

Chapter 1

Ethnicity and Panethnicity

In November 1969, eighty-nine American Indians seized Alcatraz Island in San Francisco Bay, invoking an 1868 Sioux treaty that promised the return of unused federal property to the Indians. Identifying themselves as “Indians of All Tribes,” the island occupiers represented a large number of Indian tribes, including the Sioux, Navajo, Cherokees, Mohawks, Puyallups, Yakimas, and Omahas. They occupied the island for nineteen months, intending to turn it into a cultural, educational, and spiritual center for all American Indians (Nagel 1989: 1–2).

In June 1971, twenty-three Puerto Rican and Mexican American community organizations in Chicago formed the Spanish Coalition for Jobs (La Coalición Latinoamericana de Empleos) to fight for better employment opportunities for Spanish-speaking workers. Charging job discrimination, the coalition mobilized as a “Latino group” against two Chicago employers (Illinois Bell and Jewel Tea). These protests led to job openings and job-training programs for Latinos at the two companies (Padilla 1986: 164–167).

In the mid-1980s, Asian Americans of various socioeconomic backgrounds and ethnic origins came together to campaign against possible discrimination in college admissions. Prompted by reports of declining acceptance rates of Asian Americans at the University

of California and Ivy League colleges, community leaders charged that informal quotas were being imposed on Asian American university admissions (Chan 1991: 179–180). Asian American protest led to federal and university investigations of possible anti-Asian bias at the University of California, Berkeley and other colleges (Milard 1987; Woo 1988; Wang 1989).

These events call attention to the changing scope of ethnic identities, as linguistically, culturally, and geographically diverse groups come together in the interest of panethnic, or all-ethnic, solidarity. These developments cannot be explained adequately by studies of ethnicity¹ that focus on the quantitative transformations of ethnic consciousness. Though it is important to examine the degrees to which immigrant and minority groups retain their community-of-origins ties (Bonacich and Modell 1980; Reitz 1980) or assimilate into mainstream American life (Park 1950; Gordon 1964; Sowell 1981), we need also to look at the qualitative transformations of what constitutes ethnicity, that is, changes in who belongs to the ethnic groups (see Light 1981: 70–71).

Pan (the Greek word for "all") has been used primarily to characterize macronationalisms, movements seeking to extend nationalism to a supranational form (Snyder 1984: 4). Examples of such movements include the quest for religious unity (Pan-Islam), hemispheric cooperation (Pan-Americacism), and racial solidarity (Pan-Africanism). Whatever their basis of affinity, pan-movements involve shifts in levels of group identification from smaller boundaries to larger-level affiliations. Focusing on the idea of extension, *panethnic group* is used here to refer to a politico-cultural collectivity made up of peoples of several, hitherto distinct, tribal or national origins.

In the United States, examples of newly forged panethnic groups include the Native American, the Latino American, and the Asian American. These groups enclose diverse peoples who are nevertheless seen as homogeneous by outsiders: the Native American label unites people of linguistically and culturally distinct tribes; the Latino American category combines colonized Mexicans, Puerto Ricans, Cuban refugees, and documented and undocumented immigrants; and the Asian American unit comprises groups of different national origins that continue to be divided along class, linguistic, and generational lines. Despite their distinctive histories and separate identities, these ethnic groups have united to protect and pro-

note their collective interests. They need not do so always. But as these examples indicate, for certain purposes, panethnic organization takes precedence over tribal or national affiliation.

Focusing on Asian Americans, this study asks how, under what circumstances, and to what extent groups of diverse national origins can come together as a new, enlarged panethnic group. The theoretical question concerns the construction of larger-scale affiliations, where groups previously unrelated in culture and descent submerge their differences and assume a common identity. Whereas most studies of ethnicity have focused on the maintenance of ethnic boundaries (Barth 1969; Bonacich and Modell 1980) and intergroup conflict (Bonacich 1972; Banton 1983), the study of panethnicity deals with the creation of new ethnic boundaries and intergroup cooperation (see Padilla 1985). As such, it calls attention to the unforeseen persistence of ethnicity and the mutability of ethnic boundaries in the modern world. Most important, as an emergent phenomenon, panethnicity focuses attention on ethnic change and thus allows one to assess the relative importance of external, structural conditions, as opposed to internal, cultural factors in the construction and maintenance of ethnicity (Lopez and Espiritu 1990: 198).

Theories of Ethnicity: An Overview and Assessment

Ethnic consciousness continues to thrive in contemporary societies, despite Marxist and functionalist predictions that modernization and industrialization will bring about a decrease in the importance of ethnic ties (Park 1950; Lipset and Rokkan 1967). As Edna Bonacich and John Modell (1980: 1) put it, "Almost every society in the world has some degree of ethnic diversity and for most, ethnicity appears to be a pivotal point of division and conflict." In the United States, the civil rights movement of the 1950s and 1960s and the subsequent radical minority movements (Black, Brown, Red, and Yellow Power) reawakened sociologists and others to the continuing importance of cultural and racial divisions in defining lines of social order. A variety of theories have sought to explain the tenacity of ethnic boundaries. Two divergent approaches dominate this literature: the primordialist focus on "communities of culture" and the instrumentalist emphasis on "communities of interests."²

Primordialism: Communities of Culture

Primordialists focus on culture and tradition to explain the emergence and retention of ethnicity. Ethnic cohesion is deemed sentimental; that is, people form ethnic groups because they are or regard themselves as bound together by a “web of sentiment, belief, worldview, and practice” (Cornell 1988b: 178). Scholars taking this approach claim that this “intuitive bond” originated in the primordial past—at the beginning (Connor 1978: 377; also Isaacs 1975: 45; van den Berghe 1981: 80). This “beginning” gives ethnicity a special tenacity and emotional force. In other words, the meaningfulness of ethnic identity derives from its birth connection; it came first. Capturing the emotive aspects of ethnicity, primordialism offers a plausible reason for the durability of such attachments.

Nonetheless, primordialism has several shortcomings. First, primordial ties do not always lead to ethnic solidarity. For example, the strained relationship between Canadian-born Chinese and Vietnamese-born Chinese in Canada suggests that groups sharing the same ancestry do not necessarily fraternize (Woon 1985). Second, primordial explanations of ethnicity cannot readily account for variations in the intensity of ethnic awareness. As Ivan Light (1981: 55) observed, these variations “indicate that living people are making a lot or a little of their ‘primordial’ ties according to present convenience.”

Finally, in the primordialist literature, issues of economic and political inequalities are often treated as epiphenomenal (McKay 1982: 399). Focusing on the psychological origin of ethnicity, simple primordialism overlooks the economic and political interests that are so tightly bound up with ethnic sentiment and practice (Glazer and Moynihan 1963; Greenberg 1980). Because conscious ethnic identity emerges and intensifies under situations of intergroup competition, what need to be addressed are the structural conditions that produce ethnic groups—not only the cultural variables themselves.

Instrumentalism: Communities of Interest

Unlike primordialists, who assume that participation within the confines of one’s ethnic group is valuable in and of itself (Lal 1990), instrumentalists treat ethnicity as a strategic tool or resource. Scholars taking this approach argue that populations remain

ethnic when their ethnicity yields greater returns than other statuses available to them. The functional advantages of ethnicity range from “the moral and material support provided by ethnic networks to political gains made through ethnic blocvoting” (Portes and Bach 1985: 24). In other words, ethnic groups are not only sentimental associations of persons sharing affective ties but also interest groups.

The most extreme variant of the instrumentalist approach takes whatever attributes are associated with particular ethnic groups to be primarily situational, generated and sustained by members' interests. Thus membership in one group is only for the sake of obtaining comparative advantage vis-a-vis membership in another. As Orlando Patterson (1975: 348) stated, “The strength, scope, viability, and bases of ethnic identity are determined by, and are used to serve, the economic and general class interests of individuals.” A more moderate version combines an analysis of the external activators of ethnic behavior with their specific cultural form and content. For example, Abner Cohen (1969: 3) argued that because ethnic groups are culturally homogeneous, they can more effectively organize as interest groups. In either case, rational interests are assumed to play an important role in the retention or dissolution of ethnic ties (Glazer and Moynihan 1953; Bonacich and Modell 1980).

Rethinking Primordialism and Instrumentalism

Whatever their differences, primordialists and instrumentalists both assume that ethnic groups are largely voluntary collectivities defined by national origin, whose members share a distinctive, integrated culture. The phenomenon of panethnicity challenges these assumptions, calling attention instead to the coercively imposed nature of ethnicity, its multiple layers, and the continual creation and re-creation of culture.

Voluntary and Imposed Ethnicity

Focusing on sentimentality and rational interests, primordialists and instrumentalists posit that ethnicity endures because individuals derive psychological or material support from their ethnic affiliations. But the obverse is also true: once sentimental and eco-

conomic ties disappear, ethnics will vanish into the acculturated mainstream. These propositions imply that ethnicity is largely a matter of choice—in the sense that individuals and groups can choose to keep or discard their ethnicity according to their changing psychological and material needs.

However, to conceptualize ethnicity as a matter of choice is to ignore “categorization,” the process whereby one group ascriptively classifies another. Categorization is intimately bound up with power relations. As such, it characterizes situations in which a more powerful group seeks to dominate another, and, in so doing, imposes upon these people a categorical identity that is defined by reference to their inherent differences from or inferiority to the dominant group (Jenkins 1986: 177–178). Thus, while ethnicity may be an exercise of personal choice for Euro-Americans, it is not: so for nonwhite groups in the United States. For these “visible” groups, ethnicity is not always voluntary, but can be coercively imposed. As Mary Waters (1990: 156) concluded, “The ways in which identity is flexible and symbolic and voluntary for white middle-class Americans are the very ways in which it is not so for non-white and Hispanic Americans.” Her conclusion echoes the internal colonialism perspective, which maintains that white ethnics differ from nonwhites in the reduced severity of oppression they experience (Blauner 1972: 60–66).

Panethnicity—the generalization of solidarity among ethnic subgroups—is largely a product of categorization. An imposed category ignores subgroup boundaries, lumping together diverse peoples in a single, expanded “ethnic” framework. Individuals so categorized may have nothing in common except that which the categorizer uses to distinguish them. The Africans who were forcibly brought to the United States came not as “blacks” or “Africans” but as members of distinct and various ethnic populations. As a result of slavery, “the ‘Negro race’ emerged from the heterogeneity of African ethnicity” (Blauner 1972: 13; also Cornell 1990: 376–379). Diverse Native American tribes also have had to assume the pan-Indian label in order to conform to the perceptions of the American state (Keyes 1981: 25; Nagel 1982: 39). Similarly, diverse Latino populations have been treated by the larger society as a unitary group with common characteristics and common problems (Moore and Pachon 1985: 2). And the term Asian American arose out of the racist discourse that constructs Asians as a homogeneous group (Lowe 1991:

30). Excessive categorization is fundamental to racism because it permits “whites to order a universe of unfamiliar peoples without confronting their diversity and individuality” (Blauner 1972: 113).

When manifested in racial violence, racial lumping necessarily leads to protective panethnicity. Most often, an ethnic group is sanctioned for its actual or alleged misconduct, as when middleman minorities are attacked for their own entrepreneurial success (Bonacich 1973). But minority groups can also suffer reprisal because of their externally imposed membership in a larger grouping. Because the public does not usually distinguish among subgroups within a panethnic category, hostility directed at any of these groups is directed at others as well. In 1982, for example, as detailed in Chapter 6, a Chinese American was beaten to death by two white men who allegedly mistook him for Japanese. Under the force of necessity, ethnic subgroups put aside historical rivalries and enroll in a panethnic movement. According to Tamotsu Shibutani and Kian Kwan (1965: 210), groups often join forces when they recognize that the larger society does not acknowledge their differences.

This is not to say that panethnicity is solely an imposed identity. Although it originated in the minds of outsiders, today the panethnic concept is a political resource for insiders, a basis on which to mobilize diverse peoples and to force others to be more responsive to their grievances and agendas. Referring to the enlarged political capacities of a pan-Indian identity, Stephen Cornell (1988a: 146) stated that “the language of dominant-group categorization and control has become the language of subordinate-group self-concept and resistance.” Thus, group formation is not only circumstantially determined, but takes place as an interaction between assignment and assertion (Ito-Adler 1980). In other words, panethnic boundaries are shaped and reshaped in the continuing interaction between both external and internal forces.

Multiple Levels of Ethnicity

In general, primordialists and instrumentalists have used national origin to designate ethnic groups (Parsons 1975: 56). This approach ignores the range of ethnicity — from small, relatively isolated kin groups to large categories of people bound together by symbolic attachments (Yinger 1985: 161). Addressing this oversight, recent

studies of ethnicity have been more attentive to internal ethnicity, or ethnic differences within a national origin group (Bhachu 1985; Desbarats 1986). At the other end of the spectrum is panethnicity, in which groups of different national origins merge into new larger-scale groupings (Nagel 1982; Padilla 1985; Cornell 1988a).

Although prevalent, the movement from small-scale to large-scale organization is by no means unilinear (Horowitz 1985: 64-65). Among Native Americans, Ethnic organization occurs along three boundaries: subtribal, tribal, and supratribal (Nagel 1982; Cornell 1988a). Similarly, in a study of Latino politics in Chicago, Felix Padilla (1985) reported a shifting of identity between Cuban or Mexican American on the one hand, and Latino American on the other, based on the political context. In the Asian American case, researchers have noted both the rise of pan-Asian organization and the increase in conflict among constituent populations (Trottier 1981). The ebb and flow of panethnic tendencies indicates that ethnic organization is multitiered, situational, and partly ascribed.

Ethnic Group and Cultural Group

Primordialists and instrumentalists agree that a distinctive, integrated culture is the principal antecedent and defining characteristic of ethnic groups (Horowitz 1985: 66). This assertion ignores the emergent quality of culture: culture not only is inherited but can also be created and re-created to unite group members (Roosens 1989: 12). As Lisa Lowe (1991: 27) points out, "Culture may be a much 'messier' process than unmediated vertical transmission from one generation to another, including practices that are partly inherited, partly modified, as well as partly invented."

According to Susan Olzak (1985: 67), the majority of ethnic groups in contemporary societies are fundamentally new, making claims to cultural Traditions that are symbolic or mythical, or that no longer exist. With the changing positions of groups within society, old forms of ethnic cultures may die out, but new forms may also be generated (Yancey, Ericksen, and Julirni 1976: 391). Calling attention to the emergent quality of culture, Abner Cshen (1981: 323) reported that when different cultural groups affiliate themselves in opposition to other groups, their differences quickly disappear. As group members borrow customs from one another, intermarry, and develop a com-

mor lifestyle, a common culture emerges. Donald Horowitz (1985: 69) similarly concludes that "culture is more important for providing *post facto* content of group identity than it is for providing some ineluctable prerequisite for an identity to come into being."

The above discussion suggests that, in some cases, culture is used to define a boundary; in others, it is ultimately the product of a boundary. Hence, objective cultural differences need to be distinguished from the socially constructed boundaries that ultimately define ethnic groups (Hechter 1975: 312-326). Cultural differences are merely *potential* identity markers for the members of those groups. When this potential is taken up and mobilized, a cultural group—a group of people who share an identifiable set of meanings, symbols, values, and norms—is transformed into an ethnic group, one with a conscious group identity (Barth 1969: 15; Patterson 1975: 309-310).³

Because panethnic groups are new groups, any real or perceived cultural commonality cannot lay claim to a primordial origin. Instead, panethnic unity is forged primarily through the symbolic re-interpretation of a group's common history, particularly when this history involves racial subjugation. Even when those in subordinate positions do not initially regard themselves as being alike, "a sense of identity gradually emerges from a recognition of their common fate" (Shibutani and Kwan 1965: 208). Drawing on the experiences of blacks, Robert Blauner (1972: 140-141) argued that cultural orientations not only are primordial but can also be constructed from a shared political history: "The centrality of racial subjugation in the black experience has been the single most important source of the developing ethnic peoplehood" and "the core of the distinctive ethnic culture." Similarly, Love (1991: 28) maintains that "the boundaries and definition of Asian American culture are continually shifting and being contested from pressures both inside and outside the Asian origin community." Thus the study of panethnicity suggests that culture is dynamic and analytic rather than static and descriptive.

Ethnic Change: The Construction of Panethnicity

In moving away from cultural explanations of ethnicity, the study of panethnicity directs research and theoretical debate to

those structural conditions that lead to the construction of ethnic boundaries in the first place. For the most part, structural theorists have focused on the effects of economic conditions on ethnic solidarity such as the existence of a cultural division of labor or a split labor market (Bonczich 1972; Hechter 1978; Nielsen 1985). While important, economic explanations of ethnic solidarity are incomplete because they largely ignore the similarly paramount role played by political organization and processes. Noting the important role of the polity in modern societies, Daniel Bell (1975: 161) suggested that "competition between plural groups takes place largely in the political arena."

Ethnic groups are formed and changed in encounters among groups. To interact meaningfully with those in the larger society, individuals have to identify themselves in terms intelligible to outsiders. Thus, at times, they have to set aside their national or tribal identities and accept the ascribed panethnic label. Since the central government is the most powerful ascriptive force in any state, "there is a strong political character to much modern ethnic mobilization" (Nagel 1986: 96). According to Joane Nagel (1986: 98-106), ethnic resurgences are strongest when political systems structure political access along ethnic lines and adopt policies that emphasize ethnic differences. When the state uses the ethnic label as a unit in economic allocations and political representations, ethnic groups find it both convenient and necessary to act collectively. In other words, the organization of political participation on the basis of ethnicity provides a rationale for, and indeed demands, the mobilization of political participation along ethnic lines. As Jeffrey Ross (1982: 451) suggested, ethnic groups are most likely to exist where multiple access points into the political systems are available. Thus instead of declining, ethnicity is politicized and legitimized in modern states.

One possible explanation for the development of panethnicity in modern states is the competitive advantage of large-scale identities. The formation of larger ethnic units "gives people more weight in playing ethnic politics at the higher level" [van den Berghe 1981: 256; also Hannan 1979: 271]. While valid, this ecological perspective is incomplete. Panethnic coalition is not only an efficacious organizational strategy but also a response to the institutionally relevant ethnic categories in the political system. When the state uses a unitary panethnic label—rather than numerous national or tribal

designations—to allocate political and economic resources, it encourages individuals to broaden their identity to conform to the more inclusive ethnic designation. Over time, these individuals may see themselves as more than just an artificial state category, but rather “as a group which shares important common experiences: oppression, deprivation, and also benefits” (Enloe 1981: 134). Thus, shifts in ethnic boundaries are often a direct response to changes in the political distribution system.

To conceptualize panethnicity as a political construct is not to deny its economic function. On the contrary, panethnic organization is strongest when given economic reinforcement by the politically dominant group. The state’s recognition of “legitimate” groups directly affects employment, housing, social program design, and the disbursement of local, state, and federal funds (Omi and Winant 1986: 3–4). According to Paul Burstein (1985: 126), “politics revolves around economic issues more than anything else.”

Another economic dimension is the constraint of social class on panethnic solidarity. In general, similar class position enhances the construction of panethnic consciousness whereas intense class stratification **works** against it (Lopez and Espiritu 1990: 204). Ironically, class divisions are often most evident within the very organizations that purport to advance panethnic unity: the leaders and core members of these organizations continue to be predominantly middle-class professionals (Padilla 1985: 156–157). This class bias undercuts the legitimacy of the organizations and the use of panethnicity as their organizing principle. As argued in Chapters 3 and 4, however, the dominance of the professional class in panethnic organizations is rooted in the very way the state has responded to minority demands. Because the political and funding systems require and reward professionalism, the ability to deal effectively with elected officials and public agencies has become a desirable qualification for leadership—a development that favors more politically sophisticated, articulate, and well-educated persons (Espiritu and Ong 1991). Thus, once again, economics is linked to the politics of panethnicity.

The emphasis on the political nature of panethnicity does not ignore culture either. While panethnic groups may be circumstantially constructed, they are not simply circumstantially sustained (Cornell 1988*b*). Once established, the panethnic group—as a result

of increasing interaction and communication among its members—can produce and transform panethnic culture and consciousness. As persons of diverse backgrounds come together to discuss their problems and experiences, they begin to develop common views of themselves and of one another and common interpretations of their experiences and those of the larger society (Cornell 1988b: 19). In other words, they begin to create a "political history," which then serves as the core of the emerging panethnic culture—and a guide to action against the dominant groups (Blauner 1972: 141). Culture building is essential in consolidating ethnic boundaries because it promotes group consciousness, reminding members constantly "of the disproportionate importance of what they shared, in comparison to what they did not" (Cornell 1990: 377). In so doing, it levels intergroup differences and inspires sentiments conducive to collective action. Excellent examples may be found in the recent history of the United States.

Panethnicity in the United States

In the 1960s, the discordance between the American promise of fairness and the experience of discrimination led to organized struggles against racism, sexism, poverty, war, and exploitation. These social and political struggles led minority groups to realize that their interests could be better advanced by forming coalitions. In particular, the Black Power movement sensitized minority groups to racial issues and set into motion the Yellow Power, Red Power, and Brown Power movements. International struggles also contributed to panethnic mobilization. The visibility and success of anticolonial nationalist movements in Asia, Africa, and Latin America stirred racial and cultural pride and provided a context for panethnic activism (Blauner 1972).

As a result of the 1960s movements, ethnicity was institutionalized. Civil rights and the subsequent minority movements forced the state to redefine and expand the rights of minorities. Before these social movements erupted, the approved role of government was to ensure that people were not formally categorized on the basis of race. However, after the early 1970s, antidiscrimination legislation moved away from emphasizing the equality of individual opportu-

nities to focusing on the equitable distribution of group rights. This move led to the implementation of government-mandated affirmative action programs designed to ensure minority representation in employment, in public programs, and in education. (Wilson 1987: 112–114). Because affirmative action programs are oriented to group membership, they provide a compelling material interest for minority groups to resurrect dormant ethnic ties or to create new ones in order to pursue interests that may or may not relate to culture (Lal 1990).

Unwilling or unable to listen to myriad voices, government bureaucracies (and the larger society) often lump diverse racial and ethnic minority groups into the four umbrella categories—blacks, Asian Americans, Hispanics, and Native Americans—and treat them as single units in the allocation of economic and political resources (Lowry 1982: 42–43). In response, members of the subgroups within each category begin to act collectively to protect and to advance their interests. Tracing the development of Latino ethnic consciousness in Chicago during the 1970s, Padilla (1986: 163) reported that affirmative action policy “enabled nonunited groups [Mexican Americans and Puerto Ricans] to transcend the boundaries of their individual ethnic groups and assert demands as a Latino population or group.” Along the same line, Nagel (1982: 39) concluded that the various levels of American Indian mobilization “are responses to a particular incentive structure largely determined by US Indian policies.”

Thus, panethnic groups in the United States are products of political and social processes, rather than of cultural bonds (Lopez and Espiritu 1990). For these groups, culture has followed panethnic boundaries rather than defined them. Even for Latino Americans who share a common language, the designation of the Spanish language as the defining ingredient of Latino consciousness—its “primordialization”—is largely a response to the structural commonalities shared by the subgroups. Padilla (1985: 151) reported that Latino identity is related more to the *symbolism* of Spanish as a separate language than to its actual use by all members of the group. This is not to say that the state is an entirely independent force. Depending on its political strength and resources, a panethnic group can pressure political institutions to advance the material interests of its members. In a political system in which numbers count, this political strength is derived from a unified front rather than from the sepa-

rate efforts of individual subgroups. Thus, panethnicity is not only imposed from above but also constructed from below as a means of claiming resources inside and outside the community.

To be sure, panethnic groups are still full of internal divisions. Within the broad panethnic boundary, constituent communities compete for members and loyalty and fight for the modicum of political power and material resources generated by government-sponsored programs (Nagel 1982: 44; Cornell 1983a: 161-163). Historical intergroup enmities, cultural differences, and class divisions exacerbate these conflicts, at times polarizing the panethnic coalition. For the Latino and the Asian American communities, intergroup conflicts have been further aggravated by continuing immigration. This influx creates new constituencies that may feel inadequately represented by established panethnic groups; it also rejuvenates ethnic cultures, reinforces national allegiances, and reminds ethnic members of how little they have in common with members of other ethnic groups (Lopez and Espiritu 1990: 205). Hence the study of panethnicity is a study of the process of fusion as well as of fission.

Goals, Definitions, and Scope

Pan-Asian American ethnicity is the development of bridging organizations and solidarities among several ethnic and immigrant groups of Asian ancestry. Although subject to the same general prejudice and similar discriminatory laws, Asians in the United States have rarely conceived of themselves as a single people and many still do not. "Asiatic," "Oriental," and "Mongolian" were merely convenient labels used by outsiders to refer to all Asians. The development of panethnicity among Asian Americans has a short history. While examples of white oppression of Asian Americans stretch back over a century, a meaningful pan-Asian movement was not constructed until the late 1960s (Daniels 1988: 113). This book tells the story of this construction—of the resultant unity and division, and corresponding benefits and costs. The emphasis here is on the *political* nature of panethnicity, that is, on the distribution and exercise of, and the struggle for, power and resources inside and outside the community. Panethnicity is political not only because it serves as

a basis for interest group mobilization but also because it is linked with the expansion of the role of the polity [Enloe 1980: 5].

Panethnicity has not been well studied. Moreover, the few existing works on panethnicity have dealt primarily with Native American and Latino American panethnicities (Nagel 1982; Padilla 1985; Cornell 1988a). Except for several essays from the proponents of the 1960s Asian American movement (Uyematsu 1971; P. Wong 1972), the process of pan-Asianization has not been well documented. While social scientists have devoted substantial attention to individual Asian groups (Montero 1979; Bonacich and Modell 1980; Kim 1981), few have focused on Asian Americans as a collectivity. Yet a host of pan-Asian organizations testify to the salience of pan-Asian consciousness, as do the numerous cooperative efforts by Asian American groups and organizations on behalf of both subgroup and pan-Asian interests.

There are two dimensions of groupness: the conceptual and the organizational. The conceptual refers to individual behavior and attitude—the ways group members view themselves; the organizational refers to political structures—the ways groups are organized as collective actors. The boundaries of these two dimensions usually but do not necessarily coincide (Cornell 1988: 72). Some key indicators of pan-Asian consciousness include self-identification, pan-Asian residential, friendship, and marriage patterns, and membership in pan-Asian organizations. Given the multiple levels of Asian American ethnicity, a study of individual ethnicity can also document “ethnic switching”—the relabeling of individuals’ ethnic affiliation to meet situational needs. That is, a person is a Japanese American or an Asian American depending on the ethnic identities available to him or her in a particular situation. Sometimes the individual has a choice, and sometimes not [see Nagel 1986: 95–96]. While recognizing the importance of the conceptual dimension of panethnicity, this work is primarily a study of the organizational dimension: the institutionalization of Asian American consciousness, and not the state of panethnic consciousness itself. Thus, most of the evidence is drawn from the level of formal organizations. The research methods are basically those of the historically grounded community study, combining organization archives, public records, interviews with the leaders of organizations, participant observation, and library research.

Naturally, the rank and file's level of Asian American consciousness influences its institutionalization. On the other hand, grassroots consciousness does not necessarily precede the process of organizational consolidation. As this study documents, panethnic organizations need not merely reflect existing panethnic consciousness but can also generate and augment it. In building themselves, pan-Asian organizations also build pan-Asian consciousness. Thus, the organizational level is intrinsically worthy of examination because it tells us about the directions of the populations supposedly represented.

Moreover, pan-Asian institutions cannot survive without support; their very existence presupposes some amount of consensus. One research strategy would be to quantify this consensus. Another would be to identify the individuals who may have vested interests in promoting pan-Asian ethnicity, and in so doing name the dominant groups and sectors in the pan-Asian coalitions! The research question then becomes not who identifies with pan-Asian ethnicity, but who benefits the most from it—and at whose expense? Such an approach allows us to look beyond numbers to the power struggles and the resultant intergroup conflicts and competition.

The influx of the post-1965 Asian immigrants and refugees—who are distinct in ethnic and class composition from the more “established” Asian Americans—has exacerbated intergroup conflicts. The determination of what and whose interests will be defended often factionalizes the pan-Asian collectivity, as newcomers and old-timers pursue their separate goals (Lopez and Espiritu 1990: 206). On the other hand, the pan-Asian concept is now so well institutionalized that new Asian immigrants and refugees often encounter extensive pressure to consider themselves Asian Americans, regardless of whether or not they see themselves in such terms. For example, Southeast Asian refugees have had to adopt the Asian American designation because this category resonates in the larger society (Skinner and Hendricks 1979; Hein 1989). Accordingly, this study examines the benefits as well as the limitations of pan-Asian coalitions.

Scholars and laypersons alike have argued that Asian Americans are not a panethnic group because they do not share a common culture (Ignacio 1976; Trottier 1981). While Native Americans can trace their common descent to their unique relationship to the land, and Latino Americans to their common language, Asian Americans have

no readily identifiable symbols of ethnicity. This view involves the implicit assumption that ethnic boundaries are unproblematic. However, as Frederick Barth (1969) suggested, when ethnic boundaries are strong and persistent, cultural solidarity will result. But ethnic groups that are merging need not exhibit such solidarity. Discussing the ongoing efforts to build an Asian American culture, John Liu (1983: 123–124) stated, “The admonition that we can no longer assume that Asian Americans share a common identity and culture is not a setback in our efforts, but rather a reminder that the goals we set for ourselves need to be constantly struggled for.”

The construction of pan-Asian ethnicity involves the creation of a common Asian American heritage out of diverse histories. Part of the heritage being created hinges on what Asian Americans share: a history of exploitation, oppression, and discrimination. However, individuals’ being treated alike does not automatically produce new groups. “Only when people become aware of being treated alike on the basis of some arbitrary criterion do they begin to establish identity on that basis” (Shibutani and Kwan 1965: 210). For Asian Americans, this “arbitrary criterion” is their socially defined racial distinctiveness, or their imposed identity as “Asians.” As such, an important task for pan-Asian leaders is to define racist activities against one Asian American subgroup as hostilities against all Asian Americans. In her call for pan-Asian organization, Amy Uyematsu (1971: 10–11) referred to the internment of Japanese Americans as a “racist treatment of ‘yellows,’” and the mistreatment of Chinese immigrants in 1885 as mistreatment of *Asians* in America (emphasis mine). More recently, Asian American leaders characterized the 1982 fatal beating of Chinese American Vincent Chin as a racial attack against all Asian Americans (Zia 1984a). Thus, following Barth (1969), the task at hand is to document the process of culture building and its function in the construction and maintenance of panethnic boundaries—not to define and inventory cultural symbols.

The Steps Ahead

This study examines the continuing interaction between internal and external factors that forms and transforms pan-Asian ethnicity. Chapter 2 documents the confrontational politics that led to

the emergence of pan-Asian ethnicity in the late 1960s and the early 1970s. Although the pan-Asian concept was first coined by young Asian American activists on college campuses, it was subsequently institutionalized by the larger society. Chapters 3 to 5 examine several settings—electoral politics, social service funding, and census classification—within which the pan-Asian concept was institutionalized. Government efforts to reduce the number of Asian American groups by lumping them together for the purpose of working with them in electoral politics, distributing funds, and counting them in the census represent the external forces shaping the emergence of a pan-Asian consciousness. As a result of the institutionalization of the pan-Asian concept, the confrontational politics of the activists eventually gave way to the conventional and electoral politics of the professionals, lobbyists, and politicians. Finally, Chapter 6 analyzes Asian American response to the most threatening form of external imposition: anti-Asian violence.

Groups are forged and changed in encounters among groups. Thus the study of pan-Asian ethnicity is primarily a study of social relations, of fusion and fission between Asian and non-Asian Americans as well as among Asian American subgroups. Because the socio-political environment and the Asian American world are organized in different terms, Asian Americans often have to manipulate their own organizational structure to adapt to the changing social and political reality. Such manipulation can violate zealously guarded boundaries and long-established power structures, leading to intergroup factionalism and infighting. But intergroup divisions are not news. What is important is that these divisions have rarely led to formalized factions. Because of the need to present a united front to the public, internal conflicts are often handled privately—within the confines of the Asian American community. In sum, this study is about the power—as well as the limitations—of external, structural factors to bridge dissimilar lives.