

## *2 Mexican & Chinese Immigrants in Two Cities*

The 2000 Census revealed that the foreign-born population in the United States numbered more than 28 million people, about 10 percent of the total population. Although this is less than the 15 percent figure registered during the peak waves of European migration in the early twentieth century, it is significant nonetheless. Today, Asian Americans and Latinos constitute the nation's largest immigrant populations. Within those categories, approximately 2.7 million Chinese Americans reside in the United States, more than 20 percent of the almost 12 million people who identified themselves as Asians; Mexican Americans account for more than 65 percent of the country's 33 million Latinos (Barnes and Bennett 2002; Guzman 2001).

Although Asian Americans and Latinos are often described as “new immigrants,” these groups have occupied an important place in American history, having had a presence in the United States that matches that of many fourth-, fifth-, or even sixth-generation European Americans. The earliest Asian settlements in the United States can be traced to the mid-1700s, when sailors from the Philippines and China arrived on Spanish ships that were part of the Manila-Acapulco galleon trade. They debarked on Mexico's west coast and eventually settled in Louisiana (Okihiro 2001, 21). In 1870, nearly 9 percent of California's population was of Chinese origin (Takaki 1989). The Japanese also had a significant presence in the United States by the late 1800s (Lien 2001). Mexicans have been living in the West and Southwest since the mid-1700s, when that territory was part of Spain's empire. In short, Asian Americans and Latinos had already had a long-term presence in North America at the time the Irish, German, Italian, and other southern and eastern European immigrants began arriving in great numbers. Yet unlike their European counterparts, Asian Americans and Latinos

have remained marked as racialized minority groups. Race has significantly shaped the status of immigrants from Asia, Latin America, Africa, and the Caribbean in a way that it never did for European immigrants.

*The Racialization of Asian Americans e3 Latinos*

The conceptualization of Asian Americans and Latinos as groups was socially constructed as a result of processes of “racial formation” in the United States (Omi and Winant 1994).<sup>1</sup> Historically, in contrast to European groups, which gradually came to be widely accepted as white, Asian Americans and Latinos endured discrimination based on their non-European origins, which reinforced their minority status as “people of color.” Several historical events—perhaps most importantly the mass migration of African Americans from the South to the North—“conspired in the early and mid-twentieth century to heighten the premium on race as *color* and to erode the once-salient ‘differences’ among the white races” (Jacobson 1998, 95). White identity became more inclusive as Americans of European decent consolidated their position in society vis-à-vis non-European groups (Jacobson 1998). The racial hierarchy that developed as a result of changing definitions of whiteness is represented by the comments of Lothrop Stoddard in *Refor-  
ging of America*, published in the late 1920s: “But what is thus true of European immigrants, most of whom belong to some branch of the white racial group, most emphatically does not apply to nonwhite immigrants, like the Chinese, Japanese, or Mexicans; neither does it apply to the large resident Negro element. . . . Here, ethnic differences are so great that ‘assimilation’ in the racial sense is impossible” (quoted in Jacobson 1998, 98).

Scholars who have traced European groups as they evolved from marginal to full-fledged members of the white majority argue that contestation over white status and the construction of whiteness are critical elements for understanding the unequal distribution of social, economic, legal, and political power in the United States (Haney-Lopez 1996; Rogers Smith 1997; Jacobson 1998; Lipsitz 1998). To study the political mobilization of ethnic minority immigrants, we must examine the racialization of those groups.

*Latinos and Racialization*

Colonialism structured the racialization of Latinos generally and Mexicans and Puerto Ricans in particular (Horsman 1981). The U.S.-Mexican War

began in 1846 when President James Polk ordered U.S. military leaders into the Mexican territory encompassing California, Arizona, and New Mexico (Acuna 1988). The Americans justified the taking of these lands by claiming their racial superiority to the Mexicans, who were depicted as an impure and morally weak mixture of Caucasians and Native Americans. Just one example of this widespread perception appears in a 1842 statement by Waddy Thompson, a member of the Whig administration, justifying American expansion by describing Mexicans as “lazy, ignorant, and, of course, vicious and dishonest” (Horsman 1981, 212).

Following the signing of the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo, citizenship and voting rights were granted to Mexicans based on their perceived whiteness (Perea et al. 2000, 266). Mexicans with dark complexions were barred from participating in the political system. Juan F. Perea and his coauthors note that “the meaning of the grant of citizenship in the Treaty to Mexicans was largely contingent on the Anglo-American perception of the race of particular Mexicans. Dark-skinned mestizos, the mixed race Mexicans of Spanish and Indian ancestry so despised by white Anglo-Americans, were denied citizenship and meaningful political participation” (2000, 265). Most Mexicans who found themselves on U.S. soil after the U.S.-Mexican War were not allowed to vote because of their race. Similarly, the question of Puerto Rican citizenship and political representation turned on race. In 1917, Congress passed the Jones Act, which granted limited U.S. citizenship to Puerto Ricans. Debate leading up to the vote was contentious, with the opposition arguing that Puerto Ricans, like Mexicans, were of mixed ancestry and thus racially inferior and unfit for self-government (Weston 1972, 194–95).

Even after the U.S. Supreme Court ruled in *Brown v. Board of Education* that racial segregation was unlawful, Mexican American children in the Southwest continued to attend segregated schools that were inferior to Anglo schools in terms of infrastructure and resources. Until the Mexican and Puerto Rican citizens of San Bernardino, California, challenged a segregation provision in 1944, people of Latino descent were barred from using one of the city’s public parks. In Texas and other parts of the Southwest into the 1950s, Mexican Americans suffered overt racial discrimination in the form of separate bathroom facilities and restaurants that refused to serve Latinos (Perea 1997).

Anti-Latino sentiment was also expressed in the form of nativism and policies that targeted Latino immigrants or, perhaps more importantly,

those perceived as immigrants. Mexicans faced mass deportation during the Great Depression, when hundreds of thousands of people, most U.S. citizens, were forcibly “repatriated” to Mexico (Haney-Lopez 1996, 38).<sup>2</sup> From 1953 to 1955, the U.S. federal government ran a deportation program, Operation Wetback, that “repatriated” more than a million people per year of Mexican origin (Acuna 1996, 113).

The 1965 amendments to the Immigration and Nationality Act liberalized quotas based on nationality, and immigrants from Asia and Latin America began to enter the country in increasing numbers. This growth in non-European migration spawned a wave of anti-immigrant sentiment. Politicians capitalized on the anxiety of the native-born by proposing legislation hostile to migration from Latin America, especially Mexico and Central America. In 1976, a member of Congress from Pennsylvania introduced a bill that would reduce legal Mexican immigration from forty thousand to twenty thousand annually. The measure also permitted the deportation of the U.S.-born children of immigrants who were in the United States without legal documents. The 1980s saw the appearance of English-only laws and anti-bilingual-education efforts sponsored by U.S. nativists (Acuna 1996, 115).

By the early 1990s, anti-immigrant sentiment had reached a fever pitch, with politicians in California spearheading policies to discourage immigration. The state’s Republican governor, Pete Wilson, emerged as a key proponent of anti-immigrant legislation, even calling for the issuance of identity cards to distinguish legal and illegal immigrants. In 1994, sponsors of Proposition 187, the Save Our State initiative, collected enough signatures to place it on the California ballot. The initiative restricted the social services and nonemergency health care available to undocumented immigrants and denied their children access to public education. Proposition 187 also opened the doors to racial profiling by obliging public agencies to report suspected illegal immigrants to state and federal authorities. The measure passed by a vote of 59 percent to 41 percent, although opponents immediately challenged its constitutionality and the U.S. district court issued a temporary restraining order. Although the measure was declared unconstitutional in 1998, support for Proposition 187 provided the impetus for the U.S. Congress to pass the 1996 Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act, which limited legal immigrants’ ability to qualify for means-tested federal benefit programs.

The politics around Proposition 187 illustrate the racialized nature of

the immigration debate. Exit polls showed that 77 percent of Latinos opposed the measure, as did 53 percent each of Asian American and black voters; conversely, 63 percent of white voters supported it (Tolbert and Hero 1996). In his bid for reelection, Wilson reasserted his support for restricting immigration. A Wilson campaign commercial that showed brown-skinned men crossing a border fence at night seemed to suggest that the supposedly race-neutral anti-immigrant legislation actually targeted Latinos. The shifting racial makeup of contemporary migration appears to have been the impetus behind the California voter initiative and other anti-immigrant legislation (Valenzuela 1995).

#### *Asian Americans and Racialization*

Nativist sentiment in the United States has also reinforced the racialization of Asian Americans. One of the predominant stereotypes of Asian Americans is their characterization as a “perpetually foreign race” (R. Lee 1999; Perea et al. 2000; Wu 2002). Whether recent immigrant or fifth-generation American, Asian Americans are often assumed to be foreigners in the United States. In many people’s minds, Asians are aliens in America (R. Lee 1999, ix).

Prior to 1965, U.S. law barred many Chinese, Japanese, South Asian, and Filipino immigrants from entering the United States. Chinese immigrants had begun to immigrate as laborers in 1849 and 1850 but quickly encountered racial hostility, especially in California, where many had sought work in the gold mines (Takaki 1989). In the 1870s, the anti-Chinese movement gained momentum as organizations formed in California to urge employers not to hire Chinese labor and to encourage boycotts of Chinese merchants (Perea et al. 2000, 375). White labor groups justified the movement’s goals by painting Chinese workers as racially unfit for the American workforce, uncivilized, and even animal-like: “he is a slave, reduced to the lowest terms of beggarly economy, and is no fit competitor for an American freeman. . . . [H]e herds in scores, in small dens, where a white man and wife could hardly breathe, and has none of the wants of a civilized white man” (broadside printed in the *Marin Journal*, 1876, quoted in R. Lee 1999, 62). Even Irish immigrants, struggling for acceptance on the East Coast, joined San Francisco’s Order of Caucasians for the Extermination of the Chinaman (Jacobson 1998). In 1882, Congress passed the Chinese Exclusion Act, which relied on racial arguments to curtail Chinese immigration (Chan 1991a, b; Takaki 1993; Haney-Lopez

1996; Rogers Smith 1997), and in 1917, Congress further restricted immigration by creating the racialized “Asiatic barred zone,” which excluded all immigrants from Asia. Around the same time, some representatives also attempted to pass a bill banning immigration for “all members of the African or black race” (Haney-Lopez 1996, 38).

Asian Americans were also barred from citizenship based on racial status. In 1922, Japanese-born Takao Ozawa sought to become a U.S. citizen. His request was denied when the Supreme Court argued that he was ineligible to become a citizen because naturalization was only permitted for “free white persons and aliens of African nativity and persons of African descent” (Perea et al. 2000, 405). This ruling not only reinforced the notion that Asian Americans were racially unqualified to become full-fledged American citizens but also helped to construct a definition of whiteness (Ngai 1999).

In the wake of the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor and continuing throughout World War II, the use of negative racial images and stereotypes set Japanese Americans apart, and their portrayal in movies and elsewhere as villains and members of a “perpetually foreign” group was used to justify their mistreatment. The U.S. government initiated the removal of Japanese Americans to internment camps based on the unfounded assumption that they were potential spies and saboteurs. Leslie Hatamiya notes that “throughout the course of the entire war, not one episode of espionage or sabotage is known to have been committed by a Japanese American, citizen or alien. On the other hand, a number of people who were not of Japanese ancestry—many of whom were Germans or of German descent—were charged and convicted of espionage or sabotage for Japan” (1993, 12). Yet among all groups in the United States, only the Japanese Americans were forcibly removed from their homes and sent to internment camps during World War II.

The legacy of past exclusion and stereotyping continues to shape the racialization of Asian Americans today. Robert Lee points out that “well after the legal status of alien has been shed, no matter what their citizenship, how long they may have resided in the United States or how assimilated they are, the ‘common understanding’ that Asians are an alien presence in America is still the prevailing assumption in American culture” (1999, 164). Thus, in 1996, when the Democratic National Committee was accused of accepting illegal campaign donations from foreigners, the committee’s first response was to contact all Asian Pacific American

donors with “foreign sounding” surnames to ask them to prove their citizenship or legal status in the United States (Nakanishi 1999a, 34).

In 1999, Asian American community groups, elected officials, and others charged the U.S. government with racial profiling because of American officials’ treatment of Dr. Wen Ho Lee, a Taiwanese-born naturalized U.S. citizen accused of sharing nuclear secrets with the Chinese government. During his pretrial imprisonment, Lee’s arms and legs were shackled and he was forced to speak only English, even to his family members. Given the lack of evidence that he had mishandled classified information, civil rights and community leaders charged that this treatment was excessive. Echoing the concern expressed by many Asian Americans that Lee had been the target of racial profiling, the American Association for the Advancement of Science (AAAS) issued a statement to Attorney General Janet Reno: “Our purpose is to inquire into the reasons for the extraordinarily restrictive conditions to which Dr. Lee has been subjected. Our disquiet with the government’s treatment of Dr. Lee does not extend to the issue of his guilt or innocence, which will be decided by our courts. . . . Our concern stems from the possibility that Dr. Lee is being maltreated and may have been the target of special scrutiny because of his ethnic background” (letter from Irving Leach, Chair, AAAS Committee on Scientific Freedom and Responsibility to Reno February 2000 [American Association for the Advancement of Science 2000]). Lee was ultimately found guilty of only one minor count of illegally retaining national defense information, while fifty-eight other counts, most of which carried life sentences, were dismissed.

#### *Europeans and Racialization*

Popular history often glosses over the racialization of European immigrants, especially non-Anglo-Saxons, assuming that after arriving on North American shores, they were immediately accepted as part of the white majority. However, historical attention to the discrimination faced by members of what were widely accepted as distinct white races, including the “Celts,” “Hebrews,” and “Teutons” as well as other European groups, suggests otherwise (Jacobson 1998).<sup>3</sup> Recent scholarship (Ignatiev 1995; Jacobson 1998) underscores the persecution and rampant stereotyping of certain European immigrant groups, including the Irish, Jews, Germans, and Italians. Thus, one might argue that both earlier waves of European immigrants, especially those from eastern and southern

Europe, and contemporary waves of Latino and Asian American immigrants have entered the United States as members of racial minority groups. However, even though the whiteness of many European immigrants was contested in popular and political discussion, the racial discrimination that those groups faced differed in fundamental ways from that of contemporary, non-European immigrant groups.

Those European immigrants who were confronted with widespread hostility never faced the kind of legal racial restrictions on naturalization—on becoming full-fledged American citizens—experienced by non-European groups. Historically, U.S. immigration laws reinforced a distinction between European immigrants in general and groups from other parts of the world. In 1790, Congress restricted citizenship to “free white persons,” and immigrants from non-European countries were barred from naturalization because they were deemed “not white.” Throughout the early and mid-twentieth century, while racial distinctions between the Anglo-Saxon whites and Jews, Irish, Germans, Italians, and other European groups were being eradicated, the “nonwhite” status of Japanese, Chinese, Filipinos, and Latinos was being reinforced by U.S. naturalization and immigration laws. Asians suffered the effects of the Chinese Exclusion Acts of the 1880s and 1890s and the Asiatic barred zone. During the 1930s, “racialist dogma” fueled the expulsion of hundreds of thousands of Mexican Americans, including, as mentioned earlier, U.S. citizens (Chinea 1996, 11). European immigrants never faced deportation on such a scale. When racial restrictions on naturalization were finally abolished in 1952, it was a moot issue for Irish, Jewish, Italian, Greek, and other European immigrants because U.S. naturalization laws had never classified them as nonwhite (see Guglielmo 2003).

#### *Asian Americans e? Latinos: Shared Experiences e? Internal Distinctions*

In addition to their historical and contemporary construction as racialized minority groups, Asian Americans and Latinos also share other experiences. Both have been subjected to racial “lumping,” whereby many Americans and U.S. public policies fail to acknowledge the distinct ethnic groups within the categories “Asian,” “Asian American,” “Latino,” and “Hispanic” (Espiritu 1992; Omi and Winant 1994; Oboler 1995; Skerry 1997). Size of the immigrant population is one of the most prominent traits the two major groups share. Today, more than half the U.S. foreign-

born population comes from Latin America. Mexicans make up the largest subgroup, followed by Cubans, Dominicans, and Salvadorans. More than one-quarter of the foreign-born population comes from Asia, with Chinese, Filipinos, Indians, Vietnamese, and Koreans being the largest subgroups. Thus, 75 percent of today's foreign-born population comes from Latin America or Asia, whereas fewer than 20 percent are from Europe, a vast decrease from the 60 percent figure registered in the 1970s (Schmidley 2001).

Because both the Asian American and Latino groups consist of a large proportion of people born outside the United States, many Asian Americans and Latinos face similar adaptation issues in terms of learning English and acquiring citizenship. A 2002 survey found that 74 percent of foreign-born Latinos were Spanish-language dominant, compared to only 4 percent of U.S.-born Latinos (Pew Hispanic Center/Kaiser Family Foundation 2002). The 2000 Census reported that of Asian Americans five years of age and over, 79 percent spoke a language other than English at home (Lien, Conway, and Wong 2004). Further, both groups exhibit a relatively high level of noncitizenship. In 2000, one out of four foreign-born Latinos (Therrien and Ramirez 2001) and about one out of every two foreign-born Asian Americans had acquired citizenship (U.S. Census Bureau 2002). Shared experiences with immigration and issues of adaptation may provide a basis for coalition building between the two groups (see chap. 5; Erie and Brackman 1998).

A final point of comparison is the geographic concentration of these groups in a few major U.S. cities. Most Latinos reside in the New York, Los Angeles, Chicago, Houston, and San Antonio metropolitan areas. Similarly, New York, Los Angeles, San Francisco, Honolulu, and Chicago are home to most Asian Americans. Although the number of Latinos and Asian Americans in midwestern and southern metropolitan areas is growing rapidly, most are still concentrated in immigrant gateway cities on the West and East Coasts (Jones-Correa 2001).

These two panethnic groups clearly share many traits. However, both are also characterized by tremendous internal diversity along nonethnic dimensions, including class, nationality, religion, language, sexuality, number of generations residing in the United States, citizenship status, region of origin, gender, and political ideology. At times, both Latino and Asian American activists, attempting to construct meaningful communities across internal cleavages, have struggled with issues spawned by this

tremendous internal diversity (Espiritu 1992; Trueba 1999; Lien 2001; Suárez-Orozco and Paez 2002). Activists have also had to contend with internal group hierarchies based on ethnicity, racialization, class, immigrant generation, gender, and sexuality (see Glenn 1985; Romero 1992; Shah 1994, 1997; Alarcón 1998; Padilla 1998; Sawyer, Peña, and Sidanius 2004).

In summary, both panethnic groups are racialized minorities that mainstream society subjects to racial lumping. Asian Americans and Latinos are notable for the large and growing size of the groups, which include high proportions of immigrants and in particular large numbers who have yet to naturalize in the United States. However, this set of general similarities is crosscut with extensive internal diversity, which creates a complex weaving that is difficult to disentangle as we try to tease out the processes of political mobilization as they are experienced by the members of these groups.

To further our exploration, it helps to look at two important subsets within the panethnic groups, Chinese and Mexicans—specifically, Chinese and Mexican immigrants in two of the country's largest gateway cities, New York and Los Angeles. Examining two different ethnic groups is critical because without comparing groups, it is difficult to separate those factors relevant to immigrant political mobilization that are unique to a particular group from those factors that are important for immigrants more generally. Because geographic context is likely to affect political mobilization, it is helpful to focus on two cities. This makes it possible to detect how geographic context influences political mobilization within a single ethnic group.

#### *Community Profiles of Chinese Immigrants in New York e<sup>3</sup> Los Angeles*

A comparison between the Chinese communities in New York and Los Angeles highlights internal differences within the larger Chinese community that shape their political mobilization in the United States. Although a significant Chinese presence has historically existed in both cities, the communities are distinct and have evolved differently. For example, the traditional urban enclave (Chinatown in Manhattan) is central to Chinese immigrant life in New York City and continues to play a vital role in the community. Even Chinese immigrants who live outside of Manhattan, in newer Chinese American areas of settlement such as Flushing, Queens, and Sunset Park, Brooklyn, remain tied to Chinatown via a quick subway

ride or private van services. In contrast, Los Angeles's Chinatown has struggled to retain businesses and foot traffic. The Chinese communities in New York and Los Angeles are characterized by unique class dynamics. Further, longtime Chinese residents in both cities encounter distinct groups of new Chinese immigrants: in New York, many new immigrants are from the province of Fujian, located on China's southeastern coast; in Los Angeles, many new immigrants are from Taiwan.

*Chinese Immigrants in New York City*

By the mid-1850s, Chinese immigrants began to establish a significant presence in Hawaii and California. In 1852, twenty thousand Chinese arrived in the United States through San Francisco, headed eventually to the Sierra Nevada mountains to mine gold. Between 1867 and 1870, forty thousand more Chinese arrived, intent on working on the country's first transcontinental railroad (Chan 1991a, 28). Growth of the Chinese population in the United States slowed dramatically with the passage of the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882 and did not begin to grow substantially again until the mid-twentieth century (Chan 1991a; Haney-Lopez 1996; Rogers Smith 1997). Historians attribute the decline in the U.S. Chinese population to the impediments Chinese immigrants faced in developing family relationships and creating sustainable communities as well as to the exclusion laws (Takaki 1989; Chan 1991b; Zhou 1992). Most Chinese laborers who came to the United States before the passage of the Exclusion Act were men (the ratio of Chinese men to women in 1890 was twenty-seven to one), and since most states had instituted miscegenation laws prohibiting Chinese individuals from marrying anyone except other Chinese, many of these immigrants ended up living in bachelor societies in Chinatowns (Kwong 1996, 14).

Chinese immigrants had begun to arrive in significant numbers in New York during the 1880s. In 1870, the city's Chinese population numbered about 300 but twenty years later had risen to more than 2,500 (B. Wong 1982; see also Wang 2001). Largely as a result of illegal migration, the number of Chinese in New York City continued to grow slowly from 1900 until the 1940s (Kwong 1996). The U.S. alliance with China during World War II led to the 1943 repeal of the Chinese Exclusion Act; however, immigration laws passed in 1924 permitted the immigration of only 108 people per year of Chinese origin, and immigration from that country did not increase significantly until the discriminatory quotas were lifted in

the mid-1960s (Kwong 1996). Thereafter, the Chinese population rose at a steady rate, and between 1965 and 1990, approximately two hundred thousand Chinese settled in New York City (H. Chen 1992).

Manhattan's Chinatown, a dense urban space with many shops and residences, remains the nation's largest Chinese American settlement (J. Lin 1998) as well as one of the city's most homogenous Chinese neighborhoods. In 1940, its population was 11,000; by 1985, it had exceeded 100,000 (Kwong 1996; New York City Department of Planning 2001a). In 2000, the population in the Lower East Side/Chinatown Community District neared 165,000, with Asian Americans, primarily Chinese, making up the district's largest ethnic group (36 percent) (New York City Department of Planning 2001a).<sup>4</sup>

The socioeconomic status of New York's Chinese population mirrors U.S. immigration policies that favor family reunification and professionally trained individuals. Peter Kwong (1996) describes the effects of the preferences on the post-1965 Chinese American population:

[Professionals and reunified families] foster two very different types of Chinese immigrants. Those who arrive with professional skills are better able to integrate into the American society and do not settle in Chinatowns. They are the Uptown Chinese. While the 1965 Immigration Act favors professionals, 74 percent of the quota is actually reserved for the relatives of American citizens. Since most citizens of Chinese descent were traditionally of humble origin, mainly from the rural areas of southern China, their relatives are likely to have similar backgrounds. Immigrants in this category tend to settle in Chinatowns with their sponsoring relatives. They comprise the Downtown Chinese. (22)

Kwong's study suggests that many Chinese immigrants settle in Manhattan's Chinatown because they easily find jobs there, even when their occupational or English skills are low. Compared to many other immigrants in New York City, immigrants from China are more likely to come from poor, rural, and working-class origins. Chinatown's unemployment rate is minimal, although a large number of workers are concentrated in industries that pay less than minimum wage. Rent-control provisions mean that Chinatown's rents are generally lower than those in other parts of Manhattan, but about 80 percent of the area's inhabitants live in privately owned tenement housing, which is often deteriorating and not up to code (J. Lin 1998).

Chinatown is dominated by traditional industries, such as garment manufacturing and retail (including restaurants), but there has been a recent and significant trend toward finance, insurance, real estate, and high-wage professional service occupations (J. Lin 1998). Kwong (1996) reports that the community's 450 restaurants employ approximately 15,000 workers and that the approximately 500 garment factories employ about 20,000 workers. Local senior-citizen centers, English-language schools, and hospitals employ Chinese-speaking residents. In addition, some residents in Chinatown are small-business owners who operate gift shops aimed at tourists or businesses related to the restaurant or garment business, such as restaurant supply stores. As Chinatown's immigrant population has grown, businesses that serve immigrants have also appeared.

Before the 1970s, immigrants to Chinatown came from the southeast coast of China, including Guangzhou (Canton), as well as from Kwangtung and Hong Kong (Kwong 1996; Wang 2001). Many of the migrants who came to New York around the early 1900s were from Toishan, a rural area south of Guangzhou (Sung 1967). Until recently, Cantonese-speaking Chinese immigrants, including ethnic Chinese from Vietnam, Laos, and Cambodia as well as mainland China, settled in Manhattan's Chinatown. Since 1990, however, the population has begun to shift as an increasing number of immigrants arrive from Fujian Province, and by the early part of that decade, about fifty thousand people from Fujian lived in New York City, many in Chinatown (Frankel 1993). The exploitation of Fujianese immigrants by unscrupulous members of human smuggling rings received attention in 1993, when a ship, the *Golden Venture*, ran aground in Rockaway Beach, Queens. Many of the three hundred passengers aboard were undocumented Fujianese immigrants who had paid up to thirty thousand dollars for passage. By 2002, Fujianese immigrants reported paying as much as sixty thousand dollars (Guest 2003).

The Chinatown community has become characterized by increasing diversity along class, regional, and linguistic lines (J. Lin 1998). Tensions between Fujianese residents and other Chinese immigrants illustrate how such diversity shapes the neighborhoods. Many Fujianese arrive in New York with few economic resources and are channeled into the lowest-paying sectors of the Chinatown job market. More established Chinese residents in the neighborhood hold negative stereotypes regarding Fujianese immigrants, accusing them of drug trafficking, gang membership, and crime (Lii 1994a). The longtime residents also accuse the Fujianese of tak-

ing over parts of Chinatown, especially along East Broadway, where they have established restaurants, businesses, and Fujianese-serving social service agencies and advocacy organizations (Lii 1994b). Political divisions also exacerbate the uneasy relationship between older and newer Chinese immigrants. Many Cantonese immigrants tend to support the Taiwanese nationalist movement, whereas Fujianese immigrants are often sympathetic to the mainland communist government (Lii 1994b).

Organization leaders express uncertainty about how the diversity will affect the community's future development: said one, "In my day, we had Toishanese and Toishanese, and now we have everybody. Nowadays, the faces are all different. I mean we have northern faces, and the food. It's wonderful. An amazing explosion. And we have Fukianese [Fujianese] with their associations. There are going to be a lot of differences, and I don't know if that will be better or worse, because it may end up splitting us, which is even worse."

Although Chinatown remains a major settlement area for Chinese immigrants, many also settle in other parts of New York City, such as the multicultural Flushing and Elmhurst-Corona neighborhoods in Queens and Sunset Park in Brooklyn. Recent immigrants from Hong Kong and Taiwan (about 17 percent of all Chinese immigrants to New York) are attracted to other areas because they consider Chinatown to be overcrowded and do not speak its dominant dialects, Cantonese and Toishanese (H. Chen 1992; Hum and Zonta 2000, 214). Neighborhoods outside of Chinatown tend to be more diverse and less commercial, and their Chinese residents tend to rank slightly higher socioeconomically than Chinatown's residents (Hum and Zonta 2000).

In Flushing, for example, students who could not afford Manhattan's high rents were among the first Chinese immigrants to settle there (H. Chen 1992). Today, it is characterized by Chinese businesses, including grocery stores, restaurants, garment factories, health clinics, banks, bookstores, and the offices of major Chinese-language newspapers (H. Chen 1992). By the late 1990s, more than 55 percent of Flushing's eighty thousand residents were Asian American, with most coming from northern China and Taiwan (J. Kim 2002, 155). Mandarin is the community's dominant language (Deutsch 1994, 1).

Roger Sanjek, author of a major study on Elmhurst-Corona (1998), another important Chinese community in Queens, notes that more Chinese live there than in Flushing, although the media often touts Flushing

as the city's "second Chinatown." His research reveals that as early as the 1960s, large numbers of Taiwanese immigrants were settling in Elmhurst. In a 1999 interview with a New York City newspaper, Sanjek emphasized the racial and ethnic diversity found in Flushing and Elmhurst-Corona in contrast to Manhattan: "There is no street in Queens that is 100 percent Chinese" (Ruiz 1999, 3). Chinese immigrants who reside in Queens are likely to live in integrated neighborhoods, perhaps with immigrants from Korea, Latin America, or the Caribbean (Sanjek 1998).

The press also often labels Brooklyn's Sunset Park a "new Chinatown." However, like its counterparts in Queens, Sunset Park is actually multi-ethnic rather than exclusively or even majority Chinese American. Chinese speakers in New York often refer to the Sunset Park community as Bat Dai Do, or Eighth Avenue, where much of the Chinese commercial strip is located. Since the opening of a single Chinese grocery store on that street in the 1980s, thousands of Chinese immigrant families have moved into homes between Fifth Avenue and Eighth Avenue and along the side streets from Fiftieth Street to Sixty-second Street. However, just blocks away, along Sixth and Seventh Avenues, the shops are no longer mostly Chinese but an ethnic mix, including many that sell groceries and products from Central and South America (Ruiz 1999).

Over the past twenty-five years, Sunset Park has experienced rapid demographic change. In 1980, the neighborhood was mostly Scandinavian. Today, it is one of the largest Chinese immigrant neighborhoods in New York City. In fact, Brooklyn's Chinese population grew almost 300 percent during the 1980s, and Sunset Park was one of the most popular destinations for newcomers (Ruiz 1999). By 2000, the census recorded approximately thirty thousand Asian American residents in Sunset Park, the vast majority of them Chinese (Brooklyn AIDS Task Force 2003). However, most scholars and activists in the Brooklyn community argue that the number is higher than sixty thousand (Mustain 1997). Many of those who live in Sunset Park are Cantonese speakers from Hong Kong, but Mandarin or Fujianese speakers live there as well.

Ethnic change has sparked some resentment among longtime residents. For example, one man complained to a local newspaper that the Chinese immigrants in his neighborhood do not frequent his pizzeria: "I don't mean this in a racist way, but it's just a fact we've become a Chinatown, which I resent. In this country, we are supposed to assimilate, but they don't. We are supposed to be a melting pot, but they aren't in it" (Mus-

tain 1997, 34). Despite that sentiment, it is important to note that Sunset Park is not a Chinatown in the traditional sense. Asked to speak about an exhibit focused on Sunset Park, Cynthia Lee, an associate with the Museum of Chinese in the Americas, said, "People look at the growth of the community in Sunset Park, and think it is another Chinatown. . . . Yet, it is different. It never was as self-contained as Chinatown, for instance. One of the reasons is that Sunset Park still is a destination for immigrants of many nationalities" (Ruiz 1999, 3).

### *Chinese Immigrants in Los Angeles*

When downtown Los Angeles's original Chinatown was demolished in the 1930s to make way for Union Station, Chinese merchants and Anglo activists lobbied for the development of "New Chinatown." It was built between North Hill Street and North Broadway, its architecture a combination of Hollywood kitsch and modern, 1930s design: "While the architecture of New Chinatown might invite criticism for being a stereotype of authentic Chinese architecture, the cluster of pseudo-Chinese stores and restaurants gave the 1940s community some ethnic identity where none had existed. The result was the nation's first planned Chinatown. At the time, the architecture was described as not an exact representation of native Chinese buildings, but as 'Chinese-American,' a blend of Chinese elements and modern buildings" (Heimann 1998, 1). The development was intended to attract tourists as well as to provide a residential and shared community environment for Chinese Americans in Los Angeles.

Until the 1960s, Chinatown remained the center of Chinese cultural and traditional life in southern California. Originally, mostly Toishanese immigrants lived and worked in Chinatown, and the main dialects were Cantonese and Toishanese. Following reforms in immigration law in 1965 and the Vietnam War, a large wave of ethnic Chinese from Southeast Asia began to settle in Chinatown. By 1990, twenty-five thousand people lived there, and U.S. Census reports indicated that 43.5 percent identified themselves as Chinese and 11 percent as Southeast Asian. Many of those who identified themselves as Chinese, however, were not born in China but were ethnic Chinese born in Laos, Cambodia, or Vietnam. Kevin Ng, who was born in Cambodia and now lives in Chinatown, explained to a reporter, "In 1975, we were looked down upon as refugees. But after a few years, the business community started to develop and the older Toishan couldn't compete" (Torres 1996, 1).

In 1970, there were about 22,000 immigrants from China, Taiwan, and Hong Kong in the Los Angeles metropolitan region. By 2000, the number of immigrants from China, Taiwan, and Hong Kong in the region had grown to more than 200,000 (Sabagh and Bozorgmehr 2003, 107). This influx of new immigrants led to the development of new concentrations of Chinese Americans outside the central city. Today, the San Gabriel Valley, a suburban swath in Los Angeles County that includes the cities of Monterey Park, San Gabriel, Rosemead, Alhambra, Hacienda Heights, and Rowland Heights, is a major focal point of Chinese American life in Los Angeles. Some cities in the San Gabriel Valley have experienced dramatic changes. Notably, while Monterey Park's total population grew from 54,000 in 1980 to 61,000 in 1990, the Asian American portion of the population grew from 34 percent to 58 percent, an 85 percent increase (Asian Pacific American Legal Center 1998; Harney 1992). The Chinese American population alone accounted for 41 percent of Monterey Park's residents in 2000 (Zhou and Kim 2003, 129).

During the late 1960s and 1970s, Chinese began moving out of downtown Chinatown and, concurrent with national suburbanization trends, began to settle in the San Gabriel Valley. This settlement pattern was further reinforced when immigrants from Asia began arriving in large numbers in Monterey Park after a real estate agent began to advertise homes in the area in Taiwanese and Hong Kong newspapers in the 1970s (Harney 1992; Saito 1998). Thus, not only was secondary migration occurring as residents moved from Chinatown to suburban Chinese communities, but new immigrants began to move directly to the suburbs, bypassing Chinatown and the central cities of Los Angeles County (Li 1999; Zhou and Kim 2003).

The post-1965 Chinese immigrant settlers in suburban enclave communities are notably diverse in both national origin and class background. In his 1995 study of Monterey Park, John Horton reports that 38 percent of the community's immigrants were born in mainland China, 24 percent in Vietnam, 11 percent in Hong Kong, 7 percent in other Southeast Asian nations, and the remainder in Latin America and other countries (22–23). Although many Chinese immigrants were born on the mainland, a large number immigrated from Hong Kong and Taiwan after leaving the mainland during the communist revolution. More than one-third of Chinese immigrants to Los Angeles identify themselves as Taiwanese (Hum and Zonta 2000, 214; Zhou and Kim 2003).

In terms of class, the Chinese population in the San Gabriel Valley is bifurcated along income and educational lines. This reflects the twin prongs created by the “professionally trained” and “family reunification” preference categories in post-1965 U.S. immigration policy. Because many of the original immigrants from China were from poor rural backgrounds, their relatives who arrive as part of the family reunification program and settle in the San Gabriel Valley are likely to come from similar circumstances. Nevertheless, a growing number of immigrants are professionals (Zhou and Kim 2003). Los Angeles and in particular the San Gabriel Valley are the primary destination for immigrants with professional and managerial backgrounds from Taiwan and Hong Kong (Hum and Zonta 2000). Therefore, it is not surprising that studies find both “high education and income and high levels of poverty” among the Chinese population in the San Gabriel Valley (Horton 1995, 25). Min Zhou and Rebecca Kim (2003, 142) report that Chinese immigrants as a group tend to exhibit higher levels of education than Los Angeles County’s population.

Researchers and residents have described Monterey Park and other San Gabriel communities as “suburban Chinatowns” (Arax 1987; Harney 1992; Fong 1994). Like Chinatown, these communities are characterized by Chinese-owned stores and restaurants selling Chinese products and advertising in Chinese. One Chinese American who owns a real estate agency in Monterey Park told a reporter, “You might say that Monterey Park is a second Chinatown, a Chinatown in the suburbs. A lot of businesses that began there—including ours—now have branches here. If people can buy whatever they need here, why go to Chinatown?” (Harney 1992, 8). Chinese speakers and Chinese-language signs abound, so that speaking English is often unnecessary. Wei Li, a scholar studying the Los Angeles Chinese community, asked one woman who moved to Monterey Park in the 1980s why Chinese people chose to settle there: “Because of living here we feel just like home. There are so many Chinese people and Chinese stores, restaurants, banks, newspapers, radios and TV, almost everything you need. . . . Those [Chinese] born in the U.S. do not care whether to live close to Chinese or not. But we do care as new immigrants with poor English or no English skill at all” (1999, 14).

However, like the Chinese communities in Flushing and other New York suburbs, cities in the San Gabriel Valley are not as ethnically or racially homogenous as traditional downtown Chinatowns. As Li notes,

“the ethnic concentration in the San Gabriel Valley is not just another Chinatown, but is, instead, different from previously identified ethnic settlements” (1999, 2). Although Monterey Park’s population is mostly Asian American, especially Chinese American, it is also clearly multiracial and multiethnic. According to Leland Saito (1998), in 1990 Latinos made up 30 percent of the area’s population and whites about 12 percent. Chinese were the largest Asian American group in the area during the 1990s, but Japanese (17 percent) and Vietnamese (8 percent) also made up a large proportion of Monterey Park’s Asian community.

*Comparison between Chinese Immigrants in New York and Los Angeles*

The demographic and social differences in the Chinese American populations in New York and Los Angeles shape their political participation. The Los Angeles community is more diverse economically and occupationally than is its counterpart in New York (Waldinger and Tseng 1992; Hum and Zonta 2000). On average, though, the Chinese population in Los Angeles is better off in terms of education, income, and occupational status than the Chinese population in New York (Zhou and Kim 2003, 128). In 1990, most immigrants from Taiwan (42 percent of whom entered under the “professionally trained” preference category) had Los Angeles as their destination. In contrast, New York was the most popular destination for immigrants from the People’s Republic of China (Waldinger and Tseng 1992; Hum and Zonta 2000; Zhou and Kim 2003). Of those from mainland China entering the United States in 1990, more than 80 percent did under family reunification provisions, and 60 percent were from working-class backgrounds (compared to only 15 percent of those from Taiwan) (Waldinger and Tseng 1992). Class differences in the Chinese migration flows to New York and Los Angeles have led to differential economic development in the two cities’ Chinese communities (Waldinger and Tseng 1992; Saito 1998). In Los Angeles, many Chinese-owned businesses provide services aimed at professional clients, such as real estate, technology, and financial services, whereas in New York, restaurants and garment factories dominate the Chinese ethnic economy (Waldinger and Tseng 1992).

A continuous flow of new migrants has important implications for political organizing in the Chinese community. More migrants increase the community’s overall demographic power, but the political mobilization of newcomers—who may not speak English, be familiar with the political sys-

tem, or be naturalized—also requires more resources than does incorporating the native-born. Another factor that is likely to shape the evolution of immigrant political involvement is internal ethnic diversity within the larger Chinese community. For example, a desire to understand his identity within an increasingly heterogeneous Chinese community led one immigrant to become involved in an ethnic organization that is active around both Taiwanese culture and Asian American issues:

There was a time [when] I started to think about things and I realized that I had not socialized with people or talked to people that I have a tie to from my ancestry. People asked me, “Are you Chinese?” And I’d say, “Yeah, I’m Chinese.” And “Where are you from?” “I’m from Taiwan.” And then they’d ask questions about what it means to be a Chinese person from Taiwan and Taiwanese and what the difference is. Apparently, there is a political debate. And I had a hard time, really, trying to communicate what it means to be Taiwanese, making sense of who I am. So I figured I wanted to do something like volunteer just to get myself back in learning about what the perception of the public is about being Taiwanese and Chinese as well. And this can be reflected through interacting with people, who have this experience with this every day. I mean, I can tell my personal story, but [it is] never the same as when you hear from another person who kind of has the same background. So that’s why I decided to join.

Residential mobility patterns also may pose a challenge to political organizing in the community. Chinese immigrants in New York City are more likely to move to surrounding suburbs than are those in Los Angeles. New York’s Chinese immigrants in both the suburbs and the central cities generally live in areas with a relatively high density of Chinese residents (Fang and Brown 1999). The greater city-to-suburbia mobility of New York’s Chinese is attributed to the ethnic job market for Chinese immigrants in New York, where competition for entry-level jobs for those without English-language fluency can be very high (Fang and Brown 1999). One Chinese American activist in New York suggested that Chinese settlement dynamics in New York City make political organizing particularly hard: “The difficulty for our community, the Manhattan Chinatown community, is that they turn over. After they stay [in Chinatown] a while, then they move out. They get enough money to go to Queens, and they go straight to Queens. So we have a lot of transients.”

Political experiences in the countries of origin also affect immigrants' political involvement in the United States. One Chinese American leader attributed Chinese immigrants' reluctance to affiliate with a U.S. political party to suspicions of political involvement developed in mainland China: "When we do [voter] registration, unfortunately we have a very high number of people who do not register for parties. Difficult. And some of it is because they had had the Communist Party before. And if you joined, you had obligations. They're not sure what the obligations are. But also, there's just a suspicion." Similarly, a Chinese immigrant claimed that because the political system in China is not a democracy, recent Chinese immigrants to the United States might not understand the U.S. system. Lack of familiarity with a more democratic system might prevent some Chinese immigrants from taking part in such activities as voting: "New immigrants come from places that are not a democracy. People are not used to one man, one vote. . . . There is no tradition of an open vote. People are not used to it. The U.S. system is complicated, and people are put off by that complication."

Despite their growing numbers, Chinese Americans have been slow to achieve elected representation in both Los Angeles and New York. However, there is a longer history of electing Chinese Americans to local and state offices from the Los Angeles region compared to the New York region. Elected in 1985, Michael Woo became the first Chinese American to serve on the Los Angeles City Council. He remained in that office until 1993, when he lost a bid for mayor of Los Angeles to Richard Riordan. Several Chinese Americans have been elected to the Monterey Park City Council (which has a rotating mayor system) over the past two and half decades. In 1983, Lily Lee Chen became the first Chinese American mayor of Monterey Park. Judy Chu, elected to the Monterey Park City Council in 1988, served as a council member for thirteen years, three times as mayor. Chu was elected to the California State Assembly, representing a district that encompasses much of the San Gabriel Valley, in 2001. She joined another Chinese American assemblywoman from the San Gabriel Valley, Carol Liu, elected to the state assembly in 2000, after serving as mayor of La Cañada Flintridge. The first Asian American elected to office in New York City was John Liu, who won a seat on the city council in 2001, representing a district in Queens, New York, that includes Flushing. It was not until 2004, when Jimmy Meng, a Democrat and also from the Flushing area, won office, that the first Asian American was elected to the New York State legislature.

*Community Profiles of Mexican Immigrants in Los Angeles and New York*

As with the Chinese community, the Mexican community encompasses many diverse elements. Comparing the communities in New York and Los Angeles highlights some critical internal differences. For example, Los Angeles was originally a Mexican settlement, and a well-established Mexican presence constitutes one of the city's important historical features. In sharp contrast, Mexicans are a relatively new population in New York City, beginning to settle there in large numbers only recently. Consequently, a significant proportion of Los Angeles's Mexican population is U.S.-born, whereas a majority of New York's Mexican population consists of immigrants. The Mexican population in Los Angeles includes people from a wide range of socioeconomic status groups, whereas New York's population as a whole occupies a more tenuous socioeconomic position. These geographic, historical, and socioeconomic differences influence how Mexican immigrants are incorporated into the U.S. political system. Community organizations that recognize these differences are better able to do outreach and mobilize particular segments of the Mexican immigrant community.

*Mexican Immigrants in Los Angeles*

The history of Los Angeles is tied intimately to Mexican settlement in California. El Pueblo de la Reina de Los Angeles was founded in 1781 by an expedition from colonial Mexico. During the Mexican-American War, U.S. forces occupied Los Angeles despite strong resistance by the region's residents. The war ended with the signing of the 1848 Treaty of Guadalupe, under which Mexico ceded all of Alta California to the United States. By the 1860s, Anglos began to outnumber Mexicans in Los Angeles, but Spanish remained widely spoken (Ríos-Bustamante and Castillo 1986, 98). By the end of the nineteenth century, according to Antonio José Ríos-Bustamante and Pedro G. Castillo, Mexicans were "concentrated in specific areas of the city, . . . relegated to a second-class status that belied their ancestral claim to the City of Angels. Economically and politically, Los Angeles became a two-tiered city. Anglos lived, worked, prospered, and grew self-satisfied on the top rung of a mythical social ladder, while Mexicans operated from a position of imposed subservience. These are the disturbing realities of the history of Los Angeles, but they undeniably constitute a cornerstone of the experience of the city's Mexican population—then and now" (1986, 104).

By the late 1800s, Los Angeles's Mexican population comprised not only the descendants of Spaniards and the later Mexican colonizers of Alta California but also newer immigrants from Mexico and their descendants. This community had become concentrated in a part of the downtown area west of Main Street and bounded by Short, Main, Yale, and College Streets (Ríos-Bustamante and Castillo 1986). Mexican households were found sprinkled throughout downtown until the 1920s (Sanchez 1993; Laslett 1996). Between 1900 and 1915, as the city grew and the Mexican population downtown became denser, the community began to move into East Los Angeles, an area that today remains one of the most concentrated in terms of Mexican population (Valle and Torres 2000). Some areas, such as Boyle Heights, eventually developed into multicultural neighborhoods (although Boyle Heights has again become predominantly Latino).

By 1930, more than 165,000 Mexicans lived in Los Angeles County, making it home to more Mexicans than all but a few of the most populous cities in Mexico. The community experienced the greatest growth in the Central Plaza District downtown, Lincoln Park, and Boyle Heights (Ríos-Bustamante and Castillo 1986). Rapid growth in the 1920s was followed by a period of population loss during the Great Depression, when the U.S. federal government began to impose repatriation policies and to severely limit Mexican immigration (the yearly average, which had been 58,000 entrants, fell to 16,000 nationally in 1930). In 1931, in response to lack of jobs, anti-Mexican sentiment among Anglo Americans, and forced repatriation by local governments, 7,500 individuals returned to Mexico from Los Angeles alone (Ríos-Bustamante and Castillo 1986, 153). Throughout the 1930s, more Mexicans would return to Mexico than would immigrate to the United States.

Nevertheless, during the 1940s the Mexican community constituted at least 10 percent of the total Los Angeles population (Ríos-Bustamante and Castillo 1986, 154). In addition to the primary concentrations in downtown and East Los Angeles, the cities of Santa Monica, Azusa, Burbank, Glendale, Monterey Park, and Culver City now had Mexican enclaves. However, according to Ríos-Bustamante and Castillo, "These new Mexican residence patterns were closely related to housing, income, and employment discrimination. Although Mexicans lived in most every city in the county, they were inevitably segregated into specific areas of those cities" (1986, 156).

In 1942, the United States initiated the Emergency Farm Labor Program, later known as the Bracero Program, through which it would recruit

4.6 million temporary agricultural workers from Mexico (Durand, Massey, and Parrado 1999). Although initiated as a temporary “emergency measure,” it was renewed continuously until 1964. As John Laslett notes, “With time, an increasing number of migrants dropped out of the Bracero stream, heading for better jobs in Los Angeles, San Francisco, and other urban areas. By 1964, when Congress abolished the program, networks between the United States and sending villages throughout Mexico’s central plateau were already in place, providing all the information and connections needed to keep the migrants coming, whether or not they had legal documents in hand” (1996, 10).

In the 1950s and 1960s, Mexicans in Los Angeles began to integrate into previously all-white suburbs. By the 1970s, the Mexican community had established a significant presence in suburban areas such as San Fernando, Long Beach, and El Monte. Laslett (1996) attributes suburbanization among Mexicans to the passage of the 1968 Open Housing Act, which abolished the racial covenants that had excluded Mexican and other minorities from many Los Angeles neighborhoods, as well as to the development of a growing Mexican American middle class, which included third- and fourth-generation Mexicans who could afford suburban homes.

In 1986, Congress passed and President Ronald Reagan signed into law the Immigration Reform and Control Act (IRCA), which included four main provisions: employer sanctions, resources for Border Patrol expansion, amnesty for long-term residents, and a legalization program for agricultural workers. IRCA offered amnesty to undocumented residents who could prove that they had been living continuously in the United States since 1982. The separate agricultural program provided legalization specifically for workers who could show prior employment in U.S. agriculture. More than 75 percent of those who received legal residence under these two provisions were immigrants from Mexico—more than 2 million people (Massey, Durand, and Malone 2002, 90).

By the 1990s, more than 2.5 million people, or 40 percent of Los Angeles County’s residents, were of Mexican origin, and about half were immigrants (Ortiz 1996; Allen and Turner 2002).<sup>5</sup> The community had moved south and west of traditional settlements in downtown and East Los Angeles into South-Central Los Angeles and “into the previously white heartlands of the San Fernando Valley south and west, the Santa Clarita Valley to the north, and even the newly developed exurban settlements on the county’s very northern boundaries” (Ortiz 1996, 267). Most Mexi-

cans in Los Angeles come from the central states of Guanajuato, Michoacán, México, and Jalisco. Since 1965, many have also arrived from the southern state of Oaxaca (Gutierrez 1999).

Despite their long presence in the region, Mexican immigrants today remain at the bottom of Los Angeles's economic hierarchy, earning significantly less on average than either U.S.-born Mexicans or whites (Ortiz 1996; Sabagh and Bozorgmehr 2003). The wage gap between Mexican immigrants and U.S.-born whites narrows as an immigrant's duration of residence lengthens, allowing time for an enlargement of language and other skills. However, Mexican immigrants are concentrated in the city's lowest-paid and lowest-status occupations. Allen J. Scott's work on Los Angeles's manufacturing economy finds that "in particular, foreign-born Hispanics of both sexes now occupy the least favorable labor-market positions in the region's economy" (1996, 228).

#### *Mexican Immigrants in New York*

Mexicans constitute a growing presence in the New York area (Gutierrez 1999; Sabagh and Bozorgmehr 2003). However, in comparison to Los Angeles, New York City's Mexican population is relatively small, although it constitutes the third-largest Latino group in the city, after Puerto Ricans and Dominicans (Alonso-Zaldivar 1999). Immigrant-rights advocates note that Mexicans are the city's fastest-growing immigrant group (Mollenkopf, Ross, and Olson 1999, 4; McHugh 2000). In Mexican-origin population, New York is the sixth-largest U.S. metropolitan area, after Los Angeles, Chicago, Houston, San Francisco, and Dallas/Fort Worth (Alonso-Zaldivar 1999). New Jersey and New York together form the twelfth-most-popular U.S. receiving region for Mexican immigrants (Durand, Massey, and Parrado 1999). The 1990 Census counted 69,495 Mexican-origin individuals in New York City, almost 300 percent more than were found in 1980; the 2000 Census counted 186,876, for another 250 percent increase (Inter-University Program 2002). Because estimates hold that about half of New York's Mexican population lacks documentation, most researchers and observers believe these figures are an undercount and that the number is now closer to 250,000 and possibly as high as 300,000 (Mollenkopf, Ross, and Olson 1999). Moreover, experts believe that the Mexican-origin population will double again by 2010 (Getlin 2003, A-10.)

Compared to other ethnic groups in New York, Mexicans are recent

arrivals. That is, most Mexican immigrants in the city arrived after 1985, and about half of the Mexican population migrated after 1990 (Robert Smith 1996; Gonzalez and McCoy 1998). Robert Smith (1996), an expert on New York's Mexican community, has traced its origins to two Mexican men brought to New York to work during World War II. These two men began a chain of migration from their native state of Puebla, in Mexico's Mixteca region, that still continues. Today, most immigrants to New York come from one of three states in that region: Puebla, Oaxaca, or Guerrero (Gonzalez and McCoy 1998).

When settling in New York, Mexican immigrants have usually moved into existing Latino neighborhoods, including the South Bronx; Jackson Heights, Queens; East Harlem; and Sunset Park, Brooklyn (Gonzalez and McCoy 1998; Getlin 2003). Sunset Park, for example, is home to a growing number of Mexican immigrants who work in the area's garment and manufacturing establishments (Gonzalez and McCoy 1998). However, Mexican immigrants are beginning to change the neighborhoods in which they settle. In Manhattan, on Third Avenue along East 116th Street, by the late 1990s Mexicans owned and ran more than ten stores selling tacos, cactus fruit, flowers, and even cowboy boots (McCoy 1998). Fifth Avenue in Sunset Park is dotted with Mexican-owned stores that sell tortillas and other Mexican foods. One Mexican immigrant woman explained to a *New York Daily News* reporter, "We began settling in Sunset Park because we didn't have to take the subway to get to work in the factories by the water and were far from *la migra* [immigration officers]" (Gonzalez and McCoy 1998, 6). By 1998, more than one-third of the two hundred students at Rafael Cordero Junior High School, a bilingual school on First Avenue in Manhattan, were Mexican immigrants (McCoy 1998, 35).

Although a middle-class population is emerging, many Mexican immigrants in New York are economically and educationally disadvantaged. Almost half have completed only nine or fewer years of school, and many are also young. The men tend to work in restaurants, storefront delicatessens, or construction. The women often work at home raising families or in factories. Labor statistics show that the median income for Mexicans in the city is \$10,231, compared to the \$22,402 for the average New Yorker (Getlin 2003). David Herszenhorn, for example, has noted that Mexican workers in New York are likely to "hold the lowest-paying jobs in the service industries—in kitchens, as cooks and dishwashers; in groceries, as clerks and stock handlers; behind the counters of delicatessens and pizza

shops; in factories, or among construction and cleaning crews” (1998, 51). Close to one in three Mexicans in New York live at or below the poverty line (Getlin 2003). According to a reporter who interviewed Mexicans in New York City in 1999, many Mexican immigrants describe their lives as *esclavizante* (enslaving) because they work such long hours for little pay. One advocate for Mexican immigrants in New York explains, “Life is a kind of slavery that doesn’t permit them to enjoy the things New York has to offer” (Alonso-Zaldivar 1999, A-1). It also permits little time or energy for civic involvement.

Religion plays a strong role in the lives of many Mexican immigrants in New York. Every year on December 12, the Feast of Our Lady of Guadalupe is celebrated, and in 1998 an estimated five thousand Mexicans attended a mass for that occasion held in St. Patrick’s Cathedral (Claffey, Raftery, and Singleton 1998). A Jesuit brother who directed one of the few social service organization that targets Mexican immigrants in New York emphasized the feast’s importance: “This is the biggest religious holiday of the year. We say that we are more Guadalupanos than Mexicans. We say that because Our Lady of Guadalupe is our symbol, our identity. Our Lady of Guadalupe is stronger in the United States because she is the mother of the oppressed people, of the people who are being discriminated against. She is the protector, and so in New York City, when we are feeling we are suffering that kind of situation, she becomes a stronger symbol to follow” (Herszenhorn 1998, 51).

Some neighborhoods in New York have seen the development of hometown associations, a type of ethnic voluntary association that forms around specific communities in the sending region (Gonzalez and McCoy 1998; for an extensive study of the development and maintenance of such associations, see Robert Smith 1996, 1998). Mexican migrants from Chinantla, Puebla, meet regularly in Sunset Park to discuss the new schools and water systems that their U.S. wages are helping to build in Chinantla. More than five thousand of the town’s population of seven thousand live in New York, which, according to some observers, has created “two societies that operate in tandem” (Alonso-Zaldivar 1999, A-1).

#### *Comparison between Mexican Immigrants in New York and Los Angeles*

The most prominent difference between the Mexican communities in New York and Los Angeles has to do with length of settlement. Whereas the Spanish-speaking community dates back several centuries in Los Ange-

les, Mexicans have had a significant presence in New York City only since the 1990s. The implications of this contrast are important: “Snapshots of *mexicano* New York reveal an experience much different from the one in Southern California, with its centuries of Mexican tradition and generations of Mexican Americans. In New York, all Mexicans are pioneers, facing jarring adjustments thousands of miles from home in a city that can be as treacherous as a February ice storm” (Alonso-Zaldivar 1999, A-1).

Thus it should come as no surprise that organizational life for Mexicans in the two cities is quite distinct. Mexicans in the West and Southwest have a long history of organizational development. Voluntary associations were very much a part of life there for the Spanish-speaking community in the early twentieth century, with the Alianza Hispano-Americana, the Club Anajuac, and the Sociedad Moctezuma providing social support and mutual aid. The Alianza Hispano-Americana was founded in 1894 in Arizona to provide life insurance as well as social activities to Mexican Americans in Tucson (Acosta 2002). The organization quickly spread throughout the Southwest, reaching as far as Texas and California. During the early 1900s, the Alianza annually sponsored a Mexican Independence Day celebration (Sanchez 1993).<sup>6</sup> “Indeed, the combination of rapid growth and increased importance of these organizations stands as one of the most striking features of Mexican social life during the period” (Ríos-Bustamante and Castillo 1986, 122–23). The Alianza Hispano-Americana remained active until the 1970s, although its national membership peaked at 17,366 in 1939. Furthermore, the organization established lodges in Mexico as well as the United States (Acosta 2002). The Federation of Spanish-Speaking Voters was the first explicitly political group established by the Mexican community in Los Angeles (Ríos-Bustamante and Castillo 1986). In 1930, it ran candidates for state and local offices, although none were elected.

In contrast, and in part because of their relatively short length of residence in New York, Mexicans there have not established a wide net of community organizations, and no Mexican-origin candidate has ever been elected to office. Interviews conducted for this study suggest that the disparity in the development of community institutions and candidate organizations serving Mexicans affects the level of political involvement in the two cities. Mexican immigrants in the Los Angeles sample were much more likely than were those in New York to have been contacted by an elected official. This finding is not surprising, given that representation by

Mexican-origin elected officials is so much greater in Los Angeles than New York. Although a causal relationship cannot be drawn as a result of the limited sample size, the connection between political mobilization of immigrants and elected representation by members of the same ethnic group deserves further study.<sup>7</sup>

Mexican immigrants in New York are also much farther away from their county of origin than are those residing in the western United States. Because of the proximity to Mexico, Mexican migrants in California, Arizona, New Mexico, and Texas often engage in circular migration. Mexicans who want to reach New York must first cross the U.S. border by land and then make the arduous trip by plane or land transportation (bus) to the East Coast (Alonso-Zaldivar 1999). As a result, Mexican immigrants in New York may not return to Mexico as frequently as do those residing in western and southwestern states. As their length of residence increases, Mexican immigrants in New York may find themselves naturalizing at higher rates than do those who live near the U.S.-Mexico border and who are thus able to travel back and forth more easily. This would allow the New York population to become a significant voting bloc in local elections. Despite their distance from Mexico, Mexican immigrants in New York maintain strong ties to their hometowns, especially by raising money for hometown civic projects (Robert Smith 1996).

Longer length of settlement among Mexicans in Los Angeles has also contributed to a longer history of Mexican American elected representation in that city compared to New York. As previously mentioned, no person of Mexican origin has ever been elected to citywide office in New York City. Nor are any New York State Assembly members from the city of Mexican origin. However, other, non-Mexican Latinos have won local and state elected offices in New York, including Puerto Ricans and a growing number of Dominicans (Graham 2001).

In contrast, Los Angeles has become a symbol of Latino electoral power. In 2005, Antonio Villaraigosa, son of a Mexican immigrant father and U.S.-born mother of Mexican origin, was elected mayor of Los Angeles. He defeated incumbent James Hahn to become the city's first Latino mayor since 1872. The two candidates were also opponents in 2001. According to an exit poll conducted by the Center for the Study of Los Angeles at Loyola Marymount University (2005), Villaraigosa received overwhelming support from Latino voters and strong support from whites and blacks. Although a majority of Asian Americans voted for Hahn, Vil-

lاراigosa's support among Asian Americans increased significantly between 2001 and 2005. Villaraigosa served as a member of the California State Assembly and as a member of the Los Angeles City Council before becoming mayor. Villaraigosa joins several other prominent Latino elected officials representing Los Angeles, including Speaker of the State Assembly Fabian Nuñez (D-Los Angeles), county sheriff Lee Baca, school board president José Huizar, and city council president Alex Padilla.

The growing number of Latino elected officials in Los Angeles, many of Mexican ancestry, can be attributed in large part to legal action by the Mexican American Legal Defense and Education Fund (MALDEF). In 1985, MALDEF and the Justice Department sued the city for violating the Voting Rights Act with a reapportionment plan that discriminated against Latinos. Five years later, MALDEF and the Justice Department challenged a redistricting plan adopted by the Los Angeles County Board of Supervisors, arguing that it diluted Latino voting strength (Weinstein 2005). Following MALDEF's victory in that case, the first Latina, Gloria Molina, was elected to the Los Angeles County Board of Supervisors. Although Latinos have made great strides in achieving political empowerment in Los Angeles over the past two decades, their electoral power continues to lag behind their demographic power. Latinos made up almost half of the population of the city of Los Angeles in 2005 but accounted for less than 30 percent of voters in the 2005 mayoral election (National Association of Latino Elected Officials 2005).

### *Similarities and Differences between Mexican and Chinese Groups*

The Mexican and Chinese immigrant populations in the United States can be compared along a number of dimensions, particularly in terms of settlement histories, size relative to the general population, average socioeconomic resources, challenges of adapting to U.S. life, and attitudes toward the U.S. political system. Both groups have long histories in the United States. Whereas the first Chinese immigrants had to travel a long distance to arrive here, however, Mexicans already occupied territory that the United States absorbed through expansion, conquest, and colonization. In terms of population size, immigrants from Mexico and their descendants are the largest Latino group in the United States, and immigrants from China and their descendants are the largest Asian American group. However, the Mexican population greatly exceeds the Chinese

population. Today, more than 25 million people in the United States are of Mexican origin, including 9 million immigrants, compared to only 2.7 million Chinese, 1.5 million of them immigrants (Malone et al. 2003, 2). Both are geographically concentrated in specific regions of the United States. Within each group, however, perceptible regional differences exist, especially in terms of socioeconomic status and duration of residence in the United States.

The groups differ in their attitudes toward the U.S. political system, undoubtedly influencing their political involvement. In the interviews, Chinese immigrants were much more likely than their Mexican counterparts to claim that they do not participate in U.S. politics because the system is difficult to understand. As a fifty-three-year-old Chinese immigrant woman who had lived in New York for thirty years explained, “Language. Number one problem. Because if you don’t understand what is going on, how can you get involved?” A forty-eight-year-old Chinese immigrant man who had lived in Los Angeles for more than twenty years said that “culture has a lot to do with it. Because I don’t quite understand that type of culture. Political culture. What is their motive being active in a political party? I have a hard time seeing myself becoming involved.” And an eighty-year-old man who had lived in Los Angeles for thirteen years noted that “It’s very hard. . . . The government makes it hard for us to learn about [the political system]. I mean, they don’t even allow bilingual education in the schools. How do they expect us to know or learn?” It is likely that lack of familiarity with a democratic system, parties, and voting contributes to many Chinese immigrants’ feeling that the U.S. political system is complicated. In contrast to the Chinese immigrants, only a few Mexican immigrants said that they had difficulty understanding the U.S. political system. This is not surprising, given Mexico’s proximity to the United States and the resulting flow of information across the border. Further, the Mexican Constitution was modeled in part on the U.S. Constitution, and the government is a federal system with a president and a bicameral legislature.<sup>8</sup>

In their countries of origin, Mexican and Chinese immigrants have had distinct experiences with civic and community institutions, which may influence how they respond to opportunities for political involvement in the United States. Past political participation in the country of origin may facilitate an immigrant’s willingness to join local organizations. In the interviews, Mexican immigrants were much more likely than their Chinese

counterparts to have belonged to local organizations or clubs (sports club, women's group, church group, or political organization) before migrating to the United States. This study's sample is too small to infer causal relationships, but it is interesting that those Mexican immigrants who appear to have been the most active in organizations in Mexico were also active in organizations in the United States. For example, one immigrant woman who had been active in her church choir in Mexico also sang in the choir in New York, participated in a folk dancing group, and was active in a women's organization. Analysis of the Los Angeles Survey of Urban Inequality, a quantitative survey that includes a large sample of Chinese and Mexican immigrants, indicates that the Chinese in Los Angeles are much less likely to belong to community organizations (including religious institutions, unions, or political organizations) than are Mexicans, even when the factors of age, education, income, length of residence, English proficiency, and gender are taken into account (J. Wong 2000).

These similarities and differences as well as the growing U.S. presence of both groups make Chinese and Mexican immigrants ideal populations to study. In terms of identifying factors that influence immigrants to become politically engaged, a comparison of the two groups may facilitate the determination of which factors are specific to a particular group and which are influential across groups.

### *Conclusion*

Individuals from Asia and Latin America account for the vast majority of today's U.S. immigrants. Moreover, newcomers from those areas enter the United States not only as immigrants but also as members of racial minorities. The conceptualization of these groups as racial minorities emerged through a process of racial formation, which Michael Omi and Howard Winant define as the social and historical process by which racial categories are created, changed, destroyed, and experienced (1994, 55). Throughout American history, the U.S. government's laws and policies and native-born Americans' biases have been deeply implicated in the process of racial formation for immigrants from Asia and Latin America. For example, the Naturalization Law of 1790 distinguished free "white" immigrants from others and helped to both create and support the development of racial categories in the United States. The racial minority status of Asian American and Latino immigrants has influenced their political incorporation,

which has occurred in ways that are quite distinct from that their European counterparts. Thus, it is important to understand how the two groups have been racialized and how their racialization has affected their relationship with American civic institutions.

Studying Mexican and Chinese immigrants can lead to a better understanding of the political mobilization of racial minorities and the immigrant members of these minorities more generally. Chinese and Mexicans account for a large part of the U.S. immigrant stream. The largest group of Latinos consists of people of Mexican origin, and the largest Asian group consists of people of Chinese origin. Chinese and Mexicans in the United States share many experiences but also differ in their social histories and characteristics. Thus, an examination of these groups is likely to yield insights about which factors associated with political mobilization affect a particular national-origin group versus the factors that affect immigrants more generally.

Many immigrants, like those from China and Mexico, share a history of exclusion from the political system. Common characteristics, including lack of English language skills, citizenship, and acculturation may challenge political involvement in the United States for a great number of immigrants. Despite these similarities, different immigrant ethnic groups possess unique characteristics that are likely to affect their mobilization. For example, immigrant ethnic groups differ in size and geographic settlement patterns. In addition, internal diversity along economic, religious, and national-origin lines distinguish different immigrant ethnic groups. How do U.S. civic institutions help to mobilize immigrants into the political system? Do these institutions take into account the unique features of particular immigrant communities? Given that unprecedented numbers of immigrants are entering the United States and participating in U.S. politics at much lower rates than the general population, these are critical questions for the future health of the American democratic system.