td>
<td>413,349</td>
<td>5.68%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>San Francisco, CA</td>
<td>316,751</td>
<td>4.35%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oakland, CA</td>
<td>259,002</td>
<td>3.56%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>San Jose, CA</td>
<td>254,782</td>
<td>3.50%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anaheim-Santa Ana, CA</td>
<td>240,703</td>
<td>3.31%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chicago, IL</td>
<td>227,742</td>
<td>3.13%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Washington, DC-MD-VA</td>
<td>200,113</td>
<td>2.75%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>San Diego, CA</td>
<td>184,596</td>
<td>2.54%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seattle, WA</td>
<td>128,656</td>
<td>1.77%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Houston, TX</td>
<td>125,529</td>
<td>1.73%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Top-12 Subtotal</strong></td>
<td><strong>3,830,227</strong></td>
<td><strong>52.66%</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Table 3. Top Three Metropolitan Areas of Concentration by National Origin

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>National Origin</th>
<th>Largest Concentration</th>
<th>2nd Largest Concentration</th>
<th>3rd Largest Concentration</th>
<th>All U.S.</th>
<th>Top 3 as a Percent of Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Chinese</td>
<td>New York, NY</td>
<td>LA-Long Beach, CA</td>
<td>San Francisco, CA</td>
<td>246,817</td>
<td>1,645,472 39.77%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Filipino</td>
<td>LA-Long Beach, CA</td>
<td>Honolulu, HI</td>
<td>San Diego, CA</td>
<td>219,653</td>
<td>95,945 51.40%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Japanese</td>
<td>Honolulu, HI</td>
<td>LA-Long Beach, CA</td>
<td>Anaheim-Santa Ana, CA</td>
<td>195,149</td>
<td>29,704 24.27%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Indian</td>
<td>New York, NY</td>
<td>Chicago, IL</td>
<td>LA-Long Beach, CA</td>
<td>106,270</td>
<td>43,829 24.99%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Korean</td>
<td>LA-Long Beach, CA</td>
<td>New York, NY</td>
<td>Washington, DC-MD-VA</td>
<td>145,431</td>
<td>798,849 32.54%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vietnamese</td>
<td>Anaheim-Santa Ana, CA</td>
<td>LA-Long Beach, CA</td>
<td>San Jose, CA</td>
<td>71,822</td>
<td>614,547 30.69%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cambodian</td>
<td>LA-Long Beach, CA</td>
<td>Stockton, CA</td>
<td>Lowell, MA-NH</td>
<td>27,819</td>
<td>6,516 30.31%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Laotian</td>
<td>Fresno, CA</td>
<td>Sacramento, CA</td>
<td>San Diego, CA</td>
<td>8,174</td>
<td>7,025 15.48%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hmong</td>
<td>Fresno, CA</td>
<td>Minneapolis-St. Paul, MN-WI</td>
<td>18,321</td>
<td>6,458</td>
<td>90,082 45.75%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


average American households; those from Cambodia and highland Laos (the Hmong) reported a median household income below $20,000. Poverty rates for Asian immigrants ranged from a low of 7 percent for Filipinos, Indians and Japanese to a high of more than 60 percent for the Hmong and 42 percent for Cambodians, compared to about 10 percent for average American families (Zhou 1999).
Diverse Settlement Patterns

A third salient feature of contemporary immigration from Asia is the diverse geographic settlement patterns of immigrants. Historically, most Asian immigrants in the United States have been concentrated in Hawaii and in states along the Pacific coast, with a small number of Chinese moving east to settle in New York. Within each area of settlement, they have been highly segregated in ethnic enclaves, such as Chinatowns, Little Tokyos, and Little Manilas. Today, newcomers have followed the footsteps of their predecessors to settle on the West Coast in disproportionate numbers, exacerbating geographic concentration. California has become the preferred destination for immigrants from Asian countries, with 40 percent of the nation's Asian American population. Tables 2 and 3 show the geographic distribution of Asian Americans by metropolitan areas, further confirming historical and contemporary patterns of ethnic concentration.

Nonetheless, the Asian American population has begun to disperse throughout the Northeast, the Midwest, and the South. For example, sizeable ethnic communities are found in New Orleans (Vietnamese), Houston (Vietnamese and Chinese), and Minneapolis (the Hmong) — cities that have traditionally received few Asian immigrants. Although there is still evidence of clustering along national or ethnic lines at the local level, there are very few examples of the large and distinctly mono-ethnic enclaves that were common in the past (Zhou and Kim 1999). In San Francisco, Los Angeles, and New York, there are no new Chinatowns where more than half of the residents are co-ethnics; Koreatowns in New York and Los Angeles and Little Saigon in Orange County are also no exception. Filipino Americans and Indian Americans are comparatively more spread out across the urban landscape with few identifiable ethnic enclaves. In 1990, only 12 percent of the Chinese Americans in the City of Los Angeles lived in Chinatown, 22 percent of Korean Americans lived in Koreatown, and a tiny number of Japanese Americans (about 700) lived in Little Tokyo. Overall, trends of spatial integration (moving into white middle class neighborhoods) and suburbanization among Asian Americans have been particularly strong in recent years, resulting in decreasing levels of residential segregation even in areas of high concentration (Massey and Denton 1987).

NEW CHALLENGES FOR ASIAN AMERICANS

Insiders versus Outsiders: Identity and Social Acceptance

We ABC [American-born Chinese] were ridiculed by the old immigrants as “Bamboo Stick” for not being able to speak Chinese and not being accepted as “white people.” We are not here. We are not there... We are different. Most of us are proud of the Chinese cultural heritage, but due to the pressure to assimilate and the lack of opportunity, we don’t know much about the Chinese way (Wong 1982: 33; cited in Wong 1995:86).

Changing demographics and residential mobility in contemporary Asian America make the issue of identity more salient in the minds of Asian Americans than ever before. The insider/outside divide is a paradoxical experience, whereby individuals in America still do not feel they are fully a part of it. While both immigrants and their native-born children encounter this divide, native-born generations are particularly caught in this paradox. However diverse and initially disadvantaged, immigrants are expected to assimilate into mainstream society as quickly as possible, despite invisible forces of inclusion and exclusion underlying the assimilationist ideology. J. Hector St. John de Crevecoeur described an American as “either an European or the descendant of an European” (1904 [1782]). More than a century later, Israel Zangwill characterized an American as an “immaculate, well-dressed, accent-free Anglo” (1914). This Eurocentric definition of “American,” widely if not unconsciously held, makes it hard, if not impossible, for people to feel fully American if they happen to be non-white. A second-generation Chinese American in her sixties explained her isolation from mainstream American society and her socially imposed “otherness” in these words:

The truth is, no matter how American you think you are or try to be, you do not look “American.” If you have almond-shaped eyes, straight black hair, and a yellow complexion, you are a foreigner by default. People will ask where you come from but won’t be satisfied until they hear you name a foreign country. And they will naturally compliment your perfect English.

This sense of exclusion exists even for those whose ancestors settled on this land long before the first Europeans reached American shores. The 1790 National Origin Act prohibited immigrants of certain national origins from becoming U.S. citizens, ensuring that not all outsider groups were afforded the privilege of becoming American.

Immigrants are deemed “outsiders,” and they cope with their alienation from the immigrant perspective. As a reactive strategy to resist subjugation, discrimination, and legal exclusion, Asian immigrants retreat into their own ethnic communities, rebuilding ethnic institutions that resemble those found in the homeland, and relying on one another for moral and practical support. Extreme adversity drives them to develop a clear sense of their position in the host society as “foreigners” and to maintain tangible ties to their ethnic community and their homeland, which becomes internalized as part of their shared experience.

Choosing to come to the United States to seek better opportunities, either for themselves or for their children, the immigrants’ shared experience of marginalization also reinforces their determination to push their children into the mainstream by choosing the path of least resistance (Kitano 1969). For example, pre-war Issei (first generation Japanese) drew on extensive ethnic resources in developing trade and business associations to negotiate favorable arrangements with the larger mainstream economy and to support their children’s education (Matsumoto 1993; Nishi 1995; Yoo 2000). War-traumatized Japanese American parents or grandparents were
reluctant to share wartime memories with their children and grandchildren for fear of hurting their children’s chances of social integration (Takezawa 1991). Many Asian parents pressure their children to work at least twice as hard as other American children because they see education as their only means of alleviating current disadvantaged status and moving up in society (Sue and Okazaki 1990). Post-1965 Korean immigrants pushed their children toward prestigious universities because they looked to their children to regain the social status the parents had lost in the host society (Kim 1999).

Offspring of this immigrant generation, moreover, fully embrace the principles of freedom, equality, and civil liberties, the ideological cornerstones upon which U.S. citizenship is based. This differs significantly from the tendency of the parent generation of immigrants, who avoid arousing antagonism by subscribing to the dominant society’s mode of behavior — hard work, education, delayed gratification, and non-confrontational attitudes in the face of injustice. Second generation members are unlikely to think of their parents’ home country as a place to which they might return, nor do they use it as a point of reference by which to assess their progress in the new land. Rather, their expectations are governed by the same standards to which other Americans aspire, and it is by those standards that native born Asian Americans assess themselves and are assessed by others (Zhou 1997a). Nonetheless, racial distinctions subject the second generation to the same types of discrimination and injustice faced by the first generation regardless of how long they have been in the United States. A third generation Japanese American from Monterey Park, California, expressed frustration at being characterized as a “foreigner.”

Asian Americans fought for decades against discrimination and racial prejudice. We want to be treated just like everybody else, like Americans. You see, I get real angry when people come up to me and tell me how good my English is. They say: “Oh, you have no accent. Where did you learn English?” Where did I learn English? Right here in America. I was born here like they were… People see me now and they automatically treat me as an immigrant. I really hate that. The worst thing is that these immigrants don’t understand why I am angry” (Cheng and Yang 1996, 305).

Growing up in the context of an immigrant family, furthermore, is extremely difficult for Asian American children (Zhou 1999). Parents often place multiple pressures on their children to “do and say the right things” or to “act white” as a means of moving into the mainstream and accessing resources typically reserved for “insiders.” In the process of growing up, the children often find themselves vacillating between the outsider’s world from where they came and an insider’s world into which they were born; they are increasingly ambivalent about their conflicting identities. These conflicting feelings, due to the irony of being in the United States but not being fully a part of it, are not unlike those experienced by many second generation Asian Americans of the 1960s and 1970s. In the wake of the Asian American Movement, young Asian Americans entering American higher education institutions forged a space in which they could confront these identity issues. The Movement created a means by which these young people not only shared their own personal experiences of racism and suffering in American society, but also began to articulate an Asian American consciousness and reframe their own identities in ways that were meaningful to their experiences — an Asian American identity.

Despite efforts by these Asian Americans to empower themselves across pan-ethnic lines and to raise ethnic consciousness to a new level for future generations, much of their shame and frustration has resurfaced among the children of contemporary immigrants from Asia. In particular, those children who live in suburban, white, middle-class neighborhoods internalize the negative stereotypes that society imposes upon their parents’ generation. These children of immigrants have undergone traumatic, even suicidal, identity crises, in which they feel ashamed of who they are, try to become who they are not, and end up being neither. In one instance, a Chinese American college student, born in the early 1980s, recalled her confused feelings as a teenager:

As a child, I had a very difficult time coping with my ethnic identity. I was hesitant to call myself American because, as I perceived it, American meant all the beautiful Anglo children in my classes. Yet I was also hesitant to call myself Chinese for two reasons. First, I had no clear concept of what Chinese was besides the fact that my parents were from China. [Second,] I did not feel Chinese. I did not want to be Chinese. I wanted to be white… When I was confronted with questions concerning my racial background, I found myself unable to answer… Unable to utter the simple words, “I am Chinese”… The words seemed too dissonant and distasteful. So many times I simply shrugged and said: “I don’t know.”

The pressure to assimilate and the conditional acceptance by mainstream society of racially distinctive groups like Asian Americans take a heavier toll on the second generation growing up in suburban, white, middle-class neighborhoods than on those who live in inner-city ethnic enclaves (Sung 1987). Within the enclave, the homeland is transplanted, ancestral culture and values are honored and practiced as a way of life, and ethnic pride is invigorated. Outside the enclave, ethnicity is subject to the rank order of the racial stratification system, operating under the assumption that ethnic traits should be abandoned in order to become “American.” In the midst of an identity crisis, native-born children who are seemingly assimilated structurally may find that they lack a homeland on which they can fall back and an ethnic space in which they can express their fear and anxieties.

The Salience of Ethnicity

Since the genesis of the Movement, a vibrant and multi-faceted ethnic culture has emerged and been reconstructed among native-born Asian Americans in their attempt to reclaim their identity. This culture is neither mainstream American nor
clearly associated with the immigrant generation. It is a hybrid form that has come to assume tremendous significance among Asian Americans as a viable means of resistance and compromise within the existing power structure. This phenomenon indicates the fluid nature of ethnicity. Ultimately, ethnicity is “a manifestation of the way populations are organized in terms of interaction patterns, institutions, personal values, attitudes, life styles, and presumed consciousness of kind”—the result of a process that continues to unfold (Yancey et al. 1976: 400).

We see that Asian Americans develop different patterns of ethnic identification according to the length of time in the United States, internal group dynamics, and structural situations that the particular immigrant group and its descendants have encountered. Members of the first generation generally reaffirm ethnic identity on the basis of homeland cultures and bicultural experiences, both through ethnic practices and memories of their lived experiences in the homeland, and during the process of movement. For example, Southeast Asian refugees share the common experience of living through internal power struggles in their home countries, the horrors of war, and the ordeal of exile and death. These life-threatening experiences become the basis for ethnic solidarity. Disparate societal treatment or being disadvantaged because of one’s immigrant status can also reinforce ethnic identity. In such cases, ethnic enclaves serve as a source of collective effort to preserve transnational ties, kinship networks, and homeland culture.

Native-born Asian Americans, and infant or school age immigrants, in contrast, do not seize on traditional cultural symbols in order to define their ethnicity. Rather, they build their identities largely on the basis of mediating interpretive memories of homeland cultures in which they have never personally lived, and their own diverse life experiences in the United States. Families instill in them a sense of origin, and close proximity to kinship networks and ethnic enclaves provides an infrastructure that keeps alive the memories of homeland cultures. The collective memory of Chinese exclusion, the U.S. colonization of the Philippines, and the incarceration of Japanese Americans serve as pivotal organizational principles for ethnic identity among native-born Chinese Americans, Filipino Americans and Japanese Americans, respectively. The emergence and persistence of ethnicity, nonetheless, depends on the structural conditions of the host society and the position occupied by immigrant groups in the social structure, for example, the treatment of Asian Americans as foreigners, the glass-ceiling barrier, and racially motivated hate crimes.

For many of the second generation, then, ethnicity does not carry with it material consequences and does not serve to enhance group solidarity. Indeed, ethnic identity associated with a homeland has become blurred among the second or third generations, who have lost their ancestral languages, intermarried at rates far exceeding the national average, and no longer viewed themselves with their ethnic communities on a daily basis, making their ethnicity “symbolic” (Gans 1979). Ethnicity is not an ‘either/or’ matter but rather a variable outcome that varies in its intensity. As we have noted earlier, Asian Americans, both foreign-born and native-born, experience high levels of educational attainment, occupational mobility, and residential integration. They also have high rates of intermarriage, and rapidly lose facility in the native language. Hence, much of Asian ethnicity may be optional. As they climb up the socioeconomic ladder in American society, many established Asian Americans may have more choices as to whether they want to or should be Asian.

At the societal level, however, we argue that being non-ethnic American is still not an option for Asian Americans or for other racial minority groups, as it is for most European immigrants and their offspring (Waters 1990; Takezawa 1991). As such, pan-ethnicity will continue to remain instrumental for the excluded social groups unless the whole racial perception of Americans changes and includes other groups as Americans. As a form of ethnic aggregation oriented toward achieving certain material ends and empowerment, pan-ethnicity is reactive to shared cultural values and life experiences, imposed societal perception and treatment as one racial group, and the internal need for political mobilization to fight for minority rights and to protect group interests (Lopez and Espiritu 1990). Rapid language switches to English and increasing interethnic and interracial marriages also contribute to the formation of pan-ethnicity. More significant, the construction of Asian American pan-ethnicity is a process that goes beyond the political strategy of activism and collective action and Asian Americans’ reaction to social categorization by the broader system of racial hierarchy. Pan-ethnicity involves a shared experience of “an Asian upbringing” and the internalization of “Asian values” in the second generation (Kibria 1997).

Pan-ethnicity, however, accounts neither for regional nor national differences nor for the historical legacies of inter-group conflicts. Lumping together all peoples of Asian ancestry, therefore, complicates the notion of ethnicity and its subsequent application to a particular ethnic group. At this juncture, the term “Asian American,” in and of itself, assumes a political agenda for those who subscribe to it, and pan-ethnicity remains a political identity for instrumental purposes. The Asian American community today is, and continues to be, marked by tremendous diversity in the era of high immigration. Diverse languages and religions and differing historical legacies of domination and colonization in Asia make it unlikely that a pan-ethnic coalition will develop in the near future. Differences in class background among the immigrant generation and divergent modes of incorporation of that generation can also deter the formation of pan-ethnicity. The success of Asian Americans’ integration into American society as individuals can both enhance and weaken their ability to act collectively. Also, while it is true that discrimination and violence against one Asian group serve to unite Asian Americans, it also creates intra-group conflict. During World War II, the United States government singled out Japanese Americans as enemies and targets for incarceration. Fearing similar treatment, some Chinese Americans found themselves constantly invoking their Chinese ethnicity and even wore buttons with derogative anti-Japanese words to distinguish themselves. The negative stereotypes about welfare dependency and
gang violence among Southeast Asians also cause some Asian American groups to distance themselves from them and even blame them for their plight.

**The Assimilation Problem**

Classical assimilation theories predict a linear trajectory toward structural integration into the mainstream of society, whereby the children and the grandchildren of the immigrants move beyond the status of the first generation and become progressively less distinct from other Americans (Alba 1985; Gans 1979; Gordon 1964; Warner and Srole 1945). Assimilation theories arose as an abstraction from the experience of earlier European immigration and developed largely while the process of immigrant adaptation was under way. Now that it is over, one can safely conclude that the descendants of the 1880–1920 wave have overcome earlier disadvantages, achieving parity with, if not outdistancing, “white” Americans of English ancestry, or what Milton Gordon calls the “core cultural group” (1964). Unfortunately, assimilation theories provide no account of why this outcome should have transpired — unless one subscribes to that variant of the modernization theory that most of the earlier writers embraced but many contemporary social scientists have now challenged. Most important, past success may be due to the specific circumstances encountered by earlier immigrants and their offspring. Between the 1920s and the 1950s, America experienced a long period of restricted immigration, which almost certainly weakened immigrants’ attachment to their culture and patterns of group affiliation. Should this be the case, the past is unlikely to prove a useful guide to the future, since we appear to be headed for more, not less, immigration in the years to come.

In fact, assimilation is highly exclusive. The “melting pot” does not wholeheartedly embrace non-European immigrants. We point out three of the most obvious examples of the ways in which racism and prejudice have affected Asian Americans. First, the perception of Asian Americans as “foreigners” has imposed and perpetuated the “otherness” on the group. As we have discussed in detail in the previous section, it is the socially imposed category based on race, rather than acculturation and social mobility, that governs how group members are received and treated in American society. Speaking perfect English, effortlessly practicing mainstream cultural values, and even inter-marrying members of the dominant group may help reduce this “otherness” at the individual level. However, this may have little effect on the group as a whole, given the relatively small size of the third or later generations of the Asian American population (only 12 percent of the total) and high levels of recent immigration.

Second, the image of “the yellow peril,” although largely repudiated in the post-World War II period, has repeatedly resurfaced throughout American history, especially in situations when the United States is at odds with immigrants’ ancestral homelands in Asia. The bombing of Pearl Harbor during World War II turned Japanese immigrants and Americans of Japanese ancestry into potential enemies who were forcibly exiled from their homes and put into internment camps. The

Communist takeover of China in the late 1940s and the subsequent Cold War made Chinese Americans of the 1950s prime suspects of treason and espionage. The perceived economic threat from Japan in the 1980s led to the murder of Vincent Chin, a Chinese American who was mistaken for a Japanese and beaten to death by disgruntled unemployed auto-workers in Detroit. The renewed spy stereotype is currently manifested in the case of a Taiwan-born scientist, Wen Ho Lee, who was convicted of stealing nuclear secrets for China in the court of public opinion before even appearing in a court of law. This litany of examples is endless.

Third, the “model minority” stereotype has reinforced the “otherness” of Asian Americans. It is important to note that this stereotype derives from a larger political agenda, serving the ideological function of delegitimizing African American (in particular) claims for equalization of outcomes as opposed to equalization of opportunities. Although Asian Americans as a group are above average on just about any socioeconomic indicator, the “model minority” stereotype obscures the very real problems that many highly “successful” Asians encounter. In particular, highly skilled professionals, who are most definitely part of the middle (if not the upper middle) class, are not doing quite as well as their non-Hispanic, white counterparts; they experience disproportionately underemployment because of over-qualification and over-work (Zhou 1993 and 1997b; Zhou and Kamo 1994). Furthermore, the stereotype paints a one-sided picture of the American Asian population, obscuring the plight of those who are not doing well and thus further absolving the broader society of any responsibility for redress. There are immigrant workers who are doing poorly, some subjected to severe exploitation. Some groups — Laotians, Hmong, and Cambodians — are still struggling at the very bottom of the social ladder, facing the risk of being trapped in the urban underclass, and others — perhaps the Filipinos — may be stuck in the lower middle class, showing trends of downward mobility (Oropesa and Landale 1997).

In sum, the notion of assimilation, whether it is manifested in a straight line or bumpy line, seems to clearly imply a single line — an idea that is very difficult to reconcile with the historical record of large and significant differences in the rate at which various groups move ahead in American society. Because of the multifaceted and dynamic nature of reality, it is difficult to comprehend the experiences of today’s racial minorities, Asian Americans included, within the assimilationist framework that makes explicit or implicit Anglo-conformist assumptions. Assimilationism may still be a social or moral imperative imposed on immigrants by the dominant culture, but it may not necessarily be the imperative toward which all immigrant groups and their succeeding generations are striving.

**Discussion and Conclusion**

Diversity is the hallmark of the contemporary Asian American community. The influx of Asian immigrants in response to the 1965 Hart-Cellar Act and broader economic, social, and geopolitical factors has brought new challenges for the adaptation of new immigrants and their children into American society. As the commu-
nity continues to grow in number, so too will their representation in the broader cultural, economic, and political milieu that we typify as “mainstream American society.”

The implications of the dramatic changes in Asian America that we have just described are particularly relevant for the development of a coherent vision for a future Asian America. First and foremost, diversity in national origins will produce stark disparities within the Asian American community. National origins evoke drastic differences in homeland cultures, such as languages, religions, cuisines, and customs; histories of international relations; contexts of emigration; reception in the host society; and adaptation patterns. Such differences persist most significantly in the private domain, affecting not only the immigrant generation, but also native-born generations. For some national origin groups, such as the Chinese and Indians, internal differences in languages or dialects and religions are quite substantial. While ethnic diversity among the second and third generation may be blunted because of rapid shifts to English and high rates of out-marriages (Kitano et al. 1998), it is extremely difficult to group everybody under the pan-Asian umbrella at the individual level. Increasing differences within an emerging Asian America will create obstacles for pan-ethnic coalitions.

Second, socioeconomic diversity gives rise to diverse mobility patterns. New immigrants may continue to follow the traditional bottom-up route to social mobility, starting their American life in isolated urban enclaves. Some segments of this urban population, however, may be permanently trapped in poverty with dim prospects for the future, while others with sufficient social and economic resources may simply bypass the bottom starting line, moving directly into mainstream labor markets and settling directly into suburban middle-class communities (Portes and Zhou 1993; Zhou and Kim 1999). These trajectories to social mobility not only affect life chances of the first generation but also have profound social implications for the second generation, since the current state and future prospects of immigrant offspring are related to the advantages or disadvantages that accrue through parental socioeconomic status.

Moreover, socioeconomic diversity leads to divergent destinations, creating a bifurcated distribution of the Asian American population along class lines. Some Asian immigrant groups have converged with middle-class America, but many others, especially the most recent refugee groups, are struggling in the most underprivileged segment of U.S. society. Consequently, class bifurcation toward both ends of society’s class spectrum will likely lead to fragmentation of the larger Asian American community, creating new obstacles for political mobilization and pan-ethnic solidarity. Bifurcation also affects the second generation. Unlike the second generation of the 1960 and 1970s, most of whom grew up in segregated urban enclaves, a visible proportion of today’s second generation is growing up in affluent Euro-American neighborhoods in suburbia. Members of the suburban middle class maintain little contact with their working-class co-ethnics in urban enclaves and show limited interest in working-class issues.

Third, settlement patterns have long-term implications for the development of a cohesive Asian American community. Those who are currently segregated in the inner city are confronted with a reality more daunting than the one faced by their earlier counterparts. Today, the United States has an emerging “hourglass” economy in which movement from bottom to top has gotten progressively more difficult. Those newcomers who are poorly educated and lack marketable skills may find themselves stalled or, even worse, stumbling beneath the ranks of the lower working class, either because they are unable to obtain employment or because the jobs they do obtain do not pay a decent family wage (Zhou 1997a). Consequently, they and their children may become trapped in permanent poverty and isolated from mainstream American society. While successful structural integration may not automatically lead to social acceptance, those who have achieved residential mobility are undoubtedly more privileged, enjoying comfortable homes, safe neighborhoods, quality schools, and more channels to mobility.

Last but not least, immigration complicates intergenerational relations and ethnic solidarity. Native-born Asian Americans, especially those assumed to be “assimilated,” have been rudely reawakened with renewed images of being “foreigners.” Stereotyped images of “American” create both psychological and practical problems for native-born Americans who phenotypically resemble these new arrivals. Comments about a fourth generation Japanese American’s “good English” are frequently heard. The children, U.S.-born and similar to other American children, suffer from persistent disadvantages merely because they look “foreign” (U.S. Commission on Civil Rights 1989 and 1992). While they are infuriated by their unfair treatment as foreigners, native-born Asian Americans are also caught between including immigrants in their struggle for racial equality and excluding them. Similar to other Americans in speech, thought, and behavior, native-born Asian Americans often hold values about labor rights, individualism, civil liberty, and, ultimately, the ideology of assimilation that are different from those of their foreign-born counterparts. These differences, intertwined with the acculturation gap between immigrant and native-born generations, have impeded ethnic coalition, ideological consensus, and collective action (Zhou 2000). Negotiating differences and coalition building within this very heterogeneous ethnic community will continue to remain the foremost priority in the twenty-first century. Policies reflecting the interests and needs of Asian Americans must incorporate a flexible framework to incorporate the diversity that characterizes the contemporary community. This diversity, in turn, must be reflective of each distinct Asian American ethnic group, but must also be informed by differences across lines of class, gender, generation, national origin, ethnicity, and race.

In sum, new generations of Americans of Asian ancestry will have to vie for their own place within their respective communities and challenge stereotypes that serve to denigrate their agency in mainstream American society. Although Asian Americans will continue to rally (as they have historically) around issues that unite them on the basis of a shared sense of racial identity — ethnic stereotyping, hate crimes, economic and political scapegoating, and the glass ceiling — specific national and cultural interests espoused by Asian American ethnic groups will demand innovative approaches to promote the continued development of pan-Asian
coalitions while reflecting the increasing differences among the Asian American communities.

Endnotes

1 For a more detailed discussion, please see Zhou and Gatewood 2000.

2 The number includes 1.6 million formerly unauthorized aliens and 1.1 million Special Agricultural Workers who were granted permanent resident status under the provisions of the Immigration Reform and Control Act of 1986 (see also Zhou 2000).

3 The number of Asian immigrants excludes those from Iran, Israel, and Turkey, except for 1991, when the Asian share dropped to 18 percent due to the sudden increase in the legalizes under IRA, most of whom were Mexicans or Central Americans.

4 For more information on the wartime incarceration of Japanese Americans see David K. Yoo, Growing Up Nisei, and on the 442nd and 100th Infantry, Masayo Duus, Unlikely Liberators.

5 Personal communication with a retired Chinatown activist in New York.

6 Class discussion on ethnic identity, UCLA, March 1999.

References


