Introduction

Asian American Racial Formation and the Image of American Democracy

Shortly after World War II ended, the President’s Committee on Civil Rights released its 1947 report entitled *To Secure These Rights*, which dedicated a section to discussing the injustice of Japanese internment. It noted that not since the days of slavery had the nation witnessed such a wholesale displacement and incarceration of a group of people. The committee worried about the implications of Japanese internment for the future of American civil rights and advised the federal government to explore other means to ensure national security that did not entail mass accusations based on national heritage. Besides detailing the injustice of Japanese internment, the committee called attention to discrimination against the Japanese, who were denied the right to citizenship by naturalization. It deplored the way this inequality had impinged on their economic opportunities, particularly through California’s 1913 Alien Land Law, which made it illegal for aliens ineligible for citizenship to purchase agricultural land or lease it for more than a period of three years. While the committee believed that a democracy could establish reasonable tests to determine an individual alien’s eligibility for citizenship, it nevertheless considered the racial qualification to naturalized citizenship an unjust rule, given that a standard based solely on race had “nothing to do with a person’s fitness to become a citizen.” To correct this
inequity, the committee recommended that the federal government go beyond adding Japanese to the list of exceptions to the whites-only rule that already included Chinese, Filipinos, South Asians, and persons of African descent. It urged the government to remove all racial barriers to naturalized citizenship.

The President’s Committee on Civil Rights sought to explain why it was so essential to ensure civil rights for all in the postwar period. To that end, it pointed to the rise of a new world conflict, particularly the ideological battle being waged against the United States by the Soviet Union. In this emerging struggle, the Soviet Union disseminated stories on the rampant racism in U.S. society that proved U.S. democracy “an empty fraud” and in so doing, replaced the World War II propaganda of Germany and Japan that sought to accomplish the same. The committee beseeched the federal government to take seriously the way U.S. racism was becoming an issue in world politics. It echoed the concern of the undersecretary of state Dean Acheson that broadcasting the mistreatment of Asians and blacks in the United States was hampering the nation’s ability to build trust and cooperation with non-Western countries. The committee asserted that in this highly interdependent world, American racism compromised the security of not only the United States but also the world.

Arguing that racism was undercutting the ability of the United States to be the leader of the “free world,” the committee looked to establish the importance of civil rights reforms to advancing the nation’s Cold War policy of internationalism and communist containment. It maintained that racialized minority integration was critical to reclaiming the legitimacy of American democracy and that this restoration could help contain the influence of communist ideologies and foster trust and cooperation between the United States and non-Western countries. In charting a new civil rights frontier, the committee did not merely map out what the federal government had yet to do to secure the rights of all. It also delineated a place where democracy and national security interacted and became mutually constitutive.

The interplay between democracy and national security, between Cold War internationalism and communist containment, did not, however, simply hinge on racial integration, it also appeared to necessitate the suppression of those suspected of espousing communist beliefs. This explained why President Truman not only enacted measures to desegregate
the armed forces and the federal workforce, but also passed the Federal Employees Loyalty Program to oust suspected communists from the federal government. In this expanded framework, the inclusion of racialized minorities and the exclusion of political dissenters both functioned to promote the credibility of U.S. democracy. In this view, the federal government was influenced by the need to show the international community the nation’s commitment to democratic principles when it backed civil rights reforms. It further acted to safeguard the legitimacy of American democracy by supporting measures that limited the rights of those who promoted communism or called into question the superiority of the American political system.

This book examines how both securing and infringing upon the rights of Asian Americans worked to promote the superiority of U.S. democracy over communism during the early Cold War years from 1946 to 1965. It analyzes the ways Asian American racial formation gave rise to this dual effect, specifically how popular perceptions of Asian Americans as the foreigners-within cast them at once as “loyal citizens” to be integrated into dominant society and as “alien subversives” to be deported. The racialization of Asian Americans as the foreigners-within positioned their inclusion as well as their exclusion from dominant society as responses to the demands of Cold War internationalism and communist containment. My analysis of this effect goes beyond detailing how changes in U.S. foreign relations with countries in Asia impacted the social standing of Asian Americans; I aim to develop an understanding of how these changes shaped the kinds of stories that the state told about race and U.S. democracy. These state-generated stories were important not only for promoting the nation’s Cold War agenda but also for influencing the efforts by Asian Americans to secure their social and political legitimacy in Cold War America and the stories they told about race in the United States.

The communist revolution in China in 1949 along with the outbreak of the Korean War a year later provide the context in which to see the federal government’s desegregation measures and liberalization of immigration laws as actions geared toward advancing the credibility of U.S. democracy abroad. Following the escalation of the Cold War into open conflict with the outbreak of the Korean War, the federal government drew on the successful incorporation of Asian Americans within the nation’s suburbs and workplaces to promote the benefits of the American way of life and
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to show the nation’s goodwill toward “free countries” in Asia. However, it also implemented policies that monitored the activities and scrutinized the loyalties of Chinese and Korean Americans. Through these measures, the federal government sought to promote the superiority of the American political system by suppressing any dissenting views. Still, the Cold War formation of “two Chinas” and “two Koreas” helped to avert a wholesale association of Chinese and Korean Americans with communism. The rise of the U.S.-backed Republic of China in Taiwan in 1949 and the Republic of Korea in the southern Korean peninsula in 1948 generated different means to assess the loyalties of Chinese and Korean Americans, illuminating the ways racial discourses worked to promote the benefits of the American way of life.

The belief that Asian Americans were direct extensions of people in Asia, regardless of place of birth or length of stay in the United States, allowed the political shifts that occurred between the United States and Asia to generate conflicting articulations over their place in Cold War America. The communist revolution in China along with the outbreak of the Korean War advanced beliefs about the likelihood that Asian Americans, particularly Chinese and Korean Americans, were communist agents who needed to be ousted from the nation. The nation’s endeavor to contain communism in Asia, however, also promoted Asian American integration as a means of demonstrating the legitimacy of American democracy and the goodwill of the United States toward all “free countries” in Asia. In light of these conflicting imperatives, mainstream periodicals and government reports alternated between depicting Asian Americans as fully assimilated Americans whose cultural ties were an asset to the nation’s Cold War effort and as unassimilated aliens whose ties to their country of origin needed to be monitored and regulated. As these shifts demonstrated, the construct of assimilation functioned to reveal the goals and aspirations of the state: state-generated narratives drew on the successful adjustment of Asian Americans in U.S. society to establish the superiority of the American political system.

Many Asian Americans thereby drew on their designation as assimilated Americans and as representatives of Asia to show that they deserved acceptance in mainstream society and were willing to advance the credibility of U.S. democracy in Asia. Such displays of Americanness and loyalty not only helped to deter the systematic harassment of Chinese and
Korean Americans following the communist revolution in China and the outbreak of the Korean War, they also enabled Asian Americans to press for greater civil liberties. These gains explained why so many were complicit with the state when it depicted at times the perceived cultural and national differences of Asian Americans as traits to be contained and erased, and at other times preserved and valorized. These gains did not, however, secure the consent of all to the dictates of U.S. foreign policy in Asia. Some Asian Americans promoted instead communist ideologies in their campaign to establish a "free Asia" and to create a society that was free of racist practices. This book intends to explore these varied responses and show Asian American culture as a site that generated competing stories about race and U.S. democracy.

Race and Cold War Democracy

One of the central concerns of this study is to explicate the different ways race worked to demonstrate the preeminence of the American way of life during the Cold War. To that end, this book utilizes Asian American racial formation as its primary mode of analysis to explore the effects of U.S. foreign affairs on domestic civil rights. Asian Americans, as the main subjects of this historical inquiry, also define and shape its methodological approach. This approach draws on the insights of Asian American studies scholars who examined how Japan’s bombing of Pearl Harbor and the forging of an alliance between the United States and China to combat Japanese aggression resulted in a split in the views and treatment of Chinese and Japanese Americans. As the cultural critic Elena Tajima Creef has shown, the shifts in U.S. foreign relations with Asia during World War II generated a need to discern what was previously seen as “inscrutable.” While these changes pushed the federal government to distinguish the Chinese as friends from its enemies, the Japanese, they did little to unsettle the perception of Chinese and Japanese Americans as extensions of people in China and Japan, regardless of whether or not they were American-born. The policies that the federal government enacted to mitigate wartime concerns over national security, which resulted in the internment of Japanese residents on the West Coast in 1942 and the repeal of
the Chinese exclusion acts in 1943, revealed the ties that were thought to bind Asian Americans to their countries of ancestry—ties that continued to differentially affect the social standing of Asian Americans in Cold War America.

For the historian Ronald Takaki, the perception that Japanese Americans were "strangers from a different shore," more than any other reason, led the government to adopt the policy of evacuation and internment of Japanese residents on the West Coast, in contrast to the policies that addressed concerns over the loyalties of German and Italian immigrants during World War II. Similarly, the historian Mae Ngai drew on the wartime phrase "A Jap is a Jap" to show how the belief that all Japanese were "racially inclined to disloyalty," regardless of place of birth, resulted in the suspension of the civil liberties of 120,000 internees, two-thirds of whom were citizens, given that the government never formally nullified the citizenship of Japanese Americans. The 1943 Magnuson Act, which repealed the Chinese exclusion acts, set up an annual Chinese quota of 105, and granted naturalization rights to the Chinese, was passed to increase the status of Chinese in the United States; nevertheless, the act demonstrated how the racial formation of Asian Americans as the foreigners-within continued to make the social standing of Chinese Americans contingent on U.S. foreign relations with Asia, albeit in a contrary fashion than what Executive Order 9066 had exacted on the Japanese.

According to the legal scholar Neil Gotanda, President Franklin Delano Roosevelt urged Congress to revoke the Chinese exclusion acts in order to counter Japanese propaganda that blasted the nation's racist immigration laws for banning the entry of Chinese to the United States and for denying to them the right to naturalization. The Magnuson Act was thereby enacted to thwart the efforts of the Japanese government to unite Asia under its leadership with the formation of the Greater East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere. Its passage, moreover, showed how the credibility of U.S. democracy and the nation's treatment of its Chinese residents became consequential factors in winning the Pacific War and securing an alliance with China. The political scientist Fred Riggs corroborated this view as he detailed how special interest groups had lobbied for the repeal of the Chinese exclusion acts because they believed that the extension of civil rights to Chinese Americans would help the nation's war effort in the Pacific. The passage of the Magnuson Act enabled the state to generate a
story about race and U.S. democracy that delineated the superiority of the United States over Japan and the totalitarian regime of Nazi Germany with its espousal of Aryan supremacy. In a similar fashion, the policy of "military necessity" that the federal government adopted to legalize Japanese internment safeguarded the credibility of American democracy by designating the incarceration of Japanese Americans a matter of national security and not a case of racism.

Despite the many works that focus on the split in the views and treatment of Japanese and Chinese Americans during World War II, African American history has taken center stage in studies of the impact of U.S. foreign affairs on domestic civil rights. For instance, the historian Brenda Gayle Plummer is noted for opening up the field of race and U.S. foreign affairs with her 1996 study *Rising Wind: Black Americans and U.S. Foreign Affairs, 1935–1960.* Unlike most scholars of U.S. diplomatic history, Plummer showed that black Americans maintained a sustained engagement with U.S. foreign affairs; far from being apathetic about such matters, they actively opposed the spread of fascism and the rise of the Japanese empire. African American organizations, she revealed, made use of the United Nations during the postwar era to gain political leverage in the United States. Most notably, Plummer examined the implications of the 1954 landmark U.S. Supreme Court case *Brown v. Board of Education* on U.S. foreign policy by detailing how the movement for racial equality was pivotal to advancing the nation's efforts to contain the spread of communism abroad during the early Cold War years.

Plummer's pathbreaking study has influenced the works of many scholars, including the legal historian Mary Dudziak. In her 2000 book *Cold War Civil Rights,* Dudziak analyzed how race relations in the United States influenced the nation's foreign affairs during the early Cold War years. According to Dudziak, the federal government was engaged in a sustained effort to tell a particular story about race and U.S. democracy as it sought to counter Soviet propaganda, which was calling attention to racist practices in the United States in order to undermine the benefits of the American way of life. The lesson of this story was always that "American democracy was a form of government that made the achievement of social justice possible, and that democratic change, however slow and gradual, was superior to dictatorial imposition." With this in mind, Dudziak detailed how the fight against racism became linked to the fight against communism,
establishing that civil rights reforms were vital to advancing the nation’s Cold War agenda.

This book does not merely extend Plummer’s and Dudziak’s concerns to include a discussion of Asian Americans. It depicts the ways civil rights reforms worked together with laws that limited the rights of racialized political dissenters to maintain the credibility of American democracy. It further seeks to complicate Dudziak’s conception of how race operated to promote the superiority of U.S. democracy over communism. The inquiry into how Asian American racial formation shaped the discourses surrounding U.S. democracy unsettles the practice of using African Americans as the only signifiers of race in the historiography on Cold War civil rights. It shows how the federal government drew on the relative positioning of Asian Americans vis-à-vis blacks and whites and on the racialization of Asian Americans as the foreigners-within to establish the superiority of the American way of life.

Dudziak, whose work has been formative to developing this field of study, adopted a black/white paradigm to explore the impact of U.S. foreign affairs on domestic civil rights reforms because policy makers and foreign observers of the early Cold War years saw race as “quintessentially about ‘the Negro problem.’” Her use of the black/white paradigm, which she regarded as a “narrowed conception of American race relations,” was in this respect “not an attempt to assert that race is a black/white issue.” Rather, it was an effort to “capture the way race politics were understood at a time when ‘the Negro problem’ was at the center of the discourse on race in America.”

But in this endeavor to recuperate the mindset of policy makers and foreign observers of the Cold War era, Dudziak left unexamined the possibility that policy makers and foreign observers used the category of blacks to represent the circumstances of all racialized minorities. She did not consider that their understanding of the “Negro problem” might have extended beyond the disparities and conflicts between blacks and whites. As a result, Dudziak importantly overlooked how race functioned as a relational construct even during the early Cold War years.

The 1947 report To Secure These Rights, by the President’s Committee on Civil Rights, provides a clear example of how government reports of the time conceived blacks to stand in for the interests of all racialized groups in the United States. A striking aspect of the 1947 report was the amount of attention it paid to all minoritized groups in the United States.
with respect to racial, ethnic, national, cultural, and religious differences. The report’s analysis recognized that Asian American racialization was unlike that of European immigrants, leading it to conclude that the marginalization of Chinese and Japanese immigrants was “intensified by physical characteristics which no amount of acceptance of western ways could change.” As mentioned earlier, the 1947 report also spoke out against the internment of Japanese Americans and decried the way Japanese immigrants were unfairly denied the right to citizenship by naturalization. But what made this study even more noteworthy than its attempt to provide a comprehensive overview of racism’s effects on all racialized groups in the United States was the way it accounted for its particularities. The 1947 study made known that while it aimed to show civil rights violations in all sections of the country, it honed in on the southern states because “the most sensational and serious violations of civil rights have taken place in the South.” It subsequently focused on the problems facing “Negroes” because they were the “most visible minority group” in the South. The report’s placement of blacks at the center of discussions on civil rights violations was, in this view, an attempt to rally behind the most serious of abuses rather than a display of its inattentiveness to the problems confronting other racialized groups, as Dudziak has suggested. While working to construct southern blacks as the primary signifiers of race, this placement did not conceive blacks as the only signifiers of race. What this centering did was to link the concerns of northern blacks, Asians, and Mexicans in a chain of equivalences in order to show the overarching problem of civil rights violations. The conflation of these concerns enabled “the Negro” to signify the needs of all racialized groups while allowing the state to fix the problem of racism by addressing only the issues of southern blacks.

Unlike the 1947 report, other state-sponsored studies sought to downplay the impact of structural racism. Accounts such as the 1958 Where Shall We Live? called attention to the rising number of Asian Americans in the nation’s suburbs in order to attribute the disparities between blacks and whites in U.S. society to the cultural failings of blacks rather than to the whites-only restrictions in housing. In this context, blacks did not work to represent the interest of all racialized groups in the United States. Rather, the report exemplified what the political scientist Claire Jean Kim has described as the “relative valorization” of Asian Americans vis-à-vis blacks and whites. The cultural critic Leslie Bow has, moreover,
developed the notion of “racial interstitiality” to detail how the black/white binary situated Asian Americans “within the space between normative structures of power.” As I reveal, Asian Americans were likewise figured in state narratives to be at times “like whites” and at other times “like blacks.” This relative positioning of Asian Americans, I argue, importantly shaped popular images of American democracy during the early Cold War years.

Notably, state narratives of the early Cold War years also defined Asian Americans in relation to Asians in Asia. Numerous scholars of Asian American studies have noted the caricature of Asian Americans as the perpetual foreigners-within to be the quintessential racial formation of Asian Americans. This racialization encapsulated the idea that Asian Americans regardless of place of birth or length of stay in the United States remained unmediated extensions of people in Asia. Its historical roots lay in the exclusionist movements of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, which drew on beliefs in the incompatibility of the East and the West and the unassimilability of Asian immigrants to justify barring Asian immigrants from the United States and to block businesses from relying on Asian immigrants as their main source of cheap labor. The state codified this understanding by making Asian immigrants ineligible for citizenship by naturalization and in so doing, bolstered popular perceptions of Asian Americans as the perpetual foreigners-within. These historical events critically reveal how the movement toward the systematic disenfranchise-ment of Asian immigratns established Asian Americans as knowable subjects. Racialization reduced the complexities of an entire population from East, Southeast, and South Asia to a few simple traits and habits and made Asian Americans indistinguishable from people in Asia.

The racial formation of Asian Americans as the perpetual foreigners-within thus allowed the government to draw on the successes of a very select group of Chinese, Korean, Japanese, and South Asian Americans to represent the rising status of all Asian Americans in U.S. society. The government used this generalization to demonstrate not only the validity of U.S. democracy but also the nation’s goodwill toward noncommunist countries such as Japan, the Philippines, India, Burma, and Malaysia. But the effect of Asian American racial formation to elide group differences was not without qualification, even as Soviet propaganda was working to turn the social status of all racialized groups into a measure of the validity
of American democracy. This was because the escalation of the Cold War in Asia that resulted in the formation of “two Chinas” and “two Koreas” prompted the federal government to hone in on the activities of Chinese and Korean Americans for political scrutiny. During World War II, the shifts in U.S. foreign relations with Asia had incited the federal government to distinguish Chinese Americans as its “friends”—distinct from its “enemies,” the Japanese Americans; similarly, in the geopolitical situation of the Cold War, the inclusion and exclusion of Chinese and Korean Americans from dominant society took on greater political significance than the inclusion and exclusion of Japanese, Filipino, and South Asian Americans. After Japan’s bombing of Pearl Harbor, the federal government had systematically designated Japanese Americans as “enemy aliens”; in the new Cold War context, the communist revolution in China along with the outbreak of the Korean War pushed the federal government to see Chinese and Korean Americans as likely communist spies. In examining these developments, this study extends the cultural critic Christina Klein’s observation that Cold War internationalism enhanced the value of Asian Americans as Americans; the nation’s campaign against communism, I will argue, intensified the tendency to view Chinese and Korean Americans as subversives. This book focuses on the activities of Chinese and Korean Americans in order to call attention to the way U.S. foreign affairs differentially impacted the social standings of Asian Americans in Cold War America.

Citizens of Asian America brings to the fore these varied and conflicting understandings of Asian Americans in order to show how these ideas informed the stories that the state told about race and U.S. democracy during the early Cold War years. Despite this focus, this study does not analyze race as just an ideological construct shaping human and institutional actions. It also examines race as a discursive sign that is formative to constructing the image of national progress. Once again, the 1947 report To Secure These Rights, by the President’s Committee on Civil Rights, serves as a solid example of how government reports of the early Cold War years developed race in relation to state agendas. Specifically, the report revealed the importance of positing the American heritage of freedom and equality as the unquestioned basis for the American way of life. This epistemological grounding was useful, for it allowed the report to talk about racism as a phenomenon that showed American democracy to be an ideal that “still awaits complete realization,” rather than as a flaw that
undermined the superiority of the American political system. The 1947 study was therefore able to recognize that a gulf existed between American ideals and practice while maintaining that these discrepancies did not shake the committee’s belief that civil rights would soon be extended to all. By framing racial equality to be foremost a matter of time, the report obscured even its own discussion of how the Cold War had turned racial equality into a national priority. American democracy was in this way credible because the nation remained always already on the path toward social progress.

My book seeks to explore how the rising status of Asian Americans affirmed the belief in the inevitability of national progress and effectively distinguished the superiority of the American way of life over communism. It departs in this way from the project of the historian Brenda Gayle Plummer, as it goes beyond casting racialized minorities as active agents of history and unsettles the facticity of master narratives by uncovering their constructedness. As this study looks to denaturalize the belief that racial equality is the anticipated outgrowth of American democracy, it examines how racial constructions are connected to state agendas.

In my reluctance to limit this study to a foregrounding of Asian American responses to U.S. foreign policy, I take a page out of the feminist historian Joan Wallach Scott’s work on gender as a useful category of historical analysis. Under this framework, the term “race” is not a synonym for Asian Americans, just as “gender” is not a synonym for women. Race, like gender, is an ideological construct that helps to make sense of human actions and a discursive sign that unfolds the making of metanarratives. Asian American racial formation uncovers these processes, revealing assimilation to be an ideological construct that the state drew upon to construct Asian Americans as deserving of integration and as a discursive sign that operated in conjunction with Cold War civil rights to develop a narrative of progress. This approach also importantly explores how the coherence of metanarratives is forged through the elision of differences and contradictions.

Finally, I hope to offer a view of Asian American activism that takes into account the impact of ideological and institutional structures on human actions. My study thereby analyzes how state-generated narratives on the benefits of the American way of life provided Asian Americans a discourse through which to articulate their own self-conception. These tales
not only gave Asian Americans a way to make sense of their racialization in U.S. society, they also prompted some to generate different accounts on race and U.S. democracy. In taking on this approach to understanding the activities of Asian Americans during the early Cold War years, I draw from the work of the cultural critic Lisa Lowe, who examined in her 1996 book *Immigrant Acts* the effect of state narratives on the development of an Asian American culture. For Lowe, Asian American culture can work to reimagine popular understandings of American democracy and social progress.

As Lowe has argued, the racial formation of Asian Americans as the foreigners-within revealed the narrative strategies that the state deployed, especially the immigration and naturalization laws that it enacted to conceive a national identity that was homogenous in its whiteness but still inclusive of racially and culturally marked groups. While the racialization of Asian Americans as perpetual foreigners kept intact this image of the nation, Lowe argued that it generated a clash in the social standing of Asian Americans, evidenced by the way immigration and naturalization laws designated the Asian immigrant to be a desired commodity within the nation’s workplaces but “linguistically, culturally, and racially” outside of and foreign to the national polity. The tension between being economically central and culturally marginal, between being “within” and “foreign,” formed the basis of what Lowe described as the contradictions of Asian immigration. In state-generated accounts, Asian Americans figured as both “persons and populations to be integrated” and as “contradictory, confusing, unintelligible elements to be marginalized and returned to their alien origins.” These contradictions also turned Asian American culture into an alternative site “where the palimpsest of lost memories is reinvented, histories are fractured and retraced, and the unlike varieties of silence emerge into articulacy.” The very ideas that kept Asian Americans at odds with the state worked, in this view, to generate competing visions of the nation, visions that showed how the United States was not homogeneous in its whiteness or inclusive of racialized groups.

My analysis of the writings and oral histories of Asian Americans during the early Cold War years employs this view of Asian American culture as an alternative site where Asian Americans generated competing stories about race and U.S. democracy. It shows how some contested the discriminatory practices in the United States by contending that communism and
not American democracy worked to ensure freedom and equality for all. For the few who managed to cross the racial divide and achieve a high level of professional success, this distinction did not always incite them to tout the benefits of the American way of life. Rather, many drew on the singularity of their experiences to point out that Cold War America remained a deeply segregated society. As for the many who professed support for the U.S. Cold War effort in Asia, their professions of support were often accompanied by statements that called upon the United States to relax its immigration policies toward Asia. This link importantly showed that many Asian Americans declared support for the U.S. Cold War effort in Asia as a means to increase their civil rights in the United States rather than as blind expressions of their belief that spreading American democracy in Asia would in fact lead to the betterment of Asian societies. State-generated stories on race and U.S. democracy are thereby important not only for promoting the nation’s Cold War imperatives, but also for shaping the ways Asian Americans went about fighting for civil rights and against the belief in the inevitability of national progress.

Asian Americans and the Historiography on Cold War Civil Rights

As this study examines Asian American racial formation in order to make sense of the conflicting depictions and treatment of Asian Americans during the early Cold War years, it draws on this approach to redefine and broaden the scope of Cold War civil rights historiography. Specifically, it brings together works on civil rights reforms and works on government persecution of people for their political beliefs for the purpose of reframing the conceptual compass of both fields of study. Of the scholarship on the anticommunist crusade of the early Cold War years, the legal historian Michal Belknap has written one of the most definitive studies. In his 1977 book *Cold War Political Justice*, Belknap examined the Smith Act prosecution of Communist Party leaders as a prime example of American political justice. For Belknap, the Smith Act trials demonstrated how the judicial system was intricately bound to partisan politics and did not exist apart from that. Other scholars have similarly remarked on this contingency of
American democracy in their analysis of postwar anticommunist hysteria. Victor Navasky, for instance, explored the domestic attack on political dissenters with the creation of the Hollywood blacklist in his 1980 study *Naming Names*, while Ellen Shrecker provided a comprehensive overview of the ways the government limited the rights of a nation during the McCarthy era in her 1998 study *Many Are the Crimes*. Like Belknap, these scholars highlighted the government persecution of political dissenters in order to track the development of the American political justice system and its compromise of constitutional protections.

Despite revealing U.S. democracy as a mediated ideal that was shaped by the political agendas of the state, these scholars did not seek to explain why the government’s blatant disregard of constitutional protections failed to undermine the legitimacy of the American political system in the minds of the American public. In other words, why has the notion of political justice been ineffective in unsettling fully the image that the United States is always already on the path toward the full realization of democratic principles? This study addresses this dilemma and analyzes the government harassment of Chinese and Korean Americans for their political beliefs as a mechanism to maintain the credibility of U.S. democracy during the early Cold War years. In so doing, this study looks to extend the analytical weight of American political justice and details how the suppression of dissent, although compromising the freedoms guaranteed by the Bill of Rights, critically upheld the belief that American democracy was valid, credible, and superior to all other forms of government. The study of Cold War civil rights is for this reason not complete without an analysis of how the government enacted laws that placed limits on the freedom of expression and due process. My book develops the need to explore how civil rights reforms worked together with the legal suppression of political dissent to establish the validity of the American political system.

As this book foregrounds the political ventures of Asian Americans, it further brings to the fore how the liberalization of immigration laws, particularly the 1965 Immigration and Nationality Act, was an important Cold War civil rights measure. Given that Asian Americans were racialized not only through color but also through national differences, this racialization enabled the federal government to employ both immigration laws and segregation policies to limit the rights of Asian Americans. The campaign among Asian Americans for greater civil rights had for this reason
included immigration reform. Like desegregation measures of the early Cold War years, the 1965 Immigration and Nationality Act demonstrated that granting civil rights to racialized minorities was crucial for promoting the nation’s foreign policies. The federal government promoted Cold War internationalism by placing Asian Americans on equal footing with European Americans and Asia on par with Europe. Scholars such as the immigration historian Daniel Tichenor and the legal scholar Gabriel Chin have noted this as a distinguishing feature of the 1965 act. This study develops the insights of these scholars, and argues that the study of Asian Americans necessitates an inquiry into how immigration reform worked alongside desegregation measures to advance the nation’s Cold War agenda.

In light of the reforms that were passed during the early Cold War years, scholars of Asian American history have largely seen the post-war era as a time when society opened up and when second-generation Asian Americans successfully assimilated into mainstream society. Many of these scholars have not taken into account the fact that racial restrictions were lifted as a result of collective struggle and the nation’s foreign policy endeavors; instead, they have portrayed social progress as a natural outcome of the passage of time. The historian Charlotte Brooks’s 2009 study *Alien Neighbors, Foreign Friends* offers a refreshing account of race relations in postwar California that, for the most part, avoids the reductive reading of racial integration as a testament to the nation’s progress toward the full realization of its democratic principles. In her endeavor to chart California’s shifting race relations through the residential patterns of Asian Americans, Brooks examines the move from racial segregation to racial integration as an indication of how U.S. foreign affairs shaped domestic civil rights reform. Nevertheless, she overlooks the importance of interracial activism in bringing about social change in California; in so doing, she makes light of the historian Scott Kurashige’s analysis of interracial organizations’ pivotal role in ridding postwar Los Angeles of its racist practices.

While my study similarly examines how U.S. foreign affairs connected the fight against housing segregation to the fight against communism during the early Cold War years, it also takes note of the ways U.S. Cold War politics influenced employment practices, limited the political activities of a nation, and shaped immigration reform. I therefore do not share Brooks’s contention that housing is the best way to understand California’s postwar racial dynamics. My study takes seriously the role of interracial activism...
in effecting social change in California. Moreover, it analyzes how the communist revolution in China and the outbreak of the Korean War prompted the federal government to focus on the activities of Chinese and Korean Americans over other Asian groups. My book does not for this reason foreground the experiences of Chinese and Japanese Americans the way Brooks's project had. Rather, it highlights the activities of Chinese and Korean Americans in order to explain why their activities were of greater political significance for U.S. foreign affairs than those of other Asian American groups during the early Cold War years. It hopes to reveal through this analysis the structural forces that treated all Asian American groups as the same as well as those forces that distinguished between groups.

The book explores in five chapters how the processes of securing and infringing upon the rights of Asian Americans worked to establish and uphold the legitimacy of the American political system during the early Cold War years. It begins in chapter 1 with an examination of how the fight to end race-based restrictions in housing emerged at the forefront of the federal government's attempts to show before an international audience the validity of American democracy. The legal campaign to outlaw residential segregation culminated with the U.S. Supreme Court ruling unconstitutional the practice of race-based restrictions in housing. Notably, in its ruling against housing segregation, the Supreme Court designated blacks to represent the interest of all racialized groups. Despite having accepted for review two cases involving Asian Americans due to uncertainty as to whether a ruling on blacks would apply to other nonwhite groups, the Court nevertheless moved to hear only the cases on black Americans. This decision cemented the way blacks functioned in future landmark civil rights cases to signify the capacity of American democracy to secure the rights of all. The examination of Asian American participation in the national legal campaign to invalidate the whites-only rule in housing reveals the creation of this racial understanding. State-generated stories on race and U.S. democracy were thus able to narrate the progress of American democracy by focusing only on the experiences of black Americans.

Chapter 2 suggests that the path to residential freedom entailed not just the outlawing of race-based restrictions in housing but also nonwhite assimilation to the values and lifestyle of white middle-class suburbanites. In state-sponsored studies focused on the increased number of Asian Americans in the nation's suburbs, assimilation was seen as an effective
means to rectify the housing disparities between whites and nonwhites. The reports downplayed the effects of structural racism, attributing the low number of blacks in the nation's suburbs to their failure to adjust to the white middle-class lifestyle. Assimilation emerged in these state-sponsored studies as an important ideological construct that prevented racism from undermining the credibility of U.S. democracy. Against the claims of these studies, the case of Sing Sheng showed how a fully assimilated Chinese American was barred from residing in an all-white suburb of South San Francisco because of his race. But while the Sheng case revealed how the outbreak of the Korean War turned the social standing of Asian Americans into a measure of the credibility of U.S. democracy, it also revealed how U.S. Cold War politics was working to enhance the desirability of racial integration. In this context, the caricature of Sheng as a fully assimilated American helped move the nation past its racial preferences and toward racial integration.

I examine in chapter 3 how mainstream periodicals supported the government's efforts to promote the credibility of U.S. democracy by regularly running stories that recognized the first of a particular ethnic and racial group to obtain a high level of social and professional distinction in mainstream society. Features on the firsts drew on the successes of racialized minorities to show how the nation was progressing toward a racially inclusive society. Following the outbreak of the Korean War, the U.S. State Department commissioned notable Asian American firsts such as the Olympic gold medalist Sammy Lee and the author Jade Snow Wong to embark on tours throughout East, Southeast, and South Asia for the purpose of being the living examples of the benefits of the American way of life. The federal government sought to make use of the racial heritage of Lee and Wong to authenticate the superiority of U.S. democracy over communism and to show the nation's goodwill toward “free countries” in Asia. But as Wong recollected, her Chinese heritage did not provide an inroad into the hearts and minds of the people in Asia. She became convinced after her tour of Asia that there did not exist a shared Asian sensibility. Her recollections were in this respect an attempt to contest the racial formation of Asian Americans as the foreigners-within. In this chapter, I also examine the writings and recollections of other notable “firsts,” including the oral history of Judge Delbert Wong, who sought to call attention to his status as the only Chinese American judge. Judge Wong drew on this distinction
to highlight the way Cold War America remained a deeply segregated society. His story was in this way notable as it looked to unsettle state narratives’ use of the firsts to demonstrate the progress of American democracy.

Chapter 4 details the federal government’s endeavors to protect the integrity of the American political system by suppressing the political activities of Korean radicals in the United States. The outbreak of the Korean War saw the federal government impose sanctions that limited the rights of a nation while heightening its scrutiny of the political activities of Korean Americans. A study of the arrests of David Hyun and Diamond Kimm for subversive activities charts this increased scrutiny, and reveals the rise of progressive organizations that defended the right of Hyun and Kimm to espouse communist ideologies. The government persecution of Hyun and Kimm further brought to the fore how the U.S. government had adopted a very narrow understanding of communist activities and had construed all such activities as supporting the expansion of a Soviet empire. This misconception caused the federal government to overlook how Hyun and Kimm were working to establish a sovereign Korea that was free not only from the vestiges of Japanese colonial rule but also from the dominance of wealthy landowning elites. It also led the government to dismiss the way racist practices in the United States pushed Hyun and Kimm to activism. As the federal government refused to recognize the liberatory potential of communist ideologies, it upheld the American way to be the only way toward creating a socially just society.

Finally, I explore in chapter 5 how the communist revolution in China and the outbreak of the Korean War prompted the federal government to launch two campaigns to monitor systematically the political activities and loyalty of Chinese Americans. In its campaign against the extortion racket, the U.S. government sought to keep money sent by Chinese Americans to their relatives in China from falling into the hands of the communist government in China. In its campaign against the slot racket, the U.S. government implemented tighter sanctions against Chinese immigration in order to prevent the infiltration of Chinese communist spies to the United States through illegal channels. Notably, these two campaigns did not merely document how the government sought to maintain the integrity of the American political system by infringing on the rights of Chinese Americans. They also importantly detailed the efforts of Chinese Americans to fight for greater civil rights through immigration reform. To that
end, many professed their support for the U.S.-backed Republic of China not only to prove their loyalty to the United States but also to remind the government of a viable overseas Chinese population that could help advance the nation’s Cold War efforts in Asia. They therefore appealed to the nation’s desire to create better relations with “free countries” in Asia in their call for greater civil rights through immigration reform. These efforts effectively showed how Chinese Americans made use of U.S. Cold War politics for their own gain, as I argue, contributing to the enactment of the 1965 Immigration and Nationality Act. Civil rights reforms of the early Cold War years thus centered not only on desegregation measures but also on the liberalization of immigration policies.

*Citizens of Asian America* reveals how the shift in U.S. Cold War policies toward Asia greatly enhanced the ways Asian American racial formation shaped discourses on civil rights during the early Cold War years. This study, at its core, seeks to explicate the mechanisms that worked to construct and maintain the superiority of the American political system. Specifically, it highlights how the legal suppression of dissent is vital to maintaining the belief that the American heritage is indeed rooted in the principles of freedom and equality. During the early Cold War years, the outlawing of political opposition worked together with civil rights reforms to bolster the perception that American democracy remained steadfast on the path toward social equality. Asian American representation was central to this narration. My attention to this matter aims to anchor stories on race and U.S. democracy to the goals and aspirations of the state, and thus to unsettle the practice of using historical progress to mask state agendas. Given the recent emergence of postraciality and how it is working to denote the next step toward social advancement, I consider it an important task to call into question racial equality as the anticipated outcome of American democracy. My study of race and Cold War civil rights thereby puts forward the need to examine how racial constructions are conceived in relation to state agendas and how this conception has, in turn, transformed race into a category of analysis that can work to reveal the goals of the state.