

Racial **TRANSFORMATIONS**

Latinos and Asians

Remaking the United States

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INTRODUCTION

Latino and Asian Racial Formations at the Frontiers of U.S. Nationalism

Nicholas De Genova

Next to the case of the black race within our bosom, that of the red on our borders is the problem most baffling to the policy of our country.

—JAMES MADISON TO THOMAS L. MCKENNEY (1826)

As the color of our skin began to confuse the color line drawn tyrannically between blacks and whites in the United States—segregated in the respective corners of their misplaced confidence about their races—we Asians and Latinos, Arabs, Turks, Africans, Iranians, Armenians, Kurds, Afghans and South Asians were instantly brought together beyond the uncommon denominator of our origin and towards the solidarity of our emerging purpose.

—HAMID DABASHI, “THE MOMENT OF MYTH” (2003)

There is a key to unlocking the hegemonic polarity of whiteness and Blackness that has so enduringly distinguished the racial order of the United States, especially as that tyrannically drawn binary has defined the decisive parameters for the racializations of “Latinos” and “Asians” and all other groups historically racialized as neither white nor Black. That key is to be found in the history of the U.S. nation-state’s subjugation of Native Americans.

From his vantage point as a “founding father” and the fourth president of the United States, James Madison’s formulation about the vexations presented for “the policy of *our* country” by the “black” and “red” races recalls to mind, not simply that white supremacy supplied the bedrock of U.S. nation-state formation, but moreover that the foundations of racism were devised not singularly around the enslavement of Africans and the denigration of racial Blackness but also by the genocidal dispossession and colonization of American Indians. Madison’s elegant turn of phrase invites us to revisit the precise meaning of his implicit but self-consciously white U.S. nationalism and its two-sided formulation of the racial “problem” as one that was posed with respect to both its “bosom” and its “borders,” in relation to both an “inside” and an “outside.” This originary triangulation of whiteness with the subordination of *both*

Blacks and Indians demands a reconsideration of how it has been possible historically for this racial triangle to be so thoroughly and effectively reduced to a mere binary.

In the effort to resolve this puzzle, it is, of course, insufficient to seek dubious comfort in the reassurance that the ideological disappearance of the Native American third term was nothing more than an inevitable consequence of the real annihilation of indigenous humanity. Such a proposition, after all, could only be an unwitting endorsement of the “fantasies of the master race,” to borrow a phrase from Ward Churchill, inasmuch as it would be tantamount to maintaining that genocide simply settled the matter, as if mass slaughter ever accomplished the end of absolute extermination and extinction.¹ Contrary to that most central ambition of what Herman Melville memorably called “the metaphysics of Indian-hating,” even centuries of relentless warfare and colonization were nonetheless inadequate to the murderous task of genuinely eliminating Native Americans altogether.² Furthermore, such an awkward complicity with the literal as well as ideological “removal” of the Indians likewise signals an analogous collusion with that distinctive historical amnesia that William Appleman Williams has incisively identified as “one of the central themes of American historiography . . . that there is no American Empire.”³ If it became tenable historically to conveniently forget the extermination of the indigenous peoples, doing so likewise reinforced the myth that the North American continent had really been empty all along and was, in effect, the rightful and preordained inheritance of the U.S. “nation”—its purported Manifest Destiny. Indeed, if the restlessly imperial character of the U.S. nation-state is abundantly manifest and indisputable in the face of the history of American Indian displacement and colonization, then the ideological hegemony of a Black-white racial binary is exposed as an *effect* of precisely this double erasure.

Madison’s remark is instructive, furthermore, in that it reminds us that the U.S. social order of white supremacy may have been always premised on racial Blackness as its own utterly degraded bottom, indeed, its absolute antithesis, but in a manner that was strictly *internal* to the ongoing constitution of an “American” national society. Forged through chattel slavery, whereby African Americans were denied any semblance of juridical personhood or collective representation and were generally compelled to exist as the mere property of white men, racial Blackness could be figured as a wholly owned subsidiary, possessed by, subjected to, and fully encompassed *within* an “American” social

order of white power and prestige. Throughout the nineteenth century, however, that presumed inside, which was systematically elaborated along this defining white-Black axis of racialized dominance and subjugation, was always already coupled with an equally defining and highly articulated awareness of its own inexorable expansiveness and the ever-advancing frontier beyond which it always confronted an outside. That outside, of course, was preeminently identified with Indian “savages” and, thus, taken to be racially “alien,” culturally inferior, intrinsically hostile, menacing, and ripe for conquest. Rather than the despicable bottom of white “American” society, however, Native Americans were despised as its inimical and incorrigible outsiders who could never be incorporated into white “civilization” and so were condemned to extinction. In his discussion of race in *Democracy in America* (1835/1840), uncritically embracing the common sense of the U.S. whites whom he otherwise seeks to scrutinize, Alexis de Tocqueville declares baldly: “I think that the Indian race is doomed to perish, and I cannot prevent myself from thinking that on the day when the Europeans shall be established on the coasts of the Pacific Ocean, it will cease to exist.” In contrast, Tocqueville affirms: “[T]he fate of the Negroes is in a sense linked with that of the Europeans. The two races are bound one to the other without mingling.”⁴ The long-standing common sense about the U.S. racial order as one wholly or primarily apprehensible in Black and white has, therefore, always been inherently confined to the premises of U.S. nationalism’s own hegemonic self-understanding about its putative inside and outside. Upholding one of the most cherished conceits of U.S. imperialism itself, the one-sidedness of such an angle of vision on U.S. racism also serves to obscure the racialization of all manner of nonwhiteness that has come to be variously figured as “foreign” and identified with the alien wilderness beyond the borders of “American” nationhood.

The ideological contrast between African American slavery as a type of abject domestication and American Indian “savagery” as an irreducible “foreign”-ness intrinsically relegated to a space beyond the frontier and essentially inimical to white “civilization” and capitalist “modernity” likewise has profound ramifications. If Indians were presumed to be an endangered species of humanity, irrevocably slated for extinction in the face of white civilization owing to their irremediably anachronistic savage cultures, the integration of enslaved Blacks into that same white-supremacist social order, albeit only on terms of complete subordination, was premised on the supposition that every

last vestige of their own cultural specificities, any shred of Africanity, had been effectively obliterated. Thus, in his landmark *Slavery and Social Death*, Orlando Patterson identifies “natal alienation” as the definitive centerpiece of slavery’s cultural politics of authority, by which the social death of slaves is distinguished by “the loss of ties of birth in both ascending and descending generations” and “a loss of native status . . . deracination.” Slaves could be reduced to “the ultimate human tool” for their master, Patterson continues, only if they were systematically alienated not only “from all formal, legally enforceable ties of ‘blood,’” but also “from any attachment to groups or localities other than those chosen for [them] by the master.”⁵

Again, Tocqueville is revealing in the extent to which he captures and recapitulates the racist common sense of the era:

In one blow oppression has deprived the descendants of the Africans of almost all the privileges of humanity. The United States Negro has lost even the memory of his homeland; he no longer understands the language his fathers spoke; he has abjured their religion and forgotten their mores. Ceasing to belong to Africa, he has acquired no right to the blessings of Europe; he is left in suspense between two societies and isolated between two peoples, sold by one and repudiated by the other; in the whole world there is nothing but his master’s hearth to provide him with some semblance of a homeland.⁶

Blacks might be construed as racially inferior, in a “natural” and immutable condition that was alternately cast as indelibly “childish” or “savage,” but anything that might connote the cultural integrity of a specifically *African* savagery was widely considered to have been successfully eradicated.⁷ Tocqueville repeatedly underscores the apparent bifurcation between the respective predicaments of African Americans and Indians, and the distinction is especially pronounced around precisely this question of “cultural”-ness: “In contrast the pretended nobility of his origins fills the whole imagination of the Indian. . . . Far from wishing to adapt his mores to ours, he regards barbarism as the distinctive emblem of his race. . . . The North American native preserves his opinions and even the slightest details of his customs with an inflexibility otherwise unknown throughout history.”⁸ While indubitably homogenized as a generically contemptible racial type (*Indians*), Native Americans, for as long as their colonization remained an ongoing project yet to be achieved, were, nevertheless, also consistently sorted and ranked according to their particulari-

ties as discrete “tribes” with distinct forms of social and political organization.⁹ Whereas the subordination of African Americans involved rendering racial Blackness bereft of any cultural specificity or integrity, the racialization of Indians could, therefore, be internally differentiated and refracted according to their diverse nationalities.¹⁰ In short, the alterity of Native Americans was always saturated with an excess of “culture,” figured as an inscrutable foreignness impervious, if not actively hostile, to any prospect of “assimilation.”¹¹ When the assimilation of Native Americans later became an avowed aim of U.S. policy following the General Allotment (Dawes) Act of 1887, notably, such putative assimilation was quite explicitly equated with the annihilation of Indians *as Indians* and was conjoined to a project whose purpose was the effective decimation of tribal sovereignty as such by extending U.S. citizenship to Native Americans as individuals on the basis of their status as the virtual owners of a kind of pseudoprivate property in Indian land on reservations.¹²

Despite the desire of former British colonists and their inheritors to boldly assert their “American”-ness in defiance of their European patrimony and as an emblem of their national independence and republican self-government, U.S. nationalism’s very appropriation for itself of “American”-ness as its exclusive “national” identity could never be other than a European settler-state’s imperial gesture of usurpation. U.S. “American”-ness was the expression of a white nationalism, first with respect to the indigenous nations of the North American continent, whom it disparaged as mere tribes and expelled to a condition of utter marginalization, and then in relation to all the societies of Latin America and the Caribbean.¹³ Indeed, already as early as 1823, the Monroe Doctrine had declared that all the newly independent nations of the Americas would thenceforth be presumptively considered by the U.S. nation-state to constitute its own exclusive sphere of influence and interest, such that any intervention by European imperial powers anywhere in the Western Hemisphere would be taken as “an unfriendly disposition toward the United States” and its own “rights,” “peace,” “happiness,” “safety,” and “defense.”¹⁴ Not long thereafter, when the United States instigated a war of conquest against Mexico in 1846, leading to the colonization of roughly half its national territory and the subjugation of the newly conquered land’s resident population, the palpable salience of the Indian wars for the U.S. military’s orientation to its frontiers led ineluctably to the racialization of Mexicans as “savage,” “barbarous,” or, at best, little more than “half-civilized” Indians and degraded racial “mongrels.”¹⁵

Indeed, the U.S. Senate had debated the annexation of the entirety of Mexico and the “removal” of the majority of the population (those deemed not to be white) to Indian reservations, but the prospect of becoming ensnared in a protracted guerrilla war in the effort to colonize the more densely populated portion of the country commanded a somewhat less ambitious conquest.¹⁶

Once the superintendent of the U.S. Bureau of the Census announced in 1891 that a “frontier line” between areas of white settlement and Native American wilderness, as measured by population density within the territory of the continental United States, had effectively vanished and that the “internal” frontier was, thus, officially closed,¹⁷ the presumed Manifest Destiny that had inexorably driven the U.S. settler-state west across the North American continent to the Pacific Ocean left it similarly poised for still more conquests in Asia and Latin America. In the years immediately following that momentous pronouncement, U.S. political intrigues and military interventions in Nicaragua, Colombia/Panama, Honduras, Samoa, and Wake, military intervention in Hawaii leading to its subsequent annexation, and the Spanish–American War of 1898—culminating in the invasion and occupation of Cuba, the colonization of Puerto Rico and Guam, and the brutal subjugation of the national liberation movement in the Philippines and these islands’ subsequent colonization—all bolstered the triumphalism of the United States as an ascendant global power. Following the U.S. defeat of Spain and the acquisition of new colonies in Latin America and Asia, Albert Beveridge, in his first speech as a U.S. senator from Indiana in 1900, became a national sensation when he affirmed that the colonial question transcended all political and legal considerations because it was a matter of preordained Anglo-Saxon “racial” vocation: “God . . . has made us the master organizers of the world to establish system where chaos reigns . . . that we may administer government among savage and senile peoples. . . . And of all our race He has marked the American people as His chosen nation to finally lead in the regeneration of the world.”¹⁸ In recognition of his boldly racist and ambitiously colonialist millenarian vision, Beveridge was assigned his proper place on the senatorial committee that would oversee the colonization of Puerto Rico and the Philippines. Similarly, the Wall Street banker and U.S. senator Chauncey Depew declared the Pacific Ocean to have been reduced to “an American lake” and confidently proclaimed: “The world is ours.”¹⁹ So began what would later be dubbed “the *American Century*.”²⁰

These imperial adventures would be readily, almost seamlessly, apprehensible in the same racialized political idiom that had served to rationalize Native American colonization. “All along, the obverse of Indian-hating had been the metaphysics of empire-building,” Richard Drinnon has argued. “If the West was at bottom a form of society . . . then on our round earth, Winning the West amounted to no less than winning the world.”²¹ Indeed, Drinnon convincingly demonstrates that U.S. wars in Asia over the course of the twentieth century—beginning with the ruthless war against the independence struggle of the Philippines and culminating with that conflict’s ghastly reincarnation in Vietnam—persistently had recourse to the full battery of ideological weapons as well as practical military strategies and tactics that had first been devised in the genocidal dispossession and racial oppression of the American Indians. The U.S. nation-state’s invasions and occupations, perpetrated variously against Mexico, Cuba, Puerto Rico, Haiti, the Dominican Republic, and Panama, as well as the diverse assortment of imperial exploits, military interventions, and covert operations throughout Latin America during both the nineteenth and the twentieth centuries, necessarily relied on that same arsenal. In many of these instances, even the personnel were the same. This is not to pretend that the histories of Latinos’ and Asians’ relations to the U.S. nation-state and its imperialist expansion have been distinguished by the same singular and monumental fact of genocide that has been such a defining feature of the Native American experience (although, in some episodes, such as the atrocity-ridden suppression of Filipino national aspirations, there was, indeed, an uncanny resemblance).²² But it is, nonetheless, to insist on the central significance and enduring meaningfulness for Latinos and Asians of imperialist warfare, conquest, and colonization as the elementary means by which the U.S. nation-state has so commonly sought to dominate the “savage” and “barbarous” “alien races” that it confronted on its ever-expansive and increasingly virtual frontiers. The proverbial “red” race on the borders that so baffled the policy of Madison’s United States inevitably supplied the paragon and the paradigm for how the U.S. nation-state and its military would contend with intractable “natives” wherever they presented an obstruction to the progress of U.S. prerogatives. Hence, that red race likewise necessarily provides a critical conceptual key that unlocks a variegated spectrum of “browns” and “yellows.”

While it is certainly necessary to attend to the respectively irreducible particularities of the specific historical experiences of all the groups that have

come to be crudely homogenized under the generic racial umbrellas *Native Americans*, *Latinos*, and *Asians*, it is, nevertheless, productive to emphasize the broad analogies that reveal compelling continuities among these experiences because such comparisons facilitate theorizing the social relations that historically conjoin them despite their apparent divergences. If it seems somewhat far-fetched to press these analogies, one need only be reminded of the challenge of producing an analysis that could account for the following examples. In 1854, in the legal case *People v. Hall*, the California Supreme Court upheld the appeal of a white defendant who challenged his conviction for murder on the grounds that the case had relied exclusively on the testimony of a Chinese witness and that such testimony ought to have been impermissible because an 1850 statute had established that “no Black, or Mulatto person, or Indian shall be allowed to give evidence in favor of, or against a White man.” The court ruled that *Black* was a sufficiently capacious term that it could encompass all nonwhites in any event. Specifically, however, the court reasoned that Indians originally had migrated to the New World from Asia and that, in effect, all Asians were, therefore, conversely Indians.²³ Such simpleminded racist reasoning was, of course, not the exclusive purview of U.S. jurisprudence. As early as the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, speculative theories concerning the origins of the indigenous peoples of the Americas became inextricably interwoven with a great variety of competing raciological claims as to the “Asiatic” character of the aboriginal Americans. Across the convoluted terrain extending from biblical anthropological notions of human monogenesis and racial degeneration, through scientific racism’s assertions of polygenesis and the immutable stability of a more or less restricted number of discrete and identifiable biological “races” and philology’s confabulations of circuitous racial genealogies evidenced in linguistic resemblances, to the nineteenth- and twentieth-century physical anthropological syntheses distinguished by muddled concepts of the dispersion and diffusion not only of human cultural and linguistic but also of *biological* “traits” (see Jew, chapter 3 in this volume), one or another theory of the Asian origins of American Indians has persistently contended for primacy in the dreary but incessant efforts to produce expressly raciological catalogs of humankind.²⁴

Within these same racial inventories, Latin Americans came to be pervasively racialized as the characteristically “hybrid” products of centuries of “miscegenation” under Spanish and Portuguese colonial rule (see Jew, chapter

3, and Okihiro, chapter 1 in this volume). Thus, Latinos were identified with a racial condition intrinsically anathema to the entrenched and obsessive segregationist prohibitions in the United States against racial “mixing” and intermarriage. In the case of Mexicans and many other Latinos, the despised figure of the Indian savage was routinely foregrounded as a crucial resource for their distinctive denigration as racial mongrels, the worst common denominator that remained as the debased refuse of their constituent parts.²⁵ Thus, one encounters a revealing corollary to the nineteenth-century case of *People v. Hall* in the infamous “Sleepy Lagoon” trial in Los Angeles in 1942, in which twenty-two U.S.-born Mexican youths were alleged to be members of a “gang” and collectively accused of criminal conspiracy to commit murder (see Jew, chapter 3, and Robinson and Robinson, chapter 4 in this volume). A special committee of the grand jury accepted an “expert” report prepared by the “Foreign Relations” Bureau of the county sheriff’s department concerning Mexican criminality. The chief of the bureau, Captain Ed Ayres, himself partly of Mexican heritage, was officially designated the author of the report. “When engaged in fighting,” the report asserted, “. . . [the Mexican’s] desire is to kill, or at least let blood. That is why it is difficult for the Anglo-Saxon to understand the psychology of the Indian or even the Latin.” This bloodthirsty impulse attributed to Mexicans, thus figured as simultaneously Latino and Native American, was depicted as an “inborn characteristic that has come down through the ages.”²⁶ Such innate criminality and cruelty in Mexicans could be traced, the report contended, to the Aztecs’ reputed proclivities for human sacrifice.²⁷ Indeed, the report asserted not only that Mexicans were really mere Indians at heart but furthermore that, as Indians, they were essentially “Orientals” and, thus, were distinguished by an incorrigible disregard for human life.²⁸

These pronouncements were, after all, generated in the context of the U.S. race war against Japan over imperial primacy in the Pacific and in the aftermath of the Pearl Harbor suicide bombings.²⁹ Later, when the fascist propaganda outlets Radio Berlin and Radio Tokyo cited the Ayres Report as evidence that the United States actually upheld the same sort of racial doctrines as Hitler, the enigmatic response of Captain Ayres was to make allegations that the southern California Japanese—prior to being evacuated for summary incarceration (“internment”) in wartime concentration camps (see Robinson and Robinson, chapter 4 in this volume)—had actually incited Mexicans to violence.³⁰ Thus, the figure of the Indian provided the pivotal link in the lethal nexus of ra-

cialized associations that made it possible to mobilize the patriotic conceits of U.S. imperialism's warfare in Asia for the oppression of Latinos within the United States and, likewise, to insinuate phantasmagoric racial conspiracies between Latinos and Asians in the United States as nonwhite "aliens" in the service of a foreign enemy (cf. Levine, chapter 6, and Parikh, chapter 7 in this volume).³¹

To discern the critical significance of Native American racialization as a decisive ideological template in the material and practical subordination of Latinos and Asians is not, however, to deny or trivialize the very salient analogies that could, likewise, be drawn between African American experiences of enslavement and subsequently reconstructed servitude and the colonial migration systems that subordinated the labor of Asians (especially Chinese, then Japanese and Koreans, and later Filipinos and South Asians) and Latinos (especially Mexicans, Cubans, and Puerto Ricans) in the era prior to the 1965 reconfiguration of the U.S. immigration and naturalization regime (see Jew, chapter 3, and Robinson and Robinson, chapter 4 in this volume). Both prior to and after the abolition of African American slavery, the "free labor" ideology persistently celebrated the republican virtues of white workingmen by projecting "slavishness" and "servility" on all those racialized as something other than white, who were then perniciously judged incapable of self-control, "unfit" for self-government, and systematically subjected to the most merciless exploitation.³² In this context, there were also sometimes substantial analogies between the racialization of Asians or Latinos and that of African American Blackness, including the facility with which the term *nigger* could be deployed, for example, to disparage such disparate racial targets as Chinese migrant workers in California and Filipino natives during the U.S. invasion (see Okihiro, chapter 1 in this volume).³³ Indeed, in contradistinction to so many overtly racist justifications for U.S. colonial expansion, one of the explicit white-supremacist articulations of "*anti-imperialism*"—predictably most vocal among some Southern segregationists during debates over the annexation of the entirety of Mexico or the colonization of Cuba, Puerto Rico, Guam, and the Philippines—was, simply enough, in the blunt words of Major General John Dickman while stationed in U.S.-occupied Cuba, that the United States "has too many niggers already."³⁴ While the analogies between the Latino or Asian experience of racial oppression in the United States and that of African Americans are compelling and instructive, there is a danger nonetheless that

such recourse serves to reinstate Blackness as a singular template for comprehending the workings of white supremacy in the United States and, thereby, inadvertently to recapitulate precisely the timeworn Black-white binary as well as the “American exceptionalist” elision of U.S. imperialism with which it is entangled, which I have sought to problematize. If it is indisputably true that white supremacy in the United States has long relegated Latinos and Asians to a racial terrain of nonwhiteness that they inevitably share with African Americans and that, thus, positions them in a complex, contradictory, but still substantial relation to Blackness, it is likewise the case that they are situated in a comparably complicated but meaningful relation to that other antithesis of whiteness—the “red” racial borderland of Native Americans.

Precisely because of the profound differences and divergences historically between the racial predicaments of American Indians and those of Blacks, Madison’s proverbial “border” and “bosom,” the Native American analogy is indispensable in theorizing Latino and Asian racial formations. Whether as racialized labor migrations or colonized subject populations, Latinos and Asians have long played crucial roles in the social production of “America” and “American”-ness. Both Latin America and Asia, as well as Latinos and Asians within the United States, have been central to the consolidation of historical projects of U.S. nation-state formation and empire-building. Yet, insofar as they have largely been rendered racially legible either as the natives of foreign lands or as immigrant and alien border-crossers, their respective racialized conditions of nonwhiteness have been constructed, like that of Native Americans, to be essentially not “American” at all. Like American Indians, therefore, and in marked contradistinction to African Americans, Latinos and Asians have each served as a constitutive outside against which the white supremacy of the U.S. nation-state could imagine its own coherence and wholeness.

Against an “American” national identity historically produced to be synonymous with racial whiteness and pervasively identified as such by many migrant communities of color, and in the face of a hegemonic denigration of the Blackness that has been reserved as the distinctive and degraded racial condition of African Americans, Latinos and Asians have long found that their own *national* origins come to be refashioned in the United States as *racialized* (or *reracialized*) identities inimical to the “American”-ness of white supremacy. Thus, the meaning of “Chinese”-ness, for instance, was reconfigured for nineteenth-century Chinese migrants as their pronouncedly and irreducibly

racialized station within the U.S. social hierarchy. Similarly, the very word *Mexican* became a derogatory epithet of racist contempt. And so on and on. The ever-proliferating assortment of Latin American and Asian colonial subjects and labor migrants repeatedly experienced the process by which white supremacy's lurid alchemy readily transmuted their distinct nationalities into new racialized categories of social distinction and discrimination. To be Latino or Asian within the space of the U.S. nation-state or its imperial projects has, therefore, nearly always meant having one's specific national origins as well as cultural, religious, and linguistic particularities—in short, the convoluted amalgam of one's foreign or alien status—rendered virtually indistinguishable from a conclusively racial condition of nonwhiteness. The additive elaboration of racial categories derived from terms that refer to, or may be associated with, supranational global regions—*Asian*, *Latino*—abides by the same fundamental logic that racializes people in terms of their presumed affiliation with foreign *places*. Thus, as Lisa Lowe has incisively argued, as an effect of this particular dynamic of racialization, and in spite of U.S. citizenship and having been born in the United States or descended from prior U.S.-born generations, “the Asian is always seen as an immigrant, as the ‘foreigner-within’” and “remains the symbolic ‘alien’” (see Molina, chapter 2, Jew, chapter 3, Levine, chapter 6, and Parikh, chapter 7 in this volume).³⁵ Contending with a strikingly parallel problematic in Chicano studies, Francisco Balderrama and Raymond Rodríguez have discussed the “once a Mexican, always a Mexican” racist premise that was a fundamental condition of possibility for the mass deportation and repatriation during the 1930s, not only of migrants but also of their children who were U.S. citizens by birth (see Jew, chapter 3 in this volume).³⁶ Addressing the broader implications of the characteristically racial nativism of the 1990s, furthermore, Rodolfo Acuña has argued that this new racism “does not distinguish one Brown person from another, citizen from immigrant, recent immigrant from second generation,” that it categorizes all people of color, in effect, as immigrants, “sees *all* immigrants of color as ‘illegal aliens,’ regardless of their actual legal status,” and, thus, stigmatizes them “as welfare recipients, criminals, or other morally inferior creatures”—in short, disqualifies them from any conceivable credibility as “real Americans” (cf. Jew, chapter 3, and Levine, chapter 6 in this volume).³⁷

The racialized equation of Latinos and Asians with foreignness and their figuration as inassimilable aliens and permanent virtual immigrants were the

ideological preconditions that have galvanized a heightened and increasingly pronounced public awareness of the pertinence of Latinos and Asians for the ongoing transformation of the U.S. social fabric that has arisen largely in the wake of the monumental reformulation of the U.S. immigration law in 1965 (see Saito, chapter 5, Levine, chapter 6, and Parikh, chapter 7 in this volume). With Latinos and Asians together constituting the vast majority of contemporary migrants to the United States, the intensified interest in these social groups is rather evidently animated by questions of racial formation and transformation. In spite of the long historical legacies of their diverse but agonistic trajectories of racially subordinated incorporation within the U.S. social order, however, Latinos and Asians frequently blur into one as they assume the appearance in public discourse of a more generic and enigmatic *question* about *immigration*. Not only does the *immigration* rubric generate a euphemistic ruse for what is, in fact, *racial* discourse; it also elides crucial distinctions by conflating Latin American and Asian migrations with earlier migrations from Europe that came to be racialized as white.³⁸ Elusively shared between the xenophobic nativism of immigration restrictionists and the xenophilic liberal celebration of an “immigrant America,” the transhistorical and teleological figure of “immigration” as such is exposed as a symbolically charged, ideologically overburdened fetish of U.S. nationalism itself.³⁹ Likewise, homogenized discourses of “immigration” dilute the irreducible historical specificities of distinct migrations, and the substantive inequalities among them, *within* and *between* Latino and Asian racial formations (see esp. Molina, chapter 2, and Parikh, chapter 7 in this volume).

Conversely, a critical scrutiny of the legal economies of immigration, naturalization, and citizenship becomes utterly indispensable for understanding Latino and Asian racial formations. Recent migrations, and the role of the law in hierarchically evaluating, ranking, mobilizing, and regulating them, are simply incomprehensible without an appreciation of the tenacious centrality of white supremacy for U.S. immigration and citizenship law, historically, especially as these have been deployed in divergent but complementary ways against Latinos and Asians in particular. In what was the first legislative determination of access to U.S. citizenship and, in effect, the first official definition of U.S. nationality, the First Congress of the United States mandated in the Naturalization Act of 1790 that a person who was to become a naturalized citizen of the United States must be “white.”⁴⁰ What is perhaps most remark-

able, however, is that this whites-only policy for migrant access to U.S. citizenship remained in effect until 1952.⁴¹ Among the first actual U.S. immigration laws, furthermore, was none other than the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882, which prohibited any further Chinese migration.⁴² Not only was citizenship explicitly barred on the basis of race, but now began an era of unprecedented immigration regulation that would increasingly seek to exclude whole groups even from entry into the country, solely on the basis of race or racialized nationality. Chinese exclusion was followed not long thereafter by prohibitions against Japanese and Korean labor migration by diplomatic accord and, finally, with the passage of the Immigration Act of 1917 (primarily in order to exclude migration from British colonial India), the establishment of an “All-Asia Barred Zone” proscribing migrations from Afghanistan to the Pacific.⁴³ Thus, the formulation of *Asiatic* and *Asian* as overtly racialized categories became institutionalized by law and ensconced in U.S. immigration policy.⁴⁴ Notably, the staggeringly expansive and rigid restrictions against Asian migrations were coupled with a stunningly absolute omission of Latin American migrations from any specific national-origins or hemispheric stipulations or regulations, leaving the robust and enthusiastic importation of Mexican migration in particular simultaneously unhindered by any all-encompassing exclusions and sufficiently flexible to be rendered “illegal” and conveniently subjected to mass deportations as a routine technique of labor subordination and discipline.⁴⁵ Hence, the operations of U.S. laws of citizenship and immigration reveal decisive features of how the variously racialized identities of Latinos and Asians have, indeed, been profoundly shaped in historically specific relation to the U.S. state (see esp. Molina, chapter 2, Jew, chapter 3, Robinson and Robinson, chapter 4, Saito, chapter 5, Levine, chapter 6, and Parikh, chapter 7 in this volume). Such intimate entanglements between racial formations and the state thus remind us that all racial identities are always preeminently *political* identities and, moreover, reveal U.S. nationalism itself to be a racial formation.

Social categories such as *Latino* (or *Hispanic* as well as such precursors as *Spanish speaking*, *Spanish surname*, or *Spanish American*) and *Asian* (or *Asian American* as well as precursors such as *Asiatic*, *Oriental*, or *Mongolian*) are, of course, notorious for the ambiguities and incongruities that they entail for efforts in the United States to identify and name diverse groups of people with origins in these vast regions of the globe. Nonetheless, these hotly contested labels have become pervasive and increasingly salient, both for hegemonic

projects that homogenize these groups as “minority” populations, political constituencies, or market segments and for efforts that seek to produce community and build strategic coalitions for self-representation (see Robinson and Robinson, chapter 4, and Saito, chapter 5, in this volume). How do competing projects reveal themselves in the social and political struggles over these racialized labels? Indeed, how are these struggles often manifested precisely as struggles to fix the meaning of these categories, to reify them and impose a homogenizing coherence that may be exclusionary or, on the other hand, spuriously inclusive? The intrinsic incoherence of such social categories, combined with their persistent meaningfulness, is a telltale indicator of the ongoing reconfiguration of Latinos and Asians as precisely *racial* formations in the United States. If we repudiate the preposterous absurdity of essentialist claims concerning a putative cultural basis for Latino or Asian identities and likewise dispense with *ethnicity* as an analytic category that merely muddles notions of *culture* and *race* (understood anachronistically in narrowly biological terms) precisely when it is presumed to bridge them, then our critical attention may be focused sharply on the dynamic and relational historical processes through which “Latinos” and “Asians” have been *produced* as such—as *groups*, subordinated within a sociopolitical order of white supremacy.⁴⁶

Suspended in more or less excruciating conditions of indefinitely deferred exception as the U.S. nation-state’s seemingly permanent outsiders whose alien racial status insinuates an effect of irredeemable foreignness, Latinos and Asians continue to confront the stubborn intransigence of an “American” racial order defined in Black and white. What are the wider processes of racialization that mediate constructions of both nationally specific and more broadly inclusive Latino and Asian identities—in relation to one another as well as in relation to the hegemonic polarity of whiteness and Blackness? What are the implicit or explicit ways that whiteness and Blackness might figure in the formulation of these identities? What might be the ways that particular Latino or Asian groups discern crucial differences, and, perhaps, sustain racialized distinctions, between and also within these same broad labels, among various nationally identified groups? What, in short, are the incipient racial formations and emergent racialized transformations at stake in how these groups relate to one another and the broader U.S. social formation in ways that reveal critical new issues in the ongoing remaking of the racial order of the U.S. nation-state? How are these transformations linked to multiple transnational social formations, such

as migrations, international and civil wars, refugee crises, the mobility of labor and capital, and U.S. imperial projects in the past as well as the present? How do Latino and Asian racial formations in the United States demonstrate the necessity for transnational perspectives in American studies more generally? Likewise, how do the perspectives that emerge from research on Latino and Asian racial formations enable a critique of the U.S. nationalist conceits and presuppositions that have conventionally undergirded much of the scholarship in American and (U.S.) ethnic studies? The essays in this collection have been framed by these vital questions and gesture toward an audacious and still emergent research agenda.

This collection contributes to a much-needed density of critical dialogue in the study of the United States through a concentrated focus on research that examines diverse social relations and substantive intersections *between* Latinos and Asians, or scholarship that otherwise interrogates the sociopolitical processes that have served to reify their mutual separation or exacerbate their apparent divisions. The essays that it contains emphasize the wider processes of racialization that mediate constructions of both nationally specific and more all-encompassing Latino and Asian identities in the United States—in relation to one another as well as in relation to the hegemonic polarity of whiteness and Blackness. While the contributors have foregrounded the salience of Latino and Asian *racial* formations, however, it is likewise crucial that these processes of racialization have not been artificially divorced from their articulation within wider conjunctures of gendered, sexualized, and class-specific axes of differentiation and inequality. Indeed, one of the central concerns of this book is precisely to examine some of the ways that Latinos and Asians do not exist in isolation, within the narrow, hermetically sealed segregation of their officially designated respective corners, but rather, together, are dynamically implicated in historical as well as ongoing transnationalized reconfigurations of the broader social formation of the U.S. nation-state itself.

Finally, this book arises in the midst of U.S. imperialism's so-called War on Terrorism—a militaristic frenzy without limits, definitions, or boundaries against an amorphous but undeniably racialized “Arab” and “Muslim” enemy, a global campaign of “preemptive” invasions and military occupations, immediately manifest as a new outbreak of U.S. wars in Asia—and the imposition of a draconian “Homeland Security” regime chiefly distinguished by an onslaught of mass detentions and deportations of Asian and also Latino migrants and the

suppression of political dissent and elementary civil liberties among U.S. citizens. How are Latino or Asian identities posited in relation to, and potentially in contradistinction to, some notion of “American”-ness? Rather than presuppose that what is automatically at stake in such a question is a presumably obligatory positive affirmation of each group’s putative membership and proper belonging in the U.S. polity, however, this book poses this question as a genuinely open-ended one. If, indeed, hegemonic formulations of the national identity of “American”-ness have always been profoundly entangled with the racial formation of whiteness as well as various other dominant configurations of “middle-class” status, masculinity, and heteronormativity, then one of our critical tasks is to illuminate the ways that racially oppressed people do and do not make claims on “American”-ness. Do they disrupt, repudiate, subvert, recapitulate, or endorse the hegemonic U.S. social formation? Do their very efforts to challenge their subjugation by white supremacy become captive to its grinding machinations and even enlisted in the service of sustaining the efficacy and reenergizing the resilience of their own and others’ oppression? These questions must necessarily be among the more urgent and most dire concerns of any responsible and engaged scholarship that critically investigates the workings of racism in the United States. For we must have the political courage to soberly assess not only the heroism of our organized mobilizations but also the mundane struggles of our alienated everyday life; not only the elements of antagonism within our estranged compliance but also the accommodation within our resistance; not only the integrity and vision of our movements but also their fragmentation and blind spots; not only the urgency of our insurgencies, therefore, but also the patience required to move beyond the uncommon denominator of our accidental origins and ossified identities, toward the vital solidarity of our inherently incomplete and still-emerging purpose.

Notes

The first epigraph is taken from James Madison to Thomas L. McKenney, 10 February 1826, Library of Congress, Madison Papers, “Vol. 75: Feb. 4, 1826” (I am grateful to Philip Bigler, director of the James Madison Center, James Madison University, for his gracious assistance in identifying the original source of this much-cited quotation and to my research assistant, Kimberly Seibel, for her admirable and unfaltering diligence in pursuing this question until it was finally resolved). The second epigraph is taken from Hamid Dabashi’s “The Moment of Myth: Edward Said (1935–2003),” published by AsiaSource, an online resource of the Asia Society (<http://www.asiasource.org>).

1. Churchill, *Fantasies of the Master Race*.
2. For considerations of this phrase from Melville, see Drinnon, *Facing West*; cf. Takaki, *Iron Cages*, 80–107.
3. Williams, “Frontier Thesis”; cf. Williams, *Empire as a Way of Life*.
4. Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, 326, 340.
5. Patterson, *Slavery and Social Death*, 7.
6. Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, 317.
7. Even during the earliest era of African enslavement in the British colonies in North America, Winthrop Jordan has suggested, the “heathenism” and “savagery” of Africans tended to be given relatively minor emphasis—in contradistinction to such characteristics in the Indians—and, generally, treated as secondary to their skin color (*White over Black*, 20–28).
8. Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, 319 and 319 n. 1.
9. For an important consideration of the persistence and perpetuation of *Indian* as a generic category in spite of an always increasing ability on the part of whites to differentiate among distinct Native American tribes, see Berkhofer, *White Man’s Indian*.
10. Analogously, Winthrop Jordan has argued that, for Europeans on both sides of the Atlantic, “the Indian and the Negro remained . . . distinctly different intellectual problems”: Indians raised a question as to their *origins*, whereas Blacks presented a puzzle concerning their *color* (*White over Black*, 239–40).
11. Here, it is important to note that I am not using *foreign* in any strict geopolitical sense. The enduring modern foundations of federal Indian law, based principally on U.S. Supreme Court Chief Justice John Marshall’s decisions in *Cherokee Nation v. Georgia* (1831) (30 U.S. 1 [1831]) and *Worcester v. Georgia* (31 U.S. 515 [1832]), figured the legal status of Indian tribal sovereignty as precisely *not* that of foreign nations but rather that of “domestic dependent nations.”
12. See Ruppel, “Nations Undivided,” chaps. 3–4; cf. Deloria and Wilkins, *Constitutional Tribulations*; Hoxie, *Final Promise*; and Smith, *Civic Ideals*.
13. I adopt the term *white nationalism* from Takaki (*Iron Cages*, 15) as well as Wahneema Lubiano’s incisive remark: “The perspective of black nationalism permits the realization that . . . the dominant discourse of U.S. history has been some form or other of white American nationalism” (“Black Common Sense,” 235).
14. James Monroe, “Message to Congress, December 2, 1823,” in Hofstadter, ed., *Great Issues in American History*, 244–47.
15. See esp. Horsman, *Race and Manifest Destiny*; but also Acuña, *Occupied America*; and Hietala, *Manifest Design*.
16. Hietala, *Manifest Design*, 152–66.
17. Nobles, *American Frontiers*, 241.
18. Beveridge quoted in Smith, *Civic Ideals*, 430–31; cf. Jacobson, *Barbarian Virtues*, 226–27.
19. Depew quoted in Foner, *Spanish-Cuban-American War*, 2:672.
20. So called by Henry Luce, the conservative millionaire publisher of *Time*, *Life*, and *Fortune* magazines and a vocal isolationist through the 1930s, in the essay “The American Century,” which appeared in the 17 February 1941 issue of *Life*, ten months *prior* to the bombing of Pearl Harbor. For an insightful discussion of Luce’s geopolitics, see Smith, *American Empire*, 1–28.
21. Drinnon, *Facing West*, 464–65.

22. Jacobson notes: “Historically constant casualty-to-kill ratios were dramatically reversed in the Philippines, with the Filipino dead outnumbering the wounded by fifteen to one. . . . By 1902, General [Jacob] Smith had ordered the summary death, not of actual Filipino combatants, but of ‘all persons . . . who are capable of bearing arms. . . .’ When asked by a marine commander where the line should be drawn between mere children and potential combatants, Smith replied, ‘ten years of age’ ” (*Barbarian Virtues*, 244).
23. *People v. Hall*, 4 Cal. 399 (1854). This example is borrowed from Haney López, *White by Law*, 51–52; cf. Okihiro, *Margins and Mainstreams*, 50–51.
24. See generally Smedley, *Race in North America*.
25. See, e.g., Horsman, *Race and Manifest Destiny*, 208–48.
26. Edward Duran Ayres Report (1942), Sleepy Lagoon Commission Papers, in *Readings on La Raza: The Twentieth Century*, ed. Matt S. Meier and Feliciano Rivera (New York: Hill and Wang, 1974), 131.
27. *Ibid.*, 129.
28. *Ibid.*, 128.
29. For an analysis of the U.S. war against Japan as a race war, see Dower, *War without Mercy*.
30. This example is discussed in McWilliams, *North from Mexico*, 233–35; cf. Acuña, *Occupied America*, 268–69.
31. Notably, soon thereafter, during the 1943 “zoot-suit riots,” when white sailors and soldiers stationed or on furlough in Los Angeles, augmented by civilian white mobs and the police, rampaged in the streets against Mexican youths as an alien and criminal menace, African Americans and Filipinos were likewise targeted.
32. See Almaguer, *Racial Fault Lines*; Roediger, *Wages of Whiteness*; Takaki, *Iron Cages*; and Saxton, *White Republic*; cf. Saxton, *Indispensable Enemy*.
33. Modified adaptations—such as *timber niggers*, used for Chippewa Indians in northern Wisconsin, or *sand niggers*, used for Arabs, especially during and since the first U.S. war against Iraq in 1991—are also noteworthy. For parallel examples of how the racist epithet *gook* was deployed not only against the Asian targets of U.S. military aggression in the Philippines, Korea, and Vietnam but also against a variety of other nonwhite natives, including Haitians, Nicaraguans, Arabs, and Hawaiians, see Roediger, *Abolition of Whiteness*, 117–20.
34. Dickman quoted in Jacobson, *Barbarian Virtues*, 233.
35. Lowe, *Immigrant Acts*, 5–6.
36. Balderrama and Rodríguez, *Decade of Betrayal*, 218; cf. Guerin-Gonzales, *American Dreams*; and Hoffman, *Unwanted Mexican Americans*.
37. Acuña, *Anything but Mexican*, ix–x.
38. Compare, e.g., the respective critical discussions of “the immigrant analogy,” “the ethnic myth,” or “ethnicity-based theories of race” in Blauner, *Racial Oppression*; Steinberg, *Ethnic Myth*; and Omi and Winant, *Racial Formation*.
39. For a more extended critique of the essentialized figure of the *immigrant* as an object of U.S. nationalism and nativism, see De Genova, *Working the Boundaries*; cf. Honig, “Immigrant America?” and *Democracy and the Foreigner*, 73–106.
40. Act of 26 March 1790 (*Statutes at Large of the USA* 1 [1845]: 103). For a more extensive discussion, see Haney-López, *White by Law*.
41. Immigration and Nationalities Act of 1952 (Public Law 82–414; *U.S. Statutes at Large* 66 [1952]: 163), also known as the McCarran-Walter Act.

42. *U.S. Statutes at Large* 22 (1882): 58.

43. Act of 5 February 1917 (*U.S. Statutes at Large* 39 [1917]: 874). Filipinos, notably, having been designated as U.S. nationals owing to their colonized status following the U.S. occupation that began with the Spanish-American War in 1898, were an important exception to the all-Asian exclusion (see Ngai, “Undesirable Alien”; cf. Ngai, *Impossible Subjects*, 96–126).

44. For more extensive discussion, see Ancheta, *Asian American Experience*; Chang, *Disoriented*; Haney-López, *White by Law*; Hing, *Making and Remaking*; Kim, *Legal History*; and Salyer, *Laws Harsh as Tigers*.

45. For a more detailed account, see De Genova, “Production of Mexican/Migrant ‘Illegality’”; and Ngai, *Impossible Subjects*. For a more general critical consideration of migrant “illegality,” see De Genova, “Migrant ‘Illegality’ and Deportability.”

46. For a related and more extended discussion of Latino racial formations, see De Genova and Ramos-Zayas, “Latino Racial Formations.”

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