

RONALD TAKAKI

A
DIFFERENT
MIRROR



*A History
of
Multicultural
America*

REVISED EDITION



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A DIFFERENT MIRROR

The Making of Multicultural America

I HAD FLOWN from San Francisco to Norfolk and was riding in a taxi. The driver and I chatted about the weather and the tourists. The sky was cloudy, and twenty minutes away was Virginia Beach, where I was scheduled to give a keynote address to hundreds of teachers and administrators at a conference on multicultural education. The rearview mirror reflected a white man in his forties. "How long have you been in this country?" he asked. "All my life," I replied, wincing. His question was one I had been asked too many times, even by northerners with Ph.D.'s. "I was born in the United States," I added. He replied: "I was wondering because your English is excellent!" Then I explained: "My grandfather came here from Japan in the 1880s. My family has been here, in America, for over a hundred years." He glanced at me in the mirror. To him, I did not look like an American.

Suddenly, we both became uncomfortably conscious of a divide between us. An awkward silence turned my gaze from the mirror to the passing scenery. Here, at the eastern edge of the continent, I mused, was the site of the beginning of multicultural America. Our highway crossed land that Sir Walter Raleigh had renamed "Virginia" in honor of Elizabeth I, the Virgin Queen. Taking lands from the Indians, the English colonizers founded

Jamestown in 1607, and six years later they shipped the first four barrels of tobacco to London. Almost immediately, tobacco became an immensely profitable export crop, and the rise of the tobacco economy generated an insatiable demand for Indian land as well as for labor from England, Ireland, and Africa. In 1619, a year before the arrival of the Pilgrims at Plymouth Rock, a Dutch slave ship landed the first twenty Africans at Jamestown. Indeed, history saturated the surrounding landscape.

Questions like the one that my taxi driver asked me are always jarring. But it was not his fault that he did not see me as a fellow citizen: what had he learned about Asian Americans in courses called "U.S. history"? He saw me through a *filter*—what I call the Master Narrative of American History. According to this powerful and popular but inaccurate story, our country was settled by European immigrants, and Americans are white. "Race," observed Toni Morrison, has functioned as a "metaphor" necessary to the "construction of Americanness": in the creation of our national identity, "American" has been defined as "white."¹ Not to be "white" is to be designated as the "Other"—different, inferior, and unassimilable.

The Master Narrative is deeply embedded in our mainstream culture and can be found in the scholarship of a long list of pre-eminent historians. The father of the Master Narrative was Frederick Jackson Turner. In 1893, two years after the Census Bureau announced that Americans had settled the entire continent and that the frontier had come to an end, Turner gave a presentation at the meeting of the American Historical Association. Entitled "The Significance of the Frontier in American History," his paper would make him famous. Turner would become the dean of American history, his influence spanning generations of historians to come.

In what would be hailed as the "frontier thesis," Turner declared that the end of the frontier marked "the closing of a great historic movement"—the colonization of the Great West. He explained that the frontier had been "the meeting point between savagery and civilization." At this intersection, the Europeans had been "Americanized" by the wilderness. Initially, "the wilderness masters the colonist. It finds him a European in dress, industries, tools, modes of travel and thought. It takes him from the railroad car and puts him in a birch canoe. It strips off the garments of civilization, and arrays him in the hunting shirt and moccasins. It puts him in the log cabin of the Cherokee and Iroquois.... Before long he has gone to planting Indian corn and plowing with a sharp stick; he shouts the war cry and takes the scalp in ortho-

dox Indian fashion." But "little by little he transforms the wilderness", in "a series of Indian wars," the "stalwart and rugged" frontiersman takes land from the Indians for white settlement and the advance of "manufacturing civilization." "The outcome is not the Old Europe," Turner exclaimed. "The fact is that here is a new product that is American."²

In Turner's footsteps came Harvard historian Oscar Handlin. In his 1945 prizewinning study *The Uprooted*, Handlin presented—to use the book's subtitle—*The Epic Story of the Great Migrations That Made the American People*. In his introduction, Handlin wrote: "I once thought to write a history of immigrants in America. I discovered that the immigrants were American history."³ However, Handlin studied only the migrations from Europe. His "epic story" overlooked the indigenous people of the continent and also the "uprooted" from Africa, Asia, and Latin America.

Contrary to the views of historians like Turner and Handlin, America is a nation peopled by the world, and we are all Americans.

The Master Narrative's narrow definition of who is an American can reflect and reinforces a more general thinking that can be found in the curriculum, news and entertainment media, business practices, and public policies. Through this filter, interpretations of ourselves and the world have been constructed, leaving many of us feeling left out of history and America itself.

Today, our expanding racial diversity is challenging the Master Narrative. Demography is declaring: Not all of us came originally from Europe! Currently, one-third of the American people do not trace their ancestries to Europe; in California, minorities have become the majority. They already predominate in major cities across the country—Boston, New York, Chicago, Atlanta, Detroit, Houston, San Francisco, and Los Angeles. Diversity is emerging as America's "manifest destiny."

Within the lifetime of young people today, Americans of European ancestry will become a minority. Indeed, we will all be minorities. How can we prepare ourselves for this future, when the Master Narrative is such a powerful force in our thinking about the past? Analyzing the problem, fourteen-year-old Nicholas Takaki reported that his American history course had taught him "next to nothing about the significance of Asian Americans. I believe our education system as a whole has not integrated the histories of *all* people into our education system, just the Eurocentric view of itself, and the White-centered view of African Americans, and even this is slim to nonexistent. What I find is that

most people don't know the fact that they don't know, because of the complete lack of information."⁴

Increasingly aware of this ignorance, educators everywhere have begun to recognize the need to recover the missing chapters of American history. In 1990, the Task Force on Minorities for New York stressed the importance of a culturally diverse education. "Essentially," the *New York Times* commented, "the issue is how to deal with both dimensions of the nation's motto: 'E pluribus unum'—'Out of many, one.'" Universities from New Hampshire to Berkeley have established American cultural diversity graduation requirements. "Every student needs to know," explained University of Wisconsin chancellor Donna Shalala, "much more about the origins and history of the particular cultures which, as Americans, we will encounter during our lives." Even the University of Minnesota, located in a state that is 98 percent white, requires its students to take ethnic-studies courses. Asked why multiculturalism is so important, Dean Fred Lukermann answered: As a national university, Minnesota has to offer a national curriculum—one that includes all of the peoples of America. He added that after graduation many students move to cities like Chicago and Los Angeles and thus need to know about racial diversity. Moreover, many educators stress, multiculturalism has an intellectual purpose: a more inclusive curriculum is also a more accurate one.⁵

Indeed, the study of diversity is essential for understanding *how* and *why* America became what Walt Whitman called a "teeming nation of nations."⁶

Multicultural scholarship, however, has usually focused on just one minority. Thus, Cornel West in *Race Matters* covers only African Americans, Dee Brown in *Bury My Heart at Wounded Knee* only Native Americans, Irving Howe in *World of Our Fathers* only Jewish Americans, Mario Barrera in *Race and Class in the Southwest* only Mexican Americans, and even I myself in *Strangers from a Different Shore* only Asian Americans. While enriching and deepening our knowledge of a particular group, this approach examines a specific minority in isolation from the others and the whole. Missing is the bigger picture.

In our approach, we will instead study race and ethnicity inclusively and comparatively. While it would be impossible to cover all groups in one book, we will focus on several of them that illustrate and illuminate the landscape of our society's diversity—African Americans, Asian Americans, Irish Americans, Jewish Americans, Mexican Americans, Muslim Americans, and Native Americans.

African Americans have been the central minority throughout our country's history. Even fifty years after their first arrival in Virginia, Africans still represented only a tiny percentage of the colony's population. The planters preferred workers from their homeland, for they wanted their new society to be racially homogeneous. This thinking abruptly changed, however, in 1676, when the elite encountered an uprising of discontented and armed workers. After quelling the insurrection with reinforcements of British troops, the planters turned to Africa for their primary labor supply; the new workers would be enslaved and prohibited from owning arms. Subsequently, the African population spiked upward, and slavery spread across the South. African Americans would remain degraded as unpaid laborers and dehumanized as property until the Civil War. What President Abraham Lincoln called "this mighty scourge of war" finally ended "the bondsman's two hundred and fifty years of unrequited toil." But a grim future awaited African Americans: Jim Crow segregation, lynchings, race riots, and what W. E. B. Du Bois called "the problem of the color line." Still, they insistently struggled for freedom. Joined by people of other races in the sixties, African Americans marched and sang, "We shall overcome," winning significant victories that changed society. Indeed, the history of African Americans has been stitched into the history of America itself. Martin Luther King, Jr., clearly understood this truth when he wrote from a jail cell: "We will reach the goal of freedom in Birmingham and all over the nation, because the goal of America is freedom. Abused and scorned though we may be, our destiny is tied up with America's destiny."⁷

Asian Americans began arriving in America long before many European immigrants. Seeking "Gold Mountain," the Chinese were among the Forty-Niners. Then they worked on the railroad, in the agricultural fields of the West Coast states, and in the factories of California and even Massachusetts. As "strangers" coming from a "different shore," they were stereotyped as "heathen" and unassimilable. Wanted as sojourning laborers, the Chinese were not welcomed as settlers. During an economic depression, Congress passed the 1882 Chinese Exclusion Act—the first law that prohibited the entry of immigrants on the basis of nationality. The Chinese condemned this restriction as racist and tyrannical. "They call us 'Chink,'" complained a Chinese immigrant, cursing the "white demons." "They think we no good! America cut us off. No more come now, too bad!" The Japanese also painfully discovered that their accomplishments in America did not lead to acceptance.

During World War II, the government interned a hundred twenty thousand Japanese Americans, two-thirds of them citizens by birth. "How could I as a six-month-old child born in this country," asked Congressman Robert Matsui years later, "be declared by my own Government to be an enemy alien?"⁸ In 1975, after the collapse of Saigon, tens of thousands of refugees fled to America from the tempest of the Vietnam War. Today, Asian Americans represent one of the fastest-growing ethnic groups in America, projected to represent 10 percent of the total U.S. population by 2050.

Initially, the Irish came here in the early seventeenth century. At that time, many of them were brought to Virginia involuntarily as captives of the English wars in Ireland and as indentured servants in the Irish "slave trade." During the nineteenth century, four million Irish emigrated to escape the hunger caused not only by the Potato Famine, but also by the rise of a ranching economy. In order to expand grazing lands, English landlords evicted Irish families from their farms. As beef exports from Ireland to England rose, so did the number of people leaving Ireland. In America, these immigrants became construction workers, maids, and factory workers in the textile mills of Lowell, Massachusetts. Representing a Catholic group seeking to settle in a fiercely Protestant society, the Irish became victims of nativist hostility. They came about the same time as the Chinese, but they had a distinct advantage: the Naturalization Law of 1790 had reserved citizenship for "whites" only. Consequently, the Irish became citizens, and, as voters, they pursued an "ethnic" strategy. They elected Irish to city councils and mayorships, and their elected officials made certain that Irish builders were given construction contracts and that Irish men were hired as firemen and policemen. By 1900, the Irish were entering the middle class.⁹

Fleeing pogroms in Russia, Jews were driven from what John Cuddihy described as the "Middle Ages into the Anglo-American world of the *goyim* 'beyond the pale.'" In America, they settled in the Lower East Side, a beehive of tenements and garment factories that exploited an army of Jewish women. To many Jews, America represented the Promised Land. This vision energized them to rise from "greenhorns" into middle-class Americans. Stressing the importance of education, they pooled family resources; the earnings of the daughters working in the sweatshops helped to support the education of their brothers in institutions like New York City College and Harvard. But as Jewish immigrants and their children were entering the mainstream, they found themselves fac-

ing the rise of Hitler and the horror of the ultimate pogrom. Safe in America, they asked themselves: What is our responsibility as Jews to Hitler's victims? What should we do to break America's "deafening silence" over the Holocaust? Demanding that America do everything it could to rescue people destined for the death camps, Jewish Americans encountered a tide of anti-Semitism and indifference. From the war emerged a Jewish-American activism for human rights and social justice. Jack Greenberg of the NAACP Legal Defense Fund recalled that Jews cheered when Jackie Robinson broke into the Brooklyn Dodgers in 1947. "He was adopted as the surrogate hero by many of us growing up at the time. He was the way we saw ourselves triumphing against the forces of bigotry and ignorance." Jews like Howard Zinn and Stanley Levi-son stood shoulder to shoulder with African Americans in the Civil Rights Movement.¹⁰ During the 1964 Freedom Summer, over half of the white volunteers who went South were Jewish.

Mexican Americans were first incorporated into the United States by the 1846-48 war against Mexico. They did not come to America; instead, the border was moved when the United States annexed the Southwest. Most of the Mexican Americans today, however, have immigrant roots, having begun the trek to El Norte in the early twentieth century. "As I had heard a lot about the United States," Jesus Garza recalled, "it was my dream to come here." The Mexican-American experience has been different from that of other immigrants, for their homeland borders the United States—a proximity that has helped reinforce their language, identity, and culture. Today, Mexicans are still crossing the border, pushed by poverty from the south and pulled northward by employment opportunities. Most of the current twelve million "illegal immigrants" are from Mexico, and a burning public policy question is: What should the government do about them? One answer was given by *Time* magazine in its June 18, 2007, cover story: "Give them amnesty." The illegals are "by their sheer numbers undepotable. More important, they are too enmeshed in a healthy U.S. economy to be extracted." "Assimilation is slow, but inevitable." We must have "faith in America's undimmed ability to metabolize immigrants from around the world, to change them more than they change the U.S."¹¹ Indeed, like other immigrant groups, Mexican Americans have been learning English, applying for naturalized citizenship, voting, and becoming Americans.

Among Muslim Americans are the refugees from Afghanistan. After their country was invaded by the Russians in 1979, the United

States intervened, financing and arming the mujahideen—the anti-Soviet “freedom fighters.” After the Russian defeat in 1989, civil war broke out, ending with the ascendancy of the religiously conservative and oppressive Taliban. Safe in America, the Afghan refugees were hardly noticed. On September 11, 2001, however, the terrorist attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon suddenly changed the lives of Afghans in America. The hijackers were traced to Al-Qaeda, a terrorist organization headed by Osama bin Laden and based in Afghanistan. On that unforgettable day, Nadeem Saeed was afraid that Afghan Americans would be attacked and arrested. “Being Afghan American is not what people think it was before; now it’s what people want to know about you and who you really are inside, an American or a terrorist.”¹² In 2002, Western powers led by the United States invaded Afghanistan, seeking to destroy Al-Qaeda. The Taliban was quickly routed, but not vanquished. Omar Nourzaie summed up the challenge facing Afghan Americans: “The refugees know that a return to Afghanistan is not in their near future. They will have to change and make do in America.”¹³

Native Americans represent a significant contrast to all of the other groups, for theirs was not an immigrant experience. They were the original Americans, here for thousands of years before the voyage of Columbus. They were on the shores of Massachusetts and Virginia when the English arrived in 1607. Indians had been farming the land for centuries, but the English colonizers stereotyped them as “savages” and seized their lands by warfare. Westward would be the course of empire, across Indian lands all the way to the Pacific. Leaders of military campaigns against the native people were celebrated as heroes. One of them was the Indian fighter and architect of Indian removal, President Andrew Jackson. In a message to Congress, he declared: “Humanity has often wept over the fate of the aborigines of this country, and Philanthropy has been long busily employed in devising means to avert it, but its progress has never for a moment been arrested, and one by one have many powerful tribes disappeared from the earth. To follow to the tomb the last of his race and tread on the graves of extinct nations excite melancholy reflections.” But Indians had a different interpretation of what Jackson trumpeted as “progress.” “The white man,” Luther Standing Bear of the Sioux explained, “does not understand the Indian for the reason that he does not understand America. The man from Europe is still a foreigner and an alien. And he still hates the man who questioned his path across the continent.”¹⁴

The “path” was designed to create a white America. The revolu-

tionaries of 1776 founded a white republic, a democracy that was not for all people. In 1787, the Constitution legalized the institution of slavery. One of its provisions stated that the number of representatives each state sent to Congress was to be determined by the number of “free persons” and “three fifths of all other persons,” the code phrase for slaves. In 1801, shortly before negotiating the Louisiana Purchase, President Thomas Jefferson wrote to James Madison that he looked forward to distant times when the American continent would be covered with “a people speaking the same language, governed in similar forms, and by similar laws.”¹⁵

As it turned out, the economy would set a different agenda for who would be the people covering the continent. The War for Independence had been a struggle not only for political freedom from England but also for market freedom—freedom to trade without regulations from the mother country, to manufacture goods without restrictions, and to settle the land beyond the Appalachian Mountains. Unleashed, the new republic entered the era of the Market Revolution that would pull to America what Whitman welcomed as a “vast, surging hopeful army of workers.”¹⁶

In America’s expanding industrial economy, workers were often swept into ethnic antagonisms. Irish immigrants found themselves viewed as ignorant and inferior, and were forced to occupy the bottom rungs of employment. In the South, they were even made to do the jobs considered too hazardous and dangerous to be done by slaves, who were regarded by their owners as valuable property. In the North, Irish competed with blacks for jobs as waiters and longshoremen. As they pushed blacks out of the labor market, many Irish promoted their whiteness. “In a country of the whites where [white workers] find it difficult to earn a subsistence,” they asked, “what right has the negro either to preference or to equality, or to admission?” Complaining that blacks did not know their place, many of the Irish newcomers shouted: “Down with the Nagurs!” “Let them go back to Africa, where they belong.” Born in America, blacks complained that the Irish were taking jobs from them. “These impoverished and destitute beings, transported from the trans-Atlantic shores,” a black observed, “are crowding themselves into every place of business and labor, and driving the poor colored American citizen out.”¹⁷

Despite antagonisms, minorities also had much in common: labor experiences, hopeful dreams, and, above all, values.

Dynamically tied together in a complex interregional economy, workers found themselves in a robust industrial labyrinth of

farms, factories, railroads, and mines stretching from Canada to Mexico and from the Atlantic to the Pacific. In the South, African Americans were cultivating cotton, which was shipped to New England, where "Irish factory girls" were operating machines in the textile mills, while Jewish women were sewing clothes in the garment factories of the Lower East Side. In the "New South" after the Civil War, African Americans were working in the steel mills of Birmingham, Alabama, while in the copper mines of Arizona, Mexican Americans were extracting the "red metal" used to manufacture electrical wires that made possible the illumination of America. In California, Chinese and Japanese immigrants were growing an agricultural garden to feed an industrializing urban society. By 1900, the United States was manufacturing more goods than England and France combined.

The greatest achievement of industrializing America was the Transcontinental Railroad. Together, the Chinese of the Central Pacific and the Irish of the Union Pacific built the ribbon of steel that connected the two coasts, making possible the movements of people, raw materials, and goods throughout the entire country. The construction of the nation's elaborate national railroad system required the hard work of an immense variety of workers. Their songs told the story of common experiences. Laying railroad ties, black laborers sang:

*Down the railroad, um-huh
Well, raise the iron, um-huh
Raise the iron, um-huh.*

Irish railroad workers shouted as the sweat on their brows and backs glistened in the sun:

*Then drill, my Paddies, drill —
Drill, my heroes, drill,
Drill all day, no sugar in your tay
Workin' on the U.P. railway.*

Japanese laborers in the Northwest chorused as their bodies fought the fickle weather:

*A railroad worker —
That's me!
I am great.*

Yes, I am a railroad worker.

Complaining:

"It is too hot!"

"It is too cold!"

"It rains too often!"

"It snows too much!"

They all ran off.

I alone remained.

I am a railroad worker!

Mexican-American workers in the Southwest joined in as they swore at the punishing work:

Some unloaded rails

Others unloaded ties,

And others of my companions

Threw out thousands of curses.¹⁸

Shared class exploitation often led workers to struggle together. In 1870, Chinese immigrant laborers were transported to Massachusetts as scabs to break an Irish immigrant strike; in response, the Irish tried to organize a Chinese lodge of the Knights of St. Crispin, an Irish labor union. In 1903, Mexican and Japanese farm laborers went on strike together in California: their union officers had names like Yamaguchi and Lizarras, and strike meetings were conducted in Spanish and Japanese. The Mexican strikers declared that they were standing in solidarity with their "Japanese brothers."¹⁹ In Hawaii, Japanese and Filipino laborers came together in "a solid body" during a 1920 strike. They had been pitted against each other by the planter class, but they realized they had a common class interest. To "effectively cope with the capitalists," the strikers declared, their "big, powerful union" had to bring together "laborers of all nationalities."²⁰ During its massive organizing drives in the 1930s, the Committee for Industrial Organization announced that its policy was "one of absolute racial equality in Union membership."²¹ Describing a lesson learned by Mexican and Asian farm laborers in California, a Japanese immigrant conveyed in poetry the feeling of class connectedness across racial boundaries:

*People harvesting
work together unaware
Of racial problems.²²*

Regardless of their different complexions and origins, immigrants embraced similar hopeful dreams. In Ireland, people received letters from friends in the United States that glowingly described riches growing like grass and the boundlessness of a country where there were no oppressive English landlords. "My dear Father," wrote an Irish immigrant woman from New York in 1850, "any man or woman without a family would be fools that would not venture and come to this plentiful Country where no man or woman ever hungered." A witness in China reported the excitement generated by the news of the gold rush: "Letters from Chinese in San Francisco and further in the country have been circulated through all this part of the province. The accounts of the successful adventurers who have returned would, had the inhabitants possessed the means of paying their way across, have gone far to depopulate considerable towns."²³ Facing high taxes and difficulties making ends meet, Japanese farmers were enticed eastward. Excitedly they exclaimed:

*Day of spacious dreams!
I sailed for America,
Overblown with hope.*

Fleeing from anti-Semitic persecution and violence in Russia, the cry "To America!" roared like "wild-fire" in Jewish communities. In the shtetls, a song floated in the air:

*As the Russians mercilessly
Took revenge on us,
There is a land, America,
Where everyone lives free.*

For Mexican immigrants crossing the border in the early twentieth century, El Norte became the stuff of fantasies:

*If only you could see how nice
the United States is;
that is why the Mexicans
are crazy about it.*²⁴

Beyond their shared labor experiences and dreams, the diverse American people discovered a tie that binds—the Declaration of Independence, with equality as a principle for everyone, regard-

less of race or religion. Moreover, they were prepared to fight and even die for this "self-evident truth" in two of the nation's most horrendous conflicts—the Civil War and World War II.

The Civil War was initiated by the planter class of the South. Although they constituted only 5 percent of the southern white population, the slaveholders were dominant in politics. Defending their profitable "peculiar institution," this ruling elite took their states out of the Union in 1861. In his First Inaugural Address, President Lincoln declared: "One section of our country believes slavery is *right* and ought to be extended, while the other believes it is *wrong* and ought not to be extended." Southern secession, he argued, would mean anarchy. Lincoln sternly warned the South that he had taken a solemn oath to defend and preserve the Union. Americans were one people, he explained poetically, bound together by "the mystic chords of memory, stretching from every battlefield and patriot grave to every living heart and hearthstone all over this broad land." In the South, however, Lincoln's appeal for unity fell on deaf ears, and the war came.²⁵

During the conflict, President Lincoln initially refused to allow the Union Army to enlist African Americans: he wanted to keep the border states in the Union and worried that whites would refuse to fight in an army that had black soldiers. In the spring of 1863, however, Lincoln faced a military crisis. "Manpower now posed a real problem," wrote historian David Herbert Donald. "There had been severe losses in a contest that had now lasted nearly two years. The terms for which many regiments had enlisted were about to expire, and soldiers wanted to go home. Thousands were absent without leave.... There were almost no new volunteers. It would be months before a new conscription act could bring in recruits."²⁶

This shortage of military manpower meant that the North was on the terrifying edge of losing the war. At this critical point, Lincoln made a crucial decision. In a letter to the military governor of Tennessee, he wrote: "The colored population is the great available and yet unavailed of, force for restoring the Union. The bare sight of fifty thousand armed and drilled black soldiers on the banks of the Mississippi would end the rebellion at once." Lincoln gave his generals permission to enlist black men.²⁷ Tens of thousands of escaped slaves, desperate to liberate their families still in bondage, flocked to join the fight. "Now we sowers are men—men de first time in our lives," one of them declared. "Now we can look our old masters in de face. They used to sell and whip us, and we did

not dare say one word. Now we ain't afraid, if they meet us, to run the bayonet through them."²⁸ In the Mississippi Valley, General Lorenzo Thomas enrolled twenty regiments of African Americans.

Altogether, a hundred eighty-six thousand blacks served in the Union Army. "Without the physical force which the colored people now give, and promise us," Lincoln explained, "neither the present, nor any coming administration, can save the Union." Without them, "we would be compelled to abandon the war in three weeks."²⁹ The Union Army pursued the war to victory. By then, one-third of the black soldiers were listed as killed or missing in action. But their sacrifice had not been in vain: the men that Lincoln praised as "black warriors" had made the decisive difference in determining that our "government of the people, by the people, for the people" did "not perish from the earth." Significantly, in his famous Gettysburg Address, Lincoln declared that the nation had been founded, "dedicated" to the "proposition" that "all men are created equal."³⁰

World War II was also a significant fight for equality. Franklin D. Roosevelt had refused to desegregate the U.S. Armed Forces; thus we fought the Nazis with a Jim Crow army. The defense industry employed only white men until A. Philip Randolph threatened a march on Washington and forced the president to issue an executive order opening jobs to everyone, regardless of race or gender. After the attack on Pearl Harbor and the explosion of anti-Japanese hysteria, Roosevelt authorized the evacuation and internment of Japanese Americans. Facing Hitler's death factories, Jews in Europe frantically begged Roosevelt to let them seek refuge here; but heeding the polls showing widespread anti-Semitic opposition to the admission of Jews, Roosevelt refused to offer them sanctuary.

This contradiction between our professed principle of equality and our practice of prejudice was unshrouded by James G. Thompson in a letter to the *Pittsburgh Courier*, published on January 31, 1942:

Being an American of dark complexion and some 26 years, these questions flash through my mind: "Should I sacrifice my life to live half American? Will things be better for the next generation in the peace to follow? Would it be demanding too much to demand full citizenship rights in exchange for the sacrificing of my life? Is the kind of America I know worth defending? Will America be a true and pure democracy after the war? Will colored Americans suffer still the indignities that have been heaped upon them in the past? These and other questions need answering; I want to know,

and I believe every colored American, who is thinking, wants to know.... The V for victory sign is being displayed prominently in all so-called democratic countries which are fighting for victory over aggression, slavery, and tyranny. If this V sign means that to those now engaged in this great conflict, then let we colored Americans adopt the double VV for a double victory.³¹

Thompson enlisted and served in the U.S. Armed Forces. So did 33,000 Japanese Americans. Leaving their families behind in the internment camps, they fought in the all-Japanese-American 442nd Regimental Combat Team. By the end of the war in Europe, these soldiers had suffered 9,486 casualties, including 600 killed. The 442nd, military observers agreed, was "probably the most decorated unit in United States military history."³² Welcoming home these Japanese-American soldiers after the war, President Harry Truman acknowledged the country's indebtedness to them: "You fought for the free nations of the world... you fought not only the enemy, you fought prejudice—and you won."³³

Actually, for Japanese Americans as well as other minorities, the fight against prejudice still had to be won. Out of the war came clamors for change. In 1952, under pressure from lobbying groups including Japanese-American veterans, Congress rescinded the "white"-only restriction of the 1790 Naturalization Law. A Japanese immigrant rejoiced in poetry:

*Going steadily to study English,
Even through the rain at night,
I thus attain,
Late in life,
American citizenship.*³⁴

Then came a cascade of laws for social justice. At the 1963 March on Washington, Martin Luther King, Jr., declared: "I say to you today, my friends, that in spite of the difficulties and frustrations of the moment I still have a dream. It is a dream deeply rooted in the American dream. I have a dream that one day this nation will rise up and live out the true meaning of its creed: 'We hold these truths to be self-evident; that all men are created equal.'" A year later, Congress passed the Civil Rights Act, which, in turn, opened the way to the passage of the Immigration Act of 1965, which finally allowed the entry of Asian immigrants again.³⁵

Two years later came a change that had been initiated by two

ordinary individuals. Mildred and Richard Loving, an African-American woman and a white man, fell in love and married, but then they were arrested in Virginia for violating the state's anti-miscegenation law. They sued the state, and in 1967 the U.S. Supreme Court struck down the laws banning racially mixed marriages: "Restricting the freedom to marry solely because of racial classification violates the central meaning of the equal protection clause."³⁶

In 1988, Congress passed a bill providing for an apology and a payment of \$20,000 to each of the Japanese-American survivors of the World War II internment camps. When President Ronald Reagan signed the bill, he admitted that the United States had committed "a grave wrong." The nation needed, the president acknowledged, to end "a sad chapter in American history."³⁷

Other chapters in history, both sad and joyful, hunger to be told. "It is very natural that the history written by the victim," said a Mexican in 1874, "does not altogether chime with the story of the victor." Sometimes the people of multicultural America have been hesitant to speak, thinking they were only "little people." "I don't know why anybody wants to hear my history," an Irish maid said apologetically in 1900. "Nothing ever happened to me worth the tellin'."³⁸

But their stories are worthy. Native-American writer Leslie Marmon Silko explained why:

*I will tell you something about stories....
They aren't just entertainment.
Don't be fooled.*

Indeed, the accounts given by the people in this book vibrantly re-create moments in history, capturing the complexities of human emotions and thoughts. They also provide the authenticity of experience. After she escaped from slavery, Harriet Jacobs wrote in her autobiography: "[My purpose] is not to tell you what I have heard but what I have seen—and what I have suffered."³⁹

Their stories burst in the telling. "I hope this survey do a lot of good for Chinese people," an immigrant told an interviewer from Stanford University in the 1920s. "Make American people realize that Chinese people are humans. I think very few American people really know anything about Chinese." But the remembering is also for the sake of the children. "This story is dedicated to the descendants of Lazar and Goldie Glauberman," Jewish immigrant

Minnie Miller wrote in her autobiography. "My history is bound up in their history and the generations that follow should know where they came from to know better who they are." Similarly, Tomo Shoji, an elderly Japanese-American woman, urged Asian Americans to learn more about their roots: "We got such good, fantastic stories to tell. All our stories are different." Seeking to know how they fit into America, many young people want to hear the stories of their ancestors, unwilling to remain ignorant or ashamed of their identity and roots. One of them vowed to remember:

*The story of your fight,
Though not recorded
In any history book,
Yet lives engraved on my heart.⁴⁰*

But what happens when historians do not "record" their stories, leaving out many of America's peoples? What happens, to borrow the words of Adrienne Rich, "when someone with the authority of a teacher" describes our society, and "you are not in it"? Such an experience can be disorienting—"a moment of psychic disequilibrium, as if you looked into a mirror and saw nothing." What should we do about our invisibility? Poet Audre Lorde answered:

*It is a waste of time hating a mirror
or its reflection
instead of stopping the hand
that makes glass with distortions.⁴¹*

Reflected in a mirror without distortions, the people of multicultural America belong to what Ishmael Reed described as a society "unique" in the world because "the world is here"—a place "where the cultures of the world crisscross."⁴² Out of this intermingling arose a poem by Langston Hughes. So succinctly, so sonorously, the black poet laureate captured our multicultural memory:

*Let America be America again,
Let America be the dream the dreamers
dreamed,
Say who are you that mumbles in the dark?
I am the poor white, fooled and pushed
apart,*

*I am the Negro bearing slavery's scars,
I am the red man driven from the land,
I am the immigrant clutching the hope
I seek,*

*O, let my land be a land where,
Equality is in the air we breathe.*⁴³

The struggle to "let America be America" has been America's epic story. In the making of multicultural America, the continent's original inhabitants were joined by people pushed from their homelands by poverty and persecution in Asia, Latin America, and Europe, and pulled here by extravagant dreams. Others came here in chains from Africa, and still others fled here as refugees from countries like Vietnam and Afghanistan. And all of them belonged to "the great migrations that made the American people."

The men and women in this study might not have read John Locke, but they came to believe that "in the beginning, all the world was America." Like F. Scott Fitzgerald's Dutch sailors in the seventeenth century, they held their breath in the presence of this "fresh, green breast of the new world." They envisioned the emerging country as a place for a bold new start. Crossing borders not delineated by space, they broke the "cake of custom" as they transcended traditional fixed points of classification. Marginalized and degraded as the "Other," minorities came to believe even more fiercely and fervently than did the Founding Fathers in the "self-evident truths" that "all men are created equal," entitled to the "unalienable Rights" of "Life, Liberty, and the pursuit of Happiness."⁴⁴

Together, "We the" diverse "people of the United States" transformed America into a mighty economy and an amazingly unique society of varied races, ethnicities, and religions. In the process, we transformed ourselves into Americans. Together, we composed "E pluribus unum"—a reality discerned by Herman Melville over one hundred years ago. Our country was settled by "the people of all nations," he wrote. "All nations may claim her for their own. You can not spill a drop of American blood, without spilling the blood of the whole world." Americans are "not a narrow tribe."⁴⁵

This truth is reflected in "a different mirror." Remembered more inclusively, history offers all of us hopeful ties that bind—what Lincoln cherished as our "mystic chords of memory."

PART ONE



Foundations

14



WORLD WAR II

American Dilemmas

AS WORLD WAR II raged in Europe and Asia, President Franklin D. Roosevelt issued a warning to the American people. In a speech to Congress delivered on January 6, 1941, he declared: "This nation has placed its destiny in the hands and heads and hearts of its millions of free men and women, and its faith in freedom under the guidance of God. Freedom means the supremacy of *human rights* everywhere. Our support goes to those who struggle to gain those rights and keep them. Our strength is our unity of purpose. To that high concept there can be no end save victory."¹

Eleven months later, on the Sunday morning of December 7, 1941, Japanese planes shattered the quiet sky and swooped down from the clouds to drop bombs on the ships anchored in the U.S. naval base of Pearl Harbor, Hawaii. The surprise attack was devastating. Altogether, 21 ships were sunk or damaged, 164 planes destroyed, 1,178 soldiers and sailors wounded, and 2,388 killed. Before Congress the next day, President Roosevelt gravely announced: "Yesterday... a date which will live in infamy—the United States was suddenly and deliberately attacked by naval and air forces of the Empire of Japan.... I ask that Congress declare that since the unprovoked and dastardly attack... a state of war has existed."²

Suddenly, President Roosevelt became the leader of a democracy at war, and "American dilemmas" would besiege his presidency.

Japanese Americans: "A Tremendous Hole" in the Constitution

Shortly after inspecting the still smoking ruins at Pearl Harbor, Navy Secretary Frank Knox issued a statement to the press: "I think the most effective fifth column work of the entire war was done in Hawaii, with the possible exception of Norway." At a cabinet meeting on December 19, Knox recommended the internment of all Japanese aliens on an outer island.³

However, in a radio address aired two days after the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor, General Delos Emmons as military governor of Hawaii declared: "There is no intention or desire on the part of the federal authorities to operate mass concentration camps. No person, be he citizen or alien, need worry, provided he is not connected with subversive elements... While we have been subjected to a serious attack by a ruthless and treacherous enemy, we must remember that this is America and we must do things the American Way. We must distinguish between loyalty and disloyalty among our people." For General Emmons, the "American way" required him to respect and enforce the U.S. Constitution.⁴

On March 13, 1942, President Roosevelt, acting on the advice of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, approved a recommendation for the evacuation of 20,000 "dangerous" Japanese from Hawaii to the mainland. Two weeks later, General Emmons reduced the number to 1,550 Japanese who constituted a potential threat. Irritated by Emmons, the president wrote to Secretary of War Henry L. Stimson on November 2: "I think that General Emmons should be told that the only consideration is that of the safety of the Islands and that the labor situation is not only a secondary matter but should not be given any consideration whatsoever."⁵

General Emmons countered that such a removal of Japanese would severely disrupt both the economy and the defense of Hawaii. The Japanese, he explained, represented over 90 percent of the carpenters, nearly all of the transportation workers, and a significant proportion of the agricultural laborers. Japanese were "absolutely essential" for rebuilding Pearl Harbor. Commenting on the charges of Japanese-American fifth-column activities, General Emmons declared: "There have been no known acts of sabotage

committed in Hawaii." In the end, he ordered the internment of only 1,444 Japanese.⁶

And so, the 158,000 Japanese Americans living in Hawaii did not become victims of mass internment, even though military action between the United States and Japan had in fact occurred in the islands and even though there were more of them living there than on the mainland.

But what happened to the 120,000 Japanese Americans living on the West Coast turned out to be a different story.

Three days after the attack on Pearl Harbor, FBI director J. Edgar Hoover informed Washington that "practically all" suspected individuals were in custody: 1,291 Japanese (367 in Hawaii, 924 on the mainland), 857 Germans, and 147 Italians. In a report to the attorney general submitted in early February, Hoover concluded that a mass internment of the Japanese could not be justified for security reasons.⁷

Despite these intelligence findings, Lieutenant General John L. DeWitt, head of the Western Defense Command, behaved very differently from his counterpart, General Emmons in Hawaii. DeWitt wanted to exclude Japanese aliens as well as U.S.-born Americans of Japanese ancestry from certain areas. On January 4, 1942, at a meeting of federal and state officials, DeWitt argued that military necessity justified exclusion: "We are at war and this area — eight states — has been designated as a theater of operations." He declared that he had no confidence in the loyalty of the Japanese living on the West Coast: "A Jap is a Jap." On February 5, after he had received DeWitt's assessment of the need to remove all Japanese, aliens as well as citizens, Provost Marshal General Allen Gullion drafted a War Department proposal for the exclusion of "all persons, whether aliens or citizens... deemed dangerous as potential saboteurs" from designated "military areas."

But a decision on evacuation still had not been made in Washington. During lunch with President Roosevelt on February 7, Attorney General Francis Biddle declared that "there were no reasons for mass evacuation." In his diary on February 10, Secretary of War Stimson wrote: "The second generation Japanese can only be evacuated either as part of a total evacuation... or by frankly trying to put them out on the ground that their racial characteristics are such that we cannot understand or trust even the citizen Japanese. This latter is the fact but I am afraid it will make a tremendous hole in our constitutional system to apply it."⁹

On February 14, 1942, General DeWitt sent Stimson his formal

recommendation for removal, buttressing it with a racial justification: "In the war in which we are now engaged racial affinities are not severed by migration. The Japanese race is an enemy race and while many second and third generation Japanese born on United States soil, possessed of United States citizenship, have become 'Americanized,' the racial strains are undiluted.... It, therefore, follows that along the vital Pacific Coast over 112,000 potential enemies, of Japanese extraction, are at large today." On February 19, President Roosevelt signed Executive Order 9066, which directed the secretary of war to prescribe military areas "with respect to which, the right of any person to enter, remain in, or leave shall be subject to whatever restrictions the Secretary of War or the appropriate Military Commander may impose in his discretion." The order did not specify the Japanese as the group to be excluded, but they were the target. A few months later, when President Roosevelt learned about discussions in the War Department to apply the order to Germans and Italians on the East Coast, he wrote to inform Stimson that he considered enemy alien control to be "primarily a civilian matter except in the case of the Japanese mass evacuation on the Pacific Coast." Unlike the Germans and Italians, the Japanese had been singled out.¹⁰

Under General DeWitt's command, the military posted an order: "Pursuant to the provisions of Civilian Exclusion Order No. 27, this Headquarters, dated April 30, 1942, all persons of Japanese ancestry, both alien and non-alien, will be evacuated from the above area by 12 o'clock noon, P. W. T., Thursday May 7, 1942." Years later, Congressman Robert Matsui, who was a baby in 1942, asked: "How could I as a 6-month-old child born in this country be declared by my own Government to be an enemy alien?" The evacuees were instructed to bring their bedding, toilet articles, extra clothing, and utensils. In silent numbness, Japanese stood before the notices. "Soldiers came around and posted notices on telephone poles," said Takae Washizu. Reading the evacuation notice with disbelief, a Japanese American wrote:

Notice of evacuation

One spring night

The image of my wife

Holding the hands of my mother.¹¹

Believing the military orders were unconstitutional, Minoru Yasui of Portland refused to obey the curfew order: "It was my

belief that no military authority has the right to subject any United States citizen to any requirement that does not equally apply to all other U.S. citizens. If we believe in America, if we believe in equality and democracy, if we believe in law and justice, then each of us, when we see or believe errors are being made, has an obligation to make every effort to correct them." Meanwhile, Fred Korematsu in California and Gordon Hirabayashi in Washington refused to report to the evacuation center. "As an American citizen," Hirabayashi explained, "I wanted to uphold the principles of the Constitution, and the curfew and evacuation orders which singled out a group on the basis of ethnicity violated them. It was not acceptable to me to be less than a full citizen in a white man's country." The three men were arrested and convicted; sent to prison, they took their cases to the Supreme Court, which upheld their convictions, saying the government's policies were based on military necessity. Most Japanese, however, felt they had no choice but to comply with the evacuation orders.¹²

Instructed that they would be allowed to take only what they could carry, they were forced to sell most of their possessions—their refrigerators, cars, furniture, radios, pianos, and houses. At the control centers, the men, women, and children were registered and each family was given a number, and they found themselves surrounded by soldiers with rifles and bayonets. In poetry, one of the evacuees captured the humiliation:

Like a dog

I am commanded

At a bayonet point.

My heart is inflamed

With burning anguish.

From there they were taken to the assembly centers. "I looked at Santa Clara's streets from the train over the subway," wrote Norman Mineta's father in a letter to friends in San Jose. "I thought this might be the last look at my loved home city. My heart almost broke, and suddenly hot tears just came pouring out." They knew that more than their homes and possessions had been taken from them. "On May 16, 1942, my mother, two sisters, niece, nephew, and I left... by train," said Teru Watanabe. "Father joined us later. Brother left earlier by bus. We took whatever we could carry. So much we left behind, but the most valuable thing I lost was my freedom."¹³

After a brief stay in assembly centers, the evacuees were herded

into 171 special trains, 500 in each train. One of the passengers distilled his distress in poetry:

*Snow in mountain pass
Unable to sleep
The prison train.*

They had no idea where they were going. The trains took them to ten internment camps: Topaz in Utah, Poston and Gila River in Arizona, Amache in Colorado, Jerome and Rohwer in Arkansas, Minidoka in Idaho, Manzanar and Tule Lake in California, and Heart Mountain in Wyoming.¹⁴

Most of the camps were located in remote desert areas. "We did not know where we were," remembered an internee. "No houses were in sight, no trees or anything green—only scrubby sagebrush and an occasional low cactus, and mostly dry, baked earth." They looked around them and saw hundreds of miles of wasteland, "beyond the end of the horizon and again over the mountain—again, more wasteland." They were surrounded by dust and sand.¹⁵

In the camps, the internees were assigned to barracks, each about 20 by 120 feet, divided into four or six rooms. Usually a family was housed in one room, 20 by 20 feet. The room had "a pot bellied stove, a single electric light hanging from the ceiling, an Army cot for each person and a blanket for the bed." An internee painfully conveyed the confinement's unbearableness:

*Birds,
Living in a cage,
The human spirit.*

The barracks were lined in orderly rows; barbed-wire fences with guard towers defined space for the internees.¹⁶

They found themselves in a world of military-like routine. Every morning at seven, the internees were awakened by a siren blast. After breakfast in a cafeteria, the children went to school, where they began the day by saluting the flag of the United States and then singing "My country, 'tis of thee, sweet land of liberty." Looking beyond the flagpole, they saw the barbed wire, the watchtowers, and the armed guards. "I was too young to understand," stated George Takei years later, "but I remember soldiers carrying rifles, and I remember being afraid."¹⁷

Camp life was oppressive and regimented, each day boring and tedious. Forced to abandon the values of self-reliance and activity, shopkeepers and farmers suddenly found themselves working for the government for wages. Young married couples worried about having children born in the camps. "When I was pregnant with my second child, that's when I flipped," said a Nisei woman. "I guess that's when the reality really hit me. I thought to myself, gosh, what am I doing getting pregnant. I told my husband, 'This is crazy. You realize there's no future for us and what are we having kids for?'"¹⁸

In September 1942, the Selective Service classified all young Japanese men as IV-C, enemy aliens. A month later, however, the director of the Office of War Information urged President Roosevelt to authorize the enlistment of American-born Japanese: "Loyal American citizens of Japanese descent should be permitted, after an individual test, to enlist in the Army and Navy. This matter is of great interest to OWI. Japanese propaganda to the Philippines, Burma, and elsewhere insists that this is a racial war. We can combat this effectively with counter propaganda only if our deeds permit us to tell the truth." President Roosevelt understood the need to neutralize "Japanese propaganda." In December the army developed a plan for forming an all-Japanese-American combat team. On February 1, 1943, hypocritically ignoring the evacuation order he had signed a year earlier, Roosevelt wrote to Secretary of War Stimson: "No loyal citizen of the United States should be denied the democratic right to exercise the responsibilities of his citizenship, regardless of his ancestry.... Americanism is not, and never was, a matter of race or ancestry. Every loyal American citizen should be given the opportunity to serve this country...in the ranks of our armed forces."¹⁹

Five days later, the government required all internees to answer loyalty questionnaires. The questionnaires had two purposes: to enable camp authorities to process individual internees for work furloughs as well as for resettlement outside the restricted zones, and to register young men for the draft. Question 27 asked draft-age males: "Are you willing to serve in the armed forces of the United States on combat duty, wherever ordered?" Question 28 asked all internees: "Will you swear unqualified allegiance to the United States of America and faithfully defend the United States from any or all attack by foreign or domestic forces, and forswear any form of allegiance or obedience to the Japanese emperor, or any other foreign government, power or organization?"

Forced to fill out and sign the loyalty questionnaire, internees stared at the form. One of them agonized:

*Loyalty, disloyalty,
If asked,
What should I answer?*

Some 4,600, or 22 percent, of the 21,000 males eligible to register for the draft, answered with a "no," a qualified answer, or no response. Many of them said they were not expressing disloyalty but were protesting against the internment. In January 1944, the Selective Service began reclassifying to I-A men who had answered "yes" to the two questions and serving draft registration notices. Thirty-three thousand Japanese Americans enlisted in the United States Armed Forces. They believed participation in the defense of their country was the best way to express their loyalty and to fulfill their obligation as citizens.²⁰

Several thousand of them were members of the Military Intelligence Service (MIS), functioning as interpreters and translators on the Pacific front. Armed with Japanese-language skills, the soldiers of the MIS provided an invaluable service: they translated captured Japanese documents, including battle plans, lists of Imperial Navy ships, and Japanese secret codes. One of their officers described their heroic work: "During battles they crawled up close enough to be able to hear Jap officers' commands and to make verbal translations to our soldiers. They tapped lines, listened in on radios, translated documents and papers, made spot translations of messages and field orders." General Charles Willoughby, chief of intelligence in the Pacific, estimated that the contributions of the Japanese Americans of the MIS shortened the Pacific war by two years.²¹

Japanese-American soldiers also helped to win the war in Europe. In 1942, General Emmons in Hawaii formed a battalion of Japanese Americans—the 100th Battalion. In response to Emmons's call for Japanese Americans to serve in the U.S. Armed Forces, 9,507 American-born Japanese volunteered. "I wanted to show something, to contribute to America," explained Minoru Hina-hara. "My parents could not become citizens but they told me, 'You fight for your country.'" After military training, 1,400 men of this battalion were sent to North Africa and then to Italy in September 1943. They participated in the Italian campaign until the following March: 300 of them were killed and 650 wounded.

The 100th was called the "Purple Heart Battalion." In June, the 100th Battalion merged with the newly arrived 442nd Regimental Combat Team, composed of Japanese Americans from Hawaii as well as from the internment camps on the mainland. These soldiers experienced bloody fighting at Luciana, Livorno, and the Arno River, where casualties totaled 1,272 men—more than one-fourth of the regiment. After the battle at the Arno River, they were sent to France, where they took the town of Bruyeres from the German troops in heavy house-to-house fighting.²²

Then in April 1945, the Japanese-American soldiers assaulted German troops on Mount Nebbione. "Come on, you guys, go for broke!" they shouted as they charged directly into the fire of enemy machine guns. One of them, Captain Daniel Inouye, crawled to the flank of an emplacement and pulled the pin on his grenade. "As I drew my arm back, all in a flash of light and dark I saw him, that faceless German," he remembered. "And even as I cocked my arm to throw, he fired and his rifle grenade smashed into my right elbow and exploded and all but tore my arm off. I looked at it, stunned and unbelieving. It dangled there by a few bloody shreds of tissue, my grenade still clenched in a fist that suddenly didn't belong to me any more.... I swung around to pry the grenade out of that dead fist with my left hand. Then I had it free and I turned to throw and the German was reloading his rifle. But this time I beat him. My grenade blew up in his face and I stumbled to my feet, closing on the bunker, firing my tommy gun left-handed, the useless right arm slapping red and wet against my side."²³

Inouye had given one of his limbs in defense of his country. By the end of the war in Europe, the soldiers of the 442nd had suffered 9,486 casualties, including 600 killed. The 442nd, military observers agreed, was "probably the most decorated unit in United States military history." They had earned 18,143 individual decorations—including 1 Congressional Medal of Honor, 47 Distinguished Service Crosses, 350 Silver Stars, 810 Bronze Stars, and more than 3,600 Purple Hearts. They had given their lives and limbs to prove their loyalty.²⁴

After the war, on July 15, 1946, on the lawn of the White House, President Harry Truman welcomed home the Nisei soldiers of the 442nd: "You fought for the free nations of the world.... you fought not only the enemy, you fought prejudice—and you won." As they stood on the land of their birth, however, they could not be certain they had defeated prejudice in America. Captain Inouye discovered they had not won the war at home. He was on his way back

to Hawaii in 1945 when he tried to get a haircut in San Francisco. Entering the barbershop with his empty right sleeve pinned to his army jacket covered with ribbons and medals for his military heroism, Captain Inouye was told: "We don't serve Japs here."²⁵

Even before the end of the war, the government had begun to close the internment camps. "My parents did not know what to do or where to go after they had been let out of camp," said Aiko Mifune. Her mother, Fusayo Fukuda Kaya, had come to America as a picture bride in 1919; she and her husband, Yokichi, had been tenant farmers in California before they were interned in Poston, Arizona. "But everything they had worked for was gone; they seemed listless and they stayed in Arizona and tried to grow potatoes there." Most of the internees wanted to go home to the West Coast, and they boarded trains bound for Los Angeles, Seattle, and San Francisco. At many train stations, the returning internees were met with hostile signs: "No Japs allowed, no Japs welcome." Many found their houses damaged and their fields ruined. Some of them were never able to return home: too old, too ill, or too broken in spirit, they died in the internment camps. Tragically, they had come all the way to America only to be buried in forlorn and windswept cemeteries of desert camps. Seeking solace in poetry, a camp survivor wrote:

*When the war is over
And after we are gone
Who will visit
This lonely grave in the wild
Where my friend lies buried?*²⁶

African Americans: "Bomb the Color Line"

Altogether, some nine hundred thousand African Americans enlisted in the U.S. Armed Forces during World War II. But they served in a Jim Crow, or segregated, military. Four years before the attack on Pearl Harbor, Charles H. Houston of the NAACP demanded that Franklin D. Roosevelt issue an executive order banning all racial discrimination in the armed forces. But in 1940, the president signed the Selective Service Act, which included a provision that prohibited intermingling between "colored and white" army personnel in the same regiments.²⁷

Roosevelt's refusal to integrate the armed forces provoked disbelief and anger across black America. In a telegram to the

White House, A. Philip Randolph of the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters declared: "We are inexpressibly shocked that a President of the United States at a time of national peril should surrender so completely to enemies of democracy who would destroy national unity by advocating segregation. Official approval by the Commander-in-Chief of the Army and Navy of such discrimination and segregation is a stab in the back of democracy." On October 9, 1940, the *Crisis* carried the headline: "WHITE HOUSE BLESSES JIM CROW."²⁸

Roosevelt's segregationist policy quickly became a symbol of America's hypocrisy. "Democracy must wage a two-fold battle—a battle on far flung foreign fields against Hitler, and a battle on the home front against Hitlerism," insisted Adam Clayton Powell, Jr., a New York City councilman. African-American columnist George Schuyler also castigated the Jim Crow army: "Our war is not against Hitler in Europe, but against Hitler in America. Our war is not to defend democracy, but to get a democracy we have never had." In his protest against segregation in the U.S. Armed Forces, the editor of the *Chicago Defender* urged America to "bomb the color line."²⁹

"Prove to us," African Americans challenged Roosevelt and other policymakers, "that you are not hypocrites when you say this is a war for freedom." The war for freedom had to be fought in the country's backyard. "The Army jim-crows us," complained a student. "The Navy lets us serve only as messmen.... Employers and labor unions shut us out. Lynchings continue. We are disfranchised.... spat upon. What more can Hitler do than that." In a letter to the NAACP, a soldier wrote: "I am a Negro soldier 22 years old. I won't fight or die in vain. If I fight, suffer or die it will be for the freedom of every black man to live equally with other races." Scheduled to be drafted into the army, a black youth declared: "Just carve on my tombstone, 'Here lies a black man killed fighting a yellow man for the protection of a white man.'"³⁰

The army training camps were segregated. In a letter to Truman K. Gibson, the black civilian aide to the secretary of war, private Bert Babero described the toilets at Camp Barkeley, Texas. He noticed a sign in the latrine, designating a section for "Negro soldiers" and another section for "white soldiers." The German prisoners of war held at this army base were allowed to use the white facility. "Seeing this was honestly disheartening," Babero wrote. "It made me feel, here, the tyrant is actually placed over the liberator." In a letter to the *Baltimore Afro-American*, a

soldier described the extensiveness of segregation in the training facility. "We cannot go to the church services on the camp. We have to be told when we can go and worship God." Entering the service clubs for sandwiches, they were told: "We don't serve colored."³¹

After training, African Americans were often given degrading work assignments. Writing to the *Richmond Afro-American*, blacks in the 328th Aviation Squadron based in Pampa, Texas, protested against job discrimination within the army: "We are a group of permanent K.P.'s [kitchen police]. We are allowed no other advancement whatsoever. It is true that K.P. pushers (Head K.P.) are made Cpl. and Sgt. but the K.P.'s themselves are a miserable group that will be worked like slaves. We are confined to this job not because we are not fit for anything else but because we are dark. We are referred to on this post as 'that nigger squadron at the end of the field.'"³²

African Americans wanted equal opportunity to fight in combat, but most of them found themselves assigned to service and support duties. In Europe, blacks composed half of the Transportation Corps. On the beaches of Normandy during the D-Day invasion, they unloaded supplies from ships and transported them to the fighting troops. "We were really stevedores," recalled Timuel Black. "I went into Normandy with combat troops. We served them." Their work was especially dangerous. "The Germans aimed at our supplies," explained Black. "We were direct targets. I'd been on six-by-six trucks many nights when the Luftwaffe was strafing us, dropping those small bombs and firing those machine guns at us." Their biggest task was feeding an enormous army in movement. "We were in Belgium during the Battle of the Bulge," Black boasted. "We were at one time feeding three million soldiers: the First, the Third, the Ninth, and the British Seventh. No food, no fighting, the African American soldiers knew. Without their vital support, the Allies would have been beaten back to the beaches by this fierce Nazi counterattack."³³

When given the chance, African Americans seized opportunities to be in combat as skilled fighters. Initially, the commander of the U.S. Air Service, General H. H. "Hap" Arnold, had refused to allow African Americans to serve as pilots. In his view, they should be laborers and waiters. "Black pilots could not be used," he said, "since this would result in having Negro officers serving over white enlisted men. This would create an impossible social problem." "They didn't want blacks to fly," recalled Fred

Smith of Chicago. "They said blacks were not smart enough to be pilots."³⁴

African Americans protested their exclusion from the air force. Insisting that blacks were capable of becoming aviators, the editor of the *Pittsburgh Courier* declared: "How can we excuse refusal to abolish the disuniting color line when the life of this nation is threatened?" In response to this criticism, Secretary of War Henry L. Stimson authorized the training of black aviation cadets in a segregated unit at Tuskegee Air Force Base. The War Department defended its segregationist policy, claiming that it could not ignore the social relationships between the races that had been established "through custom and habit."³⁵

Sent to Europe as members of the segregated 99th Pursuit Squadron and 332nd Fighter Group, the Tuskegee pilots fought the German Luftwaffe in aerial combat. For their heroic service in Sicily and Italy, two of them were awarded the Distinguished Unit Citation, the military's highest commendation. When General Ira C. Aker, commanding officer of the Mediterranean Air Force, inspected the 99th Pursuit Squadron on April 20, 1944, he declared: "By the magnificent showing your fliers have made since coming into this theatre, and especially in the Anzio beach-head operations, you have not only won the plaudits of the Air Force, but have earned the opportunity to apply your talents to much more advanced work than was at one time planned for you." The chance for "advanced work" came when the pilots of the 99th Pursuit Squadron and the 332nd Fighter Group escorted bombers first over France and then over Berlin itself.³⁶

As the protectors of white pilots flying bombers en route to enemy targets, the Tuskegee pilots dubbed themselves the "Lonely Eagles." Their nickname signified their segregated status even in the sky. "We flew alone," explained Coleman Young, "because our 332nd was not readily accepted when we were sent overseas and attached to white groups. A group was usually composed of three squadrons; so our one black squadron was attached to three white squadrons. They still kept us segregated." But the skills and sharpness of the Tuskegee pilots earned them respect, and bombing groups began requesting them as escorts. "They all wanted us," said Young, "because we were the only fighter group in the entire air force that did not lose a bomber to enemy action. Oh, we were much in demand."³⁷

Trained as tankers, the African Americans of the 761st Battalion were also in demand. "When General Patton sent for us," said

E. G. McConnell, "he asked for the best tank unit in the country. Hot dog it, were we proud, proud! I was in a unit I was damn proud of, and I knew that the things we did would shape the future for my children and grandchildren. We were so proud and dedicated to the cause of progress...going ahead so everyone would be able to live like an American." The black tankers participated in the first offensive after the D-Day invasion; then they found themselves fighting in one of the fiercest battles of World War II.³⁸

"They put us on flatcars in France and shipped us to Belgium, where the fighting was," recalled Johnnie Stevens. "We got off the flatcars, took our tanks off the flatcars, and went right into combat. But that Battle of the Bulge was something. I'm telling you! We never fell back. We never lost an inch of ground during the whole campaign. You can't find nothing in the record that says the 761st lost any of their ground. One of our tank crews that was knocked out, they got out of their tank and fought with machine guns—a captured German officer said he'd never seen anything like that before. Because we stood our ground up there, we really didn't give it up." On January 10, 1945, Stevens was wounded. "Well, here I am in the hospital again," he wrote in his journal. "I was not hit as bad as I was the first time, but I received my Oak Leaf Cluster today and believe me, I earned it. The whole outfit has earned a citation. They stayed on the line for 96 days without relief which is a damn good record for one tank battalion."³⁹

African-American women also served in the military. A student at New York University when she enlisted, Elaine Bennett explained: "I wanted to prove to myself, and maybe the world, that we [African Americans] would give what we had back to the United States as a confirmation that we were full-fledged citizens." They represented 4 percent of the 150,000 members of the Women's Army Corps; 855 of them worked in Europe as members of the 6888th Central Postal Directory Battalion.⁴⁰

"The job of our battalion," Lucia M. Pitts recalled, "was to keep up with the addresses of our fighting men, who were constantly on the move, and see that their mail reached them. An average of 30,000 address changes had to be made every day." Margaret Y. Jackson vividly described the frenzied work of processing the mail. "As we labored at long tables, piled high with mail, we were more than objectively impressed by the stacks of letters which we sought to place in the hands of the individuals to whom they were sent. Many of these letters were from the same loved ones.... After weeks—even months—they finally wound up on the floor of the

auditorium in the Central Postal Directory. Many of us were as pleased as the soldiers must have been when stacks of letters were distributed to them at mail call." Working together with white WACs in the auditorium, the busy mail processors took satisfaction in seeing "mountains of mail dwindle to small hills." Wherever the WACs went in Birmingham after work, they were constantly approached by servicemen profusely thanking them for getting their long-awaited letters and packages to them. The WACs took pride in their motto: "No mail, no morale."⁴¹

Meanwhile, at the home front, blacks discovered that the "Arsenal for Democracy" was not democratic: defense-industry jobs were reserved for whites only. Even before its entry into the war, the United States began to increase production of military goods. At a 1941 meeting in Chicago, a black woman called for a mass demonstration in Washington: "We ought to throw 50,000 Negroes around the White House, bring them from all over the country, in jaloopies, in trains and any way they can get there, and throw them around the White House and keep them there until we can get some action from the White House." The idea of a march on Washington seized the imagination of A. Philip Randolph, president of the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters. "Let the Negro masses speak," he declared. "Negroes have a stake in National Defense.... It involves equal employment opportunities. Let us tear the mask of hypocrisy from America's Democracy!" In his "Call to the March on Washington," Randolph declared: "Negroes, by the mobilization and coordination of their mass power, can cause President Roosevelt to issue an executive order abolishing discrimination in all government departments, army, navy, air corps and national defense jobs."⁴²

Randolph's threat of a mass demonstration alarmed Washington officials. The march was scheduled for July 1. At the White House on June 18, Roosevelt met with civil rights leaders, including Randolph. Roosevelt began by entertaining his guests with old political anecdotes. Impatient, Randolph respectfully interrupted: "Mr. President, time is running on. You are quite busy, I know. But what we want to talk with you about is the problem of jobs for Negroes in defense industries. Our people are being turned away at factory gates because they are colored. They can't live with this thing. Now, what are you going to do about it?" Roosevelt asked Randolph how many people would be at the march. "One hundred thousand, Mr. President."⁴³

A week later, Roosevelt signed Executive Order 8802: "There

shall be no discrimination in the employment of workers in defense industries or Government because of race, creed, color, or national origin... and it is the duty of employers and of labor organizations... to provide for the full and equitable participation of all workers in defense industries, without discrimination because of race, creed, color, or national origin." His order also established the Committee on Fair Employment Practice to investigate complaints of discrimination and take appropriate steps to redress valid grievances. The march was canceled. But Roosevelt's new policy for the defense industry was designed for failure. The committee had no power to penalize companies that violated the non-discrimination order.⁴⁴

Ultimately, the real pressure for the integration of the defense industries came from the sheer need for labor in America's "Arsenal for Democracy." At the beginning of 1942, only 3 percent of defense workers were black; by November 1944, that number had jumped to 8.3 percent. Blacks constituted 25 percent of the labor force in foundries, 12 percent in shipbuilding and steel mills. During the war years, the wages of black families increased from 40 percent to 60 percent of that of white families.⁴⁵

The military's demand for men created labor shortages and opened industrial employment opportunities to women, including black women. Of the one million African Americans employed in the defense industries, 600,000 were women. Between 1940 and 1944, the percentage of black women in industry increased from 6.5 percent to 18 percent of the female workforce. Between 1940 and 1944, their numbers in Detroit's factories rose sharply, from 14,451 to 46,750. In the aircraft plants of Los Angeles, 2,000 black women were employed by North American Aviation alone. In "Negro Women on the Production Front," published in a 1943 issue of *Opportunity: Journal of Negro Life*, Mary Anderson wrote: "At the same time that Negro women are contributing to the war effort in essential war and civilian jobs, they are broadening their occupational experience. They are developing skills needed now and after the war. We must use the highest skills and the full strength of all our people, men and women, to win the war and to win the peace."⁴⁶

"When we first got into the war," recalled San Francisco shipworker Lyn Childs, "the country wasn't prepared. And as the manpower in the country was getting pulled into the service, all of the industries were wide open. So they decided, 'Well, we better let some of those blacks come in.' Then after the source of

men dried up, they began to let women come in. The doors were opened." Childs described the excitement black women felt over the opportunity to work in the defense industry. "Do you think that if you did domestic work all of your life, where you'd clean somebody's toilets and did all the cooking for some lazy characters who were sitting on top, and you finally got a chance where you can get a dignified job, you wouldn't fly through the door?"⁴⁷

Between 1940 and 1944, the proportion of black women employed in housecleaning declined from 60 percent to 45 percent. One of these women was Fanny Christina Hill. Moving from Tyler, Texas, to Los Angeles in 1943, she had planned to continue working as a housecleaner. "Well, I better get me a good job around here working in a hotel or motel," Hill told her sister. "No," said her sister, "you just come on out and go in the war plants and work and maybe you'll make enough money where you won't have to work in the hotels or motels." Hill applied for a job at North American Aviation. "There was a black girl that was hired with me," she recalled. "I went to work the next day, sixty cents an hour. The war made me live better, it really did." "My sister always said that Hitler was the one that got us out of the white folks' kitchen."⁴⁸

However, as African Americans followed the defense jobs into the cities, they often found themselves targeted by hate crimes and violence. In 1943, at the height of industrial production for the war, urban race riots exploded across the country—242 racial battles in 47 cities. The center of the "Arsenal for Democracy," Detroit was also the scene of the bloodiest conflict. At the beginning of the war, African Americans totaled 150,000 of this city's population of 1.6 million. Between 1940 and 1943, half a million people, including more than 50,000 blacks, moved into the city. Although jobs in the defense industry were abundant, white workers were determined to continue the exclusion of blacks from the factories. Competition between whites and blacks intensified not only in the workplace but also in housing. The tremendous influx of newcomers into Detroit had created crowded living conditions, and black newcomers were forced to live in segregated ghettos.

Racial tensions in Detroit were volatile. As chief counsel for the NAACP, Thurgood Marshall tried to warn Roosevelt about Detroit's powder keg of racial tensions. "In those days," he told Carl T. Rowan years later, "I would lie awake some nights worrying that Detroit and other cities that had industries that were critical to the war effort were becoming tinderboxes because whites, from the Roosevelt brain trust to the unions, wanted to

keep Negroes out of the mobilization jobs. The tragedy was that Roosevelt didn't have a fucking clue as to the explosive tensions that were building up.⁷⁴⁹

Actually, the president was fully aware of the razor-sharp edges of racial tensions in Detroit. In a "Special Report on Negro Housing Situation in Detroit," March 5, 1942, marked "Confidential," the federal government's Office of Facts and Figures had noted the escalating racial antagonisms in Detroit. "It now appears," the report stated, "that only the direct intervention of the President can prevent not only a violent race riot in Detroit but a steadily widening fissure that will create havoc in the working force of every Northern industrial city." A clear warning was given: "Unless strong and quick active intervention by some high official, preferably the President, is not taken at once, hell is going to be let loose."⁷⁵⁰

Hell was actually let loose in the summer of 1943, when Detroit exploded in fire and violence as white and black mobs attacked each other. At the end of three days of burning, looting, and murdering, millions in property had been destroyed and nine whites and twenty-five blacks had been killed. John Sengstacke of the Negro Publishers' Association asked Roosevelt to appeal to the conscience of the nation in one of his famous "fire-side chats": "We urge you to call attention of all Americans through the radio and the press to the unpatriotic activities of those who subvert the constitutional guarantee of equal opportunity for all." Roosevelt felt the pressure to speak out. "Don't you think it is about time," he asked his press secretary, Steve Early, "for me to issue a statement about racial riots?" In the end, the president decided not to make a public address on the crisis. He realized, Eleanor Roosevelt explained, that "he must not irritate the southern leaders," whose votes he needed for essential war bills.⁷⁵¹

President Roosevelt did not speak out against the racial violence in Detroit, but a group of wounded American soldiers did. In a letter to a newspaper in their home city of Detroit, they wrote that the riot made "us fighters think—what are we fighting for?" They declared they were fighting and willing to die for the "principles that gave birth to the United States of America. In this hospital ward, we eat, laugh, and sleep uncomplainingly together." They signed their letter: "Jim Stanley, Negro; Joe Wakamatsu, Japanese; Eng Yu, Chinese; John Brennan, Irish; Paul Colosi, Italian; Don Holzheimer, German; Joe Wojciechowski, Polish; and Mike Cohen, Jewish."⁷⁵²

Their names with their ethnic identities said it all: the war for freedom still needed to be won at home.

Chinese Americans: To "Silence the Distorted Japanese Propaganda"

"I remember December 7th so clearly," said Lonnie Quan of San Francisco. "I was living at Gum Moon Residence Club on Washington Street. It was Sunday. I didn't have a radio in the room." When her boyfriend arrived, he exclaimed: "This is it. Pearl Harbor was attacked!" The news was overwhelming: "I just couldn't believe it—it was a shock. I remember going to work in a restaurant, Cathay House, and everybody was just kinda glued to the radio." The next day, the United States and the Republic of China declared war on Japan, and the two countries became allies.⁷⁵³

America's entry into the war ignited patriotic explosions in Chinatowns across the country. In New York's Chinatown, excited crowds cheered themselves hoarse when the first draft numbers drawn were for Chinese Americans. According to a New York City survey, approximately 40 percent of the Chinese population was drafted, the highest of all nationalities. The Chinese wanted to join the army in order to gain respect in America. "To men of my generation," explained Charlie Leong of San Francisco's Chinatown, "World War II was the most important historic event of our times. For the first time we felt we could make it in American society." The war had given them the opportunity to get out of Chinatown, don army uniforms, and be sent overseas, where they felt "they were part of the great patriotic United States war machine out to do battle with the enemy." Similarly Harold Liu recalled: "In the 1940s for the first time Chinese were accepted by Americans as being friends because at that time, Chinese and Americans were fighting against the Japanese and the Germans and the Nazis. Therefore, all of a sudden, we became part of an American dream." Altogether 13,499 Chinese were drafted or enlisted in the U.S. Armed Forces—22 percent of Chinese adult males.⁷⁵⁴

Confined for decades to a Chinese ethnic labor market composed mainly of restaurants and laundries, Chinese workers welcomed the new and higher-paying employment opportunities, especially in the defense industries, where labor shortages were acute. Waiters left the restaurants and rushed to the industrial jobs. In Los Angeles some three hundred Chinese laundry workers closed their shops to work on the construction of the ship *China Victory*.

"At Douglas, home of the A-20 attack planes and dive bombers," the *Chinese Press* noted in 1943, "there are approximately 100 Chinese working at its three plants—Santa Monica, Long Beach, and El Segundo." Chinese workers constituted 15 percent of the shipyard workforce in the San Francisco Bay Area in 1943. Chinese also found employment in the defense industries at the Seattle-Tacoma Shipbuilding Corporation, the shipyards of Delaware and Mississippi, and the airplane factories on Long Island. One of these new defense-industry workers was Arthur Wong. After arriving in New York's Chinatown in 1930 at the age of seventeen, he found himself confined to the ethnic labor market. "I worked five and a half days in the laundry and worked the whole weekend in the restaurant," he said. "And then came the war, and defense work opened up; and some of my friends went to work in a defense plant, and they recommended that I should apply for defense work. So I went to work for Curtiss-Wright, making air-planes. I started out as an assembler, as a riveter."⁵⁵

Chinese-American women also flocked to the defense industries. Several hundred "alert young Chinese-American girls," the *Chinese Press* reported in 1942, "have gone to the defense industries as office workers." The paper proudly presented a partial roster of these workers in the Bay Area—including Fannie Yee, Rosalind Woo, and Jessie Wong of Bethlehem Steel, and Anita Chew, Mildred Lew, and Evelyn Lee of Mare Island's Navy Yard. "They're part of the millions who stand behind the man behind the gun." A year later, the *Chinese Press* informed its readers about Alice Yick, Boston Navy Yard's only Chinese woman mechanical trainee, who could run light lathes, grinders, shapers, planers, and other machine tools. "Helen Young, Lucy Young, and Hilda Lee," the paper continued, "were the first Chinese women aircraft workers in California. They help build B-24 bombers in San Diego."⁵⁶

Fighting the war in the Pacific, the United States had to face the problem of anti-American propaganda by the Japanese government. Japan had been appealing to Asia to unite in a race war against white America. Tokyo broadcasts aimed at China described how the Chinese in the United States suffered from "a campaign of venomous vilification of the character of the Chinese people." "Far from waging this war to liberate the oppressed peoples of the world," Tokyo argued on the airwaves, "the Anglo-American leaders are trying to restore the obsolete system of imperialism."⁵⁷

Alarmed by the Japanese condemnation of America's anti-Chinese laws and sentiment, many policymakers felt the need to "spike" the propaganda guns of Japan. A retired Navy officer told Congress that the Chinese exclusion laws were worth "twenty divisions" to the Japanese army. Supporters of the repeal bill expressed fears of the war turning into a racial conflict. "The Japanese have been carrying on a propaganda campaign seeking...to set the oriental world against the occidental world," one congressman warned. "They have called it a campaign of Asia for Asiatics." Another congressman predicted: "Suppose the Chinese do capitulate and join Japan; then all Asia is apt to go with her. Then you will have a race struggle in which we are hopelessly outnumbered that will last, not for 1 year or 5 years, but throughout generations to come."⁵⁸

In 1943, Congress began considering a bill to repeal the Chinese exclusion laws and to allow a quota for Chinese immigration. President Roosevelt sent Congress a message favoring the repeal bill. "China is our ally," Roosevelt wrote on October 11, 1943. "For many long years she stood alone in the fight against aggression. Today we fight at her side. She has continued her gallant struggle against very great odds." Aware that the act would be essential to the war effort in Asia, the president urged Congress to "be big enough" to acknowledge an error of the past: "By the repeal of the Chinese exclusion laws, we can correct a historic mistake and silence the distorted Japanese propaganda."⁵⁹

Shortly afterward, Congress repealed the exclusion acts and provided a quota for Chinese immigration. Hypocritically, the law allowed only a tiny trickle of 105 Chinese immigrants to be admitted annually. But Chinese Americans also won a long-awaited victory: immigrants from China, the new law provided, were eligible for naturalized citizenship, even though they were not "white."

Mexican Americans: Up from the Barrio

When he heard the news of the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor, Alex Romandia was stunned. As a Mexican American, he felt righteous indignation. "Our country had been attacked," he told his brother Roberto, "and we had to defend it." Twenty-seven years old, Romandia was working in Hollywood as a stunt man and had befriended many Jewish intellectuals. Feeling rejected by the larger society, Romandia and several of his Jewish friends decided to volunteer for the army. "All of us," he said, "had to

prove ourselves—to show that we were more American than the Anglos.⁷⁶⁰

Altogether, half a million Mexican Americans enlisted in the U.S. armed services—a significant proportion of this group's population of 2,690,000. The war offered Mexican Americans a chance to claim the United States as their country, too. Soldier Anthony Navarro explained: "We wanted to prove that while our cultural ties were deeply rooted in Mexico, our home was here in this country." A Mexican-American soldier explained what it meant for America to be his homeland: "We, too, were entitled to work, play, and to live as we pleased. Weren't *all* Americans entitled to the same opportunities?"⁷⁶¹

From the barrios arose the war slogan in English, "Americans All." "All around us," Socorro Díaz Blanchard recalled, "boys were going into the service." Many families had several members in the armed forces. "When the Second World War started, my brother, José, my brother-in-law, my cousins, and my cousins' husbands served," said Socorro Delgado. "At one time there were as many as fifteen of our immediate family who had gone to war! Every Friday Father Burns and Father Rossetti had a novena for the Sorrows Mother. We would go and mention the names of the boys who were in the war. There was a victory candelabra with seven candles, and the candles would be lit. They lasted for a week."⁷⁶²

At home, families waited anxiously for news about husband, sons, and brothers at the battlefield. "It was very depressing when the men went off to war because it shattered our community," recalled Juanita Vasquez. "Whenever a young man was killed in action, we all felt the same pain because we all went to school together and were close friends." Margaret Villanueva Lambert worked on an assembly line in a defense factory. "I remember a few times during the war," she said, "when I was working and all of a sudden there would be a loud scream followed by uncontrollable crying of a woman who had learned that her husband or son was dead. We all feared that moment when we, too, could be requested to go to the front office and find a representative of the military with an attached case tucked under his arm with a letter for the next of kin. The workers would always collect a fund for these women."⁷⁶³

The Mexican-American casualty rates were extremely high. California congressman Jerry Voorhis pointed out the debt America owed to the people of the barrio: "As I read the casualty lists from my state, I find anywhere from one-fourth to one-third of those names are names such as Gonzales or Sanchez, names indi-

cating that the very lifeblood of our citizens of Latin-American descent in the uniform of the armed forces of the United States is being poured out to win victory in the war." One of the Mexican-American soldiers who returned home wounded was Raul Morin. With casts on both legs, Morin was sent to De Witt General Hospital near Auburn, California. "Among the patients there from Los Angeles I met 'Memo' Terrazas, who was slowly recovering from a brain injury, partially paralyzed, and loss of speech. I also met Frank Carrillo, and Florencio Rodriguez, both veterans of the North African campaign; Vincent Gonzales, Ernie Ochoa, Larry Vasquez, George Yorba.... There must have been over one thousand Mexican Americans in that hospital."⁷⁶⁴

Mexican-American soldiers served with distinction. *La Opinión* proudly published news of military awards: "Sergeant José Lopez was awarded the highest honor in the military—the Congressional Medal of Honor—after killing 100 Germans. He is from Mission, Texas, and is referred to as a 'one man army.'" "Sergeant Francisco Navarro of the U.S. Air Force is currently enjoying a well-earned rest after flying 295 missions (800 hours of flight) aboard a C-47 in India-Burma. He has earned the Distinguished Flying Cross, two Oak Leaves." "The Congressional Medal of Honor was awarded to Macario Garcia from Camp Hood, Texas, for bravery in combat. Garcia, a Mexican national, became a U.S. citizen. He lived in Sugarland, Texas, growing and picking cotton."⁷⁶⁵

One Mexican American was given a military award for a unique battle achievement. As a boy living in the barrio of East Los Angeles, Guy Louis Gabaldon had been one of seven children crowded into a small house. On the streets, he was befriended by two Japanese-American brothers, Lane and Lyle Nakano, and eventually moved into their home. "More and more I was with them than I was with my natural parents," recalled Gabaldon. He lived with the Nakanos for six years and learned Japanese. But then the war came, and the family was taken away to an internment camp.⁶⁶

Only seventeen years old at the time, Gabaldon joined the marines and was sent to the Pacific front. On his first day of combat on Saipan, he killed thirty-three Japanese soldiers. Perhaps they reminded him of the sons of his Japanese foster family. Filled with remorse, Gabaldon decided he would go out alone and try to persuade the Japanese soldiers to surrender, for they were completely surrounded and cut off from the Japanese navy. He captured six soldiers. Speaking in Japanese, he told them that they would be given medical care and food. "I'm keeping three of you

here," Gabaldon said. "The other three can leave and bring some friends back." But he warned them that if they did not return, he would shoot his hostages. The three came back with six more soldiers. Gabaldon kept repeating this tactic, and within seven hours, he had eight hundred prisoners. For his bravery, Gabaldon was awarded the Navy Cross. "Working alone in the front of the lines," read his citation, "he daringly entered enemy caves, pillboxes, buildings and jungle brush, frequently in the face of hostile fire, and succeeded not only in obtaining vital military information but in capturing well over 1,000 civilians and troops."⁸⁷

Meanwhile, on the home front, Mexicans were contributing to the war effort. To meet new demands for agricultural production, the federal government initiated the bracero program (from the Spanish word *brazos*, or arms). Recruited in Mexico, guest laborers would work in the United States under contract and then be returned at the end of their term. On September 29, 1942, the first fifteen hundred braceros were brought to California by train. During the war years, the federal government recruited workers by the thousands: 4,000 in 1942, 52,000 in 1943, 62,000 in 1944, and 120,000 a year later. By 1947, 200,000 of them had worked in the United States.⁸⁸

Also a "war industry," agriculture contributed a vital military need: food. The braceros worked in twenty-one states, where in 1944 alone they harvested crops worth \$432 million. "They're all right, good workers," a Washington farmer commented. "I only hope I can get them again." Other farmers agreed: "These Mexicans are as good as any help I ever had." "We wouldn't trade one of these Mexicans for ten of the kind of help we have had on this job before." But the good workers complained that the farmers were not good bosses. A farm laborer protested: "We come here like *animales rentados* [rented animals], not like men."⁸⁹

While the braceros labored in the fields, Mexican Americans in the cities worked in the factories of the defense industry. The rapidly inclining demand for labor in the defense industries forced employers to turn to Mexican labor. In 1941, the number of Mexicans employed in the Los Angeles shipyards was zero; by 1944, it had jumped to seventeen thousand. Employment opportunities for them expanded throughout the defense industries—steel, armaments, and aircraft. *La Opinión* carried advertisements in Spanish: "Martin Ship Service Company needs Mexican Workers for repair and maintenance work. You don't need to speak English. We have Mexican supervisors. You only need a birth certifi-

cate. You don't need to be a U.S. citizen." On January 23, 1944, *La Opinión* reported that twelve thousand Mexicans were employed by Douglas Aircraft in Southern California.⁹⁰

Many of these new workers were women. On April 1, 1942, *La Opinión* announced: "Roosevelt High School will open an aviation class for national defense, especially for women, on Tuesday and Thursday nights. This class will teach mounting, perforation, etc. as is taught by the various aircraft production companies." For the first time in their lives, Mexican-American women were no longer forced to be farm laborers, maids, or garment workers. "Prior to the war," recalled Natalie Martinez Sterling, "the only jobs available to young Mexican women were nonskilled types of occupations such as making cardboard boxes and sewing clothes. The war allowed us job opportunities as sales clerks and defense workers. The government was actually training us with job skills that would help us after the war." Felisa Ruiz welcomed the chance to work in the defense industry. "During the depression," she said, "the only jobs available to young Mexican-American women were limited primarily to sewing and laundry work, hotel maids, and as domestics. These jobs both were physically demanding and paid very little. When the war broke out, defense jobs were all of a sudden open to us because of the labor shortage with the men off to war. Many of us left these menial jobs into highly skilled occupations with good to excellent pay with overtime."⁹¹

During the tremendous employment expansion, thousands of Mexican-American women became riveters. One of them was Margarita Salazar. In 1942, she was twenty-five years old, working in Molly's Beauty Shop, where customers were telling fantastic stories about women assembling airplanes. "I quit Molly's and went to work for defense," Salazar recalled. "I could make more money. I could see that I wasn't going to make that much money working as an operator and the money was in defense. Everybody would talk about the overtime and how much money it was. And it was exciting. Being involved in that era you figured you were doing something for your country—and at the same time making money." She applied for a job at a Lockheed assembly plant and was hired immediately. An Italian worker taught Salazar how to drill: "Jeanette broke me in," she said.⁹²

Working on the assembly lines, Mexican-American women learned not only how to rivet but also how to get along with workers of other races. "Aircraft work generally required a team of two women for riveting—one person working outside the plane and the

other person inside," recalled Carmen Caudillo. "At one particular plant, there were many white women from Missouri who refused to have anything to do with the Black workers. One supervisor decided to pair several Black and Mexican women together. At first, there was some prejudice on both sides, but as time passed, we became good friends both in and out of the plant."⁷²

Women of different ethnicities also became friends in the factory cafeterias. "There were other Mexican women," said Margarita Salazar, "but I don't recall too many colored girls, not in our little section. But when we'd go to lunch, I'd see a lot of them. We all blended in—men, women, Mexican, Italian." At another plant, Antonia Molina also had affirming experiences. "I remember one day when some new Black workers came to our factory. From the start, some white workers absolutely refused to even say hello. The next day, some of us Mexican women invited the Black women over to our table for lunch. We did so because we knew what it was like to be discriminated against. By the end of the week, several white workers also joined us for lunch. We soon realized that we had to set aside our differences in order to win the war."⁷⁴

"Through earning our own wages," Carmen Chavez said, "we had a taste of independence we hadn't known before the war. The women of my neighborhood had changed as much as the men who went to war. We developed a feeling of self-confidence and a sense of worth." Alicia Mendeola Shelit experienced a similar feeling. With her earnings as a worker at Douglas Aircraft, this single parent purchased her first home. Shelit was proud that she was bringing "the money in to feed [her] kids, like a man."⁷⁵

For Mexican Americans in the defense industry, the war represented a convergence of patriotism and personal growth. "We didn't understand the international politics that led to the war," said a woman who had worked in a factory. "We did know, however, that the Japanese had cowardly bombed Pearl Harbor and had killed hundreds of young American boys—boys who were my brothers' ages. The Japanese had attacked our country. I say our country because I was born here. My generation went proudly to war because this country, despite the discrimination, had provided my family with a better life than my relatives had in Mexico." A better life meant a different one. "All of us were definitely changed by the four years of defense work," observed Victoria Morales. "Prior to the war, we were young women with few social and job skills. But the war altered these conditions very quickly.

By the end of the war, we had been transformed into young, mature women with new job skills, self-confidence, and a sense of worth as a result of our wartime contributions."⁷⁶

As soldier warriors overseas and as worker warriors in the "Arsenal for Democracy" on the home front, they were fighting for the dignity they were entitled to as Americans.

Native Americans: "Why Fight the White Man's War?"

"Why fight the white man's war?" asked young Indians after the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor. Why enlist in the U.S. Armed Forces, when the Indian people had been losing their lands ever since the arrival of the English colonizers at Jamestown in 1607? Now they were being asked to help defend their conquerors. "Why do you have to go?" an Indian mother asked her son. "It's not your war." "We had lost our own country to foreigners," said a Navajo. Navajos bitterly remembered the "Long Walk"—how in 1863 Kit Carson's forces had marched the Navajo tribe at bayonet point to the Bosque Redondo Reservation in New Mexico.⁷⁷

Yet, during World War II, Navajos enlisted. Almost 20 percent of all reservation Native Americans in the military came from the Navajo Nation in the Southwest. Raymond Nakai was asked why Navajos enlisted: "Our answer is that we are proud to be American. We're proud to be American Indians. We always stand ready when our country needs us." The Navajo Nation declared: "We resolve that the Navajo Indians stand ready to aid and defend our government and its institutions against all subversive and armed conflict and pledge our loyalty to the system which recognizes minority rights and a way of life that has placed us among the greatest people of our race." In 1943, a Navajo soldier wrote to his tribal council: "I don't know anything about the white man's way. I never went outside the reservation. I am proud to be in a suit like this now. It is to protect my country, my people, the head men, the chiefs of my people."⁷⁸

Another reason why so many Navajos enlisted was poverty. By the time of Pearl Harbor, the federal government's stock reduction program had made the Navajos dependent on wage income: nearly 40 percent of their annual per capita income of \$128 came from wages, mostly from temporary government employment. "I went to war," said Wilson Keedah, "because there were no jobs on the reservation." Eugene Crawford also saw the marines as a way out of squalor. "One of the recruiters," he recalled, "tried

to attract me into signing up by saying that becoming a marine would be much better than staying on the reservation."⁷⁹

Pushed by poverty, the Navajos were also pulled into the military because they possessed something uniquely valuable to the U.S. military. "The marines recruited Navajos for our language," explained Cozy Stanley Brown. "They liked to use our language in war to carry messages." In May the first group of code talkers were sent to the marine base in San Diego for training.⁸⁰

The Navajos who were selected to be code talkers had to be proficient in both their tribal language and English. Minimally, they had to have a tenth-grade education. The code talker, explained Navajo Jimmy King, had "to spell 'artillery,' and then 'bivouac,' 'reconnaissance,' and then words like 'strafing' and some other military terms. You had to know the English language well enough you could spell whatever you were saying, and the terms accurately so that you can carry on your code talking efficiently and effectively." Accuracy was an absolute necessity. "There are thousands and thousands of lives involved," said King. "Let's say bombing, or strafing, shelling so many xxx yards from a certain point. Suppose he gets one digit wrong. Now, that digit might mean shelling, strafing, bombing of our own men."⁸¹

At the marine base, recalled Cozy Stanley Brown, "we were taught to use the radio. We had to do that in a hurry. I guess that was why they forced us to complete the training in eight weeks." Then the code talkers had to creatively adapt their language for use in the Pacific war. "We got together and discussed how we would do it. We decided to change the name of the airplanes, ships, and the English ABC's into the Navajo language. We did the changing. For instance, we named the airplanes 'dive bombers' for *ginitsoh* (sparrow hawk), because the sparrow hawk is like an airplane—it charges downward at a very fast pace." Many Navajo words were converted into military terms: *a-ye-shi* (eggs) for bombs, *jaschizzie* (swallow) for torpedo plane, *ne-as-jah* (owl) for observation plane, and *jay-sho* (buzzard) for bomber. The Navajo language could not be understood or mimicked by the Japanese military. Many words had sounds that could be heard only by a native speaker, and its verb forms were so complex that they had to be composed by someone who had grown up with the language. The Navajo code talkers had developed what came to be admired by the U.S. military as "the unbreakable code."⁸²

The code talkers hit every beach from Guadalcanal to Okinawa. Altogether there were 420 Navajo code talkers, sending and

receiving reports from the field commanders. Their secret messages carried information on enemy gun locations, movements of American troops, artillery fire, plane bombardments, and the sites of enemy entrenchments and strategic lookout points.

In February 1945, the Navajo code talkers participated in one of the most important Pacific battles: the fight for Iwo Jima. "It just seemed like the island was burning early in the morning," one of them recalled. "This shelling was coming down just like rain." Teddy Draper never forgot the fear he felt during the beach landing: "There were a lot of machine guns going along all the way around Suribachi about 50 feet apart from the bottom to the top. Just flying shells, all over. You couldn't see. And I thought, 'I don't know if I'm going to live or not.'" During the first two days of the invasion, Navajo code talkers worked around the clock, sending more than eight hundred battle messages without an error.⁸³

On the third day, the fighting focused on Mount Suribachi, a vital observation post for the Japanese defense of the island. Navajo code talker Teddy Draper recalled that on the third day of fierce fighting, "I was close to 100 feet down on the north slope when Sergeant Ray told me to send a message that Suribachi had been secured and at what time and get it down to headquarters. I didn't see the flag go up, but I passed the message when it happened." The message read: "Naastsosi Thanzie Dibeh Shida Dahnesta Tkin Shush Wollachee Moasi Lin Achi." When the message was received on a ship, a Navajo translator announced that the American flag was flying over Mount Suribachi.⁸⁴

Casualty rates for the battle of Iwo Jima were enormous: twenty thousand Japanese soldiers were killed, while seven thousand marines were killed and nineteen thousand wounded. The American dead included four Navajo code talkers—Peter Johnson, Paul Kinlahcheeny, Sam Morgan, and Willie Notah. Signal officer Major Howard Conner declared: "Without the Navajos the marines would never have taken Iwo Jima."⁸⁵

After returning to the reservation, many Navajo veterans found that they had been wounded psychologically by the war. George Kirk kept having dreams of enemy soldiers jumping into his foxhole, so he went to see a medicine man for a ceremony called the "Enemy Way," a symbolic slaying of the "enemy presence." Coming home after his imprisonment in a Japanese POW camp for three years, Claude Hatch had a ceremony to help him heal from his traumatic battle experiences. "My father passed away shortly before I was liberated," he recalled, "but after returning home my

relatives decided to have the Enemy Way ceremony for me because of all the things that had happened to me." Keats Begay said that he had a Squaw Dance ceremony performed on him, but he noted that there were some veterans who were still emotionally ill and were "receiving disability income." Indeed, there were veterans who did not easily recover from the psychic wounds of the war.⁸⁶

One such veteran was described in a letter a woman had written to a marine commanding officer:

I don't know I do rite in writin you this but no harm try. It about Big Bill _____, can he be kept from comin home to he family, he was a fine guy till he got to be Marine, got big Head so many stripes on sleeve and decorate in front, first time come home got heap drunk, was maybe sick, cold not so bad, no want go back, next time staid over got wife take back, and made lie for him, she no like, she scared of him, all time want take car, her need live 1/4 mile out of town, she work hard, he all time send for money, talk he got woman, want car is talk, last week sends from town off far, her come after him, she no money, no gas, no go, he cot ride, made hell all time, argue, argue, car, money, he hit her maby broke nose, black both eyes, kick her round, he sure bad umbra, now take car, no paid for, how he pay, she works for his two chilen and one with till school out, and he put other woman fore her for spite. Bill no not me I get this from friends, they say afraid we write, he kill them and her maby. I going away tomorrow, try not let him know where, you get these army police here, maby you say they told. Her land woman for over one year, I sure will back this up.

Mrs. B _____
No like bad man buse woman.⁸⁷

Why men like this veteran had become drunken and abusive husbands was explained by Oliver La Farge of the Association of American Indian Affairs. Writing in *Harper's Magazine* in 1947, he described how a Navajo had returned from the war only to feel he was "in a box" of poverty. The land was too dry for farming, and his welfare check was too meager. "He knew what he was going to do now," La Farge wrote. "He was going to hook a ride into town, sell his coat, buy a pint of bootleg rotgut, and get drunk. He hated what he was doing, but he could not help himself. He could not get out of the box; he could only momentarily forget it."⁸⁸

The problem for many despondent Navajo veterans was not simply the post-traumatic stresses of the war. There was little

economic opportunity on the reservation waiting for these military heroes. A year after the war, the New Mexico Association on Indian Affairs reported that the average male on the Navajo reservation was earning less than \$100 a year. The association concluded: "The poor economic situation of the Navajo is beyond belief." The reason for this devastating suffering was revealed in a single set of statistics: the tribal population had reached sixty thousand in 1946, and the reservation lands could support only thirty-five thousand people.⁸⁹

Still, the war had revived a Navajo spirit. Embedded in the deployment of their language as a weapon was an irony. "When I was going to boarding school," said Teddy Draper, Sr., "the U.S. government told us not to speak Navajo, but during the war, they *wanted* us to speak it!" Recalling how he was not allowed to speak Navajo in his boarding school, Keith Little said he viewed his code-talking contribution as a fight for Navajo "freedom," including the cultural right to have their tribal language. On the blood-soaked beaches of Pacific islands, the Navajos had demonstrated the value of America's cultural diversity. "We, the Navajo people," declared Kee Etsicitty, "were very fortunate to contribute our language as a code for our country's victory. For this I strongly recommend we teach our children the language our ancestors were blessed with at the beginning of time. It is very sacred and represents the power of life."⁹⁰

Jewish Americans: A "Deafening Silence"

After World War II, the still molten memory of their near extermination as a people made Jewish Americans wonder what they should tell their children about the Nazi "heart-of-darkness." This was the question a father raised in a 1956 letter to the "Bintel Brief" (similar to "Dear Abby") editor of the *Jewish Daily Forward*. The editor advised the parents to wait until their children had grown old enough to understand the "massacres" of six million Jews. "Certainly we should tell our children about the holocaust," he answered, "and about the fact that the whole world was silent."⁹¹

That "whole world" included the United States. When Hitler came to power in 1933, four and a half million Jews were living in the United States. Safe from Nazism on this side of the Atlantic Ocean, they found themselves facing an agonizing dilemma: how should they respond to the unfolding genocide in Europe?

In 1933, representative Samuel Dickstein of New York offered a congressional resolution for the admission of all German Jews

who were related to American citizens and were fleeing from persecution in Germany. Unexpectedly, Dickstein encountered opposition from three of the leading Jewish-American organizations. The American Jewish Committee voiced the strongest criticism of his resolution. Founded in 1906 by wealthy German-Jewish immigrants, the committee believed that Jews in this country should simply be loyal Americans, and warned that Dickstein's proposal was provoking the anti-Semitic charge that Jews in America were willing to sacrifice American interests in order to help Jews in Germany. B'nai B'rith asserted that the immigration restrictions should be enforced to protect American labor. The American Jewish Congress also called for keeping the gates closed. Composed of Eastern European Jews, the Congress was led by Rabbi Stephen Wise of New York City. Speaking against the passage of "special amendments to American immigration laws" or "new legislation" for Jewish victims of Nazi Germany, Wise argued that the existing restrictions were needed to keep out immigrants who would take jobs away from American workers. Jews in this country, the rabbi declared, were "Americans, first, last, and all the time."⁹²

But, in 1938, Jewish Americans realized that they could not be just "Americans." During one terrifying night, rampaging mobs murdered scores of Jews in Germany. According to the *New York Times*, in Berlin "raiding squads of young men roamed unhindered through the principal shopping districts, breaking shop windows with metal weapons, looting or tossing merchandise into the streets or into passing vehicles and leaving the unprotected Jewish shops to the mercy of vandals who followed in this unprecedented show of violence." The night of fear and breaking glass came to be known as "Kristallnacht."⁹³

At a press conference, Roosevelt condemned the night of mayhem and murder: "The news of the past few days from Germany has deeply shocked public opinion in the United States.... I myself could scarcely believe that such things could occur in a twentieth-century civilization." Asked if he had considered a possible mass transfer of Kristallnacht victims to the United States, Roosevelt replied: "I have given a great deal of thought to it." Then he added: "The time is not ripe for that." Roosevelt was also asked if he would relax the immigration laws for Jewish refugees. "That is not in contemplation," he answered; "we have the quota system." Roosevelt was empathetic to the plight of Jews in Europe: he himself had appointed a Jewish American to his cabinet, Henry Morgenthau, secretary of the treasury. But the

president was heeding the polls. A Gallup poll conducted after Kristallnacht in November 1938 showed that 77 percent of the Americans surveyed opposed increasing the immigration quota for Germany. Although Roosevelt extended the visas for twelve thousand refugees already in the United States, he refused to open the gates to new refugees.⁹⁴

Senator Robert Wagner of New York and Representative Edith Rogers of Massachusetts hoped that Americans would at least have the heart to save Jewish children. In 1939, they jointly introduced a bill that would allow the nonquota entry of twenty thousand refugee children from Germany over a two-year period. The children would be admitted on the condition that they would be supported by responsible private agencies or individuals and would not become public charges. The bill quickly came under attack from restrictionists. John B. Trevor of the American Coalition of Patriotic Societies scolded Wagner and Rogers for sponsoring such legislation in view of the needs of a million "neglected boys and girls, descendants of American pioneers, undernourished, ragged and ill."⁹⁵

The Wagner-Rogers bill needed support from the president. While on a Caribbean cruise in February 1939, Roosevelt received a cable from Mrs. Roosevelt: "Are you willing I should talk to Sumner [Wells] and say we approve passage of Child Refugee Bill. Hope you are having grand time. Much love. Eleanor." Roosevelt replied: "It is all right for you to support the child refugee bill, but it is best for me to say nothing till I get back." After he returned, Roosevelt maintained his silence. Trying to get the president to issue a statement on the proposed legislation, Representative Caroline O'Day wrote to ask him for his view on the bill. Instead, Roosevelt penciled on her letter the following instructions to Secretary "Pa" Watson: "File, no action. FDR."⁹⁶

Roosevelt was aware of widespread public opposition to the bill. A Gallup poll revealed that 66 percent of those questioned did not want the government to admit the children. Eleanor Roosevelt understood her husband's sensitivity to the pulse of the people. "While I often felt strongly on various subjects," she wrote in *This I Remember*, "Franklin frequently refrained from supporting causes in which he believed, because of political realities."⁹⁷

The Wagner-Rogers proposal also turned out to be an extremely sensitive political issue for Jewish-American leaders. During the congressional hearings on the legislation, Rabbi Wise stated that he would be willing to admit "a rather limited number of children," but that he wanted the immigration restrictions to remain.

"If there is a conflict between our duty to those children and our duty to our country, speaking for myself as a citizen, I should say, of course, that our country comes first; and if children cannot be helped, they cannot be helped, because we should not undertake to do anything that would be hurtful to the interests of our country." The Wagner-Rogers bill failed to leave the committees, and even frightened refugee children would not be saved.⁹⁸

A few months later, 907 German Jewish refugees tried to rescue themselves. They boarded the steamship *St. Louis* bound for Cuba, where they expected to find asylum. When their ship reached Havana, however, the Cuban government suddenly invalidated their immigration visas. Turned away at the dock, they remained on board while their ship steamed in circles between Cuba and Florida. The passengers saw the lights and beaches of Miami, but the U.S. Coast Guard escorted their ship out of American waters. Frantically, they pleaded for permission to land in the United States. Describing the *St. Louis* as "the saddest ship afloat today," carrying a "cargo of despair," the *New York Times* editorialized: "We can only hope that some hearts will soften somewhere and some refuge found. The cruise of the *St. Louis* cries high to heaven of man's inhumanity to man." The *Jewish Daily Forward* printed a scream for help from the passengers: "We appeal to world Jewry. We are being sent back. How can you be peaceful? How can you be silent? Help! Do everything you can! Some on the ship have committed suicide. Help! Do not allow the ship to go back to Germany!"⁹⁹

As the ship sailed along the U.S. coastline, a Jewish-American organization, the Joint Distribution Committee, tried to post a bond of \$500,000 guaranteeing that the refugees would not become public charges in Cuba. The Cuban government refused the offer. The rejected refugees now focused all of their hope on Roosevelt. "The desperate passengers on the *St. Louis* telegraphed the President," wrote historian Arthur Hertzberg, "but he ignored them." They were forced to sail back to Europe where a ghastly future awaited them.¹⁰⁰

The *St. Louis* incident unleashed a sense of frustration within Jewish-American communities. "Let our leaders lead!" demanded Samuel Margoshes impatiently in the Yiddish daily, *The Day*. "Let them not delay and postpone. Let the General Jewish Council meet and deliberate immediately. The Jewish masses are waiting to go out into the streets, to close their places of business, to stop all work, to declare a fast and to demonstrate to the entire world that we will no longer allow ourselves to be slaughtered by a barbaric regime."¹⁰¹

The anguish intensified in September 1939 when Germany occupied Poland, and three million more Jews came under Nazi rule. "In the matter of the treatment of Jews in Nazi-occupied Poland," Wise wrote in *Opinion* in February 1940, "we face a spectacle of daily torture and horror such as men have not beheld since the days of Genghis Khan."¹⁰²

But what awaited the Jews of Europe would surpass the atrocities of Genghis Khan. Hitler's homicidal plan was unshrouded during the German invasion of Russia. Following the advancing German army, Nazi execution squads, known as the *Einsatzgruppen*, began murdering Jews by the hundreds of thousands. The atrocities were reported in newspapers throughout the West. The shocking revelations forced Wise to reassess his reluctance to give special consideration to the Jewish victims.¹⁰³

News of the mass murders continued to reach the United States, and on July 21, 1942, twenty thousand people gathered at Madison Square Garden to protest the Nazi atrocities. In a message sent to the rally, Roosevelt urged the people there to support his rescue-through-victory strategy. "Americans who love justice and hate oppression," he declared, "will hail the solemn commemoration in Madison Square Garden as an expression of the determination of the Jewish people to make every sacrifice for victory over the Axis powers." At the mass meeting, Rabbi Wise endorsed Roosevelt's strategy when he declared that the "salvation of our people" could come only through a "speedy and complete" victory.¹⁰⁴

At this point, Americans were still unaware of the extent of the Nazi extermination effort—the systematic and complex apparatus of trains, barracks, factories, gas chambers, and crematoria. But within weeks, they would no longer be able to claim that they did not know. On August 28, 1942, Wise received a cable from Gerhart Riegner, the World Jewish Congress representative in Geneva. The message stated: "Received alarming report that in Fuhrer's headquarters plan discussed and under consideration according to which all Jews in countries occupied or controlled by Germany numbering 3½–4 millions should after deportation and concentration in East be exterminated at one blow to resolve once for all the Jewish question in Europe." The Reigner report made one thing absolutely clear: there was no longer a reason for doubting the genocide, or an excuse for hesitating to make every effort to rescue Jews. Hitler had, in fact, unleashed his ultimate pogrom—the "Final Solution."¹⁰⁵

Wise took the incriminating cable to Under-Secretary of State

Sumner Wells, only to be told that he should wait until the information could be confirmed. The wait for Wells's response was agonizing for Wise, for he knew that Jews were being murdered by the thousands daily. "I have had the unhappiest days of my life," the rabbi wrote to Reverend John Hayes Holmes. "Think of what it means to hear, as I have heard, through a coded message—first from Geneva, then from Berne, through the British Foreign Office,—that Hitler plans the extermination at one time of the whole Jewish population of Europe; and prussic acid is mentioned as the medium." Wise writhed in anguish: "I don't want to turn my heart inside out, but I am almost demented over my people's grief."¹⁰⁶

Three months later, after the Nazis had murdered an additional one million Jews, Wise was finally summoned by Wells. "I hold in my hands documents which have come to me from our legation in Berne," the under-secretary of state said. "I regret to tell you, Dr. Wise, that these documents confirm and justify your deepest fears."¹⁰⁷

At once, Wise held a press conference to report the evidence of the official Nazi policy of genocide. Incredibly, the press did not cover the shocking news as a major story. In order to arouse the American public from its moral lethargy, Jewish leaders organized a Day of Mourning and Prayer on December 2, 1942. In New York City, half a million Jewish union laborers stopped production for ten minutes, and special services were held in synagogues. NBC broadcast a quarter-hour memorial service. "In every country where Hitler's edicts run, every day is a day of mourning for Jews," editorialized the *New York Times*. "Today has been set aside, by action of the chief Rabbinate of Palestine, supported by the Jewish organizations of the United States, as a day of mourning, prayer and fasting among Jews throughout the free countries of the world."¹⁰⁸

That day, Wise requested a meeting with President Roosevelt: "Dear Boss: I do not wish to add an atom to the awful burden which you are bearing with magic and, as I believe, heaven-inspired strength at this time. But you do know that the most overwhelming disaster of Jewish history has befallen Jews in the form of the Hitler mass-massacres... and it is indisputable that as many as two million civilian Jews have been slain."¹⁰⁹

Six days later, Wise and delegates from major Jewish organizations met with Roosevelt. The meeting turned out to be a great disappointment. The meeting lasted twenty-nine minutes, and Roosevelt engaged in casual conversation for nearly the entire time. Finally, the discussion turned to the Jewish crisis in Europe. "The entire conversation lasted only a minute or two," wrote one

of the participants in his diary. In a letter to Sumner Wells, the Joint Emergency Committee on European Jewish Affairs charged that the relegation of Jews to "the day of victory" was "virtually to doom them to the fate" that Hitler had designed for them.¹¹⁰

The most militant criticism of Roosevelt's rescue-through-victory strategy came from the Committee for a Jewish Army of Stateless and Palestinian Jews. To stir the moral conscience of America, this committee turned to drama to break the intolerable silence of the White House. In March 1943, they sponsored a tour of Ben Hecht's pageant *We Will Never Die*. Forty thousand people attended the opening presentation at Madison Square Garden. The performance presented the history of Jews, their contributions to civilization, and the genocide they were experiencing. Hecht's powerful dramatization of the Jews caught in the jaws of genocide conveyed a passionate plea to Americans: do everything possible to rescue the remaining four million Jews.¹¹¹

Determined to help save his Jewish brethren in Europe, Secretary of the Treasury Henry Morgenthau decided to prod Roosevelt into action. At a meeting with the president on January 16, 1944, he presented a report on the mass murders of Jews. The opening sentence expressed moral indignation: "One of the greatest crimes in history, the slaughter of the Jewish people in Europe, is continuing unabated." Morgenthau called for immediate measures. "The matter of rescuing the Jews from extermination is a trust too great to remain in the hands of men who are indifferent, callous and perhaps even hostile. The task is filled with difficulties. Only a fervent will to accomplish, backed by persistent and untiring effort, can succeed where time is so precious."¹¹²

Six days later, Roosevelt signed an executive order establishing the War Refugee Board, a government agency that would be responsible for "the development of plans and programs and the inauguration of effective measures for a) the rescue, transportation and maintenance and relief of the victims of enemy oppression, and b) the establishment of havens of temporary refuge for such victims."¹¹³

Welcoming the creation of the War Refugee Board, Jewish leaders urged the government to create havens of refuge in the United States. "Every surviving Jewish man, woman and child who can escape from the Hitlerite fury into the territories of the United Nations," the American Jewish Congress declared, should have "the right of temporary asylum."¹¹⁴

Roosevelt rejected these proposals. He defended his administration's policies by explaining that the government was

transporting to North Africa all of the refugees who had been able to escape from Nazi control. In the end, Roosevelt offered a small concession: he agreed to create an emergency shelter near Oswego, New York, for one thousand refugees representing "a reasonable proportion of various categories of persecuted people." At Auschwitz the gas chambers were murdering twelve thousand people daily.¹¹⁵

In June 1945, Roosevelt's rescue-through-victory strategy came to a conclusion as Allied military forces swept across Germany and liberated the prisoners of Hitler's death camps. By then, six million Jews had been exterminated.

What the liberating U.S. troops witnessed in the camps was the heart of a ghastly darkness. An African-American soldier recalled the sickening sensation he experienced as he scanned the searing scene—the survivors looking like ghosts, the ovens still warm. "Why Jews?" Paul Parks asked. "It doesn't make sense. Why were they killed?" A prisoner explained: "They were killed because they were Jews." Park commented: "I understand that." Then he added: "I understand that because I've seen people lynched just because they were black." Park compared the experiences of the two groups: "There's one other great incident of humanity that I'm very familiar with, the three hundred years of slavery in my own country, where people for generations were not allowed to be free, subject to the dictates of another race. Held in bondage, forced to work, and forced to do what another person wanted you to do. And if you didn't obey, there were no laws against killing you and destroying your family. So I said, 'As you talk, I see there's a close parallel between the history of my people in America and what's happened to the Jews in Europe.'"¹¹⁶

The liberators also included Japanese-American soldiers. With their families in internment camps in the United States, they had fought their way through Italy and France, and had reached Dachau. In his diary, Ichiro Imamura gave an eye-level account: "When the gates swung open, we got our first good look at the prisoners. Many of them were Jews. They were wearing black and white striped prison suits and round caps. A few had shredded blanket rags draped over their shoulders. The prisoners struggled to their feet [and] shuffled weakly out of the compound. They were like skeletons—all skin and bones." Initially, the Jewish prisoners were surprised and confused to see soldiers of Japanese ancestry. "When they first came in, we thought they were allies

of the Germans," a prisoner stated years later. "We believed they were there to torture us." Indeed, Japanese-American soldiers had to explain who they were. One of them recalled that at first the Jewish prisoners thought that their liberators did not look like "Americans." "I am an American soldier," he reassured them, "and you are free."¹¹⁷

Also among the liberators were Jewish-American soldiers. Entering one of the barracks at Buchenwald, Chaplain Rabbi Herschel Schacter saw hundreds of survivors lying on shelves from the floor to the ceiling. They were "strewn over scraggly straw sacks," looking down at him out of dazed eyes. Schacter then shouted in Yiddish, "Sholem Aleychem, Yiden, yir zent frey!" "You are free." Schacter felt a special empathy for this pitiful humanity before him: "If my own father had not caught the boat on time, I would have been there."¹¹⁸

During an inspection of the camp at Dachau, Walter J. Fellenz visited one of the gas chambers. He noticed that over its entrance, written in Yiddish, was the word "Showers." The room itself was inlaid with high-quality brown tile and had two hundred chrome shower nozzles. Chaplain Judah Nadich tried to picture what it was like to be in the gas chamber with chrome shower nozzles. The rabbi then noticed thousands of scratches on the inside of the door, "scratches that must have been made by the fingernails of so many men and women and children."¹¹⁹

The "scratches" told the story of a "deafening silence."¹²⁰

Listening, American Zionists were determined that Jews had to have a homeland: a Jewish nation in Palestine would be their Promised Land. Before the rise of Hitler, Jewish Americans had little interest in Zionism. In 1930, the Zionist Organization of America had such a dwindling membership that Rabbi Stephen Wise observed: "There is a complete lull in things Zionist in America." When Hitler came to power, however, "the dire developments" of Nazism, as historian Henry Feingold noted, would do for "the Zionist movement what it had been unable to do for itself." Membership in the Zionist Organization of America jumped from 18,000 in 1929 to 52,000 in 1939, and 136,000 by 1945. In 1947, the General Assembly of the United Nations scheduled a vote on the proposal to partition Palestine into a Jewish state and an Arab state. But President Truman hesitated on the issue when his secretary of defense, James Forrestal, informed him that enforcing the partition would require 160,000 U.S. ground troops. At this point, one of Truman's Jewish-American

friends begged the president to meet with Chaim Weizmann, chief of the World Zionist Organization. At a meeting with Weizmann on March 18, 1948, Truman agreed to "press forward with partition." On May 14, 1948, the British withdrew from Palestine, and in Tel Aviv, David Ben-Gurion declared the existence of the Jewish State of Israel. In Washington, President Truman signed the document recognizing Israel.¹²¹

A Holocaust Called Hiroshima

In a poem written in 1946, Robert Frost reflected on America's use of the atomic bomb as a weapon of mass destruction:

*Having invented a new Holocaust,
And been the first with it to win a war,
How they make haste to cry with fingers crossed,
King's X—no fairs to use it anymore!*¹²²

A year earlier, on April 12, 1945, President Franklin D. Roosevelt suddenly died, and Vice President Harry S. Truman was sworn into office. That night, the new president wrote in his diary: "I was very much shocked. I am not easily shocked but was certainly shocked when I was told of the President's death and the weight of the government had fallen on my shoulders." The former senator from Missouri felt most anxious about the tremendous burden of international responsibility and his ignorance of foreign affairs.¹²³

Feeling inadequate to fill the shoes of the great F.D.R., he confided to his friend Senator George D. Aiken of Vermont: "I'm not big enough. I'm not big enough for this job." What made his new job especially difficult was the sting of personal indignities and sarcasms. *Time* magazine described the new president as "a man of distinct limitations, especially in high level politics." Margaret Truman recalled that her father "snorted with indignation when someone called him the 'little man in the White House.'" But Truman hid his insecurity behind a facade of toughness. Publicly, he presented himself as a man of the frontier. He blustered: "The buck stops here."¹²⁴

As a southerner coming from a family of slaveholders and supporters of the Confederacy, Truman brought to his bluster strongly held ideas about race. Long before his sudden ascendancy to the presidency, he had written to his future wife, Bess:

I think one man is as good as another so long as he's honest and decent and not a nigger or a Chinaman. Uncle Will [Young, the Confederate veteran] says the Lord made a white man of dust, a nigger from mud, then threw up what was left and it came down a Chinaman. He does hate Chinese and Japs. So do I. It is race prejudice I guess. But I am strongly of the opinion that Negroes ought to be in Africa, yellow men in Asia, and white men in Europe and America.¹²⁵

Like many Americans, Truman was swept into a revenge-seeking rage over the treacherous attack on Pearl Harbor. Unlike the war in Europe, the violent conflict in the Pacific was a war of racial hatreds. The Japanese military denounced the American enemy as white "brutes" and "devils." On this side, the American military depicted the enemy as "yellow apes" and "yellow sub-humans." *Time* magazine declared: "The ordinary unreasoning Jap is ignorant. Perhaps he is human. Nothing... indicates it." In American society, the term "Jap" was widely used, implicitly identifying the enemy as the Japanese people, in contrast to the term "Nazis," referring only to the followers of Hitler, not the German people. Disturbed by Pearl Harbor and the Bataan Death March, Truman argued: "When you have to deal with a beast you have to treat him as a beast." In his diary entries written at the Potsdam Conference in July 1945, Truman expressed hatred for the "Japs—savages, ruthless and fanatic."¹²⁶

Intersecting with each other, these personal and cultural dynamics drove Truman to insist on unconditional surrender. At the Potsdam Conference in July, the president rejected Winston Churchill's suggestion to let Japan surrender, with the condition that they be allowed to keep the emperor system. Truman also refused to heed the recommendation of the Joint Chiefs of Staff and Secretary of War Stimson that the United States let the already defeated Japan surrender on a conditional basis. They knew from intercepted messages from Tokyo to Moscow that the Japanese government was asking Russia to help negotiate a surrender. On July 18, in his diary at Potsdam, Truman wrote: "Stalin had told P.M. [Churchill] of telegram from Jap emperor asking for peace."¹²⁷

In that same diary entry, he excitedly recorded: "Manhattan (it is a success)." Truman had received a top-secret message that the atomic bomb had been successfully tested by the Manhattan Project in New Mexico. Buoyed by the sudden possession of twenty thousand tons of TNT, he decided to act unilaterally,

independent of both England and Russia. In the Potsdam Declaration of July 26, Truman issued a fierce ultimatum: Japan had to accept "unconditional surrender" or face "utter devastation."¹²⁸

Japan refused, and Truman ordered the atomic attack. The first bomb was dropped on Hiroshima on August 6. Some seventy thousand people were instantly incinerated, most of them women and children. Three days later, the second atomic bomb was dropped on Nagasaki.

But the Japanese government still refused to surrender unconditionally. On August 10, Washington received from Japan an acceptance of the Potsdam Declaration, except on one crucial condition: that it "does not comprise any demand which prejudices the prerogatives of His Majesty as a Sovereign Ruler." At that point, Truman realized that his ultimatum had not worked. He ordered that the third atomic bomb not be dropped, and accepted a surrender with the stipulated condition. That day, Truman had privately told cabinet member Henry Wallace an admission he would never acknowledge publicly. He confided that "the thought of wiping out another 100,000 people was too horrible," and that he did not like "the idea of killing all those kids."¹²⁹

Shortly after the earth-shattering event, W. E. B. Du Bois condemned the atomic attack on the "colored nation" of Japan. "We have seen in this war, to our amazement and distress, a marriage between science and destruction.... We have always thought of science as the emancipator. We see it now as the enslaver of mankind." For America's leading black intellectual, the atomic flash over Hiroshima illuminated in a ghastly way "the problem of the color line."¹³⁰

For Du Bois, Hiroshima was a tragic way for the war to end. Before the attack on Pearl Harbor, the men and women of different racial and ethnic minorities had felt little in common and lacked a shared sense of national purpose. Suddenly swept into the already raging international conflict, they came to find themselves fighting as one people against fascism in Europe and Asia, bound by what Abraham Lincoln had described as the "mystic chords of memory" stretching from every battlefield and patriot grave to every "living heart and hearthstone" all over America. They also fought to make their country live up to its founding principles for all Americans. The war, Du Bois declared, was a struggle for "democracy not only for white folks but for yellow, brown, and black."¹³¹

15



OUT OF THE WAR

Clamors for Change

Rising Winds for Social Justice

AT THE END of World War II, Walter White of the NAACP declared: "A wind is rising, a wind of determination by the have-nots of the world to share the benefits of freedom and prosperity which the haves of the earth have tried to keep exclusively for themselves. That wind blows all over the world. Whether that wind develops into a hurricane is a decision which we must make now and in the days when we form the peace."¹

During the war, millions of men and women of different racial and ethnic minorities had challenged America's contradiction of the color lines, and in the process reinvented themselves. One of them was Maya Angelou. As an African-American teenager, she had been encouraged by the demand for labor to apply for a job as a streetcar operator in San Francisco. "I'd picture myself, dressed in neat blue serge suit, my money changer swinging jauntily at my waist, and a cheery smile for the passengers which would make their own work day brighter," she recalled. At the Market Street Railway Company office, the receptionist told Angelou that they were accepting applicants only from agencies. Suspicious, Angelou pointed out that the job was listed in that morning's newspaper; demanding to see the manager, she was told that he was out of the office. Angelou refused to be denied. "I WOULD HAVE THE

JOB. I WOULD BE A CONDUCTORETTE AND SLING A FULL MONEY CHANGER FROM MY BELT. I WOULD," she insisted. Returning time and again to the office, she was finally allowed to fill out an application form. "I was given blood tests, aptitude tests, physical coordination tests, and Rorschachs; then on a blissful day I was hired as the first Negro on the San Francisco streetcars."²² Angelou had discovered a spirit within her destined to soar; she would be a literary conductorette, slinging poems and stories from her heart.

Ermelinda Murillo also reinvented herself during the war. Her family had emigrated from Jalisco, Mexico; in 1923, when she was three years old, they moved to Chicago. Twenty years later, a widow with a two-year-old daughter, Murillo was hired by Inland Steel Company in Indiana. She worked as a heat chaser, hot shear expeditor, hotbed operator, and stocker of steel bars. "I speak some Spanish, Polish, Serbian, Croatian," Murillo said. "I learned bits of each language by working with people with various ethnic backgrounds. If I can't get a point across in one language, I simply try another. We worked hard, argued, shared a sandwich and had coffee together. To me it was a real world inside the mill." After the war, Inland Steel asked Murillo to continue working for the company. Her hard hat read: "MELA — QUEEN OF THE 12-INCH."²³

One of the first Chinese-American women to volunteer for the Army Nurse Corps, Helen Pon Onyett had also earned respect during the war. She was twenty-five-years-old, with four years of nursing experience, when she enlisted in 1942. Onyett nursed wounded soldiers aboard transports off North Africa. "I can't swim, so I wore my Mae West [life jacket] twenty-four hours a day. It was very scary, especially when some of the ships you would be traveling with would be sunk right under your nose." On board, she found that she was appreciated as an army nurse. Her experience was so affirming that she served in the military reserve for more than thirty years after the war. "I wouldn't have done half the things I did if I hadn't been in the service . . . I had a chance to go to school on the G.I. Bill and to improve my standing." In 1971, Onyett was promoted to the rank of full colonel. "When I spoke before audiences, people gawked at me, saying, 'Oh, my God, she's a colonel,' not 'She's Oriental.'"²⁴

African-American Mary Daniels Williams was also changed by the war. Asked by an interviewer about her military service, Williams said that she had been a housecleaner with only a ninth-

grade education when Japan attacked Pearl Harbor. She had given birth to a stillborn child and had an unsuccessful marriage. "I had no skills. I was going nowhere fast. I was getting older and I could just see us living in the slum forever. I could see myself living in two or three rooms for the rest of my life, and I decided for myself I wasn't going to do it." At a post office a military recruiter promised her "education, new places to go and to visit — well, just a totally new life." Williams enlisted in the Women's Army Corps and served in England and France. After the war, she used the G.I. Bill to attend college; she completed her bachelor's degree and worked for twenty years as a social worker in Cincinnati. "I knew what I wanted," said Williams, "and I knew that I was never gonna scrub another floor."²⁵

At the end of the war, African Americans were determined that they were "never gonna" serve again in a segregated armed forces. In 1948, while threatening to lead massive civil disobedience, A. Philip Randolph demanded the end of this shameful practice. At a meeting with President Harry Truman, Randolph declared: "Negroes are in no mood to shoulder guns for democracy abroad, while they are denied democracy here at home." Under pressure, Truman issued an executive order that required "equality of treatment and opportunity for all persons in the armed services."²⁶

After they had returned to California from the internment camps, Kajiro and Kohide Oyama petitioned the court to overturn the Alien Land Law, which denied the right to landownership to Japanese immigrants because they were not "white." They took their case all the way to the U.S. Supreme Court, and in 1948 the Court ruled that the law prohibiting the Japanese from owning land was "nothing more than outright racial discrimination" and therefore "unconstitutional." The Fourteenth Amendment was "designed to bar States from denying to some groups, on account of race or color, any rights, privileges, and opportunities accorded to other groups." Referring to the war against Nazi Germany, the Court declared that the Alien Land Law was "an unhappy facsimile, a disheartening reminder, of the racial policy pursued by those forces of evil whose destruction recently necessitated a devastating war." A Japanese immigrant welcomed the Court decision:

*Land laws faded out,
It is comfortable now —
This America.*

Four years later, under pressure from lobbying groups including Japanese-American veterans, Congress rescinded the "white"-only restriction of the 1790 Naturalization Law. Winning citizenship for the immigrant generation "was the culmination of our dreams," exclaimed Harry Takagi. "The bill established our parents as the legal equal of other Americans; it gave the Japanese equality with all other immigrants." By 1965, forty-six thousand Japanese immigrants had taken their citizenship oaths. Although they were now in their twilight years, many of them were eager to become citizens of their adopted country. One of them rejoiced in poetry:

*Going steadily to study English,
Even through the rain at night,
I thus attain,
Late in life,
American citizenship.⁷*

There was still another ghost from the past that needed to be exorcised—the mass internment of Japanese Americans during World War II. "Stigmatized" by the experience, the ex-internees had been silently carrying a "burden of shame." During the 1970s, however, many third-generation Japanese Americans were feeling the need to break the silence. Inspired by the Black Power movement and a growing sense of ethnic pride, they were searching for their roots. Now they wanted their elders to tell them about the internment experience. "Why? Why!" their parents would ask defensively. "Why would you want to know about it? It's not important, we don't need to talk about it." Young Japanese Americans replied that they needed to tell the world what happened during those years of infamy, and urged their parents to join pilgrimages to the camps at Manzanar and Tule Lake. The questions and the pilgrimages inspired a demand for redress and reparations. During the congressional hearings, scores of former internees came forward and told their stories. "For over thirty-five years I have been the stereotype Japanese American," Alice Tanabe Nehira told the commission. "I've kept quiet, hoping in due time we will be justly compensated and recognized for our years of patient effort. By my passive attitude, I can reflect on my past years to conclude that it doesn't pay to remain silent."⁸

Finally, Japanese Americans had spoken, and their voices persuaded lawmakers to redress the injustice of internment. In 1988,

led by Congressman Robert Matsui and Senator Daniel Inouye, Congress passed a bill providing for an apology and a payment of \$20,000 to each of the survivors of the internment camps. When President Ronald Reagan signed the bill, he admitted that the United States had committed "a grave wrong." During World War II, Japanese Americans had remained "utterly loyal" to this country, he pointed out. "Indeed, scores of Japanese Americans volunteered for our Armed Forces—many stepping forward in the internment camps themselves. The 442nd Regimental Central Team, made up entirely of Japanese Americans, served with immense distinction—to defend this nation, their nation. Yet, back at home, the soldiers' families were being denied the very freedom for which so many of the soldiers themselves were laying down their lives." The nation needed, the president acknowledged, to end "a sad chapter in American history."⁹

The winds of protest also swept through the barrios. "During the war," stated defense worker Juana Caudillo, "there was a lessening of discrimination by some public places because they needed our money.... After the war, some restaurants, stores, and taverns again refused to serve us on an equal basis with whites. We knew this was totally unfair because we had worked hard to win the war." Determined to win a "double victory," Mexican-American veterans founded the American GI Forum in Corpus Christi, Texas, in 1948. Membership in this civil rights organization rose rapidly. Over one hundred forum chapters were organized within a year, spreading to twenty-three states and reaching a membership of over twenty thousand. The GI Forum organized the boycott against Coors for employment discrimination and also demanded bilingual education and the end of the bracero program.¹⁰

The war had changed Mexican Americans. After veteran Cesar Chavez returned home from fighting fascism overseas, he dedicated himself to the struggle of farm workers. His mission was to combat prejudice and win decent wages for Mexican-American agricultural laborers. As the leader of the United Farm Workers, he declared: "Our struggle is not easy. Those who oppose our cause are rich and powerful, and they have many allies in high places. We are poor. Our allies are few. But we have something the rich do not own. We have our own bodies and spirits and the justice of our cause as our weapons." Sabine R. Ulibarri of New Mexico declared: "Those of us who went to war didn't return the same. We had earned our credentials as American citizens. We

had paid our dues on the counters of conviction and faith. We were not about to take any crap." "When our young men came home from the war," recalled Eva Hernandez, "they didn't want to be treated as second-class citizens anymore. We women didn't want to turn the clock back either regarding the social positions of women before the war. The war had provided us the unique chance to be socially and economically independent, and we didn't want to give up this experience simply because the war ended. We, too, wanted to be first-class citizens in our communities."¹¹

This resolve to fight discrimination inspired demands to end segregated education. In the 1946 case of *Mendez v. Westminster School District of Orange County*, the U.S. Circuit Court of Southern California declared that the segregation of Mexican children violated their right to equal protection of the law guaranteed to them under the Fourteenth Amendment and therefore was unconstitutional. To support the Mendez case, amicus curiae briefs were filed by the American Jewish Congress, the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, and the Japanese American Citizens League. This victory in court led the state legislature, a year later, to repeal section 8003, the law that permitted school districts to segregate Indian, Chinese, and Japanese children.¹²

The *Mendez* decision set a precedent for the historic Supreme Court 1954 *Brown v. Board of Education* decision. As chief counsel for the NAACP, African-American Thurgood Marshall presented the legal argument against the 1896 "separate but equal" doctrine of *Plessy v. Ferguson*. Behind his passion for social justice was Marshall's memory of World War II. "War is hell in every place and time," he told Carl T. Rowan, "but it was a special hell for people who were forced to fight for freedoms they had never known, for liberties that thousands of them would die without knowing it." Marshall was certain, however, that there would be a reckoning after the war. "I watched the bravery and patriotism of blacks, of the Japanese in World War Two, and I couldn't believe white Americans would continue to treat them as semislaves. People who died flying fighter planes in an Air Force that didn't welcome them. Japanese boys who fought valiantly even though their parents were behind the barbed wire of our concentration camps." Marshall said he was willing to bet "a bundle" that white Americans would respect the Fourteenth Amendment after the war and "that this country would move to place the colored race, in respect to civil rights, upon a level equal to whites."¹³

Marshall won his bet: the Supreme Court ruled that separate

educational facilities were "inherently unequal" and that school segregation was "a denial of the equal protection of the laws." The decision was hailed as a victory for all Americans. "We look upon this memorable decision not as a victory for Negroes alone," the NAACP announced, "but for the whole American people and as a vindication of America's leadership in the free world." Robert Williams recalled the elation he experienced when the Court announced its decision: "I felt that at last the government was willing to assert itself on behalf of first-class citizenship, even for Negroes. I experienced a sense of loyalty that I had never felt before. I was sure that this was the beginning of a new era of American democracy." A year later, the Supreme Court delivered a supplementary ruling, instructing the lower courts to implement the *Brown* decision "with all deliberate speed."¹⁴

Integration remained largely a court ruling on paper, however, while segregation persisted as a reality in society. Pressure for change would have to come not from judicial pronouncements, but from a people's movement for civil rights. A year after the *Brown* decision, blacks shifted the focus of their struggle from the courts to the community. What would turn out to be a momentous stirring for racial justice began on December 1, 1955, when a forty-two-year-old African-American seamstress boarded a bus in Montgomery, Alabama. Rosa Parks had been an activist in civil rights protests during the war, and had attended an antisegregation program that past summer at the Highland Folk School in Tennessee. She decided the time had come for action against what Du Bois had denounced as the "Problem of the Color Line." After entering the bus, Parks sat down in the row behind the section reserved for whites. City law stipulated that the first four rows were reserved for whites, and that if whites filled up their section, blacks would have to move to make room for them. The bus became full, and the driver ordered Parks to stand up so that a white man could sit down. "Are you going to stand up?" he asked. "No," she replied. "Go on and have me arrested." Her arrest led to an explosive protest—the Montgomery bus boycott. Although blacks were dependent on buses to get to and from work, thousands of them refused to take the bus. A song declared defiance:

Ain't gonna ride them buses no more

Ain't gonna ride no more

Why in the hell don't the white folk know

That I ain't gonna ride no more.

Instead they shared rides, rode in black-owned taxis, and walked. "My feet is tired," a woman said, "but my soul is rested." Another walker, an elderly woman, explained: "I'm not walking for myself. I'm walking for my children and my grandchildren."¹⁵

In this history-making moment, a young minister found himself suddenly catapulted into the leadership of the struggle. When he arrived in Montgomery a year earlier to become the pastor of the Dexter Avenue Baptist Church, Martin Luther King, Jr., noticed that blacks represented almost half of the city's population. Confined to domestic service and common labor, they were surrounded by the walls of segregation. "The schools of course were segregated," King noted; "and the United States Supreme Court decision on school integration, handed down in May 1954, appeared to have no effect on Montgomery's determination to keep them that way." But, more than the schools, the buses had become an especially disliked symbol of segregation. King personally knew what it meant to be humiliated by discrimination on a bus. When he was in the eleventh grade, he had traveled with a teacher to a distant town in Georgia to give a speech at a contest. After winning a prize for his presentation "The Negro and the Constitution," he boarded the bus for Atlanta with his teacher. When the bus filled up, the white driver told them to give up their seats for some white passengers. At first King refused and was called "a black son-of-a-bitch." Advised by his teacher to avoid a confrontation, King reluctantly surrendered his seat. "That night will never leave my mind," King recalled. "It was the angriest I have ever been in my life."¹⁶

As the leader of the Montgomery bus boycott, King gave voice to black frustration. In his first speech to the boycotters, he declared: "There comes a time when people get tired. We are here this evening to say to those who have mistreated us so long that we are tired—tired of being segregated and humiliated; tired of being kicked about by the brutal feet of oppression." What should be the course of resistance? "Our actions must be guided by the deepest principles of our Christian faith," King declared. "Love must be our regulating ideal. Once again we must hear the words of Jesus echoing across the centuries: 'Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, and pray for them that despitefully use you.'" In the struggle for freedom, King fused together this Christian doctrine and Mahatma Gandhi's tactic of nonviolence. The boycott ended more than a year later when the court ordered the desegregation of the bus system. The victory affirmed the power

of blacks to transform the conditions of their lives through a grassroots movement. Their courageous action inspired an inner transformation—a hard-won sense of self-esteem. "We got our heads up now," exclaimed a black janitor proudly, "and we won't ever bow down again—no, sir—except before God."¹⁷

After the Montgomery protest came other confrontations with America's contradictions. First there were the sit-ins of black students at the Woolworth's lunch counter in Greensboro, North Carolina, in 1960. "We're trying to eradicate the whole stigma of being inferior," the students explained. "We do not picket just because we want to eat. We do picket to protest the lack of dignity and respect shown us as human beings." One of the students, Franklin McCain, recalled: "I probably felt better that day than I've ever felt in my life. I felt as though I had gained my manhood, so to speak, and not only gained it, but had developed quite a lot of respect for it." Out of the lunch counter sit-ins emerged the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC). The student sit-ins spread across the South. "I myself desegregated a lunch counter, not somebody else, not some big man, some powerful man, but me, little me," a black student boasted. "I walked the picket line and I sat in and the walls of segregation toppled. Now all people can eat there." The students were standing tall against history-entrenched humiliations. "A generation of young people," King observed, "has come out of decades of shadows to face naked state power; it has lost its fears, and experienced the majestic dignity of a direct struggle for its own liberation. These young people have connected up with their own history—the slave revolts, the incomplete revolution of the Civil War, the brotherhood of colonial colored men in Africa and Asia. They are an integral part of the history which is reshaping the world, replacing a dying order with a modern democracy." In their songs, the students expressed their determination to break the chains of discrimination:

*Ain't gonna let nobody turn me 'round,
turn me 'round, turn me 'round,
Ain't gonna let nobody turn me 'round,
I'm gonna keep on walkin', keep on a-talkin'
Marching up to freedom land.*¹⁸

A year after the Greensboro sit-ins came the "freedom rides"—acts of civil disobedience to integrate the interstate buses and bus terminals of the South. Led by the Congress of Racial Equality

(CORE), black and white civil rights supporters defiantly and bravely rode together in buses, singing:

*Hallelujah, I'm traveling
Hallelujah, ain't it fine,
Hallelujah, I'm traveling
Down Freedom's main line.*

In the South, the freedom riders were yanked from the buses and brutally beaten by racist white mobs before television cameras. "Every Freedom Rider on that bus was beaten pretty bad," recalled Isaac Reynolds. "I'm still feeling the effect. I received a damaged ear." They faced injury and even death, but they knew they could not allow violence to turn them back. "I was afraid not to continue the Freedom Ride," explained Diane Nash. "If the signal was given to the opposition that violence could stop us...if we let the Freedom Ride stop then, whenever we tried to do anything in the Movement in the future, we were going to meet with a lot of violence. And we would probably have to get a number of people killed before we could reverse that message."¹⁹

Then, in 1963, came the famous March on Washington. The idea that had originally been proposed during World War II became a reality. On August 28, addressing the gathering of two hundred thousand people at the Lincoln Memorial, A. Philip Randolph reiterated the 1941 demands he had submitted to President Roosevelt: "We are the advance guard of a massive moral revolution for jobs and freedom. All who deplore our militancy, who exhort patience in the name of false peace, are in fact supporting segregation and exploitation. They would have social peace at the expense of social and racial justice."²⁰

After his speech, Randolph introduced Martin Luther King, Jr., as the man who personified "the moral leadership of the civil rights revolution." Speaking to the marchers, the nation, and the world, King shared his vision of freedom in America. "Five score years ago, a great American, in whose symbolic shadow we stand, signed the Emancipation Proclamation," King declared. "I say to you today, my friends, that in spite of the difficulties and frustrations of the moment I still have a dream. It is a dream deeply rooted in the American dream. I have a dream that one day this nation will rise up and live out the true meaning of its creed: 'We hold these truths to be self-evident; that all men are created equal.'"²¹

Also speaking at the March on Washington, Rabbi Joachim

Prinz wove together King's dream and the still-molten memory of the Holocaust. A death camp survivor, he shared a lesson he had learned from Hitler's murderous rampage against Jews. The "most urgent" problem was not bigotry and hatred; "the most urgent, the most disgraceful, the most shameful and the most tragic problem [was] silence." The rabbi appealed to his listeners: "America must not become a nation of onlookers." The memory of the Holocaust carried a moral lesson: as a response to racial injustice, silence constituted complicity.²²

"Black and white together," the marchers sang, "we shall overcome someday." Indeed, whites were involved in the Civil Rights Movement, and many of them were Jews. Over half of the white students who went south to organize voter-registration drives during Freedom Summer of 1964 were Jewish. The two white civil rights workers who were murdered with African-American James Chaney in Mississippi that summer were Jewish—Andrew Goodman and Michael Schwerner. Jewish supporters wrote many of the checks that financed Martin Luther King's Southern Christian Leadership Conference as well as SNCC and CORE.²³

Jewish involvement in the movement for black freedom had deep roots in American history. During the 1850s, three Jewish immigrants joined John Brown's armed struggle against slavery in "Bloody Kansas." Remembering the pogroms in Russia, Jewish immigrants identified with the victims of antiblack race riots in urban America. After the killing of thirty-eight blacks during the 1917 East St. Louis riot, the Jewish newspaper *Forward* compared the violence to a 1903 pogrom in Russia: "Kishinev and St. Louis—the same soil, the same people. It is a distance of four and a half thousand miles between these two cities and yet they are so close and so similar to each other." Jews contributed leadership to the NAACP: its chairman for most of the years between 1914 and 1939 was Joel E. Spingarn. The head of the NAACP Legal Defense and Education Fund was Jack Greenberg, and the NAACP's fiery labor director was Herbert Hill, a graduate of an orthodox Yeshiva. One of Martin Luther King's closest personal advisers was Stanley Levison; Howard Zinn, a professor at Spelman College, was a counselor to SNCC. Over half of the white lawyers who went south to defend the civil rights protesters were Jewish.²⁴

In joining the crusade for justice for African Americans, Jewish Americans remembered the persecution and violence they had experienced in Russia, and they knew that the border between

racism and anti-Semitism often blurred. A society that opposed discrimination, they realized, would also allow Jews equality of opportunity. Even as a ten-year-old kid cheering for Jackie Robinson when he broke into major league baseball in 1947, Jack Greenberg understood what this victory meant for Jews. Robinson was "adopted as the surrogate hero by many of us growing up at the time," the civil rights lawyer recalled. "He was the way we saw ourselves triumphing against the forces of bigotry and ignorance." Those forces had curbed Jewish admissions at Harvard and were continuing to discriminate against the appointment of Jews to the faculties of elite universities. The frontline of the battle for equality for everyone, including Jews, was the civil rights struggle for blacks. Indeed, as historian Jonathan Kaufman noted in hindsight, "Jews benefited enormously from the terrain shaped by the civil rights movement. Jews were the first to use antidiscrimination laws to gain access to restricted apartment buildings in large cities. The growing tide of tolerance left by the civil rights movement opened opportunities for Jews as well as for blacks in law firms, corporations, and universities."²⁶

"The civil rights movement spoke to the Jewish head," Kaufman pointed out, "but it also spoke to Jewish hearts." Though many Jews had left the Lower East Side for the suburbs and had entered the mainstream of the Promised Land, they carried in their hearts a religion that compelled them to be concerned about oppression. The American Dream had worked for them; now they felt a duty as well as a memory of their own hardships to help make this promise work for blacks. Jewish civil rights workers often referred to "that quote"—the ancient pronouncement by Rabbi Hillel: "If I am not for myself, who will be for me? But if I am only for myself, what am I? And if not now, when?" Nazi genocide had unshrouded the horrible inhumanity of racism. As Jews, they nurtured a special understanding of what it meant to be degraded and victimized as the "Other."²⁶

This black-Jewish "alliance," however, was soon "broken." As the focus of the struggle for black equality moved to the North, the relationship between blacks and Jews became increasingly strained. The Civil Rights Movement was shifting from demands for political rights to demands for economic equality. Until then, Kaufman noted, "the price of racial change had been taken out of the hide of the South. Northerners, including northern Jews, did not have to deal with consequences directly." In the North, the racial terrain was different: Jews owned about 30 percent of the

stores in Harlem, Watts, and other black communities. During the 1964 Harlem riot, blacks looted many Jewish-owned stores. A class divide separated the two groups. Ghetto blacks were also noticing that many of their landlords were Jewish. At a school integration meeting in Boston, a young black questioned whether blacks could work with Jews when Jewish landlords were exploiting them. According to Kaufman, a popular saying in the 1960s went: "Of the five people that a black meets in the course of the day—his landlord, the storeowner, the social worker, the teacher, the cop—one, the cop, is Irish. The other four are Jews."²⁷

At a deeper level, the split between Jews and blacks reflected a larger ideological divide, as conflicting visions of equality emerged. The Civil Rights Movement had begun as a struggle for equality for blacks through integration, which was often defined as a condition of equality. To "overcome" meant to integrate the schools, buses, lunch counters, and other public facilities; this goal was expanded to include equality of opportunity for voting and employment. But in 1966, like earlier black nationalists such as Marcus Garvey, Stokely Carmichael and other young militant blacks issued a clarion call for Black Power. Increasingly, they viewed racial oppression in America as "internal colonialism." Identifying themselves with the Third World, they saw themselves as members of Frantz Fanon's "wretched of the earth," the subjugated peoples of Africa, Latin America, and Asia engaged in struggles for liberation against white colonial domination. Equality, for many black militants, now meant self-determination for blacks as a colonized people in America. The cry of black nationalism was for separatism rather than integration, and there was no place for whites, including Jews, in the movement for black liberation.²⁸

But the Civil Rights Movement, composed of blacks and whites fighting together against discrimination, had led to successes. In 1964, Congress prohibited discrimination in public accommodations and employment and established the Fair Employment Opportunity Commission. A year later, lawmakers authorized federal examiners to register qualified voters and abolished obstacles like literacy tests designed to deny voting rights to blacks. Also in 1965, the demand for equality pushed President Lyndon Johnson to promote the right of equal employment by issuing Executive Order 11246. This law required firms with federal contracts to take "affirmative action" in hiring minorities. Companies had to set "good faith goals and timetables" for employing "underutilized" qualified minority workers. At Howard University, Johnson

declared: "This is the next and more profound stage of the battle for civil rights. We seek not just freedom but opportunity—not just legal equity but human ability—not just equality as a right and a theory but equality as a fact and equality as a result."²⁹

"We shall overcome," the Civil Rights Movement's diverse people sang, "we shall overcome." Indeed, in many significant ways, they did overcome. What emerged was a different America, less saturated with discrimination.

Raisins in the Sun: Dreams Deferred

Meanwhile, however, the Civil Rights Movement was unable to overcome the structural economic foundations of racial inequality for African Americans. While the laws and court orders prohibited discrimination, they failed to relieve poverty among blacks. African Americans had won the right to sit at a lunch counter and order a hamburger, but many of them did not have the money to pay for their meal. Blacks were told that the law now prohibited discrimination in employment, but they also saw that jobs for them were scarce. The desperation was especially acute in the inner cities of the North. "You know the average young person out here don't have a job, man, they don't have anything to do," an African American explained angrily in the early 1960s. "You go down to the employment agency and you can't get a job. They have you waiting all day, but you can't get a job."³⁰

Explaining the reason they could not get jobs, scholar Kenneth Clark wrote in *Dark Ghetto*: "Those who are required to live in congested and rat-infested homes are aware that others are not so dehumanized. Young people in the ghetto are aware that other young people have been taught to read, that they have been prepared for college, and can compete successfully for white-collar, managerial, and executive jobs." One of these alienated blacks predicted in 1962: "When the time comes, it is going to be too late. Everything will explode because the people live under tension now; they going to a point where they can't stand it no more." This point was dramatically reached in Los Angeles during the long hot summer of 1965.³¹

"The fire bombs of Watts blasted the civil rights movement into a new phase," declared Martin Luther King, Jr. Ultimately, the struggle to realize the American Dream had to advance beyond antidiscrimination laws and confront what King called the "air-tight cage of poverty." The underlying economic basis of racial

inequality was a far more elusive and formidable foe than the lynch mobs and police attack dogs. "Jobs are harder and costlier to create than voting rolls," King explained. "The eradication of slums housing millions is complex far beyond integrating buses and lunch counters." This harsh reality of urban squalor and despair was reflected in the jagged mirrors of every northern ghetto. "I see a young Negro boy," King wrote in 1963. "He is sitting on a stoop in front of a vermin-infested apartment house in Harlem. The stench of garbage is in the halls. The drunks, the jobless, the junkies are shadow figures of his everyday world."³²

This impoverished and depressing world was familiar to Malcolm X. "I don't see any American dream," he declared in 1964; "I see an American nightmare." Growing up in the ghettos of the North, Malcolm Little had pursued a life of drugs and crime. Arrested and found guilty of burglary, he was given an eight-year sentence. As Malcolm X later explained, his "high school" had been the "black ghetto of Roxbury" in Boston, his "college" the "streets of Harlem," and his graduate school the "prison." While serving time, he was converted to Elijah Muhammed's Nation of Islam. As a leader of the Black Muslims, Malcolm X advocated a separatist ideology and mocked King for his faith in integration as well as his strategy of nonviolence. Like David Walker, who had issued his revolutionary appeal in the early nineteenth century, Malcolm X urged blacks to use violence to defend their rights. As the struggle for racial justice shifted from the South to the urban North, Malcolm X's message exposed the failure of the Civil Rights Movement to address the problems of joblessness and poverty.³³

The Civil Rights Movement was hitting the walls of inequality based on class as well as race—what King called the "inseparable twins" of economic injustice and racial injustice. Beginning in the 1960s, black America became deeply splintered into two classes. On the one hand, the middle class experienced gains: the percentage of families earning \$25,000 or more increased from 10 percent in 1960 to 25 percent in 1982, and the number of blacks in college nearly doubled between 1970 and 1980 (from 522,000 to over 1 million). On the other hand, there emerged what has been called a "black underclass." The distressing situation of this group could be measured by the persistence of intergenerational poverty, the increasing unemployment rates for young black men, and the dramatic rise in black female-headed families. Between 1960 and 1980, the percentage of such families doubled, reaching

40 percent, compared to an increase from 8 to 12 percent for white families. While blacks composed only 12 percent of the American population in 1980, they constituted 43 percent of all welfare families. "By now my wife was pregnant," said African-American John Godfrey. "And I was unemployed. So push came to shove. We went down to welfare. I needed medical protection for her and the baby. It was a sobering experience. I felt—I don't know how to put it into words—I was totally disgusted with myself. I felt I had failed myself, because I was unable to take care of myself and my family."⁸⁴

Survival for many black women, even for those with husbands, became difficult on welfare. Trapped in a catch-22 situation, they wanted to get off welfare but found themselves forced by low wages to remain dependent on government subsidy. "None of my jobs ever paid more than minimum wage," said Alice Grady. "As soon as I can get a babysitter, I intend to go back to work. But it won't be easy. There is a bus stop right out front, but according to where your job is, you'd probably need two or three buses to get to work. You'd have to leave early in the morning, and you'd be leaving your children because they're not supposed to be at school until eight or nine o'clock. Then you'd have to find a babysitter for them in the evening until you got home. But I'm hoping to get off welfare and get me a good job. Right now they're helping me, but it's just making ends meet. You don't have anything left. Right now my husband is looking for a job. We vote. This year we couldn't because we were homeless. You know, the homeless can't vote. You have to have an address. It's just rough on welfare. It's just not enough. What can I do for school clothes for the kids? When my husband gets a job, we'll be cut back on welfare." A world of barriers surrounded women like Alice Grady, keeping them impoverished and blocking their avenues of exit. At several different points, they were frustrated by a cycle of poverty generated by low wages and reinforced by inadequate childcare, poor public transportation, lack of affordable housing, and political disenfranchisement.⁸⁵

Moreover, the employment situation of both black women and black men was devastated by major changes in the economy. The movement of plants and offices to the suburbs isolated many urban blacks from places of employment: in 1980, 71 percent of them lived in central cities, whereas 66 percent of whites resided in suburbs. Illustrating the dynamic interaction of the suburbanization of production, unemployment, and welfare, Chicago lost

229,000 jobs and enrolled 290,000 new welfare recipients in the sixties, while its suburbs gained 500,000 jobs. Meanwhile, blacks also suffered from the effects of the "deindustrialization of America." Due to the relocation of production to low-wage countries like South Korea and Mexico, some 22 million American workers lost their jobs between 1969 and 1976. "Blacks have been severely hurt by deindustrialization," William Julius Wilson explained, "because of their heavy concentration in the automobile, rubber, steel, and other smokestack industries."⁸⁶

African-American blue-collar workers had been rendered economically superfluous. One of them was Jimmy Morse. After working for U.S. Steel in Gary, Indiana, for thirty years, he voluntarily retired in 1983 rather than wait for the imminent layoff. His monthly retirement pay totaled \$552.63, which did not pay all his bills. "Now, you get the light bill outta there," he explained in 1986. "You get the water bill outta there. Buy some food outta that plus \$131 we get in food stamps. You're about \$40 short." During the 1970s, the region around Gary had lost 65,000 manufacturing jobs, including 12,000 at US Steel. "Foreign steel was takin' our man-hours away from us," Morse explained. "And it ain't no racial thing either. That blue-eyed soul brother is catchin' jes' as much hell as I'm catching." Actually, black workers were catching more than their share of hell. In the ranks of this new army of displaced workers was a disproportionately large number of blacks. A study of 2,380 firms which were shut down in Illinois between 1975 and 1978 found that while blacks constituted only 14 percent of the state's workforce, they totaled 20 percent of the laidoff laborers. Of the black workers displaced between 1979 and 1984, only 42 percent were able to secure new employment. They were forced to become the "truly disadvantaged."⁸⁷

Staring at the boarded-up factories, many young blacks were unable to get even their first jobs—work experience essential for acquiring skills as well as self-esteem. One of them, Darryl Swafford, grew up around Gary. Unemployed and dependent on food stamps, he had the same dream as most Americans: "I always had that goal, working in the mill. Have a home, a big car. But now there's no mill and I'm down. Just trying to make it, trying to survive." Many of the jobs available to young blacks were in the fast-food services like Burger King and McDonald's. But these jobs paid very low wages and led nowhere. "They treat you like a child on those minimum-wage jobs," complained Danny Coleman, who had worked in a fast-food restaurant. "And there is no

way you can make it on that kind of salary. It is just a dead end." Young workers like Coleman faced an economy that said: "Let them flip hamburgers."³⁸

In the midst of this economic crisis, America's inner cities became tinderboxes for violent explosions. On April 29, 1992, immediately after four white police officers were found not guilty of assault against black motorist Rodney King, racial rage engulfed Los Angeles. The governor declared a state of emergency and ordered 6,000 National Guard troops into the city to restore order. When the unrest finally came to an end days later, the devastation was immense: 52 deaths, 2,499 injuries, and 6,559 arrests. More than 3,000 businesses had been damaged by fire, vandalism, and looting, and losses totaled \$800 million. The live televised images mesmerized America. The thousands of fires burning out of control and the dark smoke filling the skies made Los Angeles look like a bombed-out city.

"It took a brutal beating, an unexpected jury verdict, and the sudden rampage of rioting, looting, and indiscriminate violence to bring this crisis [of urban America] back to the forefront," *Business Week* reported. "Racism surely explains some of the carnage in Los Angeles. But the day-to-day living conditions with which many of America's urban poor must contend is an equally compelling story—a tale of economic injustice." The riot was a cry of rage against the poverty of the inner city. "South Central Los Angeles is a Third World country," declared Krashawn Scott, a former member of the Los Angeles Crips gang. "There's a South Central in every city, in every state." Describing the desperate conditions in his community, he continued: "What we got is inadequate housing and inferior education. I wish someone would tell me the difference between Guatemala and South Central." This comparison vividly illustrated the squalor and poverty present within one of America's wealthiest and most modern cities. Like a Third World country, South Central Los Angeles had become extremely volatile. A gang member known as Bone explained that the recent violence was "not a riot—it was a class struggle. When Rodney King asked, 'Can we get along?' it ain't just about Rodney King. He was the lighter and it blew up."³⁹

What exploded was anguish born of despair. "What happens to a dream deferred?" asked Langston Hughes in Harlem during the 1920s.

Does it dry up

Like a raisin in the sun?

*... Or does it explode?*⁴⁰

"Once again, young blacks are taking to the streets to express their outrage at perceived injustice," *Newsweek* reported, "and once again, whites are fearful that The Fire Next Time will consume them." But this time, the magazine noticed, the situation was different from the earlier riot: the recent conflict was not just between blacks and whites. "The nation is rapidly moving toward a multiethnic future in which Asians, Hispanics, Caribbean islanders, and many other immigrant groups compose a diverse and changing social mosaic that cannot be described by the old vocabulary of race relations in America." The terms "black" and "white," *Newsweek* concluded, no longer "depict the American social reality."⁴¹

The fire this time consumed the stores and dreams of Korean-American shopkeepers. "April 29, 1992, the night the store burned down," merchant Young Soon Han recalled, "I didn't even know what was happening. I hadn't been paying much attention to the Rodney King verdict. I didn't think the issue was so serious." Warned trouble was coming, Han went home. Later he was told that his store had been burned to the ground. During the days of fury and fire, recalled Sun Soon Kim, another storeowner, Koreatown "looked like it went to war." Smoke was rising from the buildings, and Korean merchants were frantically trying to "salvage any remains of a dream." What she saw resembled a surrealistic scene from hell. "I couldn't believe what I was seeing—like something from the movies. I felt like I was on the movie screen walking through a war zone and people in the movie theater were watching this." But she was not watching a Hollywood fantasy. "I honestly wasn't prepared for what I was about to see. In front of me was the remaining rubbles of the stores that I had poured my money, sweat, and time into. Everything I had worked so hard to build was crumbled in front of me." Kim felt that she had "died, not physically but emotionally."⁴²

Out of the conflagration, however, arose an awareness of multi-racial connectedness and an affirmation of interdependency. Shortly after the 1992 explosion, social critic Richard Rodriguez reflected: "The Rodney King riots were appropriately multicultural in this multicultural capital of America. We cannot settle

for black and white conclusions when one of the most important conflicts the riots revealed was the tension between Koreans and African Americans." He also noted that "the majority of looters who were arrested... turned out to be Hispanic." Out of the Los Angeles conflict came a sense of community. "Here was a race riot that had no border," Rodriguez wrote, "a race riot without nationality. And, for the first time, everyone in the city realized—if only in fear—that they were related to one another." "I think good will come of [the riot]," stated Janet Harris, a chaplain at Central Juvenile Hall. "People need to take off their rose-colored glasses," she added, "and take a hard look at what they've been doing. They've been living in invisible cages. And they've shut out that world. And maybe the world came crashing in on them and now people will be moved to do something."⁴³

Asian Americans: A "Model Minority" for Blacks?

As inner-city African Americans struggled to get by, news pundits and policymakers celebrated Asian-American success. Five years before the 1992 Los Angeles riot, CBS's *60 Minutes* presented a glowing report on the stunning achievements of Asian Americans in the academy. "Why are Asian Americans doing so exceptionally well in school?" Mike Wallace asked and quickly added, "They must be doing something right. Let's bottle it." Wallace then suggested that failing black students should try to pursue the Asian-American formula for academic success. At the same time, President Ronald Reagan joined the chorus trumpeting Asian-American achievements. While congratulating Asian Americans for their family values, hard work, and high incomes, Reagan chastised blacks for their dependency on the "spider's web of welfare" and their failure to recognize that the "only barrier" to success was "within" them. Reagan had skillfully set the stage for the battle between "meritocracy" and affirmative action.⁴⁴

In the spring of 1995, Governor Pete Wilson of California announced his opposition to affirmative action when he launched his campaign for the Republican nomination for the presidency. Following Wilson that summer, African-American Ward Connerly began his attack on what he scorned as "preferential treatment" for blacks. As a member of the Board of Regents of the University of California, he successfully engineered a ban on affirmative action for university admissions. Connerly argued that affirmative action represented "reverse discrimination": it discriminated

in favor of African Americans and Latino Americans, not only at the expense of whites but also of Asian Americans. Pitting Asian Americans against African Americans, Connerly declared that African-American students should be like Asian-American students, and that they should study hard, get excellent test scores and grades, and seek admission to the university based solely on their merit. Buoyed by his victory, Connerly took his crusade to the 1996 election. On the ballot, he placed Proposition 209, an initiative to prohibit affirmative action in the entire state. His proposal was called the California Civil Rights Initiative. The proposition was approved by 54 percent of the voters. But exit polls revealed that 25 percent of those who voted for it were also for affirmative action. They did not clearly understand that the "civil rights" initiative would prohibit race and gender considerations for hiring, contracting, and university admissions. In the wake of Prop. 209, diversity on university campuses declined sharply for African-American and Latino enrollments, from 5 and 15 percent to 2 and 8 percent, respectively. Yet together the two minorities totaled 40 percent of the state's population, paying taxes to subsidize the University of California.

The news media and political hype over Asian-American "success" and black "failure" shrouded the impact of the Cold War economy on the problems of unemployment and poverty in the inner city. The strategic nuclear weapons program under the Reagan presidency was financed by enormous deficits. Defense expenditures under the Reagan administration more than doubled from \$134 billion in 1980 to \$282 billion in 1987. In that year, defense spending amounted to 60 cents out of every dollar received by the federal government in income tax. Meanwhile, resources were being diverted from social needs: defense spending was \$35 billion greater in 1985 than in 1981, while funds for entitlement programs such as food stamps and welfare were cut by \$30 billion. Moreover, the focus of research and development on strategic nuclear weapons was detrimental to the general economy. Between 1955 and 1990, the federal government spent more than \$1 trillion on nuclear arms and other weaponry for the Cold War—a sum representing 62 percent of all federal research expenditures. This concentration on atomic arms research and production drained national resources and at the same time undermined America's capacity to produce competitive consumer goods, which, in turn, generated trade imbalances and contributed to a decline in commercial manufacturing, especially for those sectors

of the industrial economy where many blacks had been employed. The United States won the atomic arms race, but the victory was enormously costly.⁴⁵

Still, there were new prospects for change and progress. The end of the Cold War gave the country a "peace dividend." Resources devoted to nuclear-weapons production could now be shifted to the production of consumer goods, helping revitalize the economy and making it more competitive with Japan and Germany. "It's as though America just won the lottery," the *New York Times* editorialized exuberantly in March 1990. "With Communism collapsing, the United States, having defended the free world for half a century, now stands to save a fortune. Defense spending could drop by \$20 billion next year and \$150 billion a year before the decade ends." This tremendous resource could now be directed into the consumer-goods economy. What was needed, proposed Ann Markusen of Rutgers University, was "an independent Office of Economic Conversion, designed to be self-liquidating by the year 2000 and accountable to the President."⁴⁶

The United States found itself perched on the threshold of a new era of economic expansion. To meet the research needs of the military over the prior half century, the government had educated and supported an impressive array of brilliant engineers and scientists. "These wizards of the cold war comprise the greatest force of scientific and engineering talent ever assembled," observed journalist William J. Broad in 1992. "Over the decades this army of government, academic and industry experts made the breakthroughs that gave the West its dazzling military edge." Released from military R&D, these "wizards" could now concentrate on the consumers-goods market. Under the guidance of a comprehensive national industrial strategy, giant American corporations like Rockwell International, Grumman, Northrup, Martin Marietta, and Lockheed could now start designing and producing "smart" consumer goods rather than "smart" bombs. More important, vital resources could now be redirected to the rebuilding of the manufacturing base in the inner cities as well as to schools and job-training programs.⁴⁷

A bright future seemed ahead for America. But then came September 11, 2001, with the terrorist attack on the World Trade Center. And the hopes of the rising wind for social justice again became "dreams deferred."

16



AGAIN, THE "TEMPEST-TOST"

IN SHAKESPEARE'S STORY *The Tempest*, Prospero commands the spirit Ariel to stir the seas in order to create a storm that will blow to his enchanted island the ship carrying the King of Naples and his entourage. The tempest terrifies all on board. "Now I would give a thousand furlongs of sea for an acre of barren ground—long heath, brown furze, anything," cries Gonzalo, the king's adviser. "The wills above be done, but I would fain die a dry death." Ariel lands them gently on the island's shore.

On the pedestal of the Statue of Liberty is also emblazoned a reference to a storm:

*"Keep ancient lands, your storied pomp!" cries she
With silent lips. "Give me your tired, your poor,
Your huddled masses yearning to breathe free,
The wretched refuse of your teeming shore.
Send these, the homeless, tempest-tost to me,
I lift my lamp beside the golden door!"*¹

Fleeing the "tempests" of political strife, wars, and poverty during the recent decades, the world has rushed into America once

more, and transformed our society into a more complex multicultural tapestry.

From a "Teeming Shore": Russia, Ireland, and China

The global context of the Cold War conditioned immigration from what had been the Soviet Union. Refugees fleeing from religious oppression, Jews began arriving in America again. The collapse of Communism in Eastern Europe and Russia in the 1990s unleashed a new wave of anti-Semitism, and many Jews were afraid of what would happen to them. "Anti-Semitism and all the other old national hatreds were never really extinguished by Communism, merely frozen in time," James E. Young noted in his review of Charles Hoffman's study of the Jews of Eastern Europe in the postcommunist era. "When the thaw came, the traditional conflicts bloomed with a vengeance, picking up exactly where they left off 45 years ago." The unraveling of communist controls unleashed old, pent-up nativist passions. "The country is experiencing a process of 'decivilization,'" explained a Moscow lawyer in 1990. "The layers of civilization are being peeled off, and underneath there is this ugliness, including fascism and anti-Semitic hatred. Jews are trying to get out of Russia as fast as they can." An old Jewish man in a village near Minsk told two American visitors: "It's time now. We have to go. It wouldn't be safe for us to stay." He was not religiously Jewish: for lunch he served ham. Prohibited from practicing their religion, many Jews had become Jewish mainly in terms of their ethnic origins. "The last of the [Jewish] culture-bearers were executed 40 years ago," explained Aleksandr Z. Burakovsky, chair of the Kiev Sholom Aleichem Society. "Schools, synagogues, libraries were all abolished." Aleksandr A. Shlayen, director of the Babi Yar Center, added: "They started to beat the Jewishness out of Jews a long time ago, under the czars."²

Though many Jews in what had been the Soviet Union did not feel a strong identity as Jews, they encountered hatred from their neighbors and fellow citizens. In schools, Jewish children were beaten and called names. Resentment spread to the workplace: professional Jews experienced discrimination in employment. Graffiti on walls warned: "Jews get out." "My husband wanted to emigrate, but I didn't want to leave," recounted a young Jewish woman. "My parents are old and need to be cared for. I also thought of myself as a Soviet citizen." Many people saw her only

as a "Jew," however, and the harassment became "awful." Seeking sanctuary, half a million Jews fled to Israel and also to America.³

Like the Jewish immigrants of the late nineteenth century, they sold their houses and furniture, giving away almost everything and leaving with only what they could carry. After their arrival, they had to start all over again. Describing the plight of a Jewish refugee family, Barbara Budnitz of Berkeley, California, explained: "These people have nothing. I offered them an old desk. They said they wanted it, but what they really needed was a bed." Many of these refugees had been engineers in the old country, but here they suffered from unemployment. Lacking English-language skills and possessing technical knowledge that had limited transferability, many were forced to find jobs as apartment managers, janitors, or even as helpers at McDonald's. According to Barbara Nelson of the Jewish Family Services in Oakland, California, about 80 percent of the Jewish refugee families were compelled to seek welfare support.⁴

Still, the Jews were glad to be in America, where there was religious freedom. "My five-year-old daughter is attending school at the synagogue—something she could not do in the Ukraine," explained Sofiya Shapiro, who came with her family in 1991. "I am glad she can get to know Jewish tradition." Indeed, many of the refugees were learning about Judaism for the first time. Like the Jewish immigrants of earlier times, the recent refugees embraced the hope that this country would offer them an opportunity to begin again. "That's what America is," commented Budnitz. "We need to keep it that way."⁵

America's continuing allure has also been as a place for a fresh economic start. This was particularly true for the most recent wave from Ireland. Like the nineteenth-century Irish immigrants fleeing hunger and the ravages of the Potato Famine, these newcomers were pushed by grim economic conditions at home: in 1990, unemployment in Ireland was a staggering 18 percent. Seeking work in America, many entered legally with a student, work, or tourist visa, and simply stayed after it expired. Undocumented Irish workers totaled as many as 120,000. "It's an anonymous floating population," stated Lena Deevy, director of the Irish Immigration Reform Movement office in Boston. "It's like counting the homeless." These illegal aliens constituted what one of them described as "an underclass," forced to take "the crummiest jobs at the lowest wages." The 1986 Immigration Reform Act, which made it

unlawful for employers to hire undocumented workers, created economic and social borders for many Irish. "You can't apply for a job," explained an Irish waitress who came to Boston in 1986. "You can't answer a want ad. It's all word of mouth." Undocumented Irish workers had to keep a low profile, she added: "My social life is limited to the Irish sector. I can't talk to Americans—you just have to tell too many lies." Deevy described their nervousness: "It's like living on the edge. There's a lot of fear that someone will squeal to the INS [Immigration and Naturalization Service]." In 1990, a new immigration law provided for the distribution of 40,000 green cards to be awarded by lottery, with 16,000 of them reserved for Irish. "I plan to fill out at least a thousand applications," said Joanne O'Connell of Queens, New York, as she looked forward to this "Irish Sweepstakes."⁶

Facing a rising nativist backlash against illegal immigrants, many Irish newcomers joined Mexican Americans in demanding comprehensive immigration reform that would enable all of them to become legalized. In February 2006, fifteen hundred Irish participated in an immigration reform rally in San Francisco. One of them, Elaine, worked as a nanny. "We're all in the same boat," she told a reporter. "The Irish are lucky because we speak English and we're white. We do get treated better. But we [undocumented immigrants] are all hard workers. We all want a better life." Elaine explained that she would like to become a legal permanent resident so that she could build a stable life in her adopted country without fear of being picked up by immigration authorities. She also would like to take her six-year-old son to Ireland so he can maintain his ties to his grandparents and his Irish heritage.⁷

Joining the Jews and the Irish were also immigrants from China. In the wake of civil rights legislation for African Americans in the 1960s, the question surfaced: if discrimination is immoral and illegal, why was there an immigration restriction law based on racial exclusion? "Just as we sought to eliminate discrimination in our land through the Civil Rights Act," declared a congressman, "today we seek by phasing out the national origins quota system to eliminate discrimination in immigration to this nation composed of the descendants of immigrants." All groups should have equal opportunity to enter America. "Everywhere else in our national life, we have eliminated discrimination based on national origins," Attorney General Robert Kennedy told Congress. "Yet, this system is still the foundation of our immigration law." In 1965, Congress legislated the removal of all restrictions

to Asian immigration—an injustice of exclusion that Asian Americans had struggled for decades to overcome.⁸

For the Chinese, the new law reopened the gates to the country they had affectionately called Gold Mountain. In 1960 the Chinese population was only 237,000; twenty years later it had jumped to 812,200. The Chinese-American community had been radically transformed from 61 percent American-born to 63 percent foreign-born, becoming once more mainly an immigrant community. This tide of new immigrants from China was not anticipated at all when Congress passed the 1965 immigration law. The early immigrants had been here a long time, and most of them did not have immediate family members to bring to America. But the family unification provision of the law opened the way for new immigrants who came here initially as students. "My brother-in-law left his wife in Taiwan and came here as a student to get a Ph.D. in engineering," explained Subi Lin Felipe. "After he received his degree, he got a job in San Jose. Then he brought in a sister and his wife, who brought over one of her brothers and me. And my brother's wife then came."⁹

During the 1960s, Chinese students flocked to the United States to pursue their education; in 1980 half of the 300,000 foreign students here were from China and other Asian countries. Thousands of Chinese students were able to find employment and then acquire Labor Department certification as immigrants under the sixth preference for skilled workers. In this way large numbers of Chinese were able to change their status from foreign students to immigrants. Once they became immigrants, they could develop an expanding immigrant kin network under the family preferences of the 1965 law. They could bring their wives and children here; then as U.S. citizens a few years later, they could bring their parents as well as their brothers and sisters, who, in turn, could arrange for the entry of their spouses and children. Thus one immigrant coming originally as a student could bring to America a chain migration of family members.

Not all of the new immigrants were educated. They included low-wage laborers, employed as service workers and operatives in Chinatowns. Most of them did not have a high school certificate, or English-language skills. The problems of limited English and limited employment opportunities were self-reinforcing. "Chinese people have lower incomes because first, the language problem," explained Wing Ng. "If you know just a little English, you can go to an office and get a job cleaning up. It has more security, more

benefits. But how are you going to get a job like that if you don't know a little English? And how are you going to learn English if you have to work twelve hours a day, six days a week, and then come home and take care of your family?"¹⁰

Unable to speak English, many Chinese immigrant women had no choice but to work as seamstresses. In the 1980s, they became a major source of labor for New York's garment industry, which had earlier employed Jewish immigrants. "These factories are one of New York City's unknown industrial success stories," said Harry Schwartz, president of the Garment Industry Development Corporation. "You walk around the Garment District and ask, 'Where have the production shops gone?' Well, they've gone to Chinatown." In San Francisco, Chinese women were producing almost half of the total volume of manufactured apparel, usually working for minimum wages in a sweatshop environment. "The conditions in the factories are terrible," reported a Chinatown resident. "Dirty air, long hours, from eight in the morning to eight at night, six days! They are paid by the piece and only a few can make good money. They don't protest because they don't know how to talk back and they don't know the law."¹¹

While the women in Chinatown were located largely in the garment industry, many of the men were employed in the restaurants. S. L. Wong, the director of an English-language school in San Francisco's Chinatown, explained how the newcomers were locked in a low-wage restaurant-labor market: "Most immigrants coming into Chinatown with a language barrier cannot go outside this confined area into the mainstream of American industry." Danny Lowe described his predicament: "Before I was a painter in Hong Kong, but I can't do it here. I got no license, no education. I want a living, so it's dishwasher, janitor, or cook."¹²

The low-wage workers included immigrants who had been professionals in China. Winnie Wu had been a mathematics teacher and her husband a professor of Chinese at a university; in San Francisco, she worked as an office clerk and he as a janitor in a hotel. Both wanted to get ahead and they studied English late into the night, until 2 A.M. Wah Tom Wing had been a professional with a college degree in physics. She arrived here in 1976 and went to work on an assembly line. "We are college graduates," she said, "but are working in sewing or electronic factories. We all have taken a big step backwards in our profession or work. Life cannot forever be like this—work, work, and work."¹³

Similarly Wei-Chi Poon and her husband, Boon-Pui Poon, expe-

rienced the problem of underemployment. Before they came in 1968, she had been a young biology professor, and he had been an architect in the People's Republic of China. "We had a really hard time right after we got here," she said. "My husband was a very good architect, but because he couldn't speak English he could work only as a draftsman. His pay was so low that he had to work at two jobs, from eight in the morning till eleven o'clock at night." She worked in a laundry factory, packing uniforms into bags to be sent to Vietnam, while earning only the minimum wage. "The bags were at least one hundred pounds each. At the time, I was one of the younger workers, so I had more strength than some of the others. I got scared, wondering, 'Will I be doing this for the rest of my life?'" She knew she would be trapped in this dead-end job unless she learned English. "We were so busy working and so tired we had no time and energy to study English." A program funded by the Comprehensive Employment Training Act enabled her to take English classes and work as a library assistant in the Chinatown branch of the San Francisco Library. She enrolled in the city's junior college and did so well she was able to be admitted directly to graduate study in library science at San Jose State University. In the 1990s, Wei-Chi Poon became the head of the Asian American Studies Library of the University of California at Berkeley. One of her tasks was to collect books and materials on a new group of Asian Americans—the refugees from Vietnam.¹⁴

Dragon's Teeth of Fire: Vietnam

Unlike the immigrants from China, the Vietnamese were refugees fleeing for their lives. Their country had been a French colony since the late nineteenth century; during World War II, the Vietnam, under the leadership of Ho Chi Minh, fought the French to regain their country's independence. This war ended in 1954 when the French forces were defeated at the battle of Dien Bien Phu. At Geneva shortly afterward, the French and Vietnamese signed an agreement that provided for a temporary partition of Vietnam at the Seventeenth Parallel and for an all-Vietnamese election in 1956. But a year after the Geneva conference, a new government was formed in the south headed by Ngo Dinh Diem, with the support of the United States, to counter the government in the north backed by China and the Soviet Union. The partition of Vietnam became permanent: the election was never held, and civil war erupted. U.S. involvement in the conflict began to

expand significantly in the early sixties when President John Kennedy sent special forces to Vietnam and when President Lyndon Johnson asked Congress to give him war powers in the 1964 Gulf of Tonkin Resolution. The war ended disastrously for South Vietnam and for the United States eleven years later, precipitating a massive exodus of Vietnamese to the United States.

Unlike the other Asian groups already in America, the 1975 wave of Vietnamese migrants did not choose to come here. In fact, they had no decision to make, for they were driven out by the powerful events surrounding them. Most of them were military personnel and their families, in flight from the North Vietnamese troops. A week before the collapse of the South Vietnamese government on April 29, ten to fifteen thousand people were evacuated; then in a frenzy during the last days of April, eighty-six thousand Vietnamese fled from the besieged country.

At the street level, panic gripped the people. "On those last days of April," remembered a refugee, "[there was] a lot of gunfire and bombing around the capital. People were running on chaotic streets. We got scared. We went to an American building where a lot of Americans and their Vietnamese associates were ready to be picked up by American helicopters." They could "feel" the bombing. "Our houses were shaking," said Thai Dang. "Then afterward we went outside and saw abandoned guns and army uniforms on the streets. The soldiers in flight had thrown away their weapons and taken off their clothes. Here and there we saw bodies."¹⁵

The city shuddered under relentless missile bombardments. Homes and buildings were burning everywhere. A poem captured the horrifying experience:

*Fires spring up like dragon's teeth
A furious, acrid wind sweeps them toward us
from all sides
All around, the horizon burns with the color
of death.*

Fleeing from death, frightened people rushed to get out of Saigon. From the roof of the American embassy, hundreds climbed frantically onto helicopters. Others drove to the airport, where they abandoned their cars with notes on the windshields: "For those who are left behind."¹⁶

The refugees had no time to prepare psychologically for departure; more than half of them were given less than ten hours. "I

was afraid of the killings when the Communists came to town," one of them explained. "Mother came along to the airport. Then at the last minute she stayed behind because the number of children staying was larger than those leaving." Many thought they would be gone for only a month or two: "My mother would never have left her other six children behind if she thought she wasn't coming back." Others did not even know they were leaving or where they were going. "I saw everyone running to the harbor, so I decided to go along," recalled a Vietnamese. After reaching the Philippines, a family learned they were bound for the United States; later they said: "We did not plan on taking this trip."¹⁷

Altogether some 130,000 Vietnamese refugees found sanctuary in the United States in 1975. The first-wave refugees generally came from the educated classes: 37 percent of the heads of households had completed high school and 16 percent had been to college. Almost two-thirds could speak English well or with some fluency. Coming from the urban areas, especially Saigon, they were more westernized than the general population. They had worked with the French and then the Americans. About half of them were Christian, a group that represented only 10 percent of the country's population. Unlike the earlier waves of Asian immigrants, they came as family units rather than as young single men; almost half were female. After their arrival in the United States, the 1975 refugees were initially placed in processing camps like Pendleton in California and Fort Chaffee in Arkansas. From the camps they were spread throughout the country, but they soon began to gather in communities such as Orange County, California.¹⁸

Meanwhile, in Vietnam, the fighting had stopped, and "everything had fallen into absolute silence, a silence that was so unusual." Then the new communist government began the reconstruction of society. Businesses were nationalized, and reeducation camps were instituted for individuals associated with the old regime. "New Economic Zones" were developed for the movement of the population to the countryside. Thousands of Vietnamese, particularly urban businessmen and professional elites, were ordered to "go to the country to do labour, the hard jobs, to make the irrigation canals, sometimes for one month, sometimes for two, or three months." "I remember the choked mute lines of families trudging out of the cities to begin agricultural work in the countryside," said an ethnic Chinese businessman. "They had no prior knowledge of how to do that job, yet they had no choice." One

of them said: "Life was very hard for everybody. All had changed! I could see no future for me in Vietnam, no better life! I wanted to escape."¹⁹

Thousands did escape—21,000 in 1977, 106,500 in 1978, over 150,000 in 1979, and scores of thousands later. The second-wave Vietnamese refugees took their wives and children and boarded crowded, leaky boats, risking their lives at sea, where storms threatened to drown them and pirates waited to rob them and rape the women. Two-thirds of the boats were attacked by pirates, each boat an average of more than two times. Luong Bot Chau told the terrifying story of what happened to her. She and her husband, along with more than two dozen refugees, sailed away on a small thirty-foot vessel; off the coast of Thailand, their boat was attacked by Thai pirates. The pirates chopped off one of her husband's fingers to get his ring and then tried to slit his throat. "But the knife they had was too blunt," she said later. Instead they clubbed him to death and threw his body into the sea. Then they dragged the young girls up to the deck and systematically raped them. "We heard them scream and scream," Luong Bot Chau cried. "We could not get out, because the pirates had nailed down the hatch."²⁰

The survivors floated to Thailand, where they were forced to live in squalid refugee camps for months and often years. From the camps, they went to countries like Australia, Canada, and France, but most of them came to the United States. "In 1978 my sister, Nguyet, my brothers Tinh, Hung, my father, and I left the country," wrote Tuyet Anh Nguyen in a letter to me. "My mom and sister and couple of brothers stayed in Vietnam. It was so hard for my family to suffer the separation." The second-wave refugees were diverse, including educated professionals as well as fishermen, farmers, and storekeepers from the rural areas and small coastal cities and villages. Unlike the earlier refugees from Saigon, most of them did not speak English. Approximately 40 percent of the second wave were ethnic Chinese Vietnamese. They had experienced hostility from Vietnamese society for decades and became targets of discrimination under the new communist regime. The government's program of nationalizing the economy focused heavily on the ethnic Chinese: constituting 7 percent of the country's population, they controlled about 80 percent of its retail trade. Furthermore, military conflict had broken out between China and Vietnam in 1979, and the ethnic Chinese in Vietnam found themselves caught in the political crossfire.²¹

In 1985 there were 643,200 Vietnamese in the United States.

"Remember these are the people who were on our side," an American veteran of the Vietnam War said. "They have a right to come to this country as refugees. They just need a home." But often they did not feel welcome. Like earlier Asian immigrants, the Vietnamese felt the stings of racial slurs and were sometimes called names like "Chink" and told to "go back to China." "It's really hard for you [Americans] to understand us," said a Vietnamese immigrant, "and we don't expect you to, but we do expect you to treat us as human beings and not be prejudiced."²²

Many Vietnamese, especially those who fought in the army, fiercely refused to abandon their country to the communists. At Tet New Year celebrations, they gathered under a banner trumpeting the slogan *To Quoc Ten Het, "Country Above All."* "We shall return," they shouted as they pledged themselves to the "liberation of Vietnam." Many refugees nurtured strong attachments to their homeland. "Vietnam is my home," said a refugee in 1988 as she described her determination to go back. She had been in the United States for ten years and had even become a naturalized citizen, but she adamantly claimed her Vietnamese identity. "I get angry, mad," she argued, "when I see Vietnamese children who can't speak Vietnamese." They included her own, born in the United States. When asked what would happen to her children when she returned to Vietnam, she answered: "They will have to choose between the two countries."²³

But the choice was saturated with ambivalence. "If Vietnam were a free country," said Loan Vo Le, who had fled from Saigon in April 1975, "I would like to go back. I miss my family so much. But we couldn't stay. I'm afraid we are too spoiled by life here, the conveniences, the opportunities, the education and the freedom. I feel like a Vietnamese American, but inside I'm still Vietnamese."²⁴

In their adopted country, many refugees realized that Vietnamese culture could not be strictly maintained, particularly in terms of gender roles. "In Vietnam, the women usually were dependent on the husband a great deal," a husband explained. "Then when we came here, the Vietnamese women had jobs. This made the men feel extremely insecure." But he himself had overcome this problem. "My wife didn't work in Vietnam. Now because she is working, I start to help her with the dishes and chores around the house. Sometimes when I am on vacation and she is working, I try new recipes so that when she comes home the meals are ready. She never tells me that I should help her, but I think because she is working like me too, I should give her a hand."²⁵

Finding new opportunities in America, many women reinvented themselves. Winnie Che, for example, began working as a waitress in 1981. "My first job I felt so happy," she said. "I can work! Somebody will hire me here." Che saved her money and took loans from family and friends and in 1983 opened a restaurant, the Little Sai-Gon, in Carnation, Washington. "In Vietnam, I would be just a housewife: clean up, cook dinner. Here, if you work hard, you can do what you want." Vietnamese women like Winnie Che began to stretch and feel the arches of their backs, freeing themselves for new activities and identities. But this exercise of new freedom was often accompanied by conflict within the family as college-educated Vietnamese women seeking professional careers tried to break from the traditions of arranged marriages and female subservient roles.²⁶

Thrust abruptly into a very different culture, the Vietnamese found their traditional family ties severely strained. "Back in Vietnam the family is something precious for us—father, mother, children," explained Tran Xuan Quang. "But in coming here, we saw that the family here is too loose. The father works in one place, the mother works in another, and they don't see each other at all. Sometimes the father works in the morning and the mother works in the afternoon and the children go to school. When they get home, they hardly see each other at all." Many children began to lose their Vietnamese language. "I hated it when Americans teased me about my language," complained Mai Khanh Tran. "Maybe that's why I don't talk in Vietnamese in front of an American anymore. When I first came here, I used to talk in Vietnamese, but ever since they teased me I don't feel comfortable doing it anymore. At home I do because my parents always talk Vietnamese and I'm trying to preserve what I have for as long as possible. But I can feel it's slipping away."²⁷

Most refugees began to realize that their stay in America would be permanent. "In their heart, they want to go back," observed San Francisco State University professor Chuong Hoang Chung. "But reality has crept in and they know they will be here for a long time. They receive letters from home saying the conditions are terrible and don't come back. They are also having children born here." Many Vietnamese would like to become part of American society. "I think it's necessary to acculturate to some degree in order to move up and most important to live within the society in harmony," said one of them. "For example, if we are strangers in the neighborhood, there might be some resistance from the

natives. But if we become their friends and show them that we are nice people too, then their anti-Vietnamese attitude would alter. In fact, if different people understand each other, then there will be a lot less hatred between races." He hoped the understanding would be based on accepting and appreciating them as Vietnamese as well as Americans.²⁸

Meanwhile, the refugees concentrated on more immediate economic needs. Many of them secured new jobs that did not have the remunerative rewards and status of the work they had done in Vietnam. There many of the refugees had been professionals and managers; here they became workers in craft, operative, and service employment. "In Vietnam I was a history and geography teacher," a refugee told an interviewer. "Here I worked on many different jobs—bricklayer, carpenter, clerk typist, salesman, truck driver, delivery man. I felt frustrated and depressed because I had social status and possessions in Vietnam. Here I didn't have anything." "I am a patient man," another Vietnamese refugee said. "If I have to start over again, I believe I will make it someday. I believe I will become self-sufficient as an auto mechanic. Most refugees have only one hope: to have a job and become a taxpayer."²⁹

Actually, many Vietnamese have achieved much more. In California, where the Vietnamese have concentrated and where 40 percent have made their homes, they have created their own Vietnamese colonies or ethnic enclaves. In 1988 the city council of Westminster, Orange County, officially designated the area along Bolsa Avenue from Magnolia to Bushard as "Little Saigon." This section constitutes a "large language island." "A walk down the Bolsa Avenue can testify to the extensive use and importance of Vietnamese," observed Chuong Hoang Chung. "A look at directories published in Vietnamese and distributed free to Vietnamese shoppers shows that any Vietnamese resident of Orange County can obtain all necessary services without ever having to use English."³⁰

Over the years, in Orange and Los Angeles counties, Vietnamese-owned businesses have proliferated. Vietnamese professionals have become doctors and dentists, and ethnic Chinese Vietnamese have become almost ubiquitous in restaurants and grocery stores. Their businesses have not been just mom-and-pop stores. In fact, many of the retailers had been big merchants in Vietnam and had brought capital with them to the United States: here they opened supermarket chains like Wai Wai Supermarkets and Man Wah Supermarkets. "For people who do business here, they

feel as if they are doing business at home," said Hoang Giao of the Vietnamese Chamber of Commerce in Los Angeles. Most of the shop signs in Westminster were in Vietnamese only. But the merchants of Little Saigon have begun to reach out for a larger customer market. In some Vietnamese stores, signs announce: "Se habla español."³¹

In northern California, Vietnamese entrepreneurs have been flourishing in San Jose. "Vietnamese now constitute 10 percent of San Jose's population and have moved into its commercial life in an aggressive way," reported T. T. Nhu in 1988. "Nearly forty percent of the retail business in downtown San Jose is Vietnamese.... The fact is that the Vietnamese have become an inescapable presence in San Jose. They want to become part of San Jose because they are here to stay." Downtown San Jose had been in decline until the arrival of the Vietnamese newcomers. "There's a new vitality downtown and it's the Vietnamese who have made it what it is today," stated Doanh Chau, executive director of the Vietnamese Chamber of Commerce. "It was abandoned. But the past few years has brought a new life to the area."³²

Signs of Vietnamese-American settlement are certainly evident. Significantly, more Vietnamese have recently begun coming to America as immigrants: they are entering under the Orderly Departure Program, an agreement between Vietnam and the United States begun in 1982 which encourages family reunification by allowing twenty thousand Vietnamese to enter the United States annually. In 2000, the Vietnamese-American population totaled 1,388,000. Their presence has been folded into the larger social landscape: their favorite noodle soup, pho, has become an American dish.³³

Wars of Terror: Afghanistan

Like the Vietnamese, they came as refugees, but from another region of the world—from Afghanistan, a landlocked Muslim country nearly the size of Texas, wedged between Pakistan, Iran, and the Soviet Union (the area now comprising the countries of Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan, and Tajikistan). Ruled by a monarchy and then a constitutional monarchy, the nation became a republic in 1973, when Mohammed Daoud Khan staged a coup and forced King Zahir Shah into exile. Five years later, Daoud himself was deposed. In 1979, the Soviet Union invaded Afghanistan and installed procommunist Babrak Karmal as the new leader.

Like Vietnam, Afghanistan became a battleground of the Cold

War. Concerned that Russian domination of Afghanistan could threaten U.S. access to the oil resources of Central Asia, the American government helped finance and arm the mujahideen—the anti-Soviet "freedom fighters." An Afghan refugee now living in California recalled: "They were helping the mujahideen. The mujahideen were bad." The fighting turned into a civil war. "Bloody battles were everywhere. Communists and religious people, and many different groups inside Afghanistan were fighting with each other. Cousins turned on cousins, brothers turned on brothers. Sometimes, fathers turned on their sons." The bloody fighting lasted for ten years, ending with the withdrawal of Soviet troops in 1989. "We beat the Russians!" exclaimed Afghan refugees in America as many of them prepared to return to their homeland.³⁴

Then, before the exiles could buy their plane tickets, civil war broke out between rival anti-Soviet factions, with Iran and Pakistan playing major support roles. In 1996, the Pakistan-backed Taliban faction took control of the capital city of Kabul, which became the base for extending its domination over the rest of Afghanistan. Refugee Sediqullah Rahi said: "The Taliban are very primitive, closed-minded people. They are not allowing anything progressive in Afghanistan. Our economy is destroyed, our social life is destroyed, our people's lives are nothing. And, now, they're destroying our cultural life, too."³⁵

Before the Taliban came to power, Kabul resembled a modern Paris. "I grew up in Kabul City during the 1960s," recalled a mother now living in Fremont, California. "Girls wore makeup, miniskirts, and went to school. Some of us even flirted with boys." Such Western lifestyles were suddenly banned. Imposing their fundamentalist version of Islam, the Taliban forced women to cover themselves in burqas, garments that covered their entire bodies, with nets hiding their faces. "One day," recalled Asia Miskeenar, now also in Fremont, "I went to buy shoes for my son and found it hard to breathe under the afternoon sun so I removed the burqa from covering my face. A Taliban soldier spotted me in the crowded marketplace and demanded that I cover myself again. I explained that I couldn't breathe and he fired his gun in the open air. My heart was pounding and my crying son was squeezing my thighs." After Miskeenar escaped with her children to Pakistan, she pulled off the burqa that had kept her "in the shadows for so long. I handed it to some other woman in the street. I hated that thing!"³⁶

Then came September 11, 2001. The hijackers who attacked the World Trade Center and the Pentagon were traced to Al-Qaeda, a terrorist organization based in Afghanistan and headed by Osama bin Laden, a Saudi Arabian. In 2002, Western powers, led by the United States, invaded Afghanistan; with the help of anti-Taliban factions, the coalition quickly routed the Taliban. But the Taliban had not been vanquished.

Memories of the wars and their harrowing escape from their homeland remain alive for Afghan refugees. Now living in the United States, Farhad Ahad wrote a story, "My Mother's Courage," published in 2003 in *Afghan Journal: An Inter-Generational Afghan American Voice*. In 1984, his parents had become convinced that the end of the war between the Russian-backed government forces and Western-backed rebels was not in sight. So in December his mother left for Pakistan with his five sisters and baby brother. "My mother had been gone for three months, and we had no news of her whatsoever, when miraculously one day she appeared at the door." She had successfully crossed the border and delivered all of his siblings to her cousins; then she had returned for her husband and Farhad. His father took his time getting ready to depart. "One of the clearest quotes I remember from my mother," he wrote, "was 'We have to go. I will not wait one more day not knowing how my children are doing over there.'" They went. "We started riding on top of camels, mules, and donkeys, but ended up traversing most of the otherwise impassable terrain on foot." His mother never lost her "cool, calm demeanor, and would press on, almost leading the entire caravan of escapees."³⁷

Another refugee, a teacher in her homeland, was not able to save everyone in her family. Recently widowed, she was living in Kabul with four daughters, ranging in age from three to fifteen, and an eleven-year-old son. In 1996, after a rocket destroyed their home, she decided that the time had come to escape. She and her children joined a group of strangers preparing to trek to Pakistan. Covering herself and her daughters with burqas, she commanded them not to speak, for to do so would betray their educated accents at the Taliban checkpoints; they were trying to sneak by as illiterate nomadic tribal people. "One day," this mother recalled, "as we were crossing the mountains on foot, my 13-year-old daughter had an asthma attack. When we came upon a Taliban check post, my daughter began gasping for air. In a panic to breathe, she lifted her burqa to try to get some air. The Taliban started beat-

ing my daughter with rubber tubes." Her young son then threw a stone and hit the Taliban commander. The soldiers turned on him. "I screamed and screamed and screamed as they beat him unconscious then dragged him away to one of the camps hidden in the caves in the mountains. That was the last time I saw my son." The mother knew she had to keep walking to Pakistan to save her daughters.³⁸

For this mother and 2 million other refugees, Pakistan turned out to be a hellhole. After they successfully trekked across the mountains into Pakistan, they were herded into crowded, dangerous, and disease-infested camps. In the midst of grinding poverty, many parents were forced to make their children work in brick and carpet-weaving factories where they were beaten, sexually abused, and given opium to stimulate them to work harder. In the chaotic misery of the camps, hunger prevailed, and a grim future awaited them. The lucky ones escaped from the nightmarish camps, making their way to Europe and the United States. In 2007, the Afghan newcomers totaled about 240,000 people in America.

In the beginning, the refugees found life in their new homeland confusing and challenging. "Two months after leaving Kabul," one of them recalled, "my husband and my children and I were living in an apartment in Alameda, California. It was 1980. We had one bed for the entire family, and used a cardboard box as our dining table." They quickly ran out of money. "We didn't know the language. We did not know the culture. We were scared. What was this thing called America? we asked ourselves." There were no mosques, and they were afraid to go outside their apartment. "But I was lucky, we were lucky. My little girl, and my baby boy, and my husband. We escaped. We were safe."³⁹

Like this woman and her family, some sixty thousand Afghan refugees settled in the San Francisco Bay Area, most of them in Fremont. There they found hills that reminded them of their homeland and were attracted to the city's growing diversity. The population of this bedroom community was being transformed: once predominantly white, the community had come to include Chinese, South Asians, Mexicans, and Afghans. The refugees were also pulled to Fremont by word-of-mouth tales about an emerging Afghan community, with refugee social services, educational support such as ESL (English as a Second Language), and Afghan-American organizations and businesses.

"As they say, Fremont is happening," observed Feraidoon

Mojadidi, owner of the Rumi Bookstore, where people can find Afghan magazines, newspapers, and books. Close to his bookstore are Afghan restaurants that feature kabobs, *pallow* (a rice dish similar to pilaf), and fragrant bread. Nearby are grocery stores that sell halal meats and sweet green melons native to Afghanistan. "We have many Afghan-owned businesses here, in fact this area [of Fremont] is dubbed Little Kabul," explained Homoyoun Kharmosh, a "freedom fighter" and physician who had left his homeland in 1991. Without the credentials to practice medicine in the United States, he operates a grocery store that sells Afghan breads and other Afghan foods. "I'm married and trying to support my family, so if business continues to be good I plan to buy another business. Many of my countrymen have businesses that range from hot-dog stands and gas stations to high-tech work in giant Silicon Valley corporations."⁴⁰

As they settle in Little Kabul, Afghan Americans are transplanting their traditions. They celebrate the Afghan New Year—Nowruz. As their ancestors did for thousands of years, they dress up, eat homeland foods, and dance to Afghan music. "We will celebrate our tradition over here," said Suraya Ahmadzai, who had arrived in Fremont with her two daughters and three sons in 2000. "We're not going to forget about it." The new Americans also built a \$2 million mosque, attended by Afghan men in traditional turbans as well as by younger men in designer jeans and baseball caps.⁴¹

Beneath the surface of Little Kabul's prosperity and progress have been overwhelming economic and personal difficulties. The host of Lemar-TV, a television program for the Afghan community in Fremont, Naseem Yar, told me: "Here in America, many refugee men find they have no status in the home. They don't work. They don't want to work at a gas station." Many of the women also do not work. Unable to speak English and unable to work, widows find themselves on welfare, with their eldest sons working to help pay the bills. They stay at home, keeping the curtains drawn out of fear of being seen.⁴²

Fear became widespread among Afghan Americans in the days after the 9/11 terrorist attacks. Upon waking up that morning, Nadia Ali Maiwand found a message from her mother on her answering machine. "My mom was nervous and stuttering about what she had seen on TV. I caught something about twin towers falling before the machine cut her off. I called and got the details. Thousands dead, she told me, the towers are gone." In the follow-

ing days and weeks, Maiwand noticed anxiety sweeping through the Afghan community. "Some Afghans claimed Greek, Italian or Hispanic heritage to prevent abuse and hid their 'Allah' pendants under their clothes." Some Afghans tried to demonstrate their American patriotism by hanging U.S. flags from their porches.⁴³

"When 9/11 happened," wrote Nadeem Saeed in an e-mail to me dated September 11, 2007, "I remember being in my English class at Ohlone College in Fremont. The teacher walked in very sad, so sad that she was almost about to cry." She canceled the class to let the students be with their families. Leaving campus, Nadeem and his fellow countrymen were afraid that since they were Afghans, they would be attacked and arrested. "My father told me to be extra careful now because the law is going to be much stricter on us." Nadeem saw the events of 9/11 as an anxious turning point for Afghan Americans. "I really felt like that's it, the world is not a world that we once knew anymore, but rather a world that we will never know again. It was at this moment that I realized that everything is going to change. Being Afghan American is not what people think it was before; now it's what people want to know about you and who you really are inside, an American or a terrorist."⁴⁴

"After 9/11," recalled Zarpana Reitman, an Afghan-American teacher in a nearby school, "Afghan children were asked by their fellow students. 'Are you Muslim?' 'Do you know Osama bin Laden?' The Afghan children became subversives. Some of them pretended they were Mexican. The source of the problem of ignorance of Muslims is the curriculum. Children are taught about the heroic Crusaders who defended Europe against the evil Muslim invaders."⁴⁵

That morning was also vividly remembered by Dr. Mohammad Qayoumi, the current president of California State University, East Bay. Years earlier, he had been a student in the U.S. Midwest, when the Soviets invaded his homeland and forced his family to flee to Pakistan. On September 11, 2001, he was driving from Northridge to Long Beach, California, and was listening to the radio. Suddenly came the reports of the attacks on the World Trade Center. He wondered who might have done it and hoped it was not any Muslim terrorists. In the days that followed, Dr. Qayoumi noted that most Muslim Americans spoke out against the atrocity committed by a handful of terrorists. He also found "heartwarming" the support they received from many Americans. "When some Muslims were attacked by thugs in various

U.S. cities, many Americans spoke out against such travesties." But still Dr. Qayoumi was concerned that "there were those who questioned whether Muslims like me could be true to their religion and be patriotic Americans as well."⁷⁵

In the wake of 9/11, what did it mean to be an Afghan American? This was the foremost question addressed at a conference organized by Melanie Gadener, an activist in Fremont's Afghan-American community. Entitled "East Meets West: Awakening to the Challenges of Afghans in Fremont, California," the conference was held in Little Kabul on June 23, 2007, and attended by more than three hundred people from the community, young and old. To assist in the communication between the generations, headsets were distributed for people to listen to instant translations from English into Farsi and Dari, two Afghan languages.

In her welcoming remarks, the master of ceremonies, Zarpana Reitman, asked the participants to think about their identity—what it means for "East to meet West" in the Afghan-American community.

One of the participants, Layma Murtaza, told a reporter about her struggle to be both "East" and "West." Her parents had left Afghanistan after the Soviet invasion; born and raised in Fremont, she has never been to Afghanistan but feels a strong bond with her cultural heritage. "There are a lot of kids my age," the twenty-four-year-old Murtaza said, "who don't understand or appreciate what their parents went through. We are half American. It's not a bad thing or a good thing. It's who we are. But Afghanistan is also embedded in me—it is who I am, at least a part of me."⁷⁶

Still, to be both American and Afghan has not been easy. A pan-elist at the conference, Tamim Ansary, author of *West of Kabul, East of New York: An Afghan American Story*, declared: "It is very difficult to live on two sides because the border runs up through you, and that is uncomfortable."⁷⁸

One of the conference organizers, Nadeem Saeed, offered his own metaphor for the dual identity many young people feel. His parents had fled from their homeland after the Russian invasion, and he was born in Dubai, United Arab Emirates. "I identify myself as being an Afghan American," he said. "I am Afghan because that is what my parents are and that's the blood running through my veins. And I am an American because that's what makes most of my character and style. I guess you can call me a grilled cheese sandwich, except the cheese is Afghan and the toast is American. But nonetheless, a proud American I am and

very thankful for the freedom this country has given me to pursue my goals and dreams."⁷⁹

Nadeem recently graduated with a degree in public health. When asked, "What are your dreams?" Nadeem answered: "I want to go back to Afghanistan, to open a hospital." Asked the same question, Zarpana Reitman replied: "I was six months old when my parents left Afghanistan because of the Russian invasion. It has always been a dream of mine to go back to Afghanistan, and to open a school there. But would it be good for my two-year-old child to be there, with all the bombings?"⁸⁰

One purpose of the "East Meets West" conference was to offer a common ground for the older and younger generations to interact and try to resolve their differences in culture and identity. During the Q&A, a young man commented that "cross-generational education has to be two-way. The elders want cultural retention. The young people are uncertain about what to do. There has to be change on both sides." A father of four children and grandfather of five told a reporter for the *San Francisco Chronicle*: "No one really taught us about the cross-cultural differences. We've had to learn them ourselves. They've created some problems between parents and children. In our country, children do not speak in front of their elders. But here they express themselves. Back when we first started immigrating to the U.S., conferences like this should have been arranged."⁸¹

One of the young people attending the conference was Fatema Nourzaie. Her parents had fled Afghanistan after the Soviet invasion, and she was born in California. The 9/11 terrorist attack was an experience she would never forget. "I started hearing how girls in hijab were being attacked," Fatema recalled. "Indians were getting shot because they 'looked' Middle Eastern, and mosques were getting burned down. That was the only time ever I was afraid to be a Muslim."

Even before that world-shattering event, Fatema had been struggling over her identity as an Afghan American. "I don't think I could ever completely label myself as either one or the other," she explained. "I am just as much American as I am Afghan." She was raised in the United States and did not know what it was like for her parents and brothers to come here from "a different world." But she had to face the fact that she was a daughter in a Muslim family. "It was hard to convince my parents to let me go to the football games or dances. It's a hard thing for Afghan parents to let their daughter go out no matter what the reason." Still Fatema

understood that Muslim parents in America felt they needed to preserve many of the old ways.

Fatema would like to be both Afghan and American. "Afghans have integrated instead of assimilated," she explained. "Fremont would be a good example. Afghans have managed to keep their culture and identity. It hasn't been lost in the idea of assimilation. That's when you totally and completely become the culture that you have immigrated to and completely lose your people's original identity. Afghans have kept their uniqueness, the beauty of their culture, and at the same time have thoroughly functioned in today's society. I think that's what integration means."⁵²

Fatema's brother Omar summed up the challenge facing Afghan Americans: "The refugees know that a return to Afghanistan is not in their near future. They will have to change and make do in America."⁵³ Indeed, Afghan Americans, refugees and their U.S.-born children, are "making do": they have begun to sort out and blend old and new cultures and identities. Across generations, they are, in one way or another and to varying degrees, reinventing themselves. They are also helping to change their adopted country, making America a nation of many religions, including Islam.

Beckoned North: Mexico

Joining the newcomers from Russia, Ireland, China, Vietnam, and Afghanistan are 12 million undocumented immigrants, mostly from Mexico.

What should be done about them? Arrest them and deport them to Mexico, argue the opponents of Mexican immigration. Build bigger fences and send troops to guard the border in order to keep them out of America; prohibit them from taking jobs away from American citizens; deny them driver's licenses, access to schools and medical services; and refuse to offer them English-language classes. Tell them to stay home in Mexico. Beneath this nativist clamor is a fear of the "Browning of America," one that can be found not only in television and radio talk shows, but also print news media and anti-immigrant legislation.

Give them "amnesty," answered *Time* magazine in its June 18, 2007, cover story, "Immigration: Why Amnesty Makes Sense." The "illegals are by their sheer numbers undepotable. More important, they are too enmeshed in a healthy U.S. economy to be extracted." America is "the only industrialized nation with a population that is growing fast enough...to provide the kind

of workforce that a dynamic economy needs. The illegals are part of the reason for that, and amnesty ensures that competitive advantage." *Time* also argued that the Mexican immigrants would eventually be incorporated into the culture of their new homeland. "Assimilation is slow, but inevitable." We must have "faith in America's undimmed ability to metabolize immigrants from around the world, to change them more than they change the U.S."⁵⁴

Like the earlier waves of immigrants crossing our southern border, Mexicans are being pushed by intensifying poverty. But this time it is different. The illegal border crossings from Mexico spiked upward after 1994, the year the North American Free Trade Agreement became U.S.-Mexican policy. Under NAFTA, government-subsidized corn grown in Iowa and shipped to Mexico as cheap corn bankrupted 1.5 million farmers there, forcing them to migrate to the cities and also northward across the border. Free trade has also destabilized the Mexican economy and led to increases in unemployment. "The real, dirty secret of trade agreements is displacement," wrote journalist David Bacon. "During the years NAFTA has been in effect, more than 6 million people from Mexico have come to live in the United States. They didn't abandon their homes, families, and farms and jobs willingly. They had no other option for survival."⁵⁵

Pushed by the need to survive, the migrants have also been pulled by a pursuit of happiness. "Back where we're from it was a very poor community," an immigrant explained. "There was no work there. We just planted corn. So, when we saw that we could not support ourselves, well, we said we have to start looking elsewhere." "Elsewhere" has become "El Norte." "You can see why people go to America," a Mexican stated. "They come back with brand-new trucks, with videos; they have dollars. And it has an impact. You say, 'Wow, there's the good life.'" One of the immigrants recalled that her friend had first migrated to the United States. "She would always write and tell me it was very pretty and that you could live here better. And that people don't have to be very skilled to live better." Women sometimes came alone, or with only their children. "My husband left me," one said, "and there was an opportunity for me to come. I decided to come here because I wanted to try living here, know what it is like here. I saw that it was easy for me, although I had to struggle because it was hard to understand people. But I've struggled for my children more than anything else."⁵⁶

But crossing the northern border is enormously stressful. One of their songs gives an eye-level view of the experience:

*Now boys, to earn lots of dollars,
They left Mexico.
Since they didn't bring any papers,
They crossed as "wire fence jumpers."
They crossed over the hills.
They turned and twisted on the paths.
It was night.
A helicopter searched attempting to find
them,
But with all the bushes, they couldn't see
anything.*

On this side of the border, Mexicans have often had to run across busy freeways, where scores of them have been killed. Signs have been posted: "CAUTION—WATCH FOR PEOPLE CROSSING ROAD." One sign has the word "CAUTION," with a silhouette of a man, woman, and child. Forced by the border patrol to find alternate routes, many of them have died in hot deserts, their bodies rotting in desolate canyons.⁵⁷

The illegal immigrants have kept coming because they know that employers are willing and ready to hire them. Like earlier farm laborers, they are laboring in the fields and orchards of America. Without them, California's agriculture would shut down, warned Senator Dianne Feinstein. There would be sharp increases in the prices of fruits and vegetables, and a revolt by consumers if food costs skyrocketed. At stake, she stated, is the future of California's \$32 billion agriculture industry, with its seventy-six thousand farms and 1 million laborers.

To meet California's need for agricultural workers, President George W. Bush proposed a guest worker program. But his proposal had a definite downside. "Guest workers would have to return home and stay there for up to one year before they would be eligible to come back again," wrote conservative activist Linda Chavez and union leader John W. Wilhelm. "And while working as 'guests,' they would constitute a second class of workers with few rights on the job. It harkens back to the dark period in the 1860s when we admitted tens of thousands of Chinese male laborers to help build our railroads and then prevented them from ever

naturalizing or bringing their families into America. Do we really want to repeat this experiment?"⁵⁸

In order to stop the flow of illegal immigrants from Mexico, President Bush sent six thousand National Guard troops to the border in 2006. His action provoked the *San Francisco Chronicle* to issue an editorial entitled "The Border Is Not a Military Zone." "The reality is that he is chasing a mirage that will always be out of reach as long as U.S. immigration policy is detached from reality." Since the early 1990s, the number of border patrol agents has doubled. "The result? There are three times as many illegal immigrants in the United States as a decade ago." One reason is revealed in statistics: "In the early 1980s, half of all undocumented migrants returned home within a year of entering the United States. By 2000 only 25 percent did."⁵⁹

Years earlier, a conservative Republican leader had raised his voice in support of the illegal immigrants. In a radio broadcast in 1977, Ronald Reagan noted the apples rotting on the trees in New England for lack of workers. "It makes one wonder about the illegal-alien fuss. Are great numbers of our unemployed really victims of the illegal-alien invasion or are those illegal tourists actually doing the work our own people won't do?" he asked. "One thing is certain in this hungry world: no regulation or law should be allowed if it results in crops rotting in the fields for lack of harvesters." Nine years later, as president of the United States, Reagan signed the Immigration and Control Act, which gave many illegal immigrants immediate permanent residency—green cards, granted in a fast-track application process for a small fee.⁶⁰

In addition to agriculture, undocumented Mexican immigrants are working in poultry processing plants, garment factories, construction, hotels, and restaurants. They also labor in homes, cleaning houses and babysitting, often being paid extremely low wages. Though the undocumented newcomers usually earn very little money, they rarely seek publicly financed medical assistance, food stamps, or welfare, for fear they will be apprehended and deported. Yet they pay taxes. A 2006 report of the Public Policy Institute of California pointed out that many illegal immigrants pay social security taxes but never collect benefits. A young and working population, they help to subsidize the Social Security retirement program benefiting mainly an aging white population.⁶¹

Individual stories humanize the experiences of these undocumented immigrants. One of them is Carmen Diera Trujillo. "I was

born in a small town called Jerez," she recalled. "I began to work when I was eight years old. Since my family was always short on money, we did not have money to pay for rent and food. So I began to work cleaning houses for the wealthy." At the age of sixteen, Carmen was told by her sister that she would have to go to the United States to work. "I had a boyfriend, and I did not want to leave my friends." But Carmen crossed the border, and initially worked as a housecleaner. "I started my life here living behind closed doors. I was not allowed to leave all week until Saturday. I cleaned the house, took care of the children, and since they knew I had come from Mexico, they would want me to cook Mexican food. They gave me videos, cassettes, and books so that at night I can study English. But since I never went to school, it was difficult to learn English because I did not know how to even write in Spanish."

But Carmen was able to get a Social Security card and began working as a seamstress in the garment factories of Los Angeles. "None of my employers ever asked me for my papers. A lot of employers liked the way I worked so they would look for me whenever they needed to complete a job. I even began to work two shifts because they knew that I was a hard worker. Sometimes it was 2:00 A.M. and I was still in downtown working."

After the enactment of the 1986 immigration law, Carmen was allowed to stay permanently. "I had done my taxes every year since I began working in the garment factories. I had all the papers as proof of being a qualified applicant for amnesty. I always hoped to become legalized since all of my children were already here in the U.S. and they were by birth legal." Though she had no opportunity for schooling in Mexico, she is proud that her children have fulfilled her hopes—a master's degree in school counseling, an emergency medical technician, and two future teachers.⁶²

Camelia Palafox also has an inspiring story. "Ever since I was little," she revealed, "I used to tell myself that I would be a singer. I have always loved music. Everywhere there was a party, I used to sing." Camelia began singing with a small theater group in Tijuana and toured the state of Baja California. "I got a scholarship for being the best actress of all Baja California. The scholarship was a full-paid tuition for study in Mexico City. I remember when I got the scholarship, the theater group director, Professor Orozco, looked at me with a happy and sad face. He was happy for my achievements, but he was upset because he knew that at the time I [was pregnant] with my first child." The father abandoned

the family. "I was eighteen when I had Jose. I worked and took care of my son by myself. I don't regret my decision, but I would have liked to have traveled to Mexico City and see many things there."

After working as a sales clerk in Tijuana, Camelia realized that in order to make more money, she needed to work in the United States. With her sister, she began doing housework in San Diego. "Cleaning houses for one or two days in San Diego would earn us the same amount of money that we would get if we worked in Tijuana for one whole week." The work was hard, and sometimes she was cheated by her employers; at other times she found that men advertising for domestic work wanted "other things and not really housecleaning."

Camelia then started working as a waitress in a Mexican-owned restaurant. "Most of the customers there were Mexicans. Every once in a while *la migrá* [the Immigration and Naturalization Service, or INS] would arrest a busload of undocumented people. Sometimes they would go undercover and check out the scene. Next thing you knew, people were running all over the place." Camelia was always afraid that she would be arrested and deported. "I felt ashamed that I didn't have papers. I felt inferior. I was scared that I would get put in a van with other people. I felt like we would be treated like animals, as if we were the dogs, and they [the INS] were the dogcatchers." In 1979, Camelia decided that it was time to sneak her five-year-old son, Jose, across the border. "I missed him a lot. It was luck that a friend's husband was able to cross him as a U.S. citizen with no problems at all."

Many years after she crossed the border, Camelia was allowed to stay permanently. She took special classes and passed an examination to qualify her to work in a retirement home. "What I really like about my job is that I'm helping others. I love doing that. I come home from work, and I feel good because I know I did something to help somebody." Reflecting on her life, Camelia said: "Now that I'm a U.S. citizen, I feel a little safer. Also, as a citizen, one can vote and have their voice heard. I also got Jose to get his U.S. citizenship. When I found out that my son had been accepted to UC Berkeley, I was really happy."⁶³

Today, young Mexican Americans are striving to find a place for themselves in the America of their dreams. One of them is Alexis Lopez. In 1950, when his grandfather Juan Frias was seventeen years old, he left his village in Mexico to find work. "During this time," Alexis wrote, "a craze of making it big in the United States

sparked throughout most of the 31 Mexican states." Juan worked in the fields of California, visiting his homeland to get married and have children but returning to the United States to work. In 1976, he decided to make his home permanently in San Francisco and brought his wife and two of his older children. One of them was Alexis's mother, Griselda. After graduation from high school, she worked as a cashier and cook at a Mexican restaurant, where she met Leonardo Lopez. Her parents disapproved of Leonardo, but she married him. Though he had been angry, her father finally came around with the birth of Alexis—"Juan's first grandchild and the first real Mexican American."

Alexis has had to navigate between his two identities. "I grew up speaking Spanish because that is the main language my parents spoke at home." But "I also had a television along with Nickelodeon and the Disney Channel teaching me English, along with the English-speaking children at Woodrow Wilson Elementary School." In high school, Alexis joined the Puente Program—an outreach program for educationally and financially underserved Latinos. "This program allowed me to interact with other Mexican American students and to become more college bound. Education was not something that was necessarily promoted throughout any of the generations that came before me. My grandfather worked in the fields of California. My mother spent her childhood in Mexico, and then was taken to the U.S., where she worked and began having children as a young woman. I have the opportunity to do something else, not that it is necessarily better, but different. It is because of these generations that I am able to want something 'more'—that I am privileged to have these opportunities. They came to this country to make a better life and the only thing they would want is for those that come after them, like me, to make them proud."⁶⁴

Alexis knows he is one of a fortunate few among Mexican-American students. In June 2007, the *San Francisco Chronicle* reported that Latinos have the lowest level of education of any racial group in the state. Just one in seven Latino high school graduates attends college, although they represent 48 percent of all high school students. "At stake is not only the future success of these young people in a job market that increasingly requires a college degree, but the viability of the California economy. If the majority of the state's future population lacks a good education, California will have too few skilled workers to meet the needs of

the information-driven economy and too few middle-class taxpayers to keep the state afloat fiscally as baby boomers retire."⁶⁵

However, Mexican-American students who qualify for college admissions often encounter an additional hurdle. Belonging to families here illegally, they must pay exorbitant out-of-state tuition in many states. Criticizing this policy, columnist Cynthia Tucker wrote: "Having taken advantage of their cheap labor for decades now—eagerly employing them to water our lawns, wash our cars and pluck our chickens—we shouldn't hesitate to make it easy for their children to attend college. It isn't merely a matter of fairness or compassion, but also one of economic self-interest. Any student dedicated enough to learn a new language, excel in high school and start college is going to be successful *somewhere*. I'd rather it be here."⁶⁶

Many of these Mexican-American students participated in the massive demonstrations on May 1, 2006. Facing an exploding racially tinged nativism, Mexican Americans realized they needed to take to the streets, but not in riots. Marching in cities across America, they protested against the draconian anti-Latino legislation pending in Congress. They called their action "A Day Without a Mexican" to send a message to America: the economy needs their labor.⁶⁷

The future for the Mexican newcomers is promising. According to the 2006 U.S. Census figures, 70 percent of California's Mexican population are U.S. citizens. This incline in citizenship is due to births in the United States and also to the recent spike in naturalized citizenship for their parents. About half of the 460,766 Mexican immigrants who became naturalized citizens between 2000 and 2006 were in California. One of them was Roselia Aguilar, a twenty-nine-year-old immigrant who has lived in San Jose for a dozen years and was worried about the backlash against immigrants from Mexico. As she stood with 450 individuals from fifty-seven nations and solemnly took an oath to "bear true faith and allegiance to the Constitution," she felt exuberant. "I feel it's one of the most important things that ever happened to me," she said moments after the ceremony. "It's just different. I feel something nice inside me. I feel like I was born again."⁶⁸

