

The Latinos of Asia

How Filipino Americans Break the Rules of Race

Anthony Christian Ocampo

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population has managed to fly under the radar. The historical legacies of American colonialism, coupled with US immigration policies that have left the front door open for professional migrants, have transformed Filipino America.⁸⁸ A community that only a century ago was relatively uneducated and predominantly male has evolved into one that is English speaking, well educated, and middle class.⁸⁹ Even so, Filipinos' status as racial minorities means that their ability to become fully incorporated into mainstream spaces of American society remains limited.

3 Suburban Ethnicity

NEIGHBORHOODS HAVE ALWAYS played a pivotal role in how immigrants and their children adapt to life in the United States. Historically, immigrants settled into ethnic neighborhoods out of necessity, as xenophobic attitudes were commonplace among most Americans. Unable to integrate into the mainstream middle sectors of American society, many found refuge in residential spaces that resembled their homelands, at least in terms of the cultural landscape. Within these ethnic enclaves, immigrants could form intimate connections, attend places of worship, and practice their cultural traditions with others from their home country, all the while slowly sharpening their English skills and learning American ways of life.¹ For early American immigrants, who mostly arrived from European societies like Ireland, Italy, and Germany, these neighborhoods were important sites of cultural incubation that provided some solace from the poor working conditions and discrimination they faced in the larger society.² For these early newcomers, immigrant neighborhoods helped explain why the land of milk of honey would take only a generation to yield its promises. For example, the Irish—once seen as racially on par with African Americans—went from illiterate railroad workers, maids, and factory laborers to college graduates, police officers, and respected members of the American middle class within a generation.³

Immigrant neighborhoods today have strong similarities to the ethnic enclaves of yesteryear. They still provide a social space of cultural familiarity that breeds intimate connections with other coethnics.⁴ Immigrant institutions—ethnic grocery stores, English-language-learning schools, and employment placement agencies—continue to play a prominent role in facilitating the adaptation of newcomers and their children.⁵ There are ethnic enclaves in Southern California such as Chinatown, Koreatown, and Little Saigon that resemble the Little Italys and Germantowns of the past in that they provide much-needed job opportunities for immigrants who cannot find work because of their limited English proficiency and education.⁶ In many respects, they also provide important sites of incubation that help position the second generation for a decent shot at making it into the American middle class.

However, the landscape of immigrant neighborhoods has changed dramatically over the past half century since the demographics of immigration shifted from primarily European to predominantly Asian and Latino. Part of the reason for this is that waves of immigrants who came after 1965 are much more diverse in terms of their educational and class backgrounds. In 1965, Congress passed the Hart-Celler Act, which reopened the immigrants after a forty-year hiatus and initiated a set of laws that incentivized highly skilled immigrants to come to the United States.⁷ Although there are still immigrants who come to America with little more than the money in their pockets, consistent with the immigrant narrative of yesteryear, there are also those who arrive with a significant amount of human capital—college degrees, large savings, strong professional networks, and extensive familial ties.⁸ Some of these more well-to-do immigrants even have a decent familiarity with the English language and American cultural values.⁹ The socioeconomic diversity of immigrants has yielded tremendous heterogeneity in the institutional, social, and cultural resources available in contemporary ethnic neighborhoods.¹⁰

This post-1965 wave of immigration gave birth to the modern-day “ethnoburb,” a clever scholarly integration of the terms *ethnic* and

suburb. Just east of Los Angeles lies Monterey Park, the quintessential example of the American ethnoburb. Hailed as America’s “first suburban Chinatown,” Monterey Park houses the largest concentration of Chinese Americans in the United States.¹¹ Half of the residents are of Chinese descent—mainly Chinese (and Taiwanese) professionals and entrepreneurs who migrated after 1970 and upwardly mobile Chinese Americans eager to move out of a rapidly declining Chinatown. The Chinese influence in Monterey Park is unmistakable. Although the city mandates the use of English on business signs, most establishments more prominently display the Chinese-language names of their buildings. Driving down Valley Boulevard or Garvey Avenue, the main streets of Monterey Park, one sees signs in English, but the configuration of the letters is at times confusing to outsiders (such as “H&H” restaurant).¹² The plethora of Chinese supermarkets, restaurants, businesses, community centers, and billboards at times makes local residents feel as if they are not even in the United States, particularly those who are not Chinese.¹³ The immigrant population has even made an impact on local, state, and national politics by electing Chinese officials at each of these levels. Four out of the five local council members of Monterey Park are of Chinese descent. The Monterey Park city council has proved an important training ground for Chinese American politicians.¹⁴ One former council member, Judy Chu, became the first Chinese American elected to Congress in 2009.

Filipinos do not have a Monterey Park. Filipino immigrants have the economic means to move into the suburbs, given that many come with college degrees and valuable professional experience. However, their ability to speak English and their relative familiarity with American ways of life as a result of US colonialism has allowed them to settle in more racially integrated neighborhoods.¹⁵ There are no cities or neighborhoods throughout the entire United States where Filipinos constitute a majority. In fact, there is only one major city in the United States—Daly City—where Filipinos constitute even a third of the population.¹⁶ Filipinos’ English proficiency and educational background have preempted the establishment of a thriving Filipino

ethnic economy in the United States that is comparable to New York City's Chinatown or Miami's Little Havana.¹⁷ In Los Angeles, the area officially designated as Historic Filipinotown is in actuality a predominantly Mexican and Central American neighborhood. Only 3 percent of Filipinos in the county live in Historic Filipinotown (although the area is home to several Filipino community outreach organizations).¹⁸

Two places that quintessentially capture the ethnic neighborhood experiences of Filipinos are Eagle Rock and Carson. In both Eagle Rock and Carson, there is no racial group that holds the majority. Nonetheless, many people casually refer to Eagle Rock and Carson as "Filipinotowns," even though neither neighborhood embodies the same institutional ethnocentrism as an immigrant ethnic enclave or ethnoburb. Eagle Rock and Carson are indeed suburbs, but the level of immigrant ethnic influence is not nearly as visible as that of Monterey Park or other nearby Asian enclaves, such as Koreatown or Little Saigon. Benji Bautista, one of the Filipinos I interviewed, migrated from the Philippines to Los Angeles, where he and his family settled with more established relatives in Eagle Rock when he was just ten years old. His memories of his first weeks in America captured both the suburban ambience and the subtlety of the Filipino ethnic influence in his adopted neighborhood:

My first impression was how quiet it was and how clean it was. There's that isolation from interacting with other people. Because in the Philippines, where I was growing up, right when you come out of the house, there's already interactions between people, even if it's someone selling food on the street. You already have interactions.

When we moved into our first home [in Eagle Rock], I knew my boundaries. But the first place we moved, it felt like it was the Philippines. We were living with relatives. That was an easy transition at that point. But later we moved into our own house, and I was like, this is America. You have borders. You have fences. I didn't make friends in the neighborhood. It didn't seem like there were people my age living in the neighborhood, or maybe I just never saw them. I think there

were kids a few doors down from us, but I never got to meet them, and there was no chance to meet them anyway.

I think silence was the best word for it. That silence is really deafening. The streets are pretty empty, and you have perfectly maintained lawns. Once you've transplanted yourself from a crowded street like in Manila, that's how it's deafening. . . . My image of America was prosperity and money. That image of America was what I saw on television and the movies—like *ET*. It's going to be nice and clean and comfortable, but it seemed surreal once you are transplanted into it. . . .

To my surprise, Eagle Rock was not so *puti* [white]. My image of America was like in the movies, surrounded by white people. That's what I was expecting when I came. At first, I thought I could feel comfortable being surrounded by other Filipinos in Eagle Rock [and] being around familiar faces. But surprisingly, it wasn't the same comfort. Part of it was, unlike the Philippines, everyone seemed to lead their own private life. People were indoors most of the time. I see faces of Filipinos to my left and right, but I still felt like they were inaccessible. In that way, I know there are people like me out here in this very same neighborhood, but it's still very isolating.

Benji's eloquent description of Eagle Rock depicted the quintessential aspects of American suburban life, such as privacy, boundaries, and manicured homes. At the same time, Filipinoness remained embedded throughout, albeit in subtle ways among Benji's family and neighbors. However, for him, they also embodied an Americanness that he was not accustomed to back in Manila. This was suburban ethnicity in action.

As Benji's narrative suggested, the Filipino presence in suburban communities like Eagle Rock and Carson was not overwhelming. Nonetheless, both neighborhoods were home to a plethora of Filipino businesses, most of which catered to the immigrant contingent. Both neighborhoods housed Filipino grocery stores, restaurants, video and music stores, employment placement agencies, and money remittance companies. Most of the Filipinos I interviewed did not frequent these

Filipino establishments regularly, but the sites still provided them with a symbolic sense of ownership over the neighborhoods. Marie, a college student from Carson, said she felt a tremendous sense of comfort in the presence of establishments like Jollibee, a fast-food chain that is the Filipino equivalent of McDonald's. "I think one thing I liked about Carson is that there's such a large Filipino community here," she said. "If you're craving something, you can always go to Jollibee or some other Filipino restaurant." However, when I asked her how often she ate there in the past year, she responded, "Almost never." In suburban neighborhoods like Eagle Rock and Carson, ethnic businesses were never the primary hangout spots for the Filipinos whom I interviewed. As a point of contrast, it is rather commonplace to find large groups of second-generation East Asians congregating within their respective ethnic establishments in other Asian enclaves and ethnoburbs like Monterey Park, Koreatown, and Rowland Heights.

Even though everyone appreciated the presence of Filipinos in their neighborhood, it was the racial diversity of their communities that they valued most—the idea that Eagle Rock and Carson "were Filipino, but not too Filipino." The existence of cities like Monterey Park and other Asian enclaves led some Filipinos to stereotype other Asians as being overly ethnocentric. "I feel like Asians are more to themselves. Asians hang out with other Asians. I feel like we have more exposure," said Ines, a graphic design artist who grew up in Eagle Rock. "My friend Alice grew up in Alhambra where everybody is Chinese, but I feel like Filipinos are more open." She added: "Filipinos are bound to have Hispanic friends and black friends. Asians are not." Lucy, a nursing student from Carson, echoed Ines's sentiments. "I don't see Asians interact with blacks and Latinos," she said. It was commonplace for Filipinos to unconsciously demarcate Filipinos from Asians, just as Ines and Lucy did. Both felt that the diversity of their communities made all the difference. "If I didn't have that diversity, I probably wouldn't know how to deal with other cultures," Ines said. "It made me more open minded." A *Los Angeles Times* survey of Asian Americans lent some credence to their remarks. Their findings

revealed that more than 40 percent of Asians expressed angst about interacting with people outside their ethnic group, while the vast majority of Filipinos, both immigrant and US born, reported feeling comfortable making friends with whites, African Americans, Latinos, and other Asians.¹⁹ This tendency helped shed light on why "there is no Filipino equivalent of Chinatown or Koreatown in Los Angeles, even though Filipinos are the largest Asian group in the city."²⁰ As one Filipino American community leader put it, "We won't ever get ourselves a Monterey Park."²¹

As Ines and Lucy's remarks suggest, Filipinos tend to believe that their residential choices are because they are somehow more open-minded than other Asians groups, as was also suggested by the *Los Angeles Times* survey. However, what most of them do not seem to realize, is that the tapered presence of Filipinos in both Eagle Rock and Carson is also a by-product of the immigrant backlash that earlier generations of Filipino residents faced in the early 1980s and 1990s.

Eagle Rock: Anytown, USA

In the 1970s, Eagle Rock was the stereotypical all-American small town—picturesque, residential, and predominantly white. Most of the residents were police officers and firefighters who had settled there to be close enough to respond to emergencies in any part of the city but still ensure that their families were far removed from the chaos of inner-city Los Angeles.²² Eagle Rock residents also had a reputation for being conservative, typecast in a similar way to modern-day Orange County.

A decade later, immigration rapidly changed the face of the neighborhood. According to the 1980 US Census, two out of every three residents were white, and Latino and Asian immigrant families accounted for the remaining third. However, as the white residents became older, their children were no longer replenishing the neighborhood population. By the middle of the decade, two-thirds of the students in the local junior and senior high schools were either Latino or Asian American, a stark contrast to the demographic patterns of

the neighborhood's residents. Eagle Rock's shift from a predominantly white to a majority-minority community was evident in neighborhood institutions beyond the local public school system. "When I first came here in 1972, I couldn't get over how white [and] Anglo-Saxon this area was," said Father Vincent Serpa, the associate pastor of the local Catholic Church, to a *Los Angeles Times* reporter in 1985. Long-term residents of Eagle Rock were not entirely pleased with the influx of new immigrants to their tight-knit community. "Sure, you hear certain squawks about new people moving in," said a local historian. One local city official added: "I think some of the people are threatened by other lifestyles. The mental attitude is generally conservative and, if you're not white, you're going to have a harder time."²³

During the 1980s, the population of Filipinos grew from fewer than one thousand to an estimated five thousand. The *Los Angeles Times* commended Filipinos in Eagle Rock for bringing "a new, exotic touch" to a neighborhood once described as a "bastion of working-class whites and conservative values."²⁴ Throughout the decade, neighborhoods all over Los Angeles experienced similar demographic shifts due to ongoing Latino and Asian immigration, which frequently elicited backlash from longtime white residents.²⁵ However, Filipinos in Eagle Rock felt that their English proficiency and relative familiarity with American ways of life helped buffer their entrée into the neighborhood. "Ethnic enclaves exist because of necessity," said Eagle Rock resident and Filipino community leader Gilroy Gorre to the *Los Angeles Times*. "That does not happen with the Filipino, who is an American creature, the product of an American educational program. He watches Clint Eastwood and reads *Playboy* magazine." Gorre, the longtime editor of the local *Philippine American News*, would publicly laud the positive reception of Filipinos in the United States, often juxtaposing their experiences to those of other Asian immigrants in an almost boastful fashion. "For the first five or even ten years, the Koreans who come to America are most likely to go to a Korean bookstore, grocer, and insurance agent," Gorre argued. "That creates a geographically defined center for them. But the Filipinos

don't feel subject to those same forces. . . . Filipinos are comfortable in the U.S. language and the culture."²⁶ For Gorre, these factors explained why Filipinos would even consider settling in predominantly white neighborhood like Eagle Rock. "Eagle Rock . . . that is where Filipinos move after they have climbed up the economic ladder to where they can buy their own homes," he said.

By opening ethnic establishments, Filipinos have reshaped the institutional landscape of Eagle Rock, but not to the same extent as in other Asian ethnic enclaves. "With its ethnic grocery stores, small restaurants, and musical dialects, the Filipino community is changing the landscape of Eagle Rock, splashing daubs of exotic color on the staid main streets and homes with white picket fences that characterize the area," reported the *Los Angeles Times*.²⁷ Unlike the ethnic shopping plazas of Monterey Park or Koreatown, Filipino businesses "sit tucked among purveyors of more traditional Americana—the sixty-year old hardware stores [and] the neighborhood barber shops."²⁸ In the early 2000s, Filipino business owners began leasing space in the Eagle Rock Plaza, the neighborhood's only major shopping mall. For a decade prior, Eagle Rock Plaza was practically a ghost town. The mall had a reputation for high turnover in its businesses, and many residents wondered why the mall even remained open at all. However, when Filipino eateries and stores began popping up in the first floor of the plaza, it attracted a new ethnic niche of patrons who started frequenting the mall en masse. "That is ground zero," said one Filipino local resident. "The mall has really come to symbolize the centerpiece of the Filipino community in Eagle Rock." By the late 2000s, the Eagle Rock Plaza had become a social gathering spot for Filipino immigrants, who felt going to the mall was like "walking into Manila" and "[being] back in the Philippines."²⁹ The *Los Angeles Times* even dubbed Eagle Rock Plaza the "anchor" of a "thriving Filipino community."

While not discounting the impact of this new ethnic presence in Eagle Rock Plaza, the reality was that only seven of the more than sixty retailers in the mall were Filipino businesses. Ultimately, the dramatic

response of both the local residents and the *Los Angeles Times* spoke to the newsworthiness of seeing Filipinos institutionally and socially concentrated in a public space. The idea that a "Filipino mall" could not only exist but also thrive—even if just a few stores on a single floor of a once-defunct shopping center—was almost unbelievable for some Filipinos.

Alvin Contreras was one of those Filipinos. Alvin was the cousin of someone I had interviewed from Carson. He had been visiting from San Diego and had come to the coffee shop as his cousin and I were wrapping up our interview. After being introduced, Alvin and I got into a conversation about the respective neighborhoods where we had grown up, and we were joking casually about whose hometown was "more Filipino." To leverage our friendly debate in my direction, I told him that Eagle Rock had its own Filipino mall. "You're so full of shit," Alvin said. "You're lying." I offered to prove it by driving him there, and he happily agreed since he was in the mood for Filipino food anyway. Throughout the half-hour drive to Eagle Rock, Alvin remained skeptical and continued to assume that I was messing around with him. "There's even a Seafood City [a Filipino American grocery store chain] in the mall," I told him, to which he quickly responded, "Yeah, uh-huh. Sure."

We parked the car and started walking toward the plaza entrance on the first floor. A few steps into the mall, Alvin spotted the Seafood City, as well as a parade of Filipinos pushing Seafood City supermarket carts toward the exit, and he immediately burst into laughter for what seemed like a solid minute. "Oh my God!" Alvin said repeatedly, vacillating between this and uncontrollable laughter: "You weren't lying." Once his laughter subsided a bit, Alvin pulled out his iPhone and asked me to snap a picture. "I want to send it to my mom." Alvin stood in front of the indoor Seafood City and pointed at it as if were some type of major tourist attraction. After we ate lunch, Alvin bought some Filipino DVDs and CDs for his mother and aunt, and I drove him back to Carson. Alvin's surprise perfectly captured how

unusual it was for Filipinos to see something that even remotely resembled the landscape of a typical Asian immigrant enclave.

Since their initial arrival in the 1980s, Filipinos in Eagle Rock have not been entirely exempt from immigrant backlash from white longtime residents. Filipinos have encountered major pushback whenever they have attempted to publicly codify their presence in the neighborhood. For example, in 2002, Filipino residents petitioned to have the city post a street sign that read "Philippine Village." From the viewpoint of the Filipinos who spearheaded the project, the sign was meant to celebrate the Filipino presence in the neighborhood and recognize an area that housed a number of ethnic establishments—a church, newspaper, radio station, remittance agencies, and restaurants—that catered to their community. Many opponents, most of whom were white residents, felt that the move was an act of ethnic favoritism and separatism that would ruin the neighborhood diversity. Betty Tyndall, an elderly white woman who had lived in Eagle Rock since World War II, was a fervent opponent to the decision. "The people in Eagle Rock are up in arms about this," she complained. "Eagle Rock is a diverse community where no particular ethnic group should separate itself from the community. I've never seen any group come and ask for this." Another longtime resident, Roe Muzingo, echoed Mrs. Tyndall's thoughts, despite her own immigrant roots. "We're in a melting pot, and we don't want to change it," she said. "I'm Italian, OK? Italian is my heritage, but I'm an American. We shouldn't be separated." Ultimately, the Los Angeles City Council unanimously approved the sign, largely due to the public support and politicking of Latino council member Nick Pacheco, himself the son of Mexican immigrants and a resident of Eagle Rock.³⁰

Given the potential for such immigrant backlash, Filipino business owners have remained keenly aware that being too visible could pose problems for their establishments. When trying to secure space in Eagle Rock Plaza, the Filipino grocery chain Seafood City took extra precautions "to ensure that the market's fish was packaged well enough

to mask any unpleasant odors."³¹ Of course, this company's standard for what constituted an "unpleasant" odor was based not on the perspective of Filipinos but on that of white residents more unaccustomed to the commonplace smells of an ethnic market. Ultimately, most of these neighborhood incidents related to "ethnicizing" public space have mainly involved Filipino *immigrants*. In most cases, the *children* of these immigrants—the primary segment of neighborhood residents I interviewed—remained relatively uninvolved in such debates about Eagle Rock's public space.

Carson: America's Most Racially Balanced Neighborhood

Unlike Eagle Rock, which became a minority middle-class neighborhood only in the past two decades, Carson has been a bastion for upwardly mobile people of color throughout the twentieth century. Carson has long appealed to minority families who were looking for a middle-class neighborhood existence that was unavailable in the city center. From the early twentieth century to the post-World War II period, the opportunities to purchase a home and land were generally unavailable for the majority of racial minorities. Filipinos included. Most people of color at the time lived in overcrowded housing units clustered in the center of Los Angeles. Given these constraints throughout most of Los Angeles, Carson was unique in that it provided people of color the chance not only to own homes but also to be part of community organizations and local politics. Since 1968, people of color of diverse backgrounds—African Americans, Asian Americans, and Latinos—have served as local public officials at every level, from city council members to mayor. The potential of Carson as a space of minority upward mobility even prompted the state to establish a college, California State University-Dominguez Hills, to serve the needs of students of color who were historically being shut out of other institutions for higher learning.

Filipino immigrants first moved to Carson in the early twentieth century. This pioneering group of Filipinos in Carson was part of the

first major wave of Filipino labor migrants who arrived while the Philippines was still an American colony. Unlike today's Filipino immigrants, who are mostly college-educated professionals, many of these early settlers worked in agriculture, canneries, and fishing. Some of them were members of the US Navy, which permitted and actively recruited Filipinos to enlist because of the existing colonial relationship between the Philippines and the United States. The Filipino community that formed in Carson was unique from other pockets of Filipino settlements in the state. Unlike their counterparts who endured poor living and working conditions in the labor camps of northern and central California, Filipinos in Carson had more opportunities to at least sample the American dream.³²

"They had families and their children attended local schools in the South Bay and played on sports teams in their communities and beyond," said Eloisa Gomez Borah, of the Filipino American National Historical Society. As noted earlier, because most Filipino migrants were male and not permitted to marry across racial lines, they generally found it difficult to form families.³³ However, Carson's proximity to Mexico allowed Filipino men to circumvent these constraints. In Mexico, they were not subject to antimiscegenation laws, and thus were able to marry the women they loved.³⁴ Most Filipinos married Mexican women, who at the time were considered white and were technically off limits. Ultimately, though, their common history of Spanish colonialism in their home societies meant that they shared many cultural sensibilities, which in turn allowed their marital unions to flourish.³⁵ In this respect, these marriages demonstrated how Filipinos in Carson had long been engaged in developing close relations across racial lines for most of the twentieth century.

The size of the Filipino community in Carson ushered in unique opportunities for them to become involved in local politics, unlike in Eagle Rock. In contrast to the residents of Eagle Rock, the Carson electorate had long been used to seeing people of color as local political leaders, which made the idea of a Filipino elected official a more acceptable idea. Filipinos had served as leaders in Carson's city council

since the 1980s. In 1997, residents of Carson elected its first Filipino mayor, former council member Peter Fajardo, who at that time became one of the few publicly elected Filipino officials in the country. Despite his ability to garner voter support from a diverse array of constituents, many believed that Fajardo was guilty of ethnic nepotism. During his tenure, he appointed unprecedented numbers of Filipinos into local leadership positions, which other minority leaders argued would ruin Carson's reputation for being America's "most racially balanced community."³⁶

The Fajardo administration stirred up worries among other racial groups that the Filipino presence was becoming too powerful. Many African American and Latino leaders accused Fajardo of earmarking certain positions specifically for Filipinos, a charge that Fajardo vehemently denied. Fajardo had long been a respected local leader even before serving as mayor both among Filipinos and other racial groups, but the perceived disruption in Carson's balance of power caused his political reputation to rapidly erode.³⁷ "It's certainly not a level playing field if a portion of the elected officials are working toward one ethnic group and not looking to help the remainder of the city," said Steven Caudillo, a Latino resident and local city organizer. The strong backlash against Fajardo's perceived attempts to increase Filipinos' political cachet was ultimately indicative of local residents' unwillingness to upset the balance of power among its different ethnic populations. Regardless of whether Fajardo was exhibiting ethnic nepotism, the responses of other minority leaders demonstrated their uneasiness at the idea that Filipinos would somehow come to dominate the local public sphere.

More recently, Filipino leaders attempted to rename a local street as a way to institutionalize their community's presence in Carson. In 2010, a Filipino council member proposed that Moneta Avenue in Carson be renamed Jose Rizal Avenue both to commemorate the longtime presence of Filipino residents and to pay homage to the national hero of the Philippines.³⁸ Almost immediately, local residents protested the attempted proposal. "The proposal threatens to open

ugly racial rifts in Carson . . . where no racial or ethnic group has a majority," stated the *Daily Breeze*, a local South Bay newspaper. Even some Filipinos expressed their discontent with the council member's proposal. "It's not fair for everyone," argued Manny Flores, a local Filipino resident. "It doesn't make sense. Everyone knows we live on Moneta." Flores's remarks echoed the sentiments of other Filipinos who preferred that their community fly under the radar rather than provoke racially charged confrontations with other ethnic groups in Carson.

Second-Generation Perspectives

In both Eagle Rock and Carson, Filipinos constitute about 20 percent of the population. The majority of the Filipino children of immigrants who grew up in Eagle Rock and Carson did not speak a Filipino language (although most acknowledged that they understood Tagalog when immigrant family members spoke it to them). These second-generation Filipinos said they seldom frequented Filipino businesses and establishments unless it was to accompany their immigrant parents or relatives. Only two of the people I interviewed participated in Filipino-specific cultural activities. These two individuals, both Filipina young women, were part of a cultural folk dance troupe, and both had been coerced by their mothers to join initially. When they were at home, hardly any of them watched Filipino television except passively when their immigrant relatives were watching a *teleserye* (soap opera) or newscasts about the Philippines. When they were out in the neighborhood, they were more likely to patronize the local Starbucks than a Filipino establishment. Overall, their neighborhood experiences diverged tremendously from the experiences of other second-generation Asians, who were more actively engaged with their respective ethnic institutions. To a much greater degree, second-generation East Asians and Southeast Asians were bilingual. They translated on behalf of their non-English-speaking parents, they worked for their parents' restaurants and businesses, and they attended language and supplementary tutoring schools operated by

their coethnics.³⁹ In other words, on an everyday level, Filipinos were not as engaged in the cultural activities that, some would argue, define ethnic authenticity.⁴⁰

Were Filipinos who grew up in Eagle Rock and Carson totally assimilated into American culture? Did most of them consider themselves "just" American? These patterns of their cultural engagement might suggest that the answer is yes to both. However, the majority of Filipinos that I interviewed, even those who admitted not being able to speak a lick of Tagalog or who rarely patronized the local Jollibee or Goldilocks (another famous Filipino food chain), still maintained a strong sense of Filipino ethnic identity. Jen, a retail manager who grew up in Eagle Rock, felt it was a given for Filipinos there to have pride in their heritage and to want to "learn new things about the Philippines," even if those opportunities were not readily available. She contrasted her own sense of identity with that of her cousins who grew up closer to Downtown Los Angeles, in a more predominantly white area: "My cousins that live near Downtown, all of their friends are white. Every time they went to a Filipino event that I was part of, they always complained and said it was a waste of time." Renee, a nursing student from Carson, echoed Jen's thoughts when talking about her own cousins who lived in nearby Orange County: "My cousins who live in the OC [Orange County], they're more whitewashed. They don't even like it if their parents speak to them in Tagalog. They never eat Filipino food either. You're not real Filipino if you don't eat Filipino food." As Jen and Renee's comments suggested, neighborhoods seemed to matter a great deal when it came to maintaining ethnicity, even if the institutional landscape of the neighborhood was "not that Filipino."

Even so, most still considered Eagle Rock and Carson "very Filipino" because of the community of coethnics who live there. Although Filipinos did not make up more than a quarter of the residents in either neighborhood, the vast majority overestimated the percentage of Filipinos who lived in their neighborhood. These were some of the demographic approximations made by Filipinos from

Eagle Rock:

RAYMOND: Maybe 60 percent to 70 percent Filipino? God, I don't know. Generally the rest is Latino and white.

JOEY: 30 percent Filipino, 40 percent to 60 percent Latino, and the maybe 5 percent black, and then the rest, the other 3 percent to 4 percent, would be white. I don't really know about the other [races] other than Filipinos and Latinos.

VINCE: I would say 40 percent Filipino, 40 percent Hispanic, and 20 percent Caucasian maybe.

ANGIE: Maybe 60 percent Filipino, 30 percent Latino, and 10 percent other and white.

GRACE: I would say 80 percent Filipino. The remainder would probably be Latino, maybe 15 percent or 20 percent. There's probably some whites too.

INES: I'd say, like, 80 percent Filipino. And then 15 percent Latino.

MONICA: I'd say 95 percent are Filipino.

These were the racial breakdown estimations of Filipinos from Carson:

JACOB: Probably like 40 percent Filipino, 40 percent African American, and then I guess, like, 10 percent Samoan and the other 10 percent white and Mexican.

JEFF: One side would be populated by Mexicans and blacks. Over where I live, I'd say it's 60 percent Filipino, 20 percent Mexican, 20 percent Samoan.

BRYAN: I'd say blacks and Mexicans are tied, maybe 30 percent each. And then 25 percent Filipino and the rest of the 15 percent Samoan.

ALMA: I'd say there's 30 percent Filipino, 30 percent African American, 30 percent Hispanic, and 10 percent of other. Oh, wait! There's also the Samoan population.

RENEE: Filipinos would be maybe, like, 70 percent and the rest would be divided between blacks and Hispanics.

Given that most Filipinos were not in the habit of regularly consulting demographic statistics, how did they come up with such exaggerated

estimates? Filipinos' overestimations of their ethnic presence in Eagle Rock and Carson were an indication of their regular engagement with other Filipinos in their respective communities.

Eagle Rock and Carson solidified second-generation Filipinos' sense of ethnic belonging. "I think Filipinos in Eagle Rock are aware of their culture," said Franky, who worked at a local bank in the neighborhood. When Franky left Eagle Rock to attend UC Santa Cruz, he constantly "got into it" with other Filipinos on campus who "talked shit" about him for being whitewashed, mainly because he opted out of joining the Filipino student organization. In Franky's mind, there was no need to prove himself precisely because of where he was from. "My Filipinoness is rooted in Eagle Rock," he argued. "I don't feel like I have to be super Filipino everywhere I am *because* I'm from Eagle Rock. Eagle Rock is what makes me Filipino. That's how I feel." Most from Carson felt that their neighborhood gave them the same type of ethnic authenticity. "When you say Carson, you think Filipinos," said Renee. "When I look back, in hindsight, I thought everyone was Filipino."

It was within their neighborhoods that these children of immigrants learned what it meant to be Filipino. And for the majority of Filipinos, most of these lessons about Filipino ethnic identity started in the household.

Ethnicity Happens at Home

Cesar had never been to the Philippines, but he still felt that he knew everything he needed to about Filipino culture. "Why go to the Philippines when the Philippines comes to you?" he asked rhetorically, alluding to the countless relatives who had lived with him and his parents throughout his entire life in Carson. Cesar said he was always proud about his ethnic identity. He was so proud of being Filipino that he always felt the need to display his discontent when people would call him "Asian," a label he felt "erased" his identity. Every time people described him as such, he was quick to correct them and always left them knowing that he was Filipino. Being Filipino was so

important to him that he even had the Filipino flag tattooed on his left arm, along with his two family names—Perez and Torres—written in cursive right under. I asked Cesar where he had learned so much about Filipino culture and history.

"Mainly from my grandparents," he said. "They'd have all these stories about the Philippines and what they did back there. I remember my mom and dad would have parties and events with people from their hometown. Every time we'd go to these events, there were always these little parties with Filipino dancing. I'd ask my grandparents what that was, and they would name all the dances. So my access to learning about Filipino culture was mainly through social events."

In the absence of ethnic institutions, the family became the primary "classroom" where Filipinos learned about Filipino culture. The family was where Filipinos accumulated their knowledge about Filipino traditions, foods, and even history. For Cesar, there was never any shortage of opportunities to learn about the homeland, especially when a new relative came to live with his family. Living in multigenerational, multifamily households provided Filipinos raised in the United States a symbolic connection with the homeland. Moreover, interacting with Filipino immigrant relatives also helped those born and raised in the United States develop a deeper appreciation of the struggles associated with migration.

Middle Class Dreams, Immigrant Realities

Joey, a medical student from Eagle Rock, had vivid memories of his parents' immigrant struggles. When they first contemplated migrating to the United States from the Philippines, Joey's parents anticipated that their American dreams would come into fruition rather quickly. After all, they both held degrees from the University of the Philippines, their home country's most prestigious college institution. Before moving to the United States, they both worked as accountants, which allowed them to maintain a comfortable life in a suburban neighborhood not too far outside of Metro Manila. When Joey was five years old, they decided to uproot themselves from their

comfortable life in the Philippines and move to Eagle Rock. Joey's grandmother and her sister had been living there since the early 1980s and had recently opened a nursing home in the neighborhood. Although neither of the women was trained as a nurse, both had found work as caretakers for the elderly through other Filipino immigrants who were nurses working in the home health-care industry. Joey's grandmother and sister decided to open up their own nursing facility, and they needed help with the business operations. His parents were happy to oblige their need, assuming that their accounting skills would go to some good use. Their petition to migrate was approved shortly after Joey's sixth birthday, and they packed up their belongings and moved to America. However, their first home in the States was the nursing home that Joey's grandmother owned—not exactly the American dream home his parents were expecting.

After a few months of living in the nursing home, Joey and his family moved into a bungalow adjacent to the facility. Their living situation did not seem to improve all that much, mainly because they shared their home with several other relatives. "It was me, my brother, my parents, my great-grandpa, my aunt, and my grandpa, all under one roof," Joey remembered. Even as professional accountants, living in an overcrowded bungalow was all they could financially manage. It would be almost a year before his family could finally afford their own home, a modest apartment about a mile away from the nursing home. The apartment was located in the "shadier" part of Eagle Rock, closer to the more working-class community of Glassell Park, but even then, his parents still had to scrape together extra cash by doing odd jobs in the neighborhood. "They were working as accountants the whole time, but they also worked as gardeners on the side," Joey said. "Some of the local families needed gardening services, and so they would do that on the weekends." Joey remembered that his parents could not afford new furniture for their new apartment. In fact, it was even a struggle for them to buy toys for him and his brother. "I remember on weekends, we would drive around looking for yard sales, trying to get furniture and toys because stores were too expensive," he recalled.

Despite their own financial struggles, Joey's family maintained a sense of obligation to other relatives, especially those who had just arrived from the Philippines. "At one point, we had, like, ten people living in my apartment. It was totally illegal," he said. "There were people on my couch, four in my bedroom, another four in another bedroom, and two people on the couch." Their apartment became the initial stopover for relatives who needed a few weeks, or even months, to get their feet on the ground in America. "Our aunts and uncles would come from the Philippines, one by one. And they'd live with us first before they got established," Joey remembered.

As Joey's story demonstrates, middle-class living was not all it was cracked up to be. This was true even for Filipinos who lived in the "bourgeois" side of the neighborhood. Monica, a registered nurse, remembered growing up in a quaint two-bedroom house just north of Colorado Boulevard, an area of Eagle Rock where the families, and their homes, were thought to be more affluent. Although the house where she grew up was much larger than Joey's family's—it had a large yard and a garage with an extra room on top of it—it did not seem any more spacious from the way she described it. "My house was the house where all the relatives would go when they first got to the States," she said. Monica, her parents, and her three siblings moved to Eagle Rock when she was just three years old. "When we first got there, we lived with my mom's parents, my aunt, and all my cousins," she said. "Random cousins would come in and out for months at a time. We were all living there in that house."

Although their home was spacious from the outside, Monica's family had to get creative to fit upward of twelve people "comfortably," given the limited space that they had:

We had a pullout bed in the dining room. There was one master bedroom that we converted into a two bedroom. And then my grandpa had a den that was converted into his own room. For my family, there was the garage that they had converted into a regular room—no bathroom or nothing. And it was the six of us. I remember there were

three of us on the bed, and my older brother on the floor. I remember my brother would sleep on a laundry bag. That'd be the pillow he would use.

Even though she was very young when they migrated, she was old enough to know that life back in Manila seemed much more prosperous than this. "In the Philippines, we were pretty well off there. I remember my mom gave us everything. My older brothers and sister were in private schools," Monica recalled. Even today, she vividly remembered these early days as tough times. "We were there a couple of months. It seemed like forever," she said. "It was so cold. The heater was in the house. It was a big change for us." Although her mother worked as a nurse, it would be a few years before her parents were stable enough to rent their own home and financially provide for her and her three siblings.

These multigenerational households were the norm for many Filipinos. Even when their immediate family had the means to live on their own, most said their parents felt a sense of obligation to help new relatives get on their feet, especially if they themselves had been beneficiaries of such familial generosity. Erik, an outreach coordinator at a local community health organization, said this was his family's story. When Erik and his family moved out of his grandmother's apartment located close to the more working class neighborhood of Highland Park and into their own house in Eagle Rock, there were only a few months when he could remember it being only his immediate family in their home. "After we moved, it was just my parents and my newborn baby brother," said Erik. "But then two of my cousins moved into the back house. It was my dad's brother's daughter and my mom's sister's daughter." Erik said he never minded the extra company growing up. "They were all like siblings growing up," he said. If anything, Erik and others saw such household setups as the norm for Filipino families. "Whenever I meet Filipinos who don't have large families and it's just their family, that's kind of weird," said Rachel, a college academic adviser who grew up with several cousins

in her own home in Carson. "That's definitely not the typical Filipino family," she said.

Even if they were not accommodating relatives in their home, many Filipinos remembered that their parents still provided financial assistance to loved ones back home. With so many relatives coming back and forth from the Philippines, it was rather common for Filipinos to see their parents send envelopes of cash or care packages to their family members in the homeland. Some even said that there were entire rooms or sections of the garage that were partitioned specifically for the preparation of *balikbayan* (homecoming) boxes, large cardboard boxes that Filipino immigrants would regularly ship back to the Philippines or take with them when traveling there. Filipinos sent back everything from clothing to shoes, towels, canned goods, electronics, medicines, vitamins, and other goods that were more affordable stateside. And typically, the senders would squeeze as many items as they could into the box. By the time a box was ready to send, its contents were as tightly packed as a can of sardines.

For the Filipinos I interviewed in their homes, I observed just how visible these *balikbayan* boxes became. When I would enter, some would excuse themselves for the mess in one of the bedrooms or the living room. More often than not, there was not really any significant mess. Rather, they were just excusing themselves for the large cardboard box that was awkwardly positioned next to their living room couch or dining room table, seemingly out of place amid the other furniture. "We're sending stuff back home," one young woman said. The choice of words—*we're* and *home*—became all the more interesting as I came to find that the young woman was not actively assisting with the preparation of the *balikbayan* box, nor was she making frequent trips to the Philippines. Nonetheless, the regular practice of sending *balikbayan* boxes back home gave her some sense of connection with her relatives abroad.⁴¹ In one case, *balikbayan* boxes, as well as the goods about to be sent, took over the family home. When I met with Arianna, a community college student from Carson, her living room looked like a wartime bomb shelter. The furniture in the living

room was beautiful, and there was even a seventy-inch flat-screen television. However, all of the furniture was buried under piles of clothing, canned goods, cereal boxes, shoes, and even jugs of wine. Arianna and I carved out a nook in her kitchen dining table to do the interview. After our interview, Arianna took inventory of her family's living room, caught me doing the same, and then said, "See? We're not *really* middle class because my mom uses all her extra money to buy stuff for people in the Philippines." Behind the beautifully kept lawn of their Carson home was a storage room of goods piled up over a period of months and waiting to be sent back to the Philippines. From the outside, Arianna's family was a middle-class household of four people; however, in reality, the income of that household supported many other families beyond their actual home, thousands of miles away in the Philippines.

For many of the Filipinos I interviewed from both Eagle Rock and Carson, being middle class often came with a caveat of family obligation. In their lives in the United States, most agreed they were never deprived, even if their early days of childhood involved some form of economic struggle, just as Joey and Monica's stories show. In general, Filipinos felt they grew up with everything they ever needed and wanted, Joey and Monica included, whether it be school supplies, computers, even cars. Yet despite their privileges, several Filipinos felt compelled to point out that middle-class life was not entirely what that label suggested. Most Filipinos said that their families were embedded in a larger system of reciprocity with relatives in the United States or back home, which dispelled any notions that they were affluent.

Never Miss a Family Party

One of the first questions I asked every Filipino during an interview was "What was your favorite part about growing up in your neighborhood?" By and large, the two most common responses were "the diversity" and "family." Rachel was among the Filipinos who responded with the latter. "Carson for me has *always* been about family," she said. "It's always been a large extended family, a bunch of aunts and

uncles who aren't really related to you *obviously*." When she said the word *obviously*, she made eye contact and chuckled, a tacit gesture meant to signal a mutual understanding between two Filipinos. "It was a very Filipino, very immigrant experience," she said, despite not having been born in the Philippines herself. "That's what I loved about Carson. It always felt like home because there were always a lot of people. That's what Carson was—family." As she shared her story, it became clearer why Carson, family, and Filipino came to be synonymous concepts in her mind.

Rachel's parents moved to Carson in the late 1970s. Both her parents had occupations that made it relatively easy to migrate to the United States—her mother was a nurse and her father was in the US Navy. Their choice of professions also made it relatively easy to connect with other Filipinos, given that a large number of their coethnics entered nursing and military professions. By the time Rachel was born in the early 1980s, her parents had a close-knit group of friends in Carson. "It's actually funny. The way that they made them my 'real' family was that they made them my godparents [at Baptism]. So I had sixteen godparents," Rachel said. As was custom among many Filipinos, kinship titles were liberally applied to anyone and everyone. "Everyone is your *tita* or *tito* [aunt or uncle], even if you've just met them. For me, everyone was either *ninang* or *ninang* [godfather or godmother], or *lolo* or *lola* [grandfather or grandmother]," she joked. It was not until the fifth grade, when she had to create a family tree, that Rachel learned that her relatives were not "really" relatives. "We started to learn about kin in school, and I got confused because my teacher kept asking, 'Whose sister is she?'" Rachel recalled. "I'd be like, 'They're not sisters, but she is my aunt.'" Even twenty years later, Rachel continued to see her parents' closest friends as close as blood and their children as her cousins.

Beyond her circle of fictive kin, many of Rachel's blood relatives also settled in Carson upon migrating to the United States. Like many other Filipinos, Rachel's family took full advantage of the immigration policies that encouraged family reunification during the 1980s. In the

early 1970s, Rachel's great aunt moved to Carson and shortly thereafter petitioned her husband and sisters, one of which was Rachel's grandmother. While her mother became a permanent resident on her own, her maternal grandmother was able to catalyze the migration of her mother's entire family. "My grandma petitioned all of her kids who were under twenty-one, and so now all of my mom's brothers and sisters live in Carson," she said. Rachel's entire social circle growing up consisted of family, both blood related and fictive, who were born both in the Philippines and the United States. "Christmas at my house is always about sixty people, minimum," she shared proudly. At the time of our interview, Rachel had just started to have a family of her own—she was the mother of two small children. She herself was now taking part in reifying the kinship ties among her relatives and close family friends. "When my older cousins and 'cousins' had kids, I became their godparent," she said, gesturing air quotes to denote her fictive kin. "And some of their kids are now *my* kids' godparents. It all perpetuates."

Edward's experience growing up in Eagle Rock involved much of the same. Edward, a recent college graduate and part-time tutor for a private company, reasserted the strong association of neighborhood, ethnicity, and family. When I asked him what he thought what it meant to be Filipino, he said:

Family is number one. Living with more than just the nuclear family. You live with your grandparents and other extended family nearby. And then having family gatherings pretty frequently. Respect for your *titos* and *titas* [uncles and aunts], and they are pretty invested in your life. They babysit you and things like that. It's big and close.

Edward also reiterated the mutual sense of reciprocity and kinship felt by members of a Filipino clan:

There's definitely a need to help each other a lot. There's a lot of money exchanged, time spent taking care of each other's kids. I really do think I do it out of love. Now that I am getting older, I take care of

[my cousin's] kids. . . . When I meet with other Filipinos, especially if they are older, they'll introduce me to their other [older] coworkers and say, "This is *tita* or *tito* whoever," and they immediately welcome me. We would eat Filipino food and have potlucks all the time. It's like a connector. It's a conversation starter. If you have cultural proficiency and can prove your authenticity, then it's cooler.

Embedded in Edward's remarks were notions of what it meant to be an "authentic" Filipino. This included everything from being knowledgeable about Filipino ethnic cuisines to applying fictive kinship titles immediately after meeting someone to adhering to family obligations at the drop of a hat. These became the criteria for how Filipinos, even those born in the United States, gauged how Filipino someone "really" was.

"My Filipino friends completely understand the following two words—*family party*," said Ronald, a graphic designer from Eagle Rock. "When you have a family party, you *have* to be there. It's considered really disrespectful if you don't attend. My white friends were like, 'So you don't have to be there. It's probably boring.' They don't understand the idea that the family *has* to be together." Ronald said that it was even considered faux pas in his family to miss social gatherings, even if he had academic obligations. This specific willingness to drop everything for family was something that distinguished Filipinos from his white peers in Eagle Rock (in contrast, family was something that he argued was very similar between Filipinos and Latinos in the neighborhood). In high school and college, he said that he would prioritize family gatherings over studying for midterms, a trend common among other Filipinos. Along these lines, Joey spoke extensively about how atypical his parents were from other Filipino parents precisely because they allowed him to miss family obligations to study:

My parents were nice in that way if I wanted to study. Like at family gatherings, when we'd have birthday parties, everyone would be there. I'm pretty close to my aunts and uncles so I always had to be there. But then they would defend me if I wanted to study. They'd be like, "Joey

is upstairs studying." This helped because pretty much every weekend there was a social gathering.

As Joey's remarks suggested, his choice to prioritize his academic obligations was something that might go against custom within Filipino families. His parents were able to serve as brokers between him and his extensive family so that he would not be perceived as snubbing the family, and by extension, rejecting Filipino tradition. Overall, the degree to which Joey felt he needed to strategize to save face within his family is quite telling about how the family defined the symbolic boundaries of Filipino ethnic identity.

The Neighborhood Parish

"The church thing is pretty common in Carson," said Jacob, an elementary school teacher from the neighborhood. "I think it's pretty common. I'm dead serious, about 90 percent of my Filipino friends went to St. Felipe." All of Jacob's friends were closely connected to St. Felipe, the main Catholic church in Carson. Many had been baptized there as infants. As they became older, they also participated in other Catholic sacraments, including First Communion and Confirmation, the ritual where young adults publicly reaffirm their religious faith in front of their local congregation. As he saw it, church was more of a meeting place than anything else. "My friends would all sin every week, but they would go to church. They said that was just what they had to do." Jacob himself had not grown up in the same parish. Part of it had to do with his multiracial background. His mother was a Filipino immigrant, and his father was African American. While they were both Christian, they had different religious affiliations. Not growing up too close to the Catholic faith was one arena in which he said some Filipinos might feel like an "outcast."

As Jacob's story suggests, being Filipino is often synonymous with being Catholic. Catholicism was one of the major influences of the Spanish colonial period—the vast majority of Filipinos in the homeland and in the United States are Roman Catholic, a trend quite simi-

lar to the case of Mexican Americans and other Latinos. In both Eagle Rock and Carson, there is one primary Catholic parish that houses most of the Filipinos in the area. In Eagle Rock, there is St. Daniel's; in Carson, as Jacob mentioned, there is St. Felipe, often jokingly referred to as "St. Filipino" by the people I interviewed. For many, Catholic religion, as well as attendance at these respective parishes, functioned as a litmus test of Filipino ethnic identity.

Church was much more than attending mass every Sunday. The local parish was the place where Filipinos formed connections with other Filipinos beyond their immediate families. Ronald said many of his memories of childhood and adolescence involved St. Daniel's parish. When he was five years old, Ronald started kindergarten at the parish elementary school and remained there through the eighth grade. As a youth, he remembered waiting after school with his other Filipino classmates as their parents socialized in the parish parking lot. The same thing would happen on weekends after Sunday mass, but he and his friends would wait even longer. "Sometimes as kids, we'd just be waiting there in the parking lot after church waiting for our parents to finish talking to the other Filipino parents," Ronald remembered. "They'd take forever! Everyone would already be long gone by the time my mom was finished talking to her friends." In this moment, the parking lot served the same function as most ethnic institutions. Impromptu interactions in the church parking lot became the building blocks for more intimate connections with other Filipino families in the neighborhood. Casual conversations eventually evolved into birthday invitations, babysitting favors, and car-pool groups. When Ronald participated in Confirmation classes during his first two years of high school, some of the other parents at his local parish became his "sponsors" for the sacrament. As was custom with Catholic tradition, these other Filipino parents at St. Daniel's were considered godparents, which made their kinship connection "official" in his eyes. As Ronald's story demonstrated, the church became the *de facto* ethnic institution for many Filipinos who grew up in the United States, particularly in the way

it helped crystallized strong connections among Filipinos families in the neighborhood.

The Catholic parish strengthened Filipinos' connections to their neighborhoods, particularly those who temporarily moved away for school. Lynette, a recent graduate of UCLA, said that many of her relatives, including her parents, had been attending St. Felipe's parish since they arrived in Carson in the 1970s. St. Felipe's was especially important for them as newly arrived immigrants from the Philippines since it gave them opportunities to connect with other Filipinos. She and her siblings all attended St. Felipe's from kindergarten to eighth grade. "It was mostly Filipino, like 97 percent. The others were Mexican," Lynette described. Once Lynette reached high school, however, her parents sent her Marymount High School: "And then there were no Filipinos. I could count the Filipinos on two hands. It was mostly Mexican people and black people," she said.

St. Felipe's youth ministry programs were Lynette's only connection to her old friends in the neighborhood. "I kept in touch with my Carson friends because we all had Confirmation classes," she said. After her "weird transition" to Marymount, St. Felipe's Confirmation program became just as much about staying in touch with Filipinos from Carson as it was about the religious signification. "It was weird because I never thought of us as Filipino until I moved for high school," she said. "It was more like we all grew up together. I mean it was nice that many of us [in the parish] were Filipino and we could relate to each other's family experiences. And we felt very much at home at other people's homes as if they were our own homes." Like many others, Lynette's conversations about Filipino ethnic identity, neighborhood, family, and Catholicism all happened within the same breath.

Outside the Box

Even with the financial struggles and family obligations that their families faced, most Filipinos said their families had achieved some sense of economic stability. The vast majority never worried about not hav-

ing a place to live, even if their living quarters were cramped. Unlike many working-class children of immigrants, many of the Filipinos I met did not work in high school or even college. Those who did work did so primarily to have some extra spending money, not necessarily to make significant contributions to their family's household income.

Andrea was the exception to this trend. Andrea's parents, like many other Filipino immigrants in Eagle Rock, were college-educated professionals. Her mother was a nurse, and her father was a computer technician. For most of her childhood, Andrea remembered living in a small but charming home in Eagle Rock with her parents and her sister. Unfortunately, everything changed around the time Andrea was ten years old. Her parents filed for bankruptcy and her family lost practically everything:

My parents filed for bankruptcy when I was in the fifth grade. So we didn't have the house. We didn't have anything. For a while we had to live in Fontana [approximately fifty miles east of Los Angeles], but we still went to Eagle Rock for my parents' work and our school. We only had one car at that time. We couldn't afford a second, so we would wake up at 3 a.m., take a shower, drop off my mom at work in Down-town LA, eat breakfast in the car, and get milk from Jack in the Box just to eat our cereal. My dad would go to work in Burbank while my sister and I went to Glenrock Junior High. Since he was working, after school me and my sister would have to stay at the library for hours by ourselves. That was also the hangout where everyone would go.

By "everyone," Andrea was referring to other Filipino kids in the neighborhood. At the library, Andrea and her sister often kept to themselves and to a few of their other classmates from Glenrock. Because the library was across the street from St. Daniel's, many of the other students hanging out in the library were from the parish elementary school. I asked Andrea whether she made friends with the Filipino students from St. Daniel's. Andrea said her self-consciousness about her family's financial situation often got in the way of this:

We always thought the St. Daniel's kids were too good for us. They were snobby. Because we're public school kids and they're private school kids. In our minds, we're harder [tougher] than you, you guys are spoiled, you're too religious, you don't know what it's like out there [outside the neighborhood], you're stuck in your little fence in St. Daniel's. We would never talk to each other, especially to those St. Daniel's kids in their uniform, doing their homework, doing their own thing. Us public school kids, we were running around making noise everywhere.

At the library, Andrea could literally see the class differences between her and her Filipino peers, particularly those from the local Catholic school. In many ways, her class background alienated her from other Filipinos, whom she disparaged for being overly sheltered and naive about the "real world."

After three months of commuting from Fontana, Andrea's family was finally able to move back to Eagle Rock. However, bankruptcy made it difficult to secure an apartment lease in the area, and their only option was to live in a local extended-stay motel. Their new home had a small bedroom, a tiny kitchen, and a small living room. Living in a motel made it even more difficult to make friends with other Filipinos, who were generally accustomed to visiting one another's homes and forging kinship ties with their friends' parents:

Of the Filipino friends we made, they were well off. They got everything they wanted. They got all the school supplies they wanted while me and my sister had to share everything. And then we were ashamed to say we were living in a motel. When they would ask to go to our house, we would say our mom was busy. It was embarrassing, especially because it wasn't even a nice motel. It was really hard, but it made me and my sister more thankful for things.

Eventually, Andrea's family became stable enough to rent a one-bedroom home in a working-class Latino neighborhood adjacent to Eagle Rock. Although many of the other Filipinos I interviewed spoke about their experiences growing up with Latinos, most of them were

referring to the middle-class segment in Eagle Rock. In contrast, the Latinos who Andrea grew up with were mostly poor or working class. Gangsters, drug dealers, and street crime were just part of the scenery on their block. Despite this, Andrea characterized her surroundings as friendly. "We understood that just because you're a gangster doesn't mean you're a bad person," she said. "We were able to be on level ground with them, talking about people who were passing away or talking about not having a place to live. We knew we all had it hard."

Over time, Andrea befriended more Filipinos whose financial situation converged with her own, especially as she entered high school where many of the Filipinos were lower middle class. Although her economic struggles did not compel her to completely distance herself from her Filipino identity, her narrative nonetheless demonstrated how class differences hindered the ability of low-income Filipino youth to become part of the neighborhood ethnic community.

Beyond class, religious differences also made it challenging for some Filipino youth to relate to other coethnics in the neighborhood. Five of the young Filipinos grew up Protestant. Although most people presumed that Filipinos were Catholic (a presumption made about many Latino groups as well), there were some who were part of the Lutheran, Baptist, or the increasingly popular Church of Christ (Iglesia ni Cristo) denomination. Of course, there were some similarities between Filipino Catholics and Protestants. They both belonged to the Christian faith, attended weekly church services, and celebrated sacraments such as Baptism. Filipino Protestants also developed tight-knit ethnic connections in their churches. Even though they had ethnic niches within churches, those who were Protestant sometimes felt out of place with other Filipinos. As a child, Rachel said that she could not relate to some of the religious rites of passage that her Filipino classmates in Carson were participating in:

A.O.: Did you ever feel weird around Filipino Catholics?

RACHEL: Absolutely. Because the Catholic religion is so tied in to Filipino culture, it's so difficult to separate.

A.O.: Can you give me an example?

RACHEL: I think when my classmates at school started to have their First Communion. I also couldn't understand why they didn't have Baptism as an adult, or even as adolescents. It took me a while to figure out what was going on.

Rachel said she even felt a bit disconnected from her relatives who were Catholic, even those who lived with her family after migrating from the Philippines:

People who came from the Philippines and lived with us, they'd have a Santo Niño (a statue of Jesus as a child). There's always a point of contention because we don't put a Santo Niño in our house, and it's contrary to our belief system. That's always an issue. . . . My cousin, my dad's brother's daughter, she brought her Santo Niño and brought all her different saints and such. It became an issue. I'd ask my parents, and they'd be like, "That's what they believe in. That's not what we believe in."

As Rachel's story of her cousin demonstrated, there was a difference in the way that Catholics displayed their faith. Many Filipino Catholics openly displayed religious paraphernalia in their homes—large photos and statues of Jesus, as well as the Virgin Mary and other religious saints. In contrast, Protestants tended not to display the same type of reverence toward the Virgin Mary, nor were they as inclined to display religious iconography in their homes in the same way as Catholics.

Vince, a nursing student from Eagle Rock, grew up attending a Filipino Protestant church in the neighborhood, but it did not seem to bother him as much as it did Rachel: "I don't really think about it much. The only time it comes up is when my girlfriend brings it up. She's a big-time Catholic." Vince said that his girlfriend used to constantly badger him about converting to Catholicism, especially when they first started dating. Over the two years of their courtship, she eventually became less persistent about pushing for Vince to convert. Part of Vince's relative indifference about the issue might have been due to the nature of the relationship. Although he said that they were

serious, he and his girlfriend were still technically dating. Getting married was a whole other issue altogether. Edward grew up in a "super Catholic" family in Eagle Rock and said marrying someone of a different faith, even if they were Christian, was a big deal for his relatives:

I know very few Filipinos that aren't Catholic. Interacting with Filipinos who aren't Catholic is kind of weird. You're surrounded by other Filipino kids who are like you. Some of my cousins married Protestants and one even married a Muslim, and they both converted. You can feel that there was a rift between her and the family afterward. It's hard to communicate because of the difference in religion. I think a big thing for a lot of Filipinos is the bonding you do during church. Sometimes you do Confirmation, community service, and because of that, you have that common knowledge. And when you grow up this way, you're pretty oblivious to other religions.

Edward often overheard his immigrant relatives disparage his cousins among one another: "They would say, 'It's too bad she married someone who's not Catholic. What are they going to do with their kids? *Sayang naman* [what a waste].'" Edward said that his cousins, who were mostly second generation, rarely became fixated on the issue. For them, religious differences were not a big deal. Nonetheless, because they were so closely connected with their immigrant relatives, who were much more concerned and judgmental about religion, it sometimes became an issue for them. This was particularly the case at large family gatherings, when Edward and his cousins would sometimes have to deal with older relatives gossiping about their other cousins behind their backs.

Ethnicity Matters

Neither Eagle Rock nor Carson would be considered immigrant ethnoburbs in the same way as a Monterey Park or a Koreatown, but this was what Filipinos seemed to like the most about these neighborhoods. In many respects, Filipinos felt that their multiethnic neighborhoods complemented their ethnic identity—both neighborhoods

were significantly influenced by a diversity of cultures. Traditionally, sociologists interested in the children of immigrants have argued that the maintenance of ethnic identity is predicated on their living in neighborhoods with large concentrations of other coethnics.⁴² However, what the Filipinos of Eagle Rock and Carson have demonstrated is that the diversity of their neighborhood environment reinforces what it means to be Filipino, not necessarily with respect to traditional measures of identity such as speaking the native language but in terms of the hybridity of their ethnic culture. In other words, Filipinos feel that their culture is inherently diverse because of the historical influences from Spain and the United States, and the diversity of their neighborhoods reinforced this belief. "We got along with everybody. We can make fun of everybody," said Franky. "When you're around a bunch of your people and a group of culturally diverse people, you joke about that. You talk about race. I can joke about Mexicans to my Mexican friend because it doesn't matter. I think it's because I grew up with Latino friends." Cesar from Carson echoed Franky's sentiments: "I think Filipinos have more diverse friends because we're diverse to begin with," he said in reference to his identity. "We get along well with a lot of different cultures. From my experience, you could stick us in a group of black people and we'd get along with them. We can hang out with any group of people. Filipinos could go up to any group of black guys or Hispanic guys and it's fine. They don't sweat us."

The existence of places like Monterey Park and Koreatown led Filipinos to believe that they were different from other Asians. In other words, their neighborhood identity shaped their panethnic identity—their sense of "we-ness" beyond their ethnic group. Although there are countless examples of Asians displaying the same bonds with Latinos and other minority groups in their neighborhoods, schools, and political coalitions, Filipinos still perceived other Asians as ethnically cliquish.⁴³ In this sense, the Filipinos from Eagle Rock and Carson interviewed felt that they had the best of both worlds. They were able to regularly engage with their ethnic identity and culture with Filipinos in their households and churches, but at the same, their everyday

encounters with people of other racial groups prompted them to think of themselves as racial chameleons. As the following chapters illustrate, these particular beliefs about their ethnicity and race that Filipinos developed in their neighborhoods deeply influenced how they racially positioned themselves vis-à-vis Latinos and Asian Americans. The process by which Filipinos negotiated their relative position is particularly important given that Latinos and Asian Americans are the two fastest-growing racial groups in the United States today.