

Chapter 1 | Introduction: Ethnic Boundary Change and Panethnicity

IN JUNE 2012, the Pew Research Center issued a major report, “The Rise of Asian Americans,” on the demographics and attitudes of the Asian population in twenty-first-century America.¹ Based on a nationally representative survey, the report noted that Asian Americans are the “highest-income, best-educated and fastest-growing racial group in the United States” and that, as a group, Asians are more likely to marry across racial lines, live in racially mixed neighborhoods, and place more value than other Americans do on marriage, parenthood, hard work, and career success. The report highlighted the economic success and social assimilation of Asian Americans and emphasized that three-fourths of this population is foreign-born, suggesting that Asian Americans as a group are exceptional. The national media picked up the story and focused on the achievement and integration of Asian Americans.

Within days of the report’s release, over thirty key Asian American advocacy organizations contested the report’s portrayal of the Asian population as a monolithic model minority with few challenges. Community leaders explained that Asians have been erroneously understood as a model minority since the 1960s.² The lack of attention to significant disparities within and between various Asian subgroups and the dearth of data beyond East Asian groups have produced an inaccurate representation of the Asian American community, leading to misinformation among policymakers, institutional stakeholders, and the larger public. The full Pew report examined demographic and social differences among six different Asian national-origin groups—Chinese, Filipino, Japanese, Vietnamese, Korean, and Indian—but according to scholars and community leaders, it failed to discuss the role played by U.S. immigration and foreign policies in selecting educated migrants and refugees from Asia and also neglected the continuing economic and social inequality experienced

by Asian ethnic groups, especially Southeast Asians, Filipinos, and South Asians.³

The Pew report and the uproar it created among Asian American community leaders, organizations, and their members reflected the fact that, on the one hand, the label “Asian American” is commonplace and accepted in contemporary American society, but on the other hand, it is also contested and problematic.⁴ Today the panethnic label is regularly used in the media, in household surveys and textbooks, on job applications and college admissions forms, and in the names of organizations to represent a population that shares a racial background. But before 1968 the category and identity of “Asian American” did not exist. We often forget that the ethnic and national-origin groups racially categorized as Asian American have no natural or biological affinity. The first wave of immigrants arriving in the United States from China, Japan, and Korea did not form alliances or cooperate, nor did they adopt an ideology and narrative about a shared history. Instead, they built separate ethnic communities and depended on their own systems of social and economic support. So how did distinct ethnic groups with cross-cutting differences and contentious histories come to cooperate and build a shared identity? Under what conditions did group boundaries shift and change? And what is the nature of ethnic boundaries? Are they static or dynamic, layered or uniform, flexible or durable?

This book addresses these questions by investigating *panethnicity*, the process through which multiple ethnic groups relax and widen their boundaries to forge a new, broader grouping and identity. Clearly, distinct ethnic and immigrant groups can be part of the same racial, religious, or territorial category, and they may subscribe to or act upon expansive identities and labels. When different ethnic groups come to share interests and a collective history and build institutions and identities across ethnic or cultural boundaries, the result is panethnicity.

In the American context, this boundary shifting has taken place among immigrant groups who arrived in the United States with regional, ethnic, and language differences.⁵ Over time group boundaries expanded to encompass a broader array of ethnic groups: Poles, Italians, and Greeks became European and later white ethnics⁶; Mexicans, Puerto Ricans, and Cubans became Hispanic or Latino⁷; and Chinese, Japanese, and Koreans became Asian American.⁸ And yet, these boundary expansions, at least among contemporary immigrant groups, cannot easily be equated with assimilation, the process in which ethnicity declines in importance and salience. Members of these panethnic groups have typically retained meaningful ethnic boundaries.

Asian Americans, in particular, provide a compelling case for the study

of boundary change given their recent status as the fastest-growing immigrant group in the United States, which suggests their growing influence and prominence. Additionally, the extensive diversity within the category of "Asian" by national origin, language, culture, complexion, class, and religion further complicates the panethnic group formation process. As past scholars have noted, the Asian American population is far from homogeneous; in fact, it has been characterized as reflecting "heterogeneity, hybridity, and multiplicity."⁹ But one element that particularly sets the Asian case apart from others is the unique nature of past antagonistic histories between Asian countries. The relations among Asian ethnic groups in the United States were initially hostile, in part because of homeland politics. Japan's colonization of Korea in the early 1900s, the ongoing conflicts between Japan and China, and Japanese war crimes during World War II in China, Korea, Southeast Asia, and the Philippines influenced several generations, and those who immigrated to the United States brought memories of the war and colonization with them.¹⁰ Nevertheless, decades later, Asian-origin groups developed a new, broader identity and a collective history in the United States, built shared institutions, and organized their communities under a panethnic banner.¹¹

The development of an Asian American label and identity in the post-civil rights era may not be surprising to some because of the prevalence of racial categories and the continuing salience of race in contemporary U.S. society. But such a sentiment reflects the embedded and taken-for-granted nature of Asian American identity within American culture and society today. Such a view also presumes that racial categories assigned by the state align or correspond with actual group identities and behavior. When distinct groups enter a new society through immigration or conquest and are labeled as sharing the same ethnic, linguistic, or racial grouping, it is assumed that the process of group formation will be unremarkable. These groups, however, though deemed part of the same social category, may not necessarily see themselves as sharing similar interests, conditions, or outcomes. In the United States, immigrants from distinct groups are typically viewed as belonging to a larger racial category—as Asian, Latino, black, or white—and despite their allegiance to their homeland cultures and dialects, they must work to understand themselves as members of a single racial group. In many ways, it is part of the assimilation process whereby group members adapt to social schemas and contexts in American society.¹² But we must remember that racial group formation and identity do not occur naturally. The main contribution of this book is to interrogate the use of an Asian American panethnic label and identity, and demonstrate that panethnicity is not a natural outcome or process, but a social achievement.

Scholars have focused on the key role of racialization in shaping panethnic identities and group formation. Such explanations look at the ways in which social institutions categorize and treat individuals on the basis of race, leading immigrants and ethnic group members to form new panethnic identities.¹³ Because ideas about race are deeply rooted in American culture and ideology, racialization is constant and recurring: institutions' regular use of racial categories reinforces and legitimizes them, and individuals' everyday interactions not only are shaped by racial ideologies but often reproduce them.¹⁴ The implication is that racialization imposes racial categories on distinct ethnic groups through macro- and micro-level processes and erases ethnic boundaries, encouraging Asian Americans to identify and organize themselves along panethnic lines.

And yet, as shown by the recent reaction of Asian American advocacy organizations to the Pew report, panethnicity is far more complicated. Clearly, the use of racial categories by the state, mainstream institutions, and individuals provides the logic and motivation for panethnic group formation, but other conditions and processes mediate the translation of the broader forces of racialization into panethnicity. Here I build on past work by scholars who have interrogated the category of "Asian American" and provided a nuanced understanding of Asian American organizing.¹⁵ In further unpacking the group formation process for Asian Americans, this book advances our theoretical understanding of panethnicity (1) by focusing on meso-level conditions to explain the emergent variation in panethnic activity over the post-1968 era, when Asian ethnic groups took up and used the panethnic label and identity to organize in the public arena and form institutions; and (2) by expanding how we think about ethnic boundaries to see them as layered and mutualistic rather than as competing, a view that has broader implications for ethnic boundary change and assimilation.

Redefining Race forges new ground by arguing that when Asian Americans adopted a panethnic label and organized to challenge inequalities and build new communities during the post-1968 era, they did so not simply because the state had assigned them to a racial category that encouraged the expansion of group boundaries. Instead, Asian ethnic groups organized along panethnic lines when they were configured in ways that reinforced racial group boundaries and generated shared interests, identities, and statuses across ethnic, linguistic, and cultural lines. In particular, segregation—when distinct ethnic groups comprising a racial label or category are spatially concentrated within labor markets—created a context where group members could interact, develop shared interests and experiences, and build trust and solidarity across ethnic lines. The segregation of different Asian-origin groups in the same jobs, occupations, and indus-

tries increased panethnic group solidarity, especially when the institutional arrangements reinforced unequal access to resources and opportunities and disadvantaged group members.¹⁶ But those who participated in panethnic efforts were not solely drawn from segregated workplace or industry settings or from ethnic enclaves. Labor market segregation also produced a social reality consistent with a pan-Asian ideology that community leaders and organizers drew on when articulating needs and developing new organizations and campaigns.¹⁷ Without the community leaders who constructed pan-Asian narratives, shepherded ethnic group interests, and prioritized inclusive programs, panethnic organizing would not have been realized within the context of segregation.

Additionally, the racial segregation patterns in local labor markets reflected the fact that Asian ethnic groups were segregated from whites and, to some degree, from one another. Segregation among Asian-origin groups contributed to the development of strong ethnic communities and organizations, which ultimately benefited pan-Asian organizing efforts. Thus, a key mediating factor was the presence of organized ethnic groups that encouraged panethnic efforts. Organizing along ethnic lines could have detracted from panethnic organizing, but instead, the assertion of ethnic boundaries actually *encouraged* panethnicity. The boundaries between Asian ethnic groups—between Chinese, Japanese, Filipinos, Koreans, Vietnamese, and Indians—proved to be layered and flexible, allowing for ethnic ties to enhance panethnic efforts. This mutuality further informs our understanding of group boundaries and the conditions under which they expand, illuminating the concept of panethnicity itself. It challenges standard assimilation frameworks that claim panethnicity is simply reflective of assimilation—the erosion or attenuation of ethnic distinctions as ethnic groups become part of a larger panethnic group.

In examining the conditions that give rise to cooperation and collective action among different ethnic groups, this book illuminates the layered, multifaceted nature of panethnicity. It puts forth the *racialized boundary framework*—the argument that ethnic boundaries are not static but dynamic and layered, such that panethnic identities are taken up in certain times and places and not only are multiple affiliations possible, but they can coexist and even enhance one another. Recognizing the layered and flexible nature of boundaries is important because it disrupts the idea of race as bounded and durable. Yet, at the same time, ethnic and racial groups are structured by the social reality of race embedded within institutions and everyday interactions, a reality in which resources and privileges are provided for groups near the top of the racial hierarchy and closed off for those at the bottom. This framework also posits that social conditions within local areas mediate broader racialization processes, de-

mographic shifts, and political opportunities. Structural conditions and cultural narratives that foster intergroup relations and ties and help to generate a collective identity and status across ethnic groups go a long way toward explaining the emergence of panethnicity. Before groups can respond in panethnic ways to assigned categories, group interests and identities need to have been constructed across ethnic, linguistic, and cultural lines. Local conditions—specifically, racial segregation, ethnic organizing, and active leaders—can facilitate the panethnic organizing process among Asian Americans as they redefine race by creating new communities that span ethnic lines, break down racial stereotypes, and challenge unfair treatment.

ETHNICITY AS BOUNDARY PROCESS

Early theorists initially viewed ethnic boundaries as fundamental and immutable. The intensity and meaning of ethnic attachments stemmed from the cultural content of ethnic group membership, such as shared customs and historical experiences.¹⁸ An individual who had been designated as part of an ethnic group could not switch, change, or negotiate ethnic identity because it was part of his or her genetic makeup, something that was in a person's blood. Today ethnicity is understood as socially constructed and at least somewhat malleable.¹⁹ In defining ethnicity as "a subjective belief in common descent," Max Weber emphasized the notion that ethnic attachments are based not on blood ties but on a *belief* in blood relationships, or on what people perceive to be true in terms of common descent.²⁰ Other scholars have added to this definition to include shared kinship and ancestry, a common history, and symbols that capture the core of the group's identity.²¹ This conception of ethnicity reflects a process where group members define their own self-concepts, histories, and identities, suggesting that ethnic boundaries are not rigidly ascribed.

Fredrik Barth was among the first to advocate for the study of "the ethnic boundary that defines the group."²² He recognized that even though the social and cultural features associated with certain groups may change over time, ethnic boundaries remain intact and continue to distinguish between insiders and outsiders. Following Barth, scholars have claimed that ethnicity is best conceived as an emergent boundary with both symbolic and social aspects.²³ Ethnic boundaries are symbolic in that they are used to make distinctions between people, socially defining who or what belongs in which category.²⁴ Such distinctions can generate feelings of similarity (or difference) and group membership. Ethnic boundaries are also social boundaries because they are associated with patterns of exclusion, inequality, and discrimination. To the extent that valuable resources

are generated within the group, ethnic boundaries can protect these resources by preserving their use for in-group members.²⁵ They can also be used, however, as a device to maintain exclusion from material resources and preserve social privileges.

In sum, ethnic boundaries, though socially constructed, are meaningful because of the social and symbolic differences they enact.

DEFINING PANETHNICITY

We can understand *panethnic* boundaries as similar to ethnic boundaries, especially in regard to their ability to shift and change and their power as a broader social grouping that marks insiders and outsiders. But the uniqueness of panethnicity lies in the fact that not only are ethnic identities maintained but they are necessary for the success and longevity of the broader grouping.²⁶ Along with building commonality across different ethnic groups, maintaining diversity and recognizing ethnic distinctions are inherently part of the panethnic process. Panethnic community leaders and activists must work to negotiate, maintain, and sometimes mute ethnic group interests for the good of the larger collective. This diversity principle and balancing act may occur within the context of ethnicity and ethnic boundaries, but it is central to panethnicity.

Some groups engage in widening ethnic group boundaries to form a new, broader grouping and identity primarily as a political strategy, while for others the aim is to establish a cultural identity. Groups organizing along panethnic lines as a political strategy learn that this often generates strength in numbers, which is required in a crowded political field where many interest groups are making demands of public officials and policymakers.²⁷ Speaking out as Asian Americans rather than as Koreans or Vietnamese may garner more attention on the national public stage simply because of the larger numbers affiliated with the panethnic grouping.²⁸ Likewise, claims by a Latino or Hispanic organization are likely to be recognized by policymakers and the national press even when Salvadoran and Puerto Rican organizations have already been organizing around similar issues, but on a lesser scale and perhaps with fewer ties to broader communities. The downside of enacting panethnicity solely as a political strategy, however, is that it can often be fleeting. Groups may act in unison during a political campaign to achieve a clear goal that requires the participation of multiple groups, yet in people's daily lives the ties between ethnic groups may be quite weak.

For some individuals, panethnic identity is an integral part of their self-definition, shaping their everyday interactions and influencing important life decisions. Some individuals in the United States adopt a panethnic

identity because it enables them to feel like they are part of a larger cultural group whose shared experiences help them navigate educational institutions, workplaces, neighborhoods, and everyday life.²⁹ Their personal experiences of being seen and understood as part of a racial category, such as Asian or Latino, and being stereotyped—as foreign, as a model minority, as undocumented—contribute to the building of a cultural community.³⁰ For some, adopting a panethnic identity also represents a form of resistance or opposition to the typically white, middle-class American mainstream.³¹ For others, on the other hand, identifying as Latino or Asian is a way to keep outsiders from racializing them as black. In New York City, for example, Puerto Ricans identify as Latino and Nigerians as African because of the misperceptions and negative stereotypes associated with African Americans.³²

With their focus on understanding how and to what extent immigrants have been incorporated into host societies, assimilation scholars have often interpreted the development of panethnicity as part of the assimilation process.³³ Rethinking traditional assimilation theory, Richard Alba and Victor Nee define assimilation as the attenuation of ethnic boundaries and suggest that Asian and Latino immigrants become part of mainstream society as their ethnic origins become less important in daily life and as dominant group members come to see the social differences between themselves and new immigrants as diminishing.³⁴ In this view, when ethnic group members identify as Latino or Hispanic instead of Cuban or Mexican, or as Asian American instead of Korean or Vietnamese, assimilation is taking place. The adoption of a panethnic identity is equated with the erosion of ethnic distinctions, such that becoming Asian American means that the ethnic boundaries between Chinese, Japanese, Koreans, and other Asian-origin groups are declining in importance and salience.

Other scholars understand assimilation as a “segmented” process where the adaptation of immigrants and their children can take different pathways, depending on their experiences with racial discrimination and the amount of human capital they bring with them. Scholars using the segmented assimilation framework have suggested that those who lose their ethnic distinctiveness and adopt a panethnic identity are at risk of being downwardly mobile.³⁵ Those who identify with the panethnic identity of black or Latino are likely to be treated as a racial minority and to suffer the disadvantages of weaker ties to the immigrant community, which can often serve to protect coethnics in the face of racial discrimination and inequality.³⁶ Choosing a panethnic identity such as black or Latino seems to rule out the importance of an ethnic or national-origin one and is associated with a bumpy and uneven process of incorporation into mainstream American society. Thus, within both of these assimilation

frameworks, ethnic and panethnic identities are conceived of as mutually exclusive or as operating like a seesaw, where the assertion of one is associated with the decline of the other.

For the most part, I do not quarrel with conceptions of panethnicity as a socially constructed political and cultural identity. Clearly, people can take up these identities and use them when needed (that is, to advocate for a panethnic claim), and these identities are certainly salient in the daily lives of some people. I also recognize that panethnicity is part of a broader assimilation process that occurs over time and across generations. “Asian American” and “Latino/Hispanic” are terms or categories made in the United States; for new immigrants to accept such a label is one step in the assimilation process—one where immigrants become racial minorities and eventually, over time, a part of the larger mainstream. However, I build on past notions of panethnicity and argue that ethnic group boundaries expand to create a new, broader identity not simply as part of an assimilation process—that is, not just because the distinctiveness of ethnic groups wanes as they become part of a larger panethnic group. Instead, ethnic group boundaries can be both durable and permeable; when ethnic group boundaries widen to include others, those boundaries are not displaced, and in some cases, they are actually strengthened. Additionally, organizing along ethnic lines neither attenuates nor diminishes panethnicity and can even facilitate it. So while panethnicity may result from assimilation over time and generations, it does not necessarily reflect the demise of ethnic boundaries. The recognition of ethnic diversity and the preservation of ethnic boundaries is one of the hallmarks of panethnicity in the United States, and this book shows how and when this is possible.

THEORIZING BOUNDARY SHIFTS

Standard explanations for how distinct ethnic groups come together to produce a larger, composite group emphasize the state’s minority- or majority-making strategies.³⁷ In the United States, broad identities that transcend ethnic or national-origin boundaries emanate from state-imposed economic and political systems as well as from the dominant group’s conceptions of minority groups.³⁸ Michael Omi and Howard Winant explain that racial formation takes place through the state’s macro-level racial projects of developing and enforcing laws based on racial differences and creating official racial categories to enumerate the population, divide up voting districts, and allocate governmental resources.³⁹ There is also a micro level component to the racial formation process. The state’s racial projects reinforce the idea of race as a real biological difference at the micro level when individuals enter into everyday interactions in a so-

cial world where race and ethnicity are salient markers.⁴⁰ The perceptions and schemas that individuals develop can shape whether they take up racial labels, when they use them, the extent to which these labels organize their daily lives, and whether the ethnic groups that make up a larger racial, regional, or cultural category come to redefine themselves as part of a broader grouping.

The assignment of racial labels by the state and the larger society is a *racialized* process because it classifies groups of people into categories based on physical and cultural differences that are assumed to have a biological basis.⁴¹ Racial groups are viewed and treated as homogeneous with little or no recognition of their differences—in tribe, ethnicity, national origin, immigration history, and culture. Racialization is also in many ways a relational boundary process: how one group is racialized is inextricably linked to how other groups are racialized. Asians in particular have been defined and racialized, relative to blacks and whites, as foreigners (compared to blacks, who are native-born and accepted as American) and as inferior (compared to whites, who are superior in social worth).⁴² This racial triangulation matters because the racialization of Asian Americans affects the opportunities, constraints, and possibilities not only for Asian Americans but also for whites, blacks, and Latinos.⁴³

In the United States racial categories are also significant because they are organized hierarchically: whites are at or near the top, enjoying social, economic, and political privileges, and below them are other racial minority groups, some of which suffer systematic social, economic, and political disadvantages that have significant implications for their life chances.⁴⁴ Moreover, the ways in which the state ascribes racial categories to distinct ethnic groups—how the U.S. government constructs policies and distributes resources along racial lines—influences how groups organize and how they eventually come to see themselves. African Americans, Asians, and Latinos did not enter the United States as clearly formed racial groups, but state policies and political institutions provided new incentives and motivations for each group to draw certain types of boundaries across ethnic, religious, linguistic, and cultural lines.⁴⁵ The salience of group boundaries has been shaped by whether current groupings will be useful vehicles for political competition. Groups learn that organizing along particular lines that are recognizable to the state can bring visibility to their claims and interests, as well as social, economic, and political benefits.

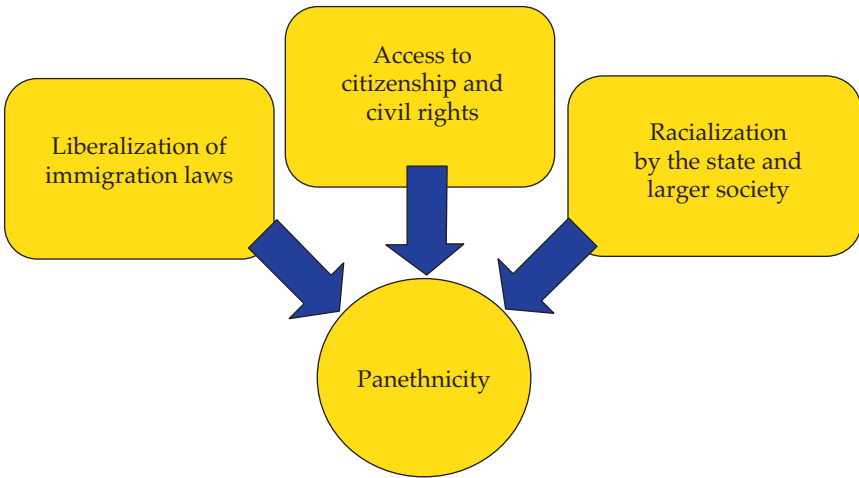
In her seminal study on the topic, Yen Le Espiritu argues that it was not simply state-ascribed labels that led Asian Americans to identify as a pan-ethnic group.⁴⁶ Ascription by individuals through anti-Asian violence was a key manifestation of the racialization process. Espiritu uses the Vincent Chin case to illustrate how racialized threats encouraged Asian Ameri-

cans to organize for justice and social change on a panethnic basis rather than along ethnic lines. In the early 1980s, Vincent Chin was attacked and killed by two white autoworkers in Detroit. They had mistaken Chin, a Chinese American, for a Japanese national and blamed him for the job layoffs in the area.⁴⁷ Because distinctions based on ethnicity, nativity, and generation had made no difference to Chin's murderers when they attacked him, all Asian ethnicities felt under threat. When Asian ethnic groups were racialized by others (that is, when racial status was made salient), they began to recognize their shared status and common fate and to work across ethnic lines to organize protests and create civil rights organizations.

In the United States, then, past accounts of boundary expansion have argued that when societies are organized on the basis of race—when social and political institutions *and* the public culture adopt racial boundaries as real—this provides the logic for the construction of panethnic identities.⁴⁸ The state plays a key role in implementing racialized policies or sanctioning racial discrimination, and individuals racialize others through key interactions. The overarching power of race compels ethnic group members to see themselves as part of a racial group when navigating mainstream institutions and everyday life. Put more positively, ethnic group members often respond to the constraints of racial boundaries by reshaping their identities to be based on a shared history and culture. In challenging racial categories by attaching new meanings to them, ethnic groups thus redefine race.⁴⁹ Their panethnic identities are formed through the interaction between the labels ascribed to them by others and their own assertions about a shared history and experience.

Beyond racialization, the expansion of group boundaries during the post-civil rights era was undoubtedly influenced by the rapid social and political changes in the 1960s (see figure 1.1).⁵⁰ Social movements forged by African Americans, women, and students challenged the status quo and the white power structure through political organizing, providing a model for social change.⁵¹ To present itself as a democratic world power in the face of stark racial inequalities at home, the U.S. government extended citizenship and civil rights to all groups, thus generating new social, economic, and political opportunities for racial minorities.⁵² The United States also abandoned its discriminatory immigration policies and opened the door to all nations, which resulted in diverse streams from around the world.⁵³ Social movements, federal policy adjustments, and demographic and political shifts contributed to new political rights and a growing and diverse Asian American population, but panethnicity, I argue, was not a natural outgrowth or result; panethnicity had to be achieved and negotiated. As other scholars have noted, the “identity-to-politics link”—the im-

Figure 1.1 The Broad Social Conditions Leading to the Emergence of Panethnicity



Source: Author's calculations.

plied linkage between demographic categories and a collective group politics—is a complicated and uneven process.⁵⁴

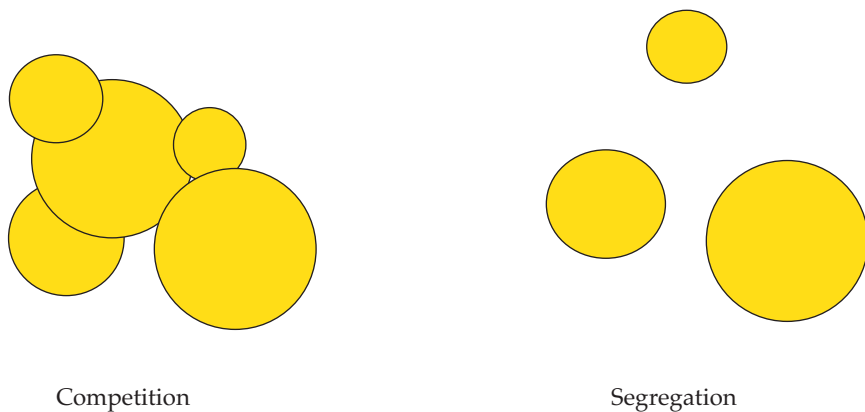
Explanations that point solely to racialization by the state and everyday individuals or the political opportunities unleashed by new federal policies are problematic because they assume that groups will respond to these factors in kind: once policies and categories are set, groups are expected to fall into line accordingly. If this were the case, however, we would see panethnicity everywhere around us. But to the contrary, as we will see throughout the book, panethnicity in the post-1968 era was the exception rather than the rule. Instead of attributing interests and agency to racial groups and assuming these groups are durable, concrete, and bounded entities, a more dynamic understanding of the emergence of panethnic categories is warranted. By distinguishing between groups and categories in our analyses, we can interrogate the relation between them—that is, the extent to which categories and groups correspond and the conditions under which they do so.⁵⁵ We can also begin to think about how individual and organizational actors interact with and use these categories, and we can focus on the processes through which ethnicity and race become manifested as categories, institutional forms, or organizational routines.⁵⁶ This book makes the case that the broad social forces of political opportunities and an increase in the Asian American population pro-

vided the possibility for panethnicity, but to understand when and how ethnic group members acted on the racialized boundaries imposed upon them and challenged established notions of race and racial inequalities, we need to focus on the local conditions and processes that shape the way these groups view and interact with one another.

THE RACIALIZED BOUNDARY FRAMEWORK

The racialized boundary framework advanced in this book suggests that socially constructed categories such as “Asian American” need to be propped up by structural conditions that encourage group formation and by narratives that are used and reproduced by leaders and organizations. Meso-level theories of ethnic conflict and solidarity address the particular ways in which ethnic groups are structured—as concentrated/segmented or as diffuse/integrated—and the impact of these structures on how group members organize, interact, and interpret their interests (for a visual heuristic, see figure 1.2). Such theoretical models focus on gleaning insights from local conditions about the mechanisms through which ethnic group members organize as a larger collective and about the creation and enforcement of ethnic group boundaries.⁵⁷ Standard threat and competition models, for example, suggest that because economic and demographic shifts in local areas encourage intergroup contact and competition, ethnic groups engage in collective efforts to exclude others from access to good neighborhoods, schools, and other desired resources, thereby maintaining

Figure 1.2 The Competition and Segregation Models



Source: Author's calculations.

or improving their position in the social hierarchy.⁵⁸ A number of studies have found support for competition as a key mechanism that heightens group boundaries and results in ethnic collective action.⁵⁹ In this case, ethnic group boundaries should expand when Asian ethnic groups, competing with other racial groups for material and symbolic resources, engage in panethnic efforts in order to be a competitive force.

The competition model is useful, but instead I draw upon a segregation model, which suggests that the structural context of segregation, by enabling the development of interethnic ties, trust, and shared interests, facilitates group solidarity. According to this model, the segregation of different social and symbolic groups through institutional arrangements such as occupational segregation facilitates minority group formation and results in ethnic collective action.⁶⁰ The centralized workplaces and cooperative work strategies that characterize segregated ethnic labor markets contribute to high levels of interaction among group members, who come to depend on one another for successful work outcomes, thus reinforcing ethnic boundaries.⁶¹ In addition, ethnic solidarity intensifies when ethnic group members have sole access to particular jobs, occupations, and industries because of closed social networks.⁶² These dynamics contribute to shared interests and experiences and provide a basis for group solidarity, especially if discrimination—which disadvantages group members by restricting their access to resources and opportunities—is just as responsible for such occupational segregation as ethnic preference. Applying this model to panethnicity, Asian ethnic groups' experience of racial segregation should reinforce the boundary between "us" and "them" (that is, between Asians and other racial groups) and foster common interests and identities across ethnic lines, leading them to see themselves as part of a larger group (Asian Americans) and to engage in panethnic group action.

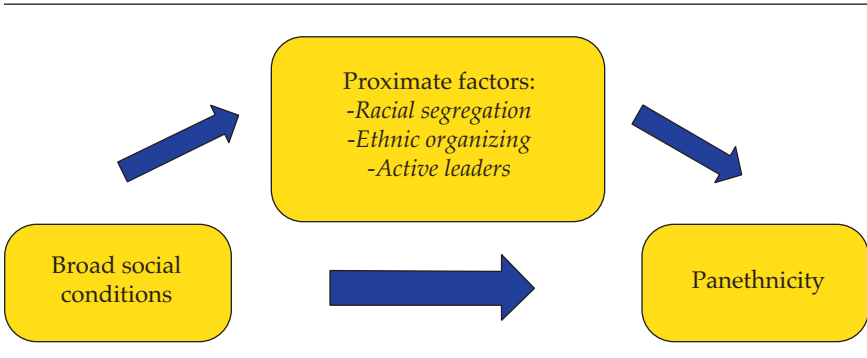
Additionally, how Asian ethnic groups are organized or distributed in a local labor market relative to one another should matter for panethnic outcomes. Because past research has primarily focused on racial groups in the United States, current theoretical models have not been used to understand the group dynamics that play out *within racial categories*. For new immigrant groups in the United States that can create identities and organize along multiple dimensions, it is not sufficient to simply examine relations between Asians and whites, blacks, or Latinos. To understand panethnicity we must pay attention to how the ethnic groups within racial categories are structured and what the resulting dynamics between them look like. The concentration of Asian ethnic groups in different parts of local labor markets should reinforce ethnic symbols, practices, and beliefs and increase ethnic solidarity. Yet this same dynamic is likely to make it difficult for interaction and trust to develop across ethnic lines, hindering panethnicity.

Beyond the mechanisms of interethnic interaction and the building of network ties and trust, I also argue that the structural condition of racial segregation has produced a social reality, which enables community leaders and activists to build and reproduce a narrative about experiences of inequality and unfair treatment among Asian Americans. To counter the “model minority” stereotype that all Asians are high-achieving, activists and organizers during the post-civil rights era drew upon the fact that Asian ethnic groups were concentrated in low-skilled jobs without access to affordable housing, workplace rights, and health care, and successfully promoted an Asian American identity when forming organizations and engaging in protests.⁶³ They also highlighted the fact that Asian Americans were not fully integrated into the American mainstream because they continued to be viewed as foreigners with divided loyalties. These leaders were also important as key actors who shaped the interests of community members, and negotiated and navigated the panethnic work. They constructed and reinforced a pan-Asian narrative about the shared social and political histories and experiences of Asian Americans, but they also recognized the diversity of needs and interests among the different national-origin groups when organizing protests and civic actions in the public arena.

Ethnic organizing is another structural condition that has encouraged Asian American panethnicity. Organizing along ethnic lines not only benefits the ethnic community but also provides an infrastructure for ethnic groups working together to support one another’s causes or to bolster a broader panethnic effort. *Ethnic organizations* have been central in providing the foundation needed to generate the support of different Asian-origin communities, and *ethnic events* have reinforced the ethnic solidarity so crucial to building a strong pan-Asian community. At times, ethnic organizations have also expanded their boundaries to include other Asian-origin groups as members and constituents in their programs and community served. This mutuality between ethnicity and panethnicity demonstrates the flexible, layered nature of ethnic boundaries, such that organizing along ethnic lines does not diminish but actually enhances panethnic collective action.

Put simply, the racialized boundary framework advanced in this book argues that a structure and narrative must be in place to facilitate panethnic organizing, and it identifies three key social conditions in generating a collective panethnic identity that can cut across language, citizenship, national origin, and phenotype—racial segregation, ethnic organizing, and active leaders. Figure 1.3 depicts how the broader social conditions shown in figure 1.1. are mediated by these proximate social conditions to produce panethnicity.

Figure 1.3 The Proximate Factors Encouraging Panethnic Activity in the Post–Civil Rights Era



Source: Author's calculations.

ASIAN AMERICANS IN THE UNITED STATES

The label of “Asian American” is used to describe more than forty-five Asian-origin groups, from countries ranging from Bangladesh to Vietnam to South Korea, that differ in terms of culture, language, religion, and even appearance.⁶⁴ As the size of the Asian American population has steadily grown over the last twenty-five years, it has become more visible and influential within U.S. society. In 1970 Asian Americans made up only 1.4 percent of the total U.S. population, and as shown in table 1.1, none of the six largest Asian ethnic groups—Chinese, Japanese, Filipino, Asian Indian, Korean, and Vietnamese—had reached 1 million in population. By 2000 Asian Americans made up 4.2 percent of the U.S. population, which translated into 12 million people.⁶⁵ In 2010 Asian Americans were the fastest-growing racial group in the United States, they made up the largest share of recent immigrants, and they had a total population of over 17 million.⁶⁶

Nearly two-thirds of the Asian population in the United States today is foreign-born, which complicates the possibility of panethnicity in the contemporary context. Immigrants from different parts of Asia arrive in the United States with their own languages, cultural traditions, and religious beliefs. Generational differences are also prevalent among these groups, and simply finding commonalities within ethnic groups can often be challenging.⁶⁷ Referring to the traditional values of the first generation, Tom, a U.S.-born Korean American organizational leader, explained (with a chuckle because of its familiarity as a topic within the Korean community), “It does create a barrier for us. We try to work with it the best we

Table 1.1 Asian American Population, by Decade, 1980–2010

	1980	1990	2000	2010
Chinese	806,040	1,645,472	2,445,363	4,010,114
Filipino	774,652	1,406,770	2,364,815	3,416,840
Indian	361,531	815,447	1,899,599	3,183,063
Japanese	700,974	847,562	1,148,932	1,304,286
Korean	354,593	798,849	1,228,427	1,706,822
Vietnamese	261,729	614,547	1,223,736	1,737,433
Other Asian	—	779,991	1,623,020	2,353,507
Total	3,259,519	8,554,110	12,223,370	17,927,506

Source: See US census reports from Barnes and Bennett (2002, Table 4, p. 9), Gibson and Jung (2002, Table C1 and C3), and Hoeffel et al. (2012, Table 5, p. 14).

Note: U.S. census, 100-percent data. No data are reported for the “Other Asian” category in 1980 because no other Asian ethnic categories were enumerated as part of the race question. In 1990, “Other Asian” was calculated to include Cambodian, Hmong, Laotian, Thai, and other Asian. In 2000 and 2010, totals reported are for Asian alone or in combination with one or more races, and “Other Asian” includes Bangladeshi, Cambodian, Hmong, Indonesian, Laotian, Malaysian, Pakistani, Sri Lankan, Taiwanese, Thai, and other Asian.

can, and recognizing that they are also a part of the community is important, and trying to change it is challenging, difficult, and damn near impossible!” Panethnic collaboration and cooperation among second-generation Asian Americans coming of age in many different Asian-origin groups may be somewhat easier because they have the shared experience of growing up in the United States. The second generation shares a language and culture, as well as an understanding of how to organize communities and navigate the political arena, but they still must work across ethnic, generational, and class lines when engaging in panethnic efforts.⁶⁸

Although the majority of Asians in the United States are foreign-born, there is clear variation among the six largest Asian subgroups: Koreans have the highest percentage of foreign-born (72 percent), and the Japanese have the lowest (37 percent). Table 1.2 demonstrates that there are also major socioeconomic differences among some of the Asian ethnic groups. Median household income ranges from \$45,980 (Koreans) to \$65,700 (Indians), and poverty rates vary as well, with Filipinos experiencing the lowest rates and Koreans the highest. For nearly all of the national-origin groups, nearly half of the adult population has received a college education with the exception of the Vietnamese adult population, only one-quarter of whom have received a B.A. degree or higher. This internal diversity of Asian America—which would be even greater if data were included on additional Asian-origin groups—and the widespread use of the racial category of Asian by government institutions represent a point

Table 1.2 Socioeconomic Indicators for Asian Ethnic Groups, 2010

	Median Household Income	Poverty Rate	B.A. Degree or Higher
Chinese	\$65,129	13.8%	50.7%
Filipino	\$78,202	6.1	48.5
Indian	\$90,711	8.5	70.8
Japanese	\$64,551	8.0	47.3
Korean	\$50,316	15.8	52.8
Vietnamese	\$52,153	15.6	25.1

Source: U.S. Census, 2010 American Community Survey, Selected Population Profiles, S0201.
Note: All indicators are based on respondents who chose a single race category.

of conflict where ethnic group members must negotiate their differences and the groupings imposed on them by the state to create a meaningful community.

This increasing diversity of Asian newcomers has presented a challenge for the formation of a broader collective identity, especially considering that ethnic groups also differ in terms of type of entry, which often is associated with differences in social and human capital.⁶⁹ Starting in 1968, immigration flows from East and South Asia have been primarily dictated by immigration policies that emphasize family reunification and occupational demands for low- and high-wage sectors in the United States, such as agriculture, health, engineering, and technology. Meanwhile, those who arrived from Vietnam, Laos, and Cambodia in the 1970s and 1980s entered as refugees due to the political turmoil in Southeast Asia.⁷⁰ These variegated flows have contributed to an informal hierarchy within the Asian American population determined by length of time national-origin groups have been in the United States, what immigrants brought with them (education, job skills, financial capital), and the status of the different countries of origin. These immigration and refugee flows also produce different historical and material conditions, which affect whether and how Asian-origin groups are incorporated, accepted, or resisted as part of a larger panethnic community.⁷¹

Because of their extensive histories in the United States and relatively high levels of human capital, the Chinese and Japanese have been considered the most established groups. Southeast Asians (Vietnamese, Cambodian, Laotian, Hmong), the newest and least assimilated group, are typically located at the bottom of the hierarchy, which further complicates the possibilities of panethnicity. Koreans, Filipinos, and South Asians are lo-

cated in the middle because of their histories in the United States before 1968 and their higher levels of human capital. This hierarchy may shift as the number of Japanese immigrants continues to decline and as the number of Indian immigrants with occupational skills and high levels of education continues to grow. Countries such as Hong Kong, South Korea, Singapore, and Taiwan are now known for their advanced, high-income economies and highly educated workforces. While they remain the world's fastest-growing developed economies, in recent years attention has shifted toward China and India. The rapid economic transformation of these two countries has increased their status within the international system, and arguably, the status of these groups in the United States has risen accordingly.

In addition to the social and economic hierarchies within the Asian American population, the view of Asian Americans as a model minority that has successfully assimilated into the American mainstream adds complexity to understanding boundary expansion. Asians as a group have made considerable economic and educational gains, even reaching parity or superseding whites on several measures of socioeconomic status.⁷² And today Asian Americans make up nearly one-fourth of the student populations at several elite colleges and universities, including Stanford, Harvard, and MIT. The representation of Asian Americans at UC Berkeley and UCLA is even higher, at almost half of the student population.⁷³ Asian Americans are also doing well in occupational attainment. Nearly half (47 percent) of all Asians work in management and professional occupations, such as financial managers, engineers, teachers, and registered nurses.⁷⁴

But if Asians have successfully assimilated, their ethnic boundaries should be diminishing and they should be an integral part of the American mainstream. As we will see, what the model minority stereotype overlooks is the low level of education among recent arrivals from China and Southeast Asia. New research shows that mobility is possible within one generation, but the fact that not all Asian Americans are at the top of the educational and labor market structures has implications for an expression of panethnic identity that distinguishes Asian Americans from the mainstream.⁷⁵ With their increasing numbers and diversity, the conditions under which group boundaries between Asian ethnic groups expand will continue to be a key issue for understanding immigrant incorporation and group formation.

THE ORGANIZATION OF THE BOOK

In terms of what is to come, the following chapters elaborate on the racialized boundary framework as a way of understanding why Asian Ameri-

cans took up a panethnic label and identity during the post-1968 era. Chapter 2 provides the historical context within which we can understand the widening of ethnic group boundaries. The exclusion of Asian immigrants from social and political citizenship during the pre-1968 era created a durable boundary between Asians and whites. At the same time, racial oppression, the hierarchical structure of work, and antagonistic relations among Asian countries reinforced ethnic boundaries, which hindered the emergence of panethnicity. The strength and durability of ethnic boundaries during this era was reflected in how Asian immigrants developed their own systems of support and primarily organized their communities along ethnic lines. These group boundaries began to loosen during the post-1968 era, in part because of the broader social and political changes of the late 1960s, which brought new social and political rights to a growing, diverse Asian population and also gave rise to the Asian American movement. These conditions undoubtedly set the stage for further panethnic activity in the contemporary period, but as I argue throughout the book, panethnicity was neither a given nor an automatic result of these conditions. Providing this early history is important because many presume that Asian immigrants entered the United States as an already formed racial group with shared interests. In emphasizing that this was not the case, chapter 2 not only demonstrates how panethnicity was shaped by broader social conditions, but also describes it as a deliberate social process with different contributing actors, including the state, student activists, community leaders, and ethnic group members themselves.

The next three chapters focus on the evolution of panethnicity in organizational and collective arenas in the post-1968 era and the conditions under which ethnic group boundaries expanded for Asian Americans. By deliberately focusing on organizational and collective forms of panethnicity, we can empirically “see” group boundaries in action. While racial attitudes and ethnic identities provide insights into the potential tensions and alliances between groups and the extent to which racial or ethnic boundaries are viewed as durable or flexible, attitudes and identities do not necessarily translate into behaviors.⁷⁶ Individuals engaged in collective panethnic efforts—that is, working across ethnic lines in pursuit of a common goal, such as challenging discriminatory action or forming a community organization—are asserting group boundaries and redefining racial categories.⁷⁷ Additionally, collective and organizational activity that cross ethnic lines must be coordinated and purposeful; group members must build interethnic relations and work together to ensure that the needs and demands of the different Asian ethnic communities are being met. Whether organizing a public event or working with others in an organizational context, group members must devote considerable time and

effort to planning and coordination, and oftentimes, they must also participate in intensive outreach efforts to secure the support of in- and out-group members. In short, collective and organizational panethnicity are deliberate accomplishments.

The data I draw on in these chapters come largely from original data sets. The first data set documents the formation of national organizations serving the Asian American community in the United States from 1970 to 2000. The *Encyclopedia of Associations (EA)*, a comprehensive public directory of nonprofit organizations, was the main source of information about when new organizations entered the field, how organizational characteristics changed over time, and when organizations ceased to exist.⁷⁸ Asian ethnic and pan-Asian organizations were located in different regions and metropolitan areas of the United States and served or advocated for ethnic-specific and broader Asian American communities. To construct the second data set, I gathered information on protest and civic activity involving Asian Americans from national newspapers from 1970 to 1998.⁷⁹ Newspaper data are useful for providing the “hard news”—the facts related to who, what, when, where, and why—and detailing how groups organize themselves, advocate, and make claims.⁸⁰ I searched in the *Los Angeles Times*, the *New York Times*, and the *Chicago Tribune* for accounts of collective ethnic and panethnic action events—protests, demonstrations, campaigns, public celebrations—across the United States over a nearly three-decade period in which Asian-origin groups were engaged in such coordinated group action.

The organization and event data sets both provide conservative estimates of pan-Asian activity: *EA* only captures the formation of large, established organizations operating at the national level, and major mainstream newspapers report on publicly visible events that are potentially relevant for social and political change.⁸¹ Thus, for my purposes, these data sets capture the organizations and events that serve as leading indicators of the level of Asian American panethnicity across the United States and can provide insights into panethnic boundary formation, but they are by no means comprehensive or exhaustive in measuring panethnic activity in all of its diverse forms. We might think of the formation of national organizations as a top-down process initiated and carried out by elites, and of collective action as a grassroots process that develops from within the larger community. But the distinction is not always clear-cut: many national organizations began as grassroots initiatives with a handful of volunteers (chapter 3), and some of the leaders and activists who had a hand in organizing the masses to engage in protest and civic actions were part of the political and educational elite (chapter 4).

In chapters 3 and 4, I discuss the ways in which ethnic identities were

transformed into panethnic ones through collective organizing efforts during the post-civil rights era. Building upon the founding moments of social movement activism that contributed to the formation of new panethnic organizations (chapter 2), chapter 3 describes the development of the national pan-Asian organizational field in the United States and emphasizes that after 1970 new organizations began to focus on serving a broader Asian American community rather than advancing cross-cultural education and trade, as their predecessors had done. Beyond the broad social and political opportunities that emerged in the post-1968 era thanks to civil rights, citizenship, and immigration legislation, local conditions also shaped the ability of Asian ethnic groups to organize along panethnic lines. Specifically, interracial contact and competition did not activate panethnic boundaries, but when Asians found themselves clustered together in the occupational structure, they began to form panethnic organizations. While racial segregation produced shared interests, network ties, and trust among Asian ethnic groups, leaders also played an important role in developing and reinforcing the pan-Asian narrative, which was critical to generating and sustaining panethnicity.

Chapter 4 elaborates on the dynamic nature of ethnic boundaries by highlighting the fact that while Asian Americans were engaging in panethnic collective action during the post-1968 era, they were also organizing along ethnic lines in the public arena. Importantly, ethnicity and panethnicity not only coexisted but were complementary, as one facilitated the other. In addition to illustrating the layered nature of ethnic boundaries, this chapter also highlights the ways in which leaders constructed and reproduced panethnic narratives at collective action events that emphasized the social and political commonalities among Asian Americans yet recognized the diversity of needs and interests across ethnic groups.

Throughout the book, I also draw on interviews with fifty leaders, staff members, and program directors from forty community-based nonprofit organizations representing Japanese, Chinese, Filipino, Korean, Southeast Asian, and Asian Indian populations and pan-Asian organizations serving multiple Asian-origin groups in San Francisco and Oakland. Additionally, I use information from public documents on both the organizations in my sample and organizations in the broader San Francisco Bay Area, including program fliers, annual reports, press releases, newspaper articles, newsletters, and online organizational materials.⁸² I use pseudonyms to protect the identities of the organizations and organizational leaders I interviewed, but I refer to the actual names of organizations and leaders when I cite publicly available documents, such as websites or newspaper articles.

The interviews, which were conducted in 2003–2004, provide insights into how community leaders think about ethnic and panethnic boundaries: who they view as part of the pan-Asian community, when and why they engage in panethnic efforts, what narratives they use when adopting new panethnic practices, and what factors hinder interethnic cooperation. Many of the subjects had worked in the community-based organization (CBO) nonprofit sector for over twenty years and were able to provide detailed retrospective information about the origins of the organization, shifts in its mission and programs, and changes in the Asian American community. The interview and documentary data also allowed me to move beyond panethnic organizations and events on the national stage and focus on the practices of local community-based organizations to gain a sense of the flexibility and reach of ethnic boundaries. The San Francisco–Oakland area provided a useful context for this study given its history of Asian American immigration, activism, and progressive politics. But while we would expect panethnicity to flourish in the Bay Area—and to some extent it does—panethnicity is a process that must be negotiated, developed, and maintained.

Chapter 5 draws most heavily on the interview and documentary data and further investigates the processes that encourage group boundaries to widen by taking a closer look at the organizational landscape in San Francisco and Oakland. It emphasizes the key role that leaders play in prioritizing panethnic programs, building ties with other ethnic communities, and supporting one another's causes, while at the same time working to maintain ethnic boundaries, all of which contributes to the larger purpose of panethnicity: recognizing ethnic diversity while creating a common panethnic boundary. This chapter also shows the impact of the panethnic model—which is now generally accepted by mainstream institutions and ethnic communities—on ethnic organizations and the ways in which leaders of ethnic organizations have framed the transition to panethnic practices. Organizational practices and leader narratives not only reveal who is part of the panethnic community but they also provide insights into the flexibility and durability of ethnic group boundaries.

Finally, in chapter 6 I address the broader implications of this work for understanding boundary processes by discussing how the theoretical ideas presented here relate to other groups, both within and outside the United States. In hopes of providing some direction for future research, I also consider questions that remain about boundary expansion and assimilation, the relationship between organizing and identity, and the durability of race.

A NOTE ON LANGUAGE AND CONCEPTS

Throughout the book I use the terms “ethnic” and “national origin” interchangeably, though I recognize that in some instances an ethnic group is not also a national-origin group—for example, the ethnic Chinese from Vietnam and the Hmong from Laos. Also, I often use “racial” and “panethnic” to describe the same group. “Racial” refers to groups that have been racially categorized in U.S. society, such as Asian, Latino, black, and white. Because these racial categories continue to be used by social institutions and remain significant in access to rewards and opportunities, and ultimately life chances, I use them here too. “Panethnic” refers to a grouping or category that is defined by the group itself, within the constraints imposed by the larger society. Ethnic group members, by taking part in creating their own collective histories, cultures, and identities, are challenging and redefining current notions of race, despite the fact that group boundaries are often set by the larger society, and serve as reminders of group positions within the racial hierarchy. I use the overarching term “community” to refer to a grouping of people who may or may not share a communal relationship or belief in a shared history and culture. At times, “community” refers to a population, category, or group, and it may not yet be clear whether group members actually understand themselves as part of a broader grouping. Communities need not be unified and cohesive, but they may be identified by certain cultural, ethnic, or religious markers. At times, in the following chapters, I also discuss panethnicity as identity, even though my data are about panethnicity as activity, practice, and narrative. I do not have original data on the strength and meanings that individuals attribute to their own identities. Instead, I examine social action at the collective and organizational levels, and use theory and past research to guide how actions relate to identity. I also draw upon leaders’ narratives and organization documents to understand how a collective identity—a connection with a broader category or community—is formed, expressed, and deployed.⁸³

Focusing on panethnicity in the United States as a way to understand group boundary formation is useful because it is a social phenomenon that will likely endure in the United States and beyond, owing to the forces of globalization, immigration, and the static nature of social hierarchies based on race, ethnicity, language, or culture. As immigrants from Asia, Africa, and Latin America enter the United States, Europe, and other parts of the world, they are likely to be categorized according to race, skin color, language, or appearance even if they see themselves as Chinese, Nigerian, Mexican, or Iranian. The insights provided in this book about the mechanisms and processes that encourage distinct ethnic, linguistic,

and cultural groups to form and organize around a broader identity, such as European, Latino, Yoruba, or Muslim, have many implications for group formation processes, immigrant integration, and intergroup relations. More generally, a greater understanding of how group boundaries expand has implications for inequality because social groupings are often associated with ranking systems and inequality, and when group boundaries shift and change, it is possible for minority groups to disrupt this process.