

New Faiths, Old Fears

MUSLIMS AND OTHER ASIAN
IMMIGRANTS IN AMERICAN
RELIGIOUS LIFE

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Introduction

Your country? How came it yours? Before the Pilgrims landed, we were here. . . . Our song, our toil, our cheer, and warning have been given to this nation in blood-brotherhood. Are not these gifts worth the giving? Is not this work and striving? Would America have been America without her Negro people?

—W. E. B. Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folk*¹

I'm just a white person who stayed in the sun too long.

—Asian American motel owner, *Mississippi Masala*²

General Approach

The principal subjects of this book are recent Asian immigrants to the United States, especially those who have come here since 1965. The passage of a major bill in that year dramatically increased the number of Asian immigrants. Yet their adjustment within American sociocultural as well as political economic space was complicated, in part because Asian immigrants were neither the intended nor the sole beneficiaries of the U.S. Immigration and Naturalization Act, also known as the Hart-Celler Act.³

Latin American immigrants, for instance, almost doubled their percentage of the total pool of legal immigrants, while dominating the ranks of the illegal immigrants, between the 1950s and the 1990s. Four-fifths of all immigrants to the United States since 1970 have been either Latino or Asian, at the same time that arguments about immigration, and also about the cultural/religious loyalties of immigrants, have been channeled along disciplinary lines, reflecting the perspective of one academic field while too often ignoring quite different perspectives from other fields.

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The major challenge of talking about any form of American religion post-1965 is to account for difference between disciplinary assumptions and methods as much as it is about the differences among the immigrants themselves. And by focusing on race as a variable crucial to religion, one that ranks along with it but in a certain sense prior to it, I am following a line of reasoning that comes from sociology, specifically the research and writing of Howard Winant. “Once created and institutionalized, once having evolved over centuries, racial difference,” observes Winant, “is a permanent, though flexible, attribute of human society.”⁴ One cannot avoid race, yet one is not limited to one notion of race or one approach to the complexity of racial difference. Especially crucial is the relationship between subjective approaches, which focus on racial identities, popular culture as well as “apparent” common sense, and structural approaches, approaches that derive from political movements and parties, state institutions and policies as well as market processes.⁵

In its broadest formulation the challenge for Asian Americans is to understand where they are, or can be, or should be, in the racialized pattern of American society. At the subjective level there is no longer the bipolar model of white/black or black/white. Always complicated by the presence of Native Americans, it is now multiplied by the recent immigration of Asians and Hispanics. Yet the multipolar, racially piebald profile of American society has not permeated the state or political society or the market to the extent that either common sense or foundational ideals would mandate.⁶ At many levels, twenty-first-century America remains what Winant called a racially dual society: black and white are still the dominant categories. Polyvalent racial differences claim the lives and the imaginations of but a few, with the result that most Asian Americans, like their non-Asian counterparts, must choose among four levels of discourse concerning race and religion in the United States:

1. *Public policy.* Whether pursued at the national, state, or local level, public policy presumes a notion of the common good that is seldom articulated, except in statistical or economic terms. Issues of race and religion alike are glossed as issues of professionalization and income distribution. While questions of religious affiliation are absent from the U.S. Census, religious diversity is thought to be a good thing, which supports mainstream or middle-class America, while racial difference is a bad thing, presumed to have a divisive affect on collective solidarity and national consensus.

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2. *Law.* The court system frames issues in terms of citizenship, with individual rights and state responsibilities as well as resources directed only to legal immigrants. The plight of illegal immigrants in California has received extraordinary attention, but it is only symptomatic of a more diffuse national pattern that has made certain U.S. cities urban magnets for the majority of post-1965 immigrants, both illegal and legal.⁷

3. *Cultural studies.* The site of an internal debate between cosmopolitanism and pluralism,⁸ it restages the age-old debate between universalism and particularism. Most recently, it has been recast as a debate within the circle of those who advocate cosmopolitanism, between critical cosmopolitans and liberal or universalizing cosmopolitans.⁹ More interesting for the current focus on immigration and its cultural/religious consequence is the location of numerous theorists within the Asian American community. Seldom noted is the fact that some of the most acclaimed and oft-cited theorists within cultural studies are themselves immigrants or are identified with a particular subset of the immigrant community. Two examples, whose views recur in the following pages, are Arjun Appadurai, originally from India but long resident in the United States and now at the University of Chicago, and David Palumbo-Liu, originally from Taiwan but educated in the United States and now teaching at Stanford.

4. *Participants themselves*—One might say that they provide a ground-up rather than a top-down view of the immigrant experience and its religious dimension. Yet at least some of them are also part of the scaffolding project known as critical theory that provides the parameters and the arguments for cultural studies. It is a task almost unnoticed, but one that will become increasingly necessary: to locate the theorists themselves within the discourse about which they are theorizing. Appadurai, for instance, has been roundly criticized by David Hollinger for his views of transnationality.¹⁰ Hollinger's critique is blunted, however, once one realizes that Appadurai is not speaking about all U.S. immigrants as participants in networks of long distance nationalism but only about the South Asian subset of which he himself is a representative as well as a spokesperson. Appadurai's discursive strategy may be universalist, but it masks a narrative perspective that is specific to South Asia, one that has to be understood from his speaking position, however occluded.

In most cases, the ground-up view presupposes that the stories make their own point, but they, too, are riddled with presuppositions and prejudgments. One of the least noted prejudgments is about race. A collage of

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narratives from Muslim women immigrants to Canada, for instance, identifies them by class and by sectarian loyalty without ever noting racial markers, either within these women's daily lives or in their perception of Canadian society at large.¹¹ Another approach is to embrace particular strategies for resistance. It has the benefit of foregrounding racial prejudice, but only as an external gaze: its individual essayists are resilient in crafting collective strategies and individual choices for resistance to stereotypes of the Asian immigrant, but they do not examine how those same normative degradations apply to their own reckoning of status and choice for location, education, and marriage.¹²

A graphic instance of how race suffuses all readings of immigrant religious outlook and practice occurred just as I was doing the final revision of this book. In June 2001 a Duke undergraduate working as a White House intern was ejected from a meeting on the faith-based and community initiatives chaired by President George W. Bush. Was he Christian or Jewish, was he Hindu or Buddhist? No, Abdullah al-Arian was Muslim, and since the meeting took place with other Muslims, many of them leaders of American Muslim groups, why would he be ejected? The official reason was this: a technical error in security clearance. The president, through his press secretary, apologized the next day, and even offered the ejected young Muslim student a tour of the West Wing of the White House and the Secret Service office! Yet the "technical error," even if it was a mere error, masks an evident fear: the ejected Muslim was not a South Asian Muslim nor an African American Muslim but an Arab Muslim. Not just an Arab Muslim but a Palestinian Muslim, and one whose father and uncle were both alleged to be pro-Palestinian activists—not only alleged to be activists but punished by the U.S. government for their presumed anti-American activity. The "error" visited on the son/nephew seems to have stemmed from secret profiling, and it reveals not just the difficulty of all groups' participating equally in the faith-based and community initiatives dear to President George W. Bush but also the impossibility of freeing Palestinians, whether Muslim or Christian, from the "terrorist" image that has been cast on all Arab Americans in recent years. Months later, in the aftermath of the September 11 bombings, with the psychic as well as physical harm they inflicted on American well-being, Arab Muslim Americans remain even more suspect—of disloyalty toward their adopted country at best, of terrorist intent toward public targets at worst.

Asian Americans may seem to have an easier time of it than Arab Amer-

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icans, but they, along with Hispanics and other immigrants, also are framed by the four levels of discourse just outlined. At two extremes stand the economic and the culturalist views of twenty-first-century American society. Both are projected as arguments. While the economic argument characterizes those who tend to view immigrant issues through the eyes of law and public policy, for cultural theorists and religious studies scholars, as also for participants themselves, it is the culturalist argument that holds sway.

In both cases 1965 looms as a critical milestone.

The statement about 1965 as a watershed year for economic/public policy approaches to immigration is boldly etched by the Cuban American economist George Borjas. Even though immigration from Asia was effectively banned after 1924, due to the enactment of the national origins quota, Borjas, a Harvard professor, defends the need for a return to some form of national origins quota in the aftermath of 1965. His argument is elegantly economic and statistical:

The rekindling of the immigrant debate at the end of the twentieth century had its roots in the 1965 Amendments to Immigration and Nationality Act. The 1965 Amendments and subsequent minor legislation repealed the national origins quota system, set a worldwide numerical limit . . . , and enshrined a new objective for awarding entry visas among the many applicants: the reunification of families.

The policy shifts in the 1965 Amendments had a profound impact on the number of legal immigrants. . . . Almost one million were entering (annually) by the 1990s [comparable to the First Great Migration to the United States, when 9 million immigrants entered between 1901 and 1910]. Moreover, many persons have come into the country illegally [about 7 million, according to Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS) estimates, by 2001]. . . . As a result of these trends, the proportion of foreign-born persons in the population began to rise rapidly, from 4.7 percent in 1970 to 7.9 percent in 1990 and 10 percent in 1998.

The 1965 Amendments also changed the national origin mix of the immigrant population. . . . Over two-thirds of the legal immigrants admitted during the 1950s originated in Europe or Canada, 25 percent in Latin America, and 6 percent in Asia. By the 1990s, only 16 percent originated in Europe or Canada, 49 percent in Latin America, and 32 percent in Asia.¹³

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What do these policy shifts and attendant population shifts portend? For Borjas, there is no doubt that the beginning and the end of the twentieth century present mirror-image challenges:

There is an uncanny similarity in the key issues that fueled the immigration debates at the beginning and end of the twentieth century: a rapid increase in the number of immigrants, a huge change in their ethnic mix, and the perception that the new immigrants do not do as well as the earlier ones. American history has already revealed how immigrant policy responds when these “fundamentals” play themselves out in the political arena. The national origins quota system [enacted in 1924] was not born out of thin air; it was the political consensus that was reached after thirty years of debate to address the real or perceived problems. The current immigration debate revolves around the same issues. Will history repeat itself? Should it?¹⁴

The outcome for Borjas is clear: annual limits need to be set on total immigration (preferably scaling back to 500,000, as in the 1970s), and policies favoring more skilled workers need to be implemented. The outcome is less important for our purposes than the argument that precedes it. It is framed entirely above the fray of social concerns, yet it presupposes their heady, emotive tone. The historian Arthur Schlesinger, another Harvard professor, is deemed to be an authority predicting the fissiparous dangers of large-scale immigration. Schlesinger sees American identity threatened by the latest wave of immigrants. His fear is the old fear, that the newcomers will not only challenge that identity but replace it with anarchistic asymmetry. “The historic idea of a unifying American identity,” warns Schlesinger, “is now in peril in many arenas. If separatist tendencies go unchecked, the result can only be the fragmentation, resegregation, and tribalization of American life.”¹⁵ Not only will there be loss of democracy and linguistic disunity but even possibly territorial disaggregation.

What all these economic/policy/historicist arguments omit is the cultural component of the new immigrants, charted dramatically by the accent on Asians and the added texture that they provide to an already piebald American social fabric. Here is how two humanists, who are also religious studies scholars, chart that difference in their coauthored introduction to a textbook on Asian American religions:

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Between 1960 and 1989 Asians accounted for 37 percent of the total immigration [to the USA]. As a result, the Asian-origin population doubled during the 1980s, rising to more than 7.2 million. By 1990 Asians constituted 3 percent of the US population, and, with Asians continuing to arrive in large numbers each year, demographers predicted the number would rise to 10 percent by 2050.

Over half these post-1965 Asian immigrants are Christian: most Filipinos are Catholic, and the majority of Korean immigrants are Protestant, but they also include almost a million Hindus, perhaps 700,000 Buddhists and the same number of Muslims, as well as 100,000 Sikhs.¹⁶

These transnational migrations—together with the effects of American conversions and the diffusion of Asian influences—have made the cultures of the United States more diverse than ever. . . . By the end of the nineteenth century, more forms of Christianity and Judaism flourished in America than anywhere else in the world. By the end of the twentieth century, however, a new global diversity had taken hold. America had mapped Asia and met its peoples and religions earlier . . . but after the 1960s diversity had become not just one feature of the American religious landscape; it was the major one.¹⁷

In short, though they agree on the centrality of 1965, culturalists and their economic counterparts disagree on its significance: endless diversity is inherently lauded by Tweed and Prothero, while threat to the social fabric and its harmony is seen as more fundamental by Borjas. The radiant hope of multiculturalism is pitted against the looming disaster of socioeconomic unrest and perhaps political instability. Neither side accounts for the other; the two views seem both diametrical and incommensurate. To explore a middle ground one must account for much more evidence on both sides, and to do so one must begin by looking beyond the Asian beneficiaries of the immigration act to its other, non-Asian beneficiaries.

As crucial as is the Asian accent charted by Tweed, Prothero, and others, it is difficult to interpret its significance for the post-1965 period without also taking account of the major group that benefited from the Hart-Celler Act of 1965: the Latinos. While 49 percent of the legal immigrants during the final decades of the twentieth century were Latino, most of the illegal immigrants were also Latino. The Latino component alone may exceed 10 million, but in any case it numerically dominates the entire Asian component

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by a factor of two to one. Yet no major study to date has attempted to splice together the experience of Asian and Hispanic immigrants, or to understand both groups vis-à-vis other nonimmigrant minority groups, especially Native and African Americans, as well as the dominant Anglo group.¹⁸

My project, while concerned with immigrants, whether Asian or Latino, also extends to religion. It examines religious markings, both institutional and experiential, both familiar and unfamiliar. It emerges out of religious studies at the same time that it implicates other disciplines. It must necessarily confront a major aporia in all reflection to date on Asian immigrants. Just as there has never been an attempt to see Asian immigrants within a larger pattern of immigration to the United States since 1965, so there has been a near total omission of religion as a significant dimension of either immigrant identity or immigrant struggle within North American space. Instead, the indices of difference that are mapped across disciplines move from literary criticism to cultural anthropology to political economy. Religion, if considered, becomes a subset of cultural anthropology rather than religious studies proper.

This kind of synthesizing, polythetic study is all the more needed now because immigrant studies itself is undergoing a sea change. Studies of immigrants are entering what might be termed a third phase. If the first one was marked by temporal interest in the pre-1965 period, and the second by the racial shift to non-Anglo immigrants since 1965, the third phase is marked by a generational shift within the immigrant populace itself. Some of the second-generation immigrants from the post-1965 period are now working in the American academy. They are credentialed as professors even as they write about their own experience in becoming Americans who are still Asian (or Latino) in their self-understanding. In other words, if the first phase was to understand European immigrant patterns at the turn of the century, and if successive studies since 1965 have looked at discrete groups emerging since the passage of the 1965 law, current studies are now marked by an accent on local and individual experiences not available, or even attempted, in previous academic writing about immigrants and American culture.¹⁹

Specific Key Terms

Raymond Williams, the British cultural critic, has underscored the distinctive value of key terms. It is not merely what they say; the range of con-

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notation that they evoke also sets the stage for reflection and for debate, for an analytical yield that is at once distinct and productive of other insights. It is for that reason that the key terms of this book are also neologisms. I am introducing two key terms that do not have lexical referents; they cannot be found in the dictionary. Yet they do evoke a sense of immigrant experience and its religious dimension that, at least in my view, justifies the labor of reading them, reflecting on them, and applying them to the circumstances of Asian American immigrants since 1965.

The first term is *polyvalence*. It presupposes diversity, but unlike diversity, it accents not just perpetual variety and change but also stability and persistence. If diversity is a myriad of changing forms, polyvalence is the plumbing of depths within each form. Like its etymological analogues, *polytheism* and *polycentrism*, it connotes the many as equivalent to the one. The many are created and debated and re-created and adumbrated, yet they retain a referential link to the memory and the hope of each immigrant group. Polyvalence is neither essentialism nor fixity redeployed; it is negotiated equivalence without guaranteed permanence, it is pragmatic hope rather than utopian idealism. It is a value-added rather than a value-neutral projection of culture-specific norms.

The second term is also a neologism: *kaleidoculture*. It is the alternative to multiculturalism. Even when critical pedagogy is advocated, even when mestizo or Latino-style hybridity is counterposed to Anglo-Protestant cultural hegemony,²⁰ it is numerical increase that suffuses multiculturalism; many cultures rather than one is presupposed as an unquestioned good, yet the quality of the many is never hinted at, much less accented. Kaleidoculture, by contrast, makes a strong value judgment, one that is also informed by aesthetics. Like its etymological precursor, *kaleidoscope*, *kaleidoculture* evokes a changing spectrum of cultural values and experiences, each set of which is bright and scintillating, worthy of attention, examination, and appreciation as well as debate, critique, and transformation.²¹

Polyvalence and kaleidoculture extend the semantic range of the key terms that they both echo and supplant. Polyvalence echoes the technical language of chemistry: to be polyvalent is to have more than one power or capacity or value. Polyvalent culture also has an uncharted potential; polyvalence marks that potential without limiting it. Similarly, kaleidoculture adds value to the analysis of culture: while multiculturalism projects culture as irreducibly plural, kaleidoculture affirms culture as intrinsically var-

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ied and alluring: the many faces of kaleidoculture, while changing, never cease to dazzle and to engage.²²

Despite the value of economic research and writing, I am troubled by its assumptions as well as its conclusions. They remain on the surface; they are two-dimensional. What they miss are the depth, the ambiguity, the three-dimensionality of cultural experience and its religious subset. While culture is not primarily religious, it cannot be understood without explicit and sustained attention to religious evidence. *The* key question is how to approach religious idioms/experiences while keeping race, gender, class, generation, and locational differences in tension. I want to argue that the polyvalence that characterizes twenty-first-century North America entails an increase in speaking positions and strategic advocacies available to immigrants.

The decisive analytic rubric is best defined as *racialized class prejudice*. Whiteness studies have demonstrated the pervasive influence of whiteness as an unmarked category projecting Anglo privilege. Class prejudice underscores how the economic and social and cultural resources of whiteness are denied to all nonwhites, but especially to one race that is underlined as occupying the other end of an unspoken U.S. hierarchical social order, namely, African Americans. Far from being freed of racial taintedness because they are neither white nor black, neither Anglo nor African American, other minority groups—Asians, Hispanics, and also Amerindians—are implicated in that persistent biracial patterning of norms and values. Racialized class prejudice applies to immigrants as much as it does to African or Anglo Americans; it also suffuses religion and politics.

Polyvalence holds out a twin hope: first, that citizenship can be cultural as well as political, with cultural citizenship demanding internal integrity, not external conformity, and second, that equivalent cultural citizenship can be extended to an expanded cluster of non-Anglos. Internally unlike each other, these groups need to be named and affirmed at the outset. Even though race has been defined overwhelmingly with reference to African Americans, cultural citizenship must extend to South Asians and Latinos as well as to African Americans. Racial difference, as Winant observed, did not begin in this century or even the last century. It has evolved over many centuries; the problem of race comes with the first European settlers in North America. If we believe historian of religion Jonathan Z. Smith, the problem of racial difference in the New World emerged from the Spanish encounter with Native Americans:

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It was neither Orientals nor Blacks, who had long been mapped on the old Greco-Roman and biblical taxonomy, that gave rise to the intellectual problematics of race. Rather, it was the unanticipated presence of native Americans.²³

There is a trajectory from sixteenth-century explorations to seventeenth- to nineteenth-century transatlantic slave trade to twentieth-century Asian American immigrations. Yet beyond the history of racism as experienced by discrete groups within the American social fabric, what is denied is the connection between the racialized class prejudice experienced by one group, Asian Americans, and its counterpart among another group, African Americans. Apart from forays into popular culture,²⁴ one finds few references to the parallel exclusion of blacks and Asians from white society.²⁵ An impassioned article by a South Korean American scholar, for instance, laments “the persistence of racial inequality and structural exclusion. Asian Americans must still contend with the discriminatory assumption that they are *not* Americans, and must face the question, ‘where are you from?’”²⁶ Like African and Native Americans, Asian Americans have experienced stereotypical representation, along with racial prejudice and structural exclusion. All three groups, plus Hispanics, have felt the pressure to conform to Anglo norms, and it is that experience which has not only shaped their location in U.S. social history but also structured their relationship with each other.

In sum, to pursue a binary analysis or to rely on binary categories of Asian-American or black-American is to miss the sense in which Anglo unhyphenated still projects the fullest form of U.S. citizenship, placing Anglo Americans apart from and above all other groups, whether those groups are deemed to be others, outsiders, or minorities. At the outset of a new millennium the old prejudice lingers: all non-Anglos have yet to find the equal access, equal rights, equal hopes that mark the American dream.²⁷

The option most often explored is to overleap class prejudice even when racial prejudice lingers. Bruce Lee and Tiger Woods may have made it, but the message of their success is not people of color unite and resist the oppressor; it is rather work hard so that you are less excluded than that other nameless minority—the Guptas or Singhs or Kims. To understand how popular culture reinforces rather than weakens or reduces stereotypical representation one need but glance at two Chinese American novels. Each

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attempts to engage critically the tension between inclusion and exclusion, but each also cannot avoid translating that tension into two others: the tension between success and failure, the tension between citizen and foreigner. In other words, to be included is to succeed—even a second-class citizen is a citizen. Both Lan Chang's *Hunger* and David Louie's *The Barbarians Are Coming* demonstrate how “the privileges of symbolic national citizenship and material socioeconomic success depend upon Asian American compliance with culturally racist narratives about Asians in America.”²⁸

Culturally racist narratives are etched in film as well as in literature. A powerful instance of stereotype reinforcement from popular culture appears in the 1992 Mira Nair movie *Mississippi Masala*. Though the movie's central plot revolves around an interracial romance between two minorities, a South Asian immigrant woman from Africa and an African American man from Mississippi, and though it offers oblique critiques of racism, it subtly reinforces both the power of Anglo normativity and also the compliance of South Asian Americans with those norms. When the woman's father questions the relationship, the challenged suitor explodes: “You and your folks can come down here from God knows where and be about as black as the ace of spades, and as soon as you get here you start acting white and treating us like we're your doormats.” Reinforcing that perception is the reflection of an Indian motel owner on his own experience of racism. “I'm just a white person who stayed in the sun too long,” he lamented, thus implying that his skin color was essentially light enough for him to be accepted by white Mississippians.²⁹

In the face of durable institutions—from town house to White House, from classroom to workplace—that reflect the history of race/class inequity in the United States, and also the popular media, including Hollywood movies, that perpetuate rather than deflect that institutional bias, one needs to do more than advocate diversity or continue to debate about multiculturalism. One needs to have a rigorous rethinking of categories, replacing diversity with polyvalence, multicultural ideals with kaleidocultural ones. Polyvalence advocates cultural equivalence, not more variety in the collective rainbow or more seats at the common table. Kaleidoculture affirms that there is no cultural majority: all cultures, including mestizo or mixed cultures, should find equivalent symbolic and institutional space within the arc of twenty-first-century American public life, but until their representatives cease to be defined as minorities, they will remain confined by the pressure to conform, to adopt, to assimilate, to disintegrate.

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If the goal of polyvalent kaleidoculture is distant, it is because of racialized class prejudice and all that it embodies. Minorities will always be defined by both race and class, each reinforcing the stigma of being minority. There is more to the category *minority* than prejudice about race and class differences; it is a word that denotes lesser in numbers but it also entails lesser in terms of access, power, and privilege in the public sphere. The word is entrenched in all discussion and analysis of contemporary social relations. I may not like what it means, yet I cannot avoid using it myself. My focus is Asian Americans and their religious/cultural worlds. I want to explore how one can think differently—at once more subtly and more positively—about Asian communities and other non-Asian communities in twenty-first-century America, but I cannot do so without using the word *minority*. Not just Asians but Latinos and Africans and Amerindians are American minorities because they are cast as such vis-à-vis the majority, which is also the dominant, Anglo community. It is never called the Anglo American majority because it is obvious that the American way is both Anglo and Protestant, while at the same time non-Anglo others are seen as independent minorities, whether Asian or Latino or African or Amerindian. Yet they are dependent on each other and not just on the relationship that each has with the dominant group—or so I want to argue in the pages that follow. Any long-term understanding of Asian Americans as a minority, in my view, will fail if it does not take into account their relationship to all three of the other minority groups who, along with the dominant Anglo group, are seen as defining the ethno-racial pentagon.

The ethno-racial pentagon? It is hardly a felicitous phrase, since the pentagon immediately connotes the Pentagon, a five-sided building that contains the headquarters of the U.S. military and projects U.S. political power throughout the globe. The ethno-racial pentagon, in its own way, is no less powerful than the military Pentagon.³⁰ The ethno-racial pentagon implies an equivalence among five groups that are far from equivalent. Each is defined by ethno-racial markings: Amerindian and African American are framed with Asian American as freestanding categories, while the Anglo category has a subset: Hispanic. To put it differently, it is called the ethno-racial pentagon instead of the racial pentagon because there is one ethnos, a group defined as like but not quite Anglos. These are Hispanics, meaning Latinos and Chicanos together, though one could argue that Latinos and Chicanos deserve to be separated, each with their own subcategory.³¹ But then the same could be said for Asian Americans (where else in the world

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are Pakistanis and Japanese regarded as statistically the same?) or Amerindians (tribes as diverse as the Cherokees and the Lumbini share little in common apart from the census designation) or African Americans (who include multiple Caribbean as well as African family trees but, and even more important, are mingled with Anglo-Americans far more than conventional wisdom or constructed categories admit).³² In other words, almost all the “neat” rubrics defining minorities hide untidy subjects. None is strictly linear, all conceal multiracial histories.

The same could be said for the unmarked majority group: Anglo Americans. Consider the case of American Jewry. Why are they defined reflexively as part of the majority? Because, argues Hollinger, “multiculturalism [in the United States] has been a means of advancing not cultural diversity as such but several specific cultures popularly associated with groups who have suffered color-triggered discrimination.”³³ In other words, Jews don’t fit the model of color-triggered discrimination, since they are neither colored nor economically disadvantaged. The same could be said for Americans of German and Polish, Scottish and Welsh, descent. They are hardly identical as cultural groups, yet because none is disadvantaged as a group, all are combined under one category: white = Anglo = European American, for the purposes of the U.S. Census.³⁴

There is more than a vast diversity cloaked within the ethno-racial pentagon. It is true that it rounds off squares, that it fits loose ends into a tight box, that it is procrustean, but above all, it projects the very racialized class prejudice that some of its defenders seek to remedy. Why, then, does it persist? Because it provides an administrative shorthand. First, it tags race as the key to wholesale notions of cultural difference, and then it provides socioeconomic entitlement for those marked as disadvantaged.

The history of the U.S. Census leaves little hope that the category “race” will ever be removed from this cornerstone of U.S. public policy.³⁵ Fixation on “race” reinforces popular perceptions that groups should be both typed and ranked by physical traits. How then can academic reflection on racialized practices help reduce them, or at least diminish their force? In chapter 1 I examine the work of two academics who have contributed to current debates about multiculturalism. One argues for religious pluralism, the other for civilizational purity, yet they both dismiss racialized differences as incidental, rather than central, to their own projects. They are not isolated voices; they represent an ill ease with race, or denial of its centrality, that pervades most studies of immigrant culture and Asian Americans. The ana-

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lytic value of scholarly inquiry is reduced when predispositions amount to systemic biases among highly respected scholars.

Another way to move beyond the ethno-racial pentagon is to move beyond government, or at least beyond the state as the sole instrument of governance. In chapter 2 I argue that civil society is a critical category if we are to move beyond either state or community as competing alternative sites for citizenship. Civil society is not an autonomous realm. It competes not only with the state and ethnic communities but also with the family and the market. Yet civil society alone provides hope for individual initiative and collective planning among groups that advocate either critical distance from powerful institutions or active resistance to both their norms and their values.

Through the optic of civil society one can chart not just the lived experience of centuries but also the emergence of prejudice, the practice of typing, then stereotyping, and finally the critical role of modern media in both reflecting stereotypes and perpetuating them. The individual may appear to be free, but in fact she is shaped by the memory of a homeland, by the views that she carries across borders as well as the views that others have of her. There is at once the perception that the “foreign” group as a whole is marginalized, and also that individuals within the group share a double consciousness, a living between the world of bygone images, not all of them unsullied or hallowed, and another world of day-to-day interactions that also carry different norms and values. What characterizes the range of immigrant and native minorities is a sense that they are “outside” or “out-cast” from the dominant group no matter what they do. The effort of this book is to elaborate on how out-groups in the United States have been marginalized by both race and class, and why both markers continue to elide in subtle but insidious new forms of prejudice.³⁶ At first blush, this distinctively American form of social exclusion may seem to have nothing to do with religion, since academic labor separates out religion, or religious studies, from the sociology of power relations, entailing as it does analysis of the social forms of hierarchy, prestige, and prejudice, yet neither Hindus nor Muslims, nor Buddhists, nor Sikhs can escape the elision of religious labels with race/class markers in twenty-first-century America. The benefit of civil society is to see how these connotations of religious identity are constructed by the state rather than being intrinsic to lived experience. They are neither timeless nor inevitable.

The state, moreover, operates within a framework of norm-setting insti-

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tutions, one of which is the judicial system. It is too easy to assume that courts have an objective view of the interests of all plaintiffs, but notions of the Anglo-dominant center or core of U.S. society permeate legal reflection in general and discussion of immigrants in particular. Chapter 3 unmasks some of the strange turns that lawyers and judges have taken: their view of Asian immigrants at the turn of a new century/millennium includes assumptions about all immigrants from the past century that need to be challenged.

At the same time, it is crucial not to exaggerate the category of religion in thinking about immigrants. Not all immigrants are marked by religion as their dominant cultural difference. How does one account for the non-religious or the irreligious? This “hidden” aspect of the Asian immigrant experience is the topic of chapter 4, and because it also links immigrants to specific metropolitan centers, such as Los Angeles, Chicago, and New York, it raises the related question of media portrayal of immigrants. Even though “out” groups are out to the extent that they share cultural exclusion and economic discrimination, cultural citizenship is conferred by mainstream media as well as by historical precedent and bureaucratic fiat. It is the role of media that becomes at once more crucial and more problematic when minority groups are imaged or imagined through group profiles. Even though many Asian Americans are also working-class Americans, they are too often represented in media as spiritual lodestones. Asian gurus appeal, above all, to that aging segment of upper-middle-class Americans known as baby boomers. To correct this distorted reading of Asian Americans, chapter 5 explores the contours of a generic cultural indulgence that might be best labeled “hypervisualization.”

Running through my analysis of racialized class prejudice is attention to the other element that, along with race, frames almost all American religious experience, including that of Asian American immigrants. That element is fundamentalism. Far from being peripheral to American culture, fundamentalism lies at its core. Fundamentalism has become axiomatic to contemporary American religiosity. It has become axiomatic because fundamentalists have defined the agenda even as they have protested that they are the ones excluded from the benefits of modernity. The politics of religion is identified with the fundamentalist voices, heard loud in America and abroad since the 1980s, channeled through visual as well as print media. What has not been heard is the echo of these same voices in the very agenda set by scholarly work.³⁷

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The politics of religion has precluded attention to other expressions of religion in the public sphere. Religion can and does exist apart from the state. Equally, religion can and does exist apart from the family. And what comes between the state and the family if not civil society? Yet civil society has been downplayed in studies of American religion because civil society is seen as compromised by political structures and market forces. Contaminated by both Wall Street and Washington, civil society ceases to be viable as a third space, one subject to influences from the state and the market yet not fully determined by either. It is precisely this liminal, variable role of civil society that must be recuperated from the fundamentalist rhetoric about American religion.

Because civil society helps us to grasp the social expression of religious groups in general and immigrant religious groups in particular, the long shadow of fundamentalism must itself be revisited in terms of civil society. The necessary first step is to see the contours of a cultural fundamentalism that etches the Anglo-Protestant ethos. Henry May described it as Progressive Patriotic Protestantism (PPP).³⁸ The key element here is Protestant; there is no love of country without a Protestant accent, just as there is no progress without Patriotic Protestants. Each word in this trio is linked to, and interdependent with, the others. While Progressive Patriotic Protestantism may have its equivalent in other religious traditions and in other parts of the globe, what concerns me in thinking about Asian Americans is their relationship to PPP in the United States.³⁹ The basic reflex is to understand that PPP describes more than religion. It is the religious reflex writ large in civil society. It is civic virtue that is Protestant even when it has no creed. It is Protestant even when the creed is Catholic or Mormon or Jewish.

The literary critic Harold Bloom, himself a devout skeptic, was correct to speak of the American Religion and to distance it from Christian belief: "There are indeed millions of Christians in the United States, but most Americans who think that they are Christians truly are something else, intensely religious but devout in the American Religion, a faith that is old among us, and that comes in many guises and disguises, and that over-determines much of our national life."⁴⁰ Yet Bloom was wrong to diagnose fundamentalism as "the great curse of all American religion, and of all religion in this American century." Bloom was wrong because fundamentalism is more than "the shadow side of what is most spiritual and most valuable in the American Religion."⁴¹ It is also close to the core of civic virtue.

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The reflex to think of America with slogans, such as “In God We Trust,” or “One Nation Under God,” runs deep through the American psyche, as we have seen repeatedly since September 11, 2001. What is overdetermined is not the reflex but its use toward political or cultural ends that reserve God for only one race or one class, one gender or one generation. The Progressive Patriotic Protestant is, above all, the middle-class white heterosexual male, with his wife and family. The actual advances in women’s liberation and professionalization have not changed either the reflex or the stereotype; they have only served to reinforce its fragility and the need for neo-conservatives to advocate more stridently its centrality to “the American dream.”⁴² Contemporary scholarship and media reports alike demonstrate that Progressive Patriotic Protestantism still pervades the minds, and motivates the actions, of many Americans, not just those self-labeled, or labeled by others, as Anglo-Protestants.

Who are the central advocates of cultural fundamentalism? One might presume that they are Protestant preachers identified with the Religious Right, such as Jerry Falwell or Pat Robertson. Some are preachers, at least to the extent that cultural assumptions of America as above all a Christian—meaning an Anglo-Protestant, market-driven, warmongering—nation pervade religious as well as political rhetoric. But the central advocates of cultural fundamentalism are also academic voices, whether Anglo, such as Samuel Huntington, or African American, such as Stephen Carter, or South Asian, such as Dinesh D’Souza.⁴³ All advocate some pure space that is defined as homogeneous, a group that is at risk, a culture that is in dire need of defense by high-minded politicians and their well-heeled, largely conservative constituents.⁴⁴

In what follows I want to emphasize not just the official ethno-racial pentagon but also the unofficial racialized blinders that limit the analytical value of even the most detailed inquiries into new patterns of global diaspora. Where do Asian immigrants to North America fit into the religion, race, and class hierarchy in the United States?⁴⁵ The religious studies scholar Aminah McCloud offers a purely theological explanation for Muslim difference. “For immigrants,” she argues, “there is a monolithic Islam in the Muslim world which is normative, and the real experience of African-American Muslims should be rejected; they should aspire to effect something called ‘orthodox’ Islam.”⁴⁶ Yet the underlying racialized class perceptions of immigrants cannot be ignored. Muslim immigrants do not simply pick and choose between different versions of Islam. To the extent

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that a variant or heterodox version of Islam exists, and is linked to African Americans, it becomes doubly tainted: it is both American (not Arab) and it is linked to the underclass, the underprivileged, the discriminated against, the oppressed. African American Muslims are not given equivalent billing in the menu of options for immigrant Asian Muslims. So vast is this gap between American ideals and the African American lived experience that one astute Asian observer laments “the process by which new immigrants have for over a century (mis)translated the black American presence into their own perplexed lives.”⁴⁷

The imperative is to see the Asian immigrant experience in the broader spectrum of minority social experience and minority political activism. This imperative becomes even more clear when we realize that the Civil Rights Act, which defined the 1960s for African Americans, coincided with the 1965 immigration act.⁴⁸ The full impact of both acts was not felt till the 1980s, when it became evident that “most of the people of the world on the move—immigrants, refugees, or asylees—were of dark color.”⁴⁹ U.S. immigration policy, unlike that of West European nations, attempted to avoid racialized xenophobia, in part because of the civil rights movement. As Lawrence Fuchs once observed:

The fact that Europe generally tightened its rules for immigration . . . in the 1980s at the same time that the US had become more open to diverse immigration could be explained mainly by the impact of the civil rights revolution, which led to the conclusion that it is wrong not only to abridge fundamental rights by race, religion, or nationality, but also wrong to base immigration policy on those considerations.⁵⁰

Yet racialized class prejudice against “people of color” remained even when the practical result of the new immigration policy was to expand beyond all expectations the number of Asians and Latinos who came to work and live in the United States. The newest immigrants were not free to choose their own lifestyles. According to a respected policy analyst, it was not wise even for Caribbean immigrants to identify with African Americans, because the latter were viewed as both indifferent students and unambitious workers. “The stereotypes that shape the relationships between white Americans and either Asians or Latinos,” notes Christopher Jencks, “have little in common with the stereotypes that shape relations

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between whites and blacks.” In other words, even among stereotypes there is a rank ordering, and some stereotypes are definitely more favorable toward immigrants than others. For instance, continues Jencks, “white Americans are not surprised when an Asian student hands in a good paper or when a Mexican worker in California holds two arduous jobs.” What this statement insinuates about African Americans is nothing short of racialized class prejudice at its worst. It is evident that in each example the dominant figure—the teacher and the employer—are both Anglo and upper class, yet their stereotypical judgment is not qualified with irony or critique; it is merely reported as common sense. Of course, we are led to believe, a white teacher would not expect a good paper from an African American student; he would be surprised. Of course, it is implied, a white employer would not expect industrious behavior from an African American employee. And so the Asian student, and the Mexican worker, should be “pleased” that both are positively stereotyped while their African American minority counterpart is not!

And the realm where this racialized class prejudice runs deepest is marriage, or more precisely, racial intermarriage. Jencks’s hyperbole extends to the white/black rift at the altar rail: “Intermarriage rates suggest that the social distance between whites and blacks is also far greater than that between whites and either Asians or Latinos.” Using statistics to bolster his claims, Jencks declares: “Only 6 percent of married black men and 3 percent of married black women had a non-black spouse in 1998.” The Asian case is starkly different: “While almost all Asian immigrants marry other Asians, a third of their children and over half their grandchildren marry non-Asians. The figures for Latinos are almost identical.”⁵¹

So deep is this racialized class prejudice that it affects others who observe, analyze, then describe how American immigrants, regardless of their religious practices, are restricted in their social choices. *American Medina* is a pioneering study of Sunni Muslim immigrants to Chicago. Its Danish author analyzes intergenerational as well as professional cross sections of the diverse immigrant community in greater metropolitan Chicago. While it does not highlight the intrinsic racialization of choices by immigrant Muslims, the extrinsic racialization is evident. There is, for instance, the contest over language, dress code, mosque space between Arabs and South Asians, but these issues pale next to the inter-Muslim racial values that separate African Americans from South Asians. Consider an especially powerful local preacher, an African American convert to

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Islam in the Chicago area. He focuses on Islam as the solution to the social gap between white and black America. Why? Because, observes the Danish scholar, this young preacher “formulates Islam according to an African American experience that still, by the late 1990s, is placed at the bottom end of the social scale.”⁵² There is no qualification or critique of the assumption that to be African American is to occupy the lowest rung in a nominally classless society that is rife with class, and also race/class, assumptions. Similarly, an Egyptian researcher, in examining a Houston mosque/Islamic center, discusses relations between its Arab and Pakistani members. Then, turning to African Americans, she offers the stark observation that “immigrant Muslims choose to identify themselves with whites rather than blacks . . . [since] the children of Arab and Pakistani immigrants rarely marry African Americans.”⁵³ In other words, the barrier between all immigrant Muslims and the largest group of American converts, African Americans, remains high, as it does for other Asian groups defined by religion, whether they be Hindu or Buddhist or Sikh.

Because racialized class prejudice persists, it needs to be included in any assessment of American religion or American society, and precisely because it has been so routinely neglected or presumed as “self-evident,” it informs the chief theoretical contribution of this book. My intent is to frame notions of cultural citizenship and cultural fundamentalism on a continuum that includes both immigrants and nonimmigrants, Asian, African, and Anglo-Americans. At the same time, I want to acknowledge, and preserve, the internal diversity of the very groups who are put in conversation with each other as though they were “obviously” different from all others when often they are also different from each other. Cultural fundamentalism presupposes the unquestioned centrality of Anglo culture, while multiculturalism seems to oppose it. Yet, all too often the advocates of multiculturalism frame difference in terms of static, essentialized notions of culture/religion that freeze persons into a textualized, abstract norm that makes them but one part of a neat, lapidary mosaic. Multiculturalism at its worst allows neither for internal difference nor for multiple strategies nor for multiple speaking positions—especially, second- and third-generation immigrants are never the same in all circumstances and should not be treated as though they are.

Even more problematic is the failure of multiculturalists to address hierarchies of race, class, and power. The multicultural label not only disguises and manipulates difference, it also starkly raises the question of who

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decides who gets what benefits. If we do not accept black, brown, red, yellow, and white as self-evident, then “why should the tax monies of a democratic nation state go toward the project of encouraging individual citizens to remain culturally in the color-coded [and class-tilted] enclosures into which they were born?”⁵⁴ The answer is, They should not, and also these enclosures must be critiqued time and again, until dominant institutions—not just the government and the courts and the academy but also the media—promote class and color as markers of dignified difference, markers that invite engagement and respect rather than prejudice and discrimination. That may be a goal as utopian as it is distant, but to entertain anything less as a goal is to accept and also perpetuate racialized class prejudice.

In short, my approach in the chapters that follow is critical and comparative; it is equally interpolating and integrative. I am critical of racialized class prejudice even while acknowledging that it is a stubborn virus in the American social body. I compare many perspectives on race, on religion, and also on minority Americans, especially but not solely Asian Americans. I interpolate disparate views from polyvalent sections of the cultural kaleidoscope called twenty-first-century American religion, yet at the same time I try, whenever possible, to make sense of how irreducibly different subgroups engage each other, even at angles, even obliquely, even fleetingly. The continuous, imaginative engagement of Asian with non-Asian Americans—and vice versa—remains the best hope for a vibrant civil society. Though the United States can never be free of race or class or religious preferences, these preferences, to the greatest extent possible, should be acknowledged rather than presumed. To acknowledge is to challenge, to challenge is to change, and through gradual change future generations may yet hope to reduce the burdens of a too violent past and a still troubled present.