One

Before Asian America

Tensions over sameness and difference have unsettled Asian America from the late 1800s to the present. While the dominant society tends to lump Asians together regardless of ethnicity or national origin, Asians view themselves as distinct from one another. Migrants from Asia never set foot on American soil already thinking of themselves as Asians, let alone "Asian Americans." Instead, they arrive with identities tied to nations, regions, ethnicities, or even tribes. Some immigrants gravitate toward enclaves that feature ethnic communities, employment opportunities, and the familiar sounds, aromas, and foods of home. Others settle into areas with dense Asian American populations but find few who share their particular languages or cultures. Still others disperse into the wider terrain of the United States, where they encounter majority populations that are white, black, or Latino. Longstanding national and ethnic antagonisms in Asia often continue to fester in the United States and at times inhibit political organizing across ethnic lines. But although new immigrants may not consider themselves Asian Americans upon arrival, they enter into a racial landscape not of their own making, which positions them according to its own logic.

From the mid-nineteenth century onward, the category "Oriental" has been a critical organizing principle under which diverse peoples of various Asian nations, cultures, and ethnicities in the United States were

collapsed into a monolithic bloc. Orientalism, as Edward Said has famously argued, constructs the East and West as dichotomous opposites, with the Orient embodying weakness, immorality, and irrationality, in contrast to the Occident's strength, virtue, and reason. Nineteenth- and early twentieth-century American versions of Orientalism imagined Asians within the United States as unwanted perpetual foreigners who could never be assimilated or become good Americans, a Yellow Peril that threatened white racial dominance.[1] Many different Asian groups entered the United States separately, only to exploited, legislated, and discriminated into uniformity in the eyes of the dominant society.

Before the 1960s, in response to this American system of race that agglomerated them together as "Orientals," Asian ethnics employed political strategies that emphasized their differences or rejected distinctions between Asians and whites. Supporting Asian homeland nationalism highlighted differences among Asians and exacerbated ethnic tensions in the United States. Promoting assimilation rejected the idea that Asians were racially distinct from whites and instead argued that they could be seamlessly incorporated into the nation. Organizing by labor unionists and radicals tended to emphasize class solidarity over racial identity.

Racializing Asians

Asians in the United States were racialized in three main ways. First, as subjects of capitalism and imperialism, waves of Asians from various nations were impelled to migrate across the Pacific. Each group, in turn, was exploited for their labor and then, subsequently, had immigration restrictions imposed upon them. Second, each ethnic group petitioned for naturalized citizenship but was denied by court rulings and legislation, leaving Asians uniquely and uniformly considered "aliens ineligible to citizenship" under the law. Third, social discrimination against each group constructed them as inassimilable and undesirable. Chinese, Japanese, Koreans, Indians, and Filipinos—the five Asian immigrant groups before World War II—all found themselves caught in cycles of migration, exploitation, and exclusion that left them similarly positioned vis-à-vis the state and dominant society.

Immigration and Exclusion

From the beginning of large-scale Asian immigration to the United States and its territories in the mid-1800s, Asians provided cheap labor to the rapidly expanding capitalist economies of Hawaii and the West Coast.[2]

Chinese began immigrating in large numbers in the 1850s, some 46,000 to Hawaii by 1900 and about 380,000 to the mainland by 1930.[3] Initially drawn to California by dreams of the riches to be found on Gold Mountain, they worked in agriculture, mining, and small manufacturing and on the railroad. While employers welcomed the Chinese, white workers viewed them as labor competition and formed a vigorous anti-Chinese movement. Historian Alexander Saxton argues that in California, the Chinese functioned as an "indispensable enemy" that allowed Europeans of various ethnicities and immigrant statuses to unite under the banner of whiteness.[4] Chinese exclusion began in 1875 with the enactment of the Page Law, which was intended to bar the importation of Asian women for prostitution. However, according to George Anthony Peffer, "Government officials recklessly applied popular anti-Chinese stereotypes to exclude women whom the Page Law technically regarded as eligible," in effect erecting a "formidable barrier" to the immigration of all Chinese women.[5] Exclusionists triumphed in 1882 with the passage of the Chinese Exclusion Act (CEA), which prohibited the entry of laborers into the United States, effectively ending large-scale Chinese immigration. The CEA gave the Chinese the dubious distinction of being the first people whose immigration was restricted based on "race and nationality."[6] Chinese exclusion was renewed in 1892 and made permanent in 1904.[7]

While the flow of Chinese workers was largely staunched, the need for cheap labor continued unabated, and Japanese began migrating in large numbers in 1885. By 1924, some 200,000 Japanese had migrated to Hawaii and another 180,000 to the mainland. While Japanese Americans managed to build urban enclaves, agriculture proved to be the mainstay of their community as they rapidly became major growers of fruits and vegetables.[8] The nativist movement that had previously targeted the Chinese remobilized to oppose Japanese immigration. In 1907–8, the federal government engineered the so-called Gentlemen's Agreement, in which the Japanese government agreed to end the emigration of workers from Japan.[9] This allowed Japan, a rising power in the Pacific, to evade the humiliation of outright unilateral exclusion that had befallen China while still impeding the flow of male laborers.[10] However, Japanese women continued to immigrate; many were "picture brides" who had been married in absentia in Japan and would meet their new spouses for the first time at the dock in America. Exclusionists, distressed that Japanese women were evading the Gentlemen's Agreement and functioning as de facto laborers (which was in some sense true, because they worked in the fields

alongside the men, in addition to performing household work and caring for children), again pressured the federal government. In 1920, the two governments reached a second agreement that ended the immigration of picture brides.[11]

While Chinese and Japanese composed the largest Asian immigrant streams, Koreans and Asian Indians also entered the United States and Hawaii, albeit in smaller numbers. Some seven thousand Koreans (40 percent of whom were Christian converts) immigrated to the mainland and Hawaii, where they worked primarily in agriculture.[12] After Japan colonized Korea in 1905, it severely restricted Korean emigration, and after the Gentlemen's Agreement, Koreans became subject to the bans against Japanese emigration.[13] Indian emigrants tended to follow the contours of the British Empire, but a small number ended up in the United States, some by crossing the border from Canada.[14] By 1910, the Indian population of the United States topped five thousand.[15] Some Indians worked in the lumber industry in the Pacific Northwest, while others were agricultural laborers.[16] Despite their small population, Indians attracted ample attention from exclusionists: in 1907 the Japanese and Korean Exclusion League renamed itself the Asian Exclusion League in order to target Indians as well.[17] Indian immigration was ended by the passage of the 1917 Immigration Act, which created an "Asiatic Barred Zone" including the Indian subcontinent.[18]

The 1924 Immigration Act was one of the most important pieces of American legislation of the twentieth century. It substantially diminished mass immigration from southern and eastern Europe by allotting those nations minuscule quotas. But while it drastically reduced European immigration, it virtually ended Asian immigration. Most important, the 1924 legislation, sometimes known as the Asian Exclusion Act, conglomerated the peoples of multiple Asian nations into a monolithic, distinctly nonwhite racial bloc of undesirables. Despite the near-wholesale ban on Asian labor migration, however, the agricultural industry continued to require cheap labor.

Immigrants from the Philippines constituted the sole exception to the Asian Exclusion Act. Filipinos could not be easily excluded, because they were American subjects due to the U.S. colonization of the Philippines. Filipinos thus made up the third large wave of Asian migrants to Hawaii and the U.S. mainland. Takaki states, "By 1930, some 110,000 Filipinos had gone to Hawaii and another 40,000 to the mainland."[19] In Hawaii, they worked the sugar plantations. On the mainland, they labored in the

salmon canning industry, as domestic workers, and, most frequently, in agriculture. The overwhelmingly male workforce composed an itinerant army that followed the crops across the west. Though initially valued by growers as docile, Filipinos proved highly organized and militant.[20] When the Great Depression greatly reduced the need for Filipino labor, calls for their exclusion began to reverberate more loudly. The 1934 Tydings-McDuffie Act disposed of the problem of Filipino immigration by promising independence for the Philippines in the future while immediately making Filipinos aliens and giving them an immigration quota of fifty per year.[21]

By 1934, U.S. immigration policy had aggregated "Orientals" into a bloc of racial undesirables. Chinese, Japanese, Koreans, Indians, and Filipinos were all excluded, either unilaterally by the United States or by means of coerced agreements with foreign governments. Although they confronted the United States in separate ways and at different times, Asian immigrants were exploited and excluded in remarkably similar fashion and were legally and socially discriminated against in ways that differed significantly from the treatment of white European immigrants.

Naturalization Bars

While immigration restrictions impaired the ability of Asians to enter the United States, they did not generally address those who had already landed on American shores. As legal scholar Leti Volpp points out, "The terms Asian American and American citizenship stand in curious juxtaposition," for Asian immigrants were banned from naturalization for over a century and a half.[22] Asian immigrants of many different ethnicities sought to gain the benefits of U.S. citizenship through naturalization, but, as historian Mae Ngai contends, the state's responses once again constructed Asians as a monolithic racial bloc.[23] From its inception in 1790 until 1952, U.S. naturalization policy was based on an explicit racial criterion. The 1790 Naturalization Act restricted the ability to obtain naturalized citizenship to "free white persons." After the Civil War, Congress debated how to extend naturalization to blacks. While Senator Charles Sumner advocated removing the racial qualification altogether, others sought to limit the extension to blacks, specifically in order to exclude Asians. In the end, the Naturalization Act of 1870 extended the right to naturalization to people of "African nativity" and "descent," thus leaving claims to whiteness or Africanness as the only routes by which immigrants could pursue citizenship.[24]

Between 1878 and 1923, Chinese, Japanese, Asian Indian, Korean, and Filipino immigrants made numerous unsuccessful bids for naturalization, almost universally by claiming that the Asian petitioners were white.[25] As legal historian Ian Haney Lopez demonstrates, in the "prerequisite cases" (so named because they tested whether petitioners possessed the racial prerequisite for naturalization), federal courts repeatedly denied Asian claims to whiteness.[26] In 1878, a federal circuit court ruled that the first Asian litigant, a Chinese man by the name of Ah Yup, was Mongolian, not white, and hence ineligible for naturalization.[27] Subsequently, the Chinese Exclusion Act specifically barred Chinese from naturalized citizenship.[28] After the Chinese petitions came petitions from Japanese (In re Saito, 1894), Asian Indians (In re Balsara, 1909), and Filipinos (In re Alverto, 1912), all of whom federal courts ruled were nonwhite and therefore ineligible for naturalization. The final authority on race and citizenship, however, lay with the U.S. Supreme Court, which heard three definitive cases between 1922 and 1925.

The Japanese immigrant Takao Ozawa should have been the perfect candidate to become an American citizen. After arriving in 1894, he graduated from high school in Berkeley and attended the University of California for three years. He settled in Hawaii and raised a family. In his petition for naturalization, he stated that he did not drink, smoke, or gamble; he spoke English at home and sent his children to Sunday school; and he had not registered his children for dual Japanese citizenship upon their births.[29] Despite his qualifications, the U.S. Supreme Court ruled in 1922 that Ozawa was not eligible for naturalization because he was "clearly of a race which is not Caucasian."[30] In other words, he and all other Japanese were disbarred from naturalization not because of their appearance or skin color but because of their race.[31]

Just three months after disposing of Ozawa's claim, the Supreme Court took up the case of Bhagat Singh Thind. An Indian immigrant who had served in the U.S. military during World War I, Singh had been naturalized in 1920 by the U.S. District Court in Oregon. Federal officials sought to deport Thind because of his advocacy of Indian independence from Great Britain, but in order to do so, they first had to strip him of his citizenship. Thind's defense of his citizenship claimed that Indians are Aryan and therefore white. The Supreme Court conceded that although Thind, unlike Ozawa, might be racially Caucasian, he was nevertheless not white according to "the understanding of the common man." Furthermore, it referred to the 1917 Immigration Act's exclusion of Indians,

concluding that it was "not likely that Congress would be willing to accept as citizens a class of persons whom it rejects as immigrants."[32] The high court thus stripped Thind of his citizenship and decreed that Indians were ineligible for naturalization.[33] In so doing, it reversed its logic in *Ozawa,* for it ruled that Indians were ineligible because of their appearance, not their "scientifically" determined race.

Filipinos occupied an ambiguous position with regard to citizenship. On the one hand, they were American nationals by virtue of being colonial subjects of the United States, but on the other hand, as nonaliens, they were not specifically eligible for naturalization. The question as to their eligibility was answered by the Supreme Court in a rather circuitous fashion. In 1925, in *Toyota v. United States,* the Court ruled that Japanese were ineligible to apply for naturalization under legislation aimed at facilitating citizenship for veterans of World War I. In finding that the law was specifically applicable to Filipinos, the Court further ruled that Filipinos were eligible for naturalization only under this law, not more generally.[34] Earlier, in 1921, a Korean American veteran named Easurk Emsen Charr had petitioned for naturalization under this same law, but a district court had ruled that as a member of the "Mongol family" he was ineligible for naturalization.[35]

By 1925, Chinese, Japanese, Koreans, Asian Indians, and Filipinos formed a bloc of "aliens ineligible to naturalization." In contrast, European immigrants, even those like Irish and Italians deemed racially inferior to Anglo-Saxons, enjoyed unfettered rights to naturalization, making them what historian Thomas Guglielmo terms "white on arrival."[36] After 1870, blacks enjoyed the right to naturalization, and even American Indians could attain citizenship through the 1890 Indian Naturalization Act. Asians thus stood as the sole group to be barred from naturalization on racial grounds. Ah Yup, Alverto, Charr, Ozawa, and Thind approached the courts separately and advanced divergent claims, yet all were denied with equal certainty. The category "aliens ineligible to citizenship" thus consolidated various Asian immigrants into a uniform bloc in the eyes of the law.

Social Discrimination

Asians of various ethnicities encountered numerous forms of social discrimination, including violence, bans on union membership, employment and housing discrimination, unequal pay, bars from certain public facilities, and antimiscegenation laws. But beyond simply noticing that Asians

faced racism, it is perhaps more important to trace out how people of different ethnicities and nationalities came to be discriminated against in similar fashions. Interracial marriage provides one key way to measure the social status of sundry Asian groups, for as scholars such as Peggy Pascoe and Susan Koshy have argued, the regulation of intimacy has been an important technique for enforcing racial hierarchies.[37] Furthermore, Asians were seen as a threat to white racial purity, and indeed, much anti-Asian animus was expressed as anxiety about sexuality between "Orientals" and "whites," as Henry Yu has shown.[38] Hence, the degree to which diverse Asians were targeted by antimiscegenation laws provides evidence that they were not only viewed as distinct from whites but also understood by the dominant society to be alike in their inferiority.

Although immigration and naturalization fall within the domain of the federal government, the regulation of marriage has been left to states, and no nationwide consensus emerged with regard to the question of whether Asians could marry people of other races. However, the case of California's antimiscegenation legislation is instructive. California's antimiscegenation law, first enacted in 1850, forbade whites from marrying blacks; it was amended in 1880 to include Chinese, to whom it referred as "Mongolians."[39] The state's antimiscegenation statutes were again amended in 1905, with the critical intention of including Japanese in the forbidden category of "Mongolian."[40] Filipinos who were barred from intermarriage argued that they were not Mongolians in *Roldan v. Los Angeles County.* Although the California Appellate Court agreed, the antimiscegenation statutes were again amended in 1933 to forbid whites from marrying anyone of "the Malay race," as Filipinos were then classified.[41]

California's stringent antimiscegenation law thus made clear that people of various Asian ethnicities were equivalently undesirable. The state's ban on interracial marriage remained in force until after World War II, when the California Supreme Court struck it down in *Perez v. Sharp* (1948). California was far from exceptional, for antimiscegenation laws were enacted in forty-one states and colonies, with most remaining on the books through the mid-1960s. In all, fourteen states forbade intermarriage between whites and Asian Americans (Chinese, Japanese, and Koreans), and nine included Filipinos. The national demise of antimiscegenation laws did not occur until 1967, when the U.S. Supreme Court decreed them unconstitutional in *Loving v. Virginia*.[42]

From the mid-1800s to World War II, the state had consolidated the

category "Oriental" through a series of legislative and juridical maneuvers that sharpened racial definitions and made Orientals of a diverse stream of immigrants from various nations. These immigrants and their descendants hailed from an assortment of nations, spoke different languages, worshiped in sundry ways, and practiced a variety of cultures. Nevertheless, the state formed them into a monolithic bloc with regard to their rights to immigrate, naturalize, and assimilate through intermarriage with whites.

Political Mobilizations before the 1960s

Asians who encountered racism and exploitation in the United States did not passively accept their subordination but instead actively resisted, using a variety of ideologies throughout the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Asian nationalism, assimilationism, and radicalism all provided means by which Asians in the United States sought to better their lives and diminish the racism they faced. However, none of these avenues built multiethnic solidarity among Asians; instead, they exacerbated ethnic tensions at times.

Asian Nationalism

Although the state and popular discourses conflated Asian nationalities and ethnicities, Asians themselves resisted this presumption of their uniformity and instead emphasized their distinctions, often through embracing a variety of Asian nationalisms.[43] Immigrants in the United States often supported the liberation, establishment, or strengthening of their home nation-states. These diasporic nationalist movements were shaped in part by the American conditions that immigrants faced. For one thing, in an instrumental sense, supporting their homelands could improve their life in the United States, for, in the words of Robert G. Lee, a "strong diplomatic presence on the part of Asian countries would be one of the few sources of protection for immigrants who had been declared ineligible for citizenship."[44] But beyond instrumentality, diasporic nationalists also drew upon quintessentially American discourses of democracy and puzzled over the contradictions between America's promises and its realities in terms of racism and colonialism. For example, historian Augusto Espiritu comments that the critiques of colonialism deployed by expatriate Filipino intellectuals in the United States were deeply rooted in the "American realities" of discrimination that they encountered.[45] Finally, diasporic nationalisms were sustained by complicated and ongoing relationships

between migrants and their countries of origin, for, as historians increasingly recognize, transnational ties endured for decades and generations.[46]

The United States proved to be a useful base from which immigrants could mobilize to liberate their homelands from colonial rule. Among Asian Indians, the Ghadar ("Revolution") Party was organized in 1913 to fight for Indian independence from Britain. It unified Indians across ethnic and class lines, bringing together Bengali intellectuals and Punjabi Sikh agricultural workers, and its newspaper, *Ghadar,* was distributed throughout the Indian diaspora. Led by the exiled intellectual Har Dayal, who studied Marx, Bakunin, and Kropotkin and served as secretary of the Radical Socialist Club in San Francisco, the party's opposition to British imperialism drew support from the Social Labor Party and the Industrial Workers of the World (the Wobblies). The Ghadar movement was broken during World War I, when over a thousand Ghadarites returned to India to instigate a rebellion, only to be promptly arrested and imprisoned; some were hung. When the United States entered the war, party leaders were arrested, tried and convicted, and threatened with deportation for their anti-British activities.[47]

Koreans in the United States also fought for independence for their homeland, which Japan had formally annexed in 1910. Prominent nationalist leaders, including Ahn Chang-ho, Park Yong-man, Syngman Rhee (who became the first president of the Republic of Korea in 1945), and Philip Jaisohn, lived at various times in Hawaii or the United States and drew faithful support for their organizations from Korean immigrants.[48] As Richard S. Kim argues, the diasporic nationalism practiced by Koreans in the United States drew heavily upon "American political ideals and values" and sought to mobilize Wilsonian internationalism to liberate their homeland.[49]

Chinese nationalism also flourished on American soil. In 1905, immigrant workers joined their compatriots in China in a boycott of American goods organized to protest the United States' lack of respect for Chinese national sovereignty.[50] Chinese leaders, both revolutionaries and reformers, traveled to the United States and sought support and financial aid for their causes. Sun Yat-sen, who sought to overthrow the Qing Dynasty and establish a Chinese republic, founded the Xingzhonghui (Revive China Society) in Hawaii in 1894. Meanwhile, the reformist Baohuanghui (Chinese Empire Reform Association) drew thirty thousand members in Hawaii and North America. Later, during a period of struggle following the overthrow of the Manchu emperor in 1911, Sun's Kuomintang party

(KMT, the Chinese Nationalist Party), was dissolved in China but continued to operate in North America, where it claimed a membership of more than fifteen thousand. By World War II, the KMT had established itself as the dominant political force in Chinese America.[51]

Competing Asian nationalisms often caused conflicts or exacerbated existing rifts between Asians in the United States. At the beginning of the twentieth century, Japanese protesting against proposals to exclude them argued vigorously against being grouped with Chinese. The Japanese insisted that they were the equals of whites and therefore should not be subject to exclusion, even while agreeing that exclusion of the inferior Chinese was justified.[52] Conversely, Chinese Americans were largely unperturbed by the anti-Japanese movement in California.[53] Korean loathing of Japan continued to resonate in the United States, where Korean immigrants seethed with resentment when they were mistaken for Japanese, to the point of refusing Japanese consular intervention and assistance.[54] After Japan invaded Manchuria in 1931, Chinese Americans quickly mobilized to defend China, raising millions of dollars for relief, boycotting Japanese goods, and attempting to curb shipment of scrap metal to Japan.[55] Meanwhile, Issei (Japanese American immigrants) in communities across the west mobilized to support the Japanese war effort, and the Japanese American press, including the English-language papers such as Jimmie Sakamoto's *Japanese-American Courier,* parroted the Japanese government's official line of blaming China for the conflict.[56] During World War II, when Japanese Americans were incarcerated in concentration camps and Japan was occupying much of Asia, various Asian Americans vigorously sought to dissociate themselves from the Japanese by posting signs saying, "This is a Chinese shop," wearing buttons proclaiming "I am Chinese" or "I am a Filipino," carrying identification cards that announced "I am Korean," or wearing Korean dresses.[57]

Competing Asian nationalisms were thus clearly not suited to fostering multiethnic solidarity in the United States. Diasporic nationalisms, in particular, tended to be embraced most ardently by immigrants and often attenuated over subsequent generations. As exclusion restricted the entrance of new migrants, the proportion of native-born Asian Americans grew dramatically, from 10 percent to 52 percent between 1900 and 1940.[58] Some of these second-generation Asian Americans, who enjoyed citizenship by birth yet continued to face racial discrimination, fiercely proclaimed their American identity.

Assimilation through Americanism

In 1938, James Y. Sakamoto, President of the Japanese American Citizens League (JACL), declared that the JACL was "definitely aligned" with "patriotic organizations [such] as the American Legion, the Veterans of Foreign Wars, the Daughters of the American Revolution, and all that uphold American institutions."[59] This was an astonishing statement given the notoriously anti-Asian histories of the organizations he named, yet Sakamoto and the JACL sought to prove to nativists that Japanese could become good Americans through assimilation. In particular, Sakamoto performed Americanism by collaborating with nativists, highlighting the patriotic citizenship of Japanese Americans, and portraying Japanese culture as compatible with American values. Throughout the 1930s, he and the JACL advocated an ideology that I call "liberal assimilationism," which argued that Japanese could prove their worthiness as Americans through civic participation in the public sphere while retaining their cultural particularities in the private sphere. Liberal assimilationism rejected Anglo conformity, that is, the idea that immigrant groups had to forsake their unique cultural identities. Contrary to the ideal of the melting pot, it envisioned unmelted cultural groups continuing to coexist alongside each other. Although it resembled cultural pluralism most closely, liberal assimilationism reflected a more sophisticated analysis of power. Whereas cultural pluralism imagined that everyone, regardless of ethnicity or race, could participate equally in the political sphere, liberal assimilationism understood that whiteness represented the ultimate position of power and thus sought to gain racial equality by collaborating with whites and arguing implicitly for the extension of the privileges of whiteness to Japanese Americans.

Sakamoto was a key figure in the establishment of the JACL, which, as its name implies, was composed of Nisei (second-generation Japanese Americans), the only Japanese Americans who possessed American citizenship. Initially formed in 1929, the JACL had chapters in urban centers and farming communities across the west. Sakamoto, a Nisei born in Seattle in 1903, had earned renown within the community as a professional boxer who fought in Madison Square Garden. But when detached retinas in both eyes cost him his eyesight and career, he returned to Seattle, where he applied the dogged determination he had displayed in the boxing ring to the task of organizing his fellow Nisei. He began publishing a weekly newspaper, the *Japanese-American Courier,* the first

all-English-language Japanese American periodical, and used its pages to proclaim his message of Americanism.[60] The first edition of the *Courier* rolled off the press at 4:15 p.m. on January 1, 1928. As Sakamoto recalled later, "The trials and hardships of the paper were to be many."[61] Indeed, the publisher and his wife, Misao, struggled through financial privation to publish the *Courier* (which had a circulation of only thirteen hundred in 1940), but persevered until the paper was shut down on April 24, 1942, by the mass incarceration of Japanese Americans.[62]

The eminent JACL member Bill Hosokawa, who cut his journalistic teeth at the *Courier,* recalls Sakamoto as "preaching militant, unquestioning loyalty to the United States" and embracing an American identity so zealously that he even banned the Japanese word "Nisei" from the headlines of his newspaper, insisting instead on the more cumbersome term "Second Generation."[63] Sakamoto was far from a lone crusader, for he and the *Courier* not only proved instrumental in building the fledgling JACL but indeed typified the JACL ideology of liberal assimilationism. JACL practices were remarkably consistent across the organization, in chapters and regions near and far from Seattle. Mike Masaoka, perhaps the central figure of the JACL during World War II, agreed on the organization's prewar uniformity, asserting that "most of the local chapters carried on almost identical programs, varied, of course, to meet local situations and conditions."[64]

The young Jimmie Sakamoto had received his first lesson in identity from his father, who had asked him what he would do if war broke out between the United States and Japan. When the boy tried to playfully evade the question, his father admonished him, "If war comes you'll fight for America even to the extent of pointing your gun at me. That son is the spirit of Bushido, the code of ethics and chivalry of the Samurai, who knows no two masters." Sakamoto recalled, "That, might I say, was my first lesson in Americanism."[65] His father's declaration had neatly encapsulated the version of Americanism that Sakamoto would advocate throughout his life, for it posited that Japanese Americans' political fealty to the United States was demonstrated through performing their civic duties but derived from Japanese cultural traits. Sakamoto's father had drawn upon a dominant strain in Issei thinking that identified Nisei Americanism as a product of Japanese values such as bushido.[66]

Sakamoto and Pacific Northwest JACL members collaborated with nativist organizations, including the American Legion, Veterans of Foreign Wars (VFW), and the Daughters of the American Revolution (DAR).

Sakamoto himself spoke before the women's auxiliaries of both the American Legion and the VFW. He claimed that the JACL program of Americanism would help the Nisei to "become contributing factors to the community, . . . strengthen the foundation of society, . . . [and] perform their function at the polls at election times in accordance with their conscience and convictions."[67] Sakamoto thus constructed Japanese Americans as independent and fit for self-government, both traits that scholars such as David Roediger and Matthew Frye Jacobson agree were key to claims of whiteness.[68]

Nativists embraced Sakamoto's work eagerly. Clark Frasier, the state commander of the American Legion in Washington state visited Sakamoto in the fall of 1937, and Sakamoto provided him with a report on the JACL's Yakima convention. Frasier warmly praised "the very excellent work" that Sakamoto and the JACL were doing with Japanese American citizens, especially the resolutions regarding Americanism adopted at the conference.[69] Similarly, when National JACL planned to meet in Seattle, Harry Weingarten, adjutant of Seattle Post No. 1, wrote, "The Seattle Post Number One of the American Legion wishes to extend to both the Northern and Southern California League a welcome to hold their Fourth Biennial Convention in the city of Seattle." Weingarten effused, "We are very proud of the Washington League, with whom we have cooperated 100%."[70] The warm relations between Sakamoto and local American Legionnaires can be seen in the informal language used in their correspondence. Department adjutant Fred Fueker opened one letter, "My dear Jimmie," and enthused in another, "I am darn glad to be able to do this as you don't know how much we appreciate the fine work you are doing in your American born Japanese Americanism work."[71]

The interests of the JACL, the American Legion, and the VFW converged on one issue in particular. All three groups backed the Nye-Lea Act, which would confer citizenship upon Asian veterans of World War I. Tokutaro "Tokie" Slocum, an immigrant from Japan who had fought in the U.S. Army during the war, was a leading actor in this episode. In 1921, Slocum had applied for naturalization under the Act of May 19, 1918, which promised citizenship to aliens who had served in the armed forces during the war. The Bureau of Naturalization informed Slocum that as an Asian he was racially ineligible for naturalization, to which he replied despondently, "I know what you mean; you mean that I am yellow. I may be yellow in face, but I am not yellow at heart."[72] As a veteran who had himself been denied citizenship, Slocum managed the JACL

efforts in Washington and liaised with veterans' organizations. Although the JACL's desire to extend citizenship rights to certain Asian immigrants was in keeping with its general mission, it is somewhat surprising that the American Legion and the VFW would concur. This episode demonstrates that all three organizations saw the performance of the civic duty of military service as trumping the racial exclusion from naturalization. In other words, they agreed that through good behavior Japanese Americans could surmount their racial restrictions. After the passage of Nye-Lea, Charles McCarthy of the American Legion praised Slocum's work and presented the pen with which President Franklin D. Roosevelt had signed the bill to the national president of the JACL.[73] Conversely, the JACL presented Japanese swords to two influential Legionnaires and two VFW leaders in gratitude for their support.[74] The act of thanking white veterans by presenting them with Japanese swords makes clear that in 1937, the JACL was not afraid to be associated culturally with Japan. Thus, in keeping with the ideal of liberal assimilationism, the JACL was eager to emphasize that Japanese Americans performed the duties of citizenship and yet also happily underscored their ethnic particularity.

Flag presentations constituted a recurring motif in the JACL play. In 1933, the Yakima chapter of the DAR presented the Yakima Citizens League with an American flag as a token of its approval of the JACL chapter's Americanization program.[75] The DAR did so with remarkable self-importance: in a letter of commendation, the chapter regent enthusiastically called the banner, the "American Flag–The Emblem of our Country."[76] Similarly, Seattle Post No. 1 of the American Legion presented a flag to the Seattle JACL chapter in 1935 in recognition of its efforts in Americanizing the Nisei.[77] Ralph Horr, a member of the American Legion and Republican chair of King County, repeatedly addressed Seattle Progressive Citizens League and JACL meetings, urging members to "actively participate in the political activities of the nation."[78] Horr's seemingly open position—that Japanese Americans deserved citizenship rights—masked a less tolerant position that revealed itself when he ominously intoned, "By going to the polls you will be doing something for your community and country and you will be a part of them; but if you do not and disenfranchise yourself, you cannot be one of the community nor of your country."[79] Horr's thinly veiled threat begins to explain why Legionnaires and members of the VFW and DAR might have cooperated with a Japanese American group like the JACL.

The JACL's stated goal, like the American Legion's and the DAR's,

was Americanization, and both American Legion and DAR flags were presented to the JACL in recognition of its Americanization efforts. Nativist organizations sought to impose uniformity upon the American population in two ways: by preventing further immigration (thus, the Legion's prior stand on Japanese exclusion) and, especially after 1924, by forcing assimilation in the guise of Anglo conformity upon those already in the United States (thus, the Legion's Americanization program). Horr's admonition contained elements of both strands of Legion strategy: on the one hand, it offered membership in the nation if the Nisei acquiesced to the Legion's brand of Americanism, but on the other hand it threatened exclusion or removal if they did not. As historian Matthew Frye Jacobson shows, discussions of the fitness for citizenship of various not-quite-white groups frequently hinged on the question of whether their members possessed the ability to make independent political decisions.[80] By emphasizing that Nisei were ready to make informed choices, the JACL argued that Japanese Americans were fully prepared to assume the duties and privileges of citizenship. Generally, in making their bid for full citizenship through their assimilability and readiness for self-government, Japanese Americans implicitly argued for their aptness for inclusion in whiteness.

Radicalism

Before World War II, Asian American communities contained few but vibrant lefts consisting of labor unionists, socialists, and communists. Asian American workers showed a remarkable willingness to organize from their earliest years in the United States.[81] As early as 1867, some two thousand Chinese workers building the transcontinental railroad high in the Sierras struck for better wages and working conditions. The railroad company responded by cutting off their provisions; consequently, the strike lasted for only a week before the workers capitulated.[82] Filipino laborers worked and organized up and down the West Coast, as chronicled by the great Filipino writer Carlos Bulosan in his fictionalized bildungsroman *America Is in the Heart*.[83]

Like Asian diasporic nationalism, ethnic nationalism—which sought to build cohesion among co-ethnics in the United States—also proved more divisive than unifying. In Hawaii, Japanese laborers struck against sugar plantations in 1909 to demand wages equal to those earned by Portuguese. Ronald Takaki characterizes the strike as an example of ethnic solidarity, for Japanese workers, merchants, and professionals supported

the strike with money, food, and services. The limitations of ethnic nationalism became clear when planters broke the strike by bringing in "massive numbers of Filipinos to counterbalance the Japanese laborers."[84] Similarly, Eiichiro Azuma argues that ethnic nationalism inhibited labor from organizing and obscured class consciousness among Japanese and Filipino workers in the San Joaquin delta from 1936 to 1941.[85]

Although much early Asian American labor organizing followed ethnic or national lines, the 1920 sugar plantation strike in Hawaii stands out as an important exception. After the 1909 strike, planters consciously sought to balance the plantation workforce so that no single ethnic group would predominate. Consequently, comprehensive organizing required cross-ethnic cooperation. In 1920, more than eight thousand Japanese and Filipino plantation workers struck together. Plantation owners responded by evicting thousands of workers and their families from plantation housing in the midst of an influenza epidemic, and 150 died. Though workers stayed off the job for six months, the strike was largely unsuccessful.[86] Yen Le Espiritu astutely attributes the 1920 strike's cohesiveness to class solidarity rather than any sense of shared racial identity, a conclusion bolstered by the fact that Koreans organized themselves as strikebreakers, saying, "We are opposed to the Japanese in everything."[87]

The emergence of organized Asian American labor in the salmon canning industry on the Pacific Coast further illustrates ethnic tensions within the working class. Chinese, Japanese, and Filipino American workers in the Alaska Cannery Workers Union and the Cannery Workers and Farm Laborers Union vied for power not only with employers but among themselves. During the 1930s, these unions briefly succeeded in building a fragile multiethnic alliance based on shared class position, but the outbreak of World War II bolstered Filipino nationalism and removed Japanese Americans from the picture altogether.[88]

Asian American workers sometimes crossed not only ethnic but racial lines in organizing unions. They did so in spite of longstanding opposition to Asian workers from the American Federation of Labor (AFL), which was a staunchly nativist and exclusionary organization during the early twentieth century. In the first instance, the Japanese-Mexican Labor Association (JMLA) was formed in 1903 by Japanese and Mexican sugar beet workers in Oxnard, California. When the JMLA petitioned the AFL for membership, AFL president Samuel Gompers replied that a charter would be granted only if the JMLA agreed to ban Japanese and Chinese workers. The Mexican members of the JMLA bravely demurred.[89] Asians and

Latinos once again cooperated in California agriculture when the AFL granted a charter to a joint Mexican and Filipino union, the Field Workers Union, Local 30326, in 1936.[90] In addition to forming interracial alliances in agriculture, Asian American sailors and porters found acceptance in unions dominated by other racial groups. In 1933, the National Maritime Union (NMU) broke from an AFL affiliate, the Seamen's International Union (SIU), over the SIU's racism. In contrast, the NMU adopted a policy of racial inclusion, and some three thousand Chinese sailors joined in the NMU strike of 1936.[91] The primarily black Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters countered the Pullman Company's recruitment of Filipinos to dilute the union's power by incorporating Filipinos.[92] And in Hawaii, as Moon-Kie Jung demonstrates, the International Longshoremen's and Warehousemen's Union brought together Filipino, Japanese, and Portuguese workers in a movement that did not seek to obliterate racial distinctions as unavoidably divisive but rather rearticulated race as a category of exploitation.[93]

In addition to unionists, Asian American communities contained vital segments of political radicals. The eminent Asian American historian Yuji Ichioka has argued that socialism and communism, in addition to unionism, were central to Japanese American politics up to 1924. Sen Katayama, the founder of Japan's socialist movement, spent several years in exile in the United States, promoting socialism among Japanese immigrants, lecturing widely, publishing a newspaper, and participating as a founding member of the American Communist Party (CPUSA). Upon his death in Moscow in 1933, Katayama was lauded as a workers' hero and buried in the Kremlin. Japanese immigrant radicals included not only intellectuals like Katayama but workers as well. Ichioka demonstrates that Japanese American workers regularly organized in the agricultural and mining industries, despite being generally barred from the AFL and targeted for exclusion by the white labor movement.[94] Karl Yoneda's memoir, *Ganbatte,* takes up where Ichioka leaves off, chronicling worker activism and organizing from the 1920s through the 1970s. Yoneda, who adopted the first name Karl in honor of Marx when he joined the CP in 1927, edited *Rodo Shimbun,* the official organ of the Japanese section of the CPUSA, stirred up support for the 1934 Pacific Coast Maritime Strike, and organized Alaskan cannery workers into Congress of International Organizations (CIO) unions.[95] Yoneda met his wife, Elaine Black, through his political activism. She played a crucial role in International Labor Defense (ILD), a communist-affiliated organization devoted to the legal defense

of arrested and jailed labor and political activists. Vivian Raineri's biography of Black, *The Red Angel,* shows that in the prewar period Japanese American communists were tightly interwoven into the fabric of the CPUSA, participating in demonstrations and actions, being bailed out by ILD, and so on.[96]

Despite the commitment of Japanese American progressives, the left never formed a primarily political tendency within the Japanese American community. Yoneda estimates that there were perhaps only two hundred Japanese American communists in the 1930s, and they, along with other progressives, were subject to red baiting and ostracism from the community.[97] Yet the historical significance of the Japanese American left cannot be evaluated simply in terms of numbers, for leftists were the most persistent critics of racism and imperialism. Unlike more conservative unionists, Katayama never shied away from impugning the AFL's anti-Japanese policies as racist.[98] At a time when Sakamoto's *Japanese-American Courier* defended Japan's annexation of Manchuria, Yoneda and other communists condemned it as imperialist.[99] In early 1942, a progressive organization called the Young Democrats wrote a letter protesting the expulsion of Japanese Americans from their homes on the West Coast. Although all of the community newspapers to which they submitted the letter refused to publish it, this act marks the Young Democrats as perhaps the only Japanese American organization to openly oppose the expulsion.[100]

Chinese Americans also organized extensively, and some joined socialist or communist parties, as historian Him Mark Lai has discussed widely.[101] The Unionist Guild, formed in 1919, won concessions on working conditions from shirt manufacturers in San Francisco and Oakland. Nearly two decades later, the Chinese Workers' Mutual Aid Association (CMWAA), established in 1937, became the first organization to develop links to the CIO and the AFL. In New York City, as Renqiu Yu has shown in *To Save China, To Save Ourselves,* the Chinese Hand Laundry Alliance (CHLA) organized in 1933 to oppose a proposed city ordinance aimed at eliminating small laundries. The CHLA membership was composed of small entrepreneurs, not the business elite of Chinatown, and their progressive politics led them to march in the National Recovery Act parade, support the Chinese revolution of 1949, and establish the leading left newspaper, the *Chinese Daily News.*[102] Following the communist revolution, American Chinatowns factionalized into pro–People's Republic of China contingents, which included the left-leaning CWMAA and

readers of the *Chinese Daily News,* and pro-KMT camps, which were composed primarily of the business elite and represented by the Chinese Consolidated Benevolent Association.[103]

The linkage between the prewar Asian American left and the Asian American movement of the 1960s and 1970s is complicated. An argument for tenuous continuity between the Asian American old and new lefts could possibly be made in three ways. First, in some instances individual old leftists personally influenced and organized new leftists. The eminent Chinese American leftist Grace Lee Boggs, whose activism predated the Second World War and included a close association with the black Marxist C. L. R. James, started the Asian Political Alliance in Detroit in 1970.[104] Similarly, Kazu Iijima was one of two Japanese American women who were communists before the war, and then in 1968 she organized Asian Americans for Action, an early and important radical group in New York City.[105] Iijima functioned as an Asian American analogue to Ella Baker, who personally bridged the institutions of the pre–World War II black civil rights movements and the 1960s movement.[106] Second, a few activists in the Asian American movement grew up as "red diaper" babies. For example, Steve Yip, a prominent member of Wei Min She, was the son of a Marxist, and Chris Iijima, a radical musician who is one of the subjects of chapter 5, was the son of Kazu Iijima.[107] However, unlike Yip and Iijima, the vast majority of Asian American 1960s radicals did not inherit their parents' politics but rather rejected what they saw as their parents' assimilationism. The Asian American movement's third and by far most important linkage to the prewar left was its recovery of the history of Asian American radicalism. Movement participants recuperated the legacies of Asian American radical individuals and organizations, including Karl Yoneda, the JMLA, Carlos Bulosan, the CHLA, Sen Katayama, and Ben Fee. While living figures like Yoneda and Fee did not provide day-to-day leadership or point-by-point ideological guidance to the nascent Asian American movement, their very existence bespoke a legacy of Asian American resistance through radicalism, and their personal support buoyed the younger movement.

Despite these tenuous linkages, however, it is difficult to draw a solid, continuous line from the Asian American old left to the Asian American new left. Individual old leftists, scattered red diaper babies, and recuperation do not constitute continuity per se. Most important, there is no evidence of institutional continuity between the old and new lefts. For example, there was no Asian American analogue to the League for

Industrial Democracy, the old anticommunist socialist group that served as the parent organization for Students for a Democratic Society during its earliest days.[108] The lack of institutional continuity may be attributed to the fact that the Asian American left fell quiescent during the 1950s, the victim not only of McCarthyist red baiting from the mainstream society but also of repression from within Asian American communities. Furthermore, as Him Mark Lai contends, the Chinese American new left diverged in important ways from the Chinese American old left: the new left was dominated by native-born Chinese Americans rather than immigrants; it was composed of students, professionals, and intellectuals rather than workers; and it was more interested in local conditions than in Chinese nationalism.[109] While these generalizations may be disputable, Lai's observations about the Chinese American left apply more or less to the Asian American left in general.

The category "Asian American" is a social construction that groups together people of diverse ethnicities, religions, languages, nationalities, and cultures. Despite the fact that Asians have been present in the United States for over a century and a half, the term *Asian American* is a relatively recent invention. As the following chapters demonstrate, in the late 1960s and early 1970s, a variety of people of Asian ancestry in the United States recognized the similar ways Asians had suffered from exploitation and discrimination. They noticed the pattern in which groups of people from a series of Asian nations had been recruited to the United States to serve as cheap labor, encountered prejudice and discrimination, and were subsequently excluded from immigration, naturalization, and equal inclusion in the nation. Asian American radicals built the conceptual bridges that linked together peoples of divergent ethnicities and cultures into a political alliance devoted to ending racism and imperialism. That alliance and the political stance that it espoused marked the beginning of Asian America. Although Asian American identity emerged for the first time in the 1960s, it did not simply supersede its historical predecessors but instead opened up new avenues for political mobilization. Asian American identity contested with Asian nationalism, liberal assimilationism, and narrow ethnic and class-based radicalism by embracing multiethnic, interracial, and transnational solidarity. This contestation was illustrated in the 1968–69 Third World Liberation Front strike at San Francisco State College, a pivotal moment in Asian American politics that is discussed in the next chapter.