# ONE Race and Political Activism

The experience of growing up in Los Angeles partly explains my interest in the issues of race, class, and political activism that this book addresses. Born in East Los Angeles, I lived for a number of years in San Pedro and subsequently moved to Westminster in Orange County. Throughout these various moves, one constant was riding in our station wagon with my brothers and sister while driving to visit relatives throughout the area. Throughout the 1960s and 1970s I regularly traveled the Harbor Freeway to visit Grandpa and Tía Lola in East L.A.; the Pomona Freeway to see my aunt in Pico Rivera as well as my *ninos* (godparents) in Monterey Park; and the San Diego Freeway to visit my cousins in Canoga Park (see map 1). Little did I know that the history and geography of my extended family was in many ways typical of working-class Mexican Americans: with a decrease in residential segregation, as well as a strong Fordist economy, many of my relatives began leaving the greater East L.A. barrio around 1970.[1] Nevertheless, the maintenance of family ties was highly valued, and we managed to see some set of relatives at least once a week, usually on Sundays. The Southern California freeway system was key to maintaining this connection.

Aside from the usual childhood complaints stemming from seemingly interminable car rides, including such things as being touched and looked at by one's siblings, what I remember most was the landscape and geography of the region: eerie industrial buildings, dramatic mountains and palm trees, the downtown skyline, endless housing tracts, and of course, the racial patterns associated with them. Who lived in those vast expanses of South L.A. or the Westside, in which we knew no one? And why did our family seem to be strung out along the Pomona Freeway?

It was clear to me that East L.A. was the heart of the Mexican American community, and I suspected that Watts served a similar function for Blacks,

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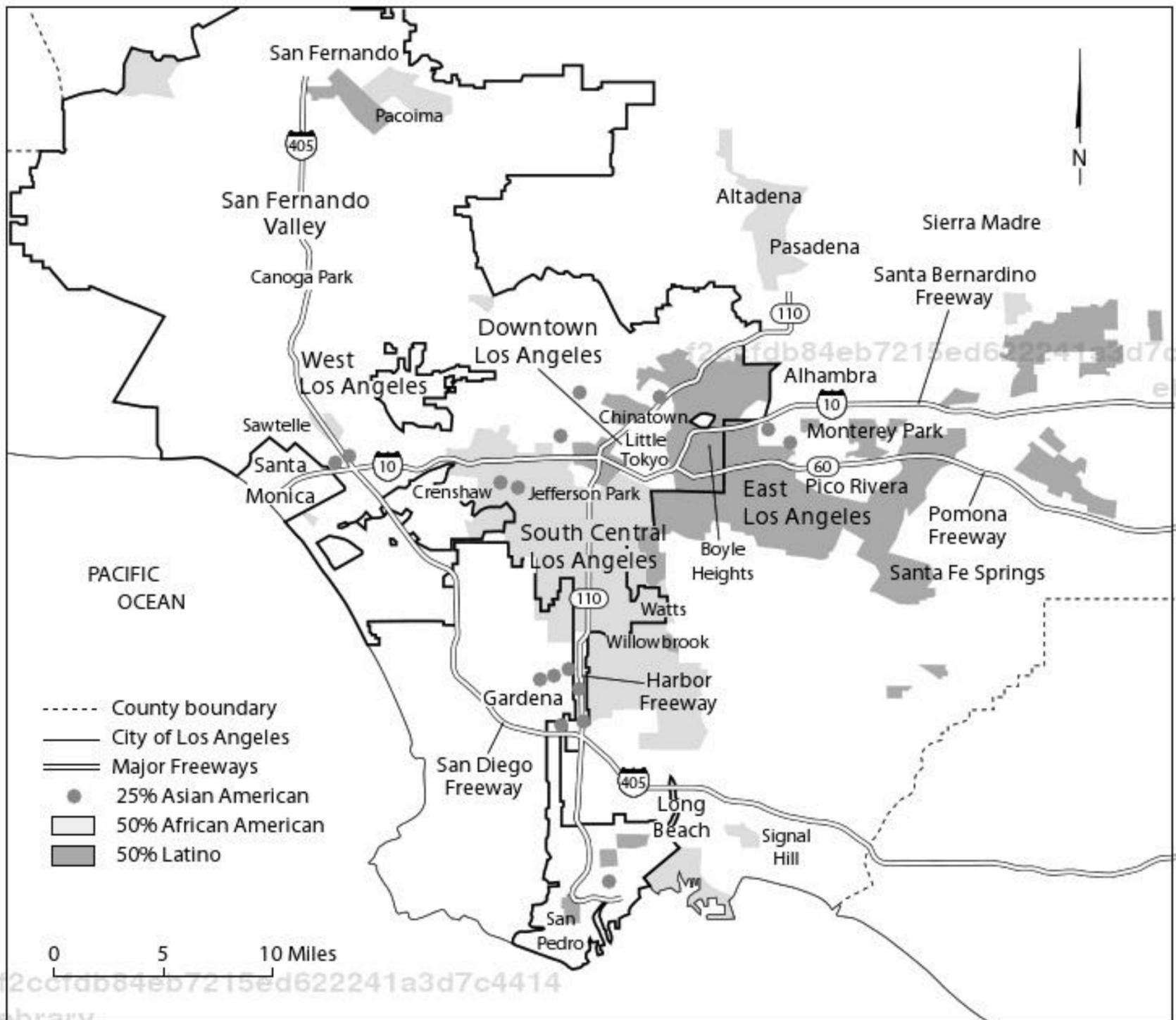
Map 1. Distribution of ethnic groups in Los Angeles County, 1970.

but I could not identify a comparable place for Asian Americans. In my mind, Chinatown and Little Tokyo were tourist spots with only a limited connection to contemporary Asian Americans. Such partial knowledge stemmed from intense residential segregation and a resulting lack of familiarity with either Black or Japanese people. My world was largely brown and white.

As a youngster, I struggled with being brown. Living in San Pedro, I learned early that being Mexican was far from desirable. At various times I

detested my brown skin, was embarrassed by the Spanish spoken in our household, and was envious of light-skinned Mexicans, wondering why I couldn't be a *güera*.[2] My painfully limited consciousness concerning my Mexican identity was complicated by my awareness of other peoples of color. Although I did not really know any African Americans, I knew that Blacks were a devalued racial/ethnic group, and I sensed that my racial position was somehow tied to theirs—how that worked out exactly I wasn't sure, but I understood that what it meant to be brown in Los Angeles was somehow linked to what it meant to be Black. I vaguely recall one incident in which I came home from school crying one day. My mom, seeing my anxiety, inquired, "*M'ija*, what happened?" Apparently, a girl at school, who was white, had asked if I was Black, and this had caused me great anguish. What indeed if I *was* Black? It was a frightening thought to a little Mexican American girl who knew she was racially problematic but sensed that things could be worse. My mom assured me that no, I wasn't Black, but she also stressed, in her very Catholic way, that even if I were, what would be wrong with that?

In contrast, I actually did know some Japanese Americans, a family down the street in San Pedro. While they were nice enough, I considered them to be "foreign." Several things stood out about them: their yard was landscaped in a distinctly Japanese style, they did not wear shoes in the house, and they enjoyed a cuisine that was totally unfamiliar to me. But what was significant was how I perceived them relative to me: *they* were foreign. And while I was uncomfortable with my Mexican background, which I equated with being both inferior and different, I had somehow absorbed the dominant reading of Asian Americans as the ultimate foreigners. Moreover, I sensed that my Japanese American neighbors occupied a distinct social position. I did not feel that they were as despised as Blacks and Mexicans, but they clearly were not on the same level as whites either. They were somewhere in between.

I share this bit of autobiography to introduce a basic premise of this book: what we know as racial/ethnic groups (I use the term *racial/ethnic* to emphasize that racial groups may also function as ethnic groups) can be grasped only in relation to *other* racial/ethnic groups. In other words, racial/ethnic groups, the meanings attached to them, the economic positions they occupy, and the status conferred upon them can be understood only in the context of the larger racial landscape. Further, the dynamics that produce racial/ethnic groups are so profound that a grade school child living through them can discern them. Unfortunately, what most kids know social scientists, myself included, are only beginning to pay close attention to.

My first political awakening centered on issues of racial oppression, particularly the plight of African Americans. I certainly did not learn these things in school, but as an avid reader I became aware of the civil rights movement and slavery (Harriet Tubman was my hero—I was deeply inspired by her courage). In addition to reading, popular culture contributed to my nascent consciousness. In particular, I recall the deep impact that Stevie Wonder's song "Living for the City" had on me. I experienced deep moral outrage upon learning how Blacks had been treated, and, having no idea what other groups had undergone, I came to believe that African Americans were the only oppressed racial/ethnic group in the United States. I knew that I was not Black, so it was impossible for me to think of myself as affected by racism. But I also knew that I was not white, and I struggled with being rendered invisible by the Black/white binary—despite living in a city with deep Mexican roots.

In addition to racial oppression, however, I was concerned with the plight of workers and the poor of all colors. Coming from a union family, I was all too familiar with the power that the "contract," which was negotiated every three years, had over our lives. In addition, I became acquainted with strikes, the rhythms of the hiring hall, and the idiocy of waterfront bosses that we heard about every night from my dad. These events provided a framework in my mind of what it meant to be a worker. Thus it was hardly surprising that when I learned about the United Farm Workers (UFW) and its struggle, it resonated deeply within me. Here at last was a group of Mexicanas/os giving voice to the inchoate feelings and consciousness that were stirring in so many of us. Not only did the UFW announce our presence to the world, but it mobilized around a series of issues that most poor and working-class people could readily identity with. When I was young, I had a very romantic vision of the UFW. I was appalled at the conditions that Mexicana/o field workers labored and lived under, but I was proud of this seemingly organic and charismatic form of Mexican American resistance. Although I sensed that Mexicans had long been subordinated in California, before I learned of the UFW I knew of no instance of collective resistance and/or struggle. Accordingly, my impression was not only that we were invisible but that we lacked the ability to mobilize and fight for our rights. Maybe we really were the "dumb Mexicans" that everyone said. Not surprisingly, I took the UFW struggle, as perhaps one of the most profound instances of Chicana/o resistance, to heart, and explored it more closely in my dissertation.[3] One of the things I learned from that project, which compared how two Chicana/o communities mobilized around environmental issues, was how deeply anticommunist the UFW was. Yet I also knew that many people considered the

UFW to be "radical." This led me to question the term. What is radical? Who is a radical? If nothing else, I have learned that *radical* is a relative term. While the Chicana/o movement was indeed radical, there was tremendous diversity within it, with some groups assuming far more conservative positions than others. Further, it struck me that much of the scholarship and teaching of *el movimiento* centered on a few themes and groups, such as the UFW, the Brown Berets, La Raza Unida Party, New Mexican land-grant struggles, and the Crusade for Justice.[4] Though this work was of tremendous importance and had a great impact, I knew that it was not complete, as my own experience at the Strategy Center suggested otherwise.

I wished to study the Chicana/o left for this project because I was intrigued by this missing piece of history and was keen to learn how such organizations handled race and class. As I began the research for this book, however, I quickly became immersed in a larger set of racial/ethnic relationships. I realized that I could not grasp the Chicana/o left without addressing the Black Panther Party. The Black Panther Party loomed large in the national, including Chicana/o, consciousness, and it seemed to me that in addition to inspiring other peoples of color it had created the necessary political space for the development of a Third World Left. This could not be ignored. Thus I found myself having come full circle and needing to explore the very issues I had first become aware of as a child regarding the interconnectedness of racial meanings and structures. Accordingly, I decided that the project needed to be comparative so that I could examine the racial dynamics associated with these radical groups, as well as the relationships between them.

Several questions are at the heart of this book. They come from my personal experiences, the empirical research I conducted for this project, and larger debates within the literature. My primary concern was to examine the extent to which differential racialization leads to distinct forms of radical politics. Scholars have long noted that wherever domination exists, resistance will follow. Often resistance is invisible to all but the participants themselves, but at other times it evolves into a broad-based opposition. This book examines one moment when "revolution was in the air," engendering extremely public and overt forms of resistance, and thus offers an exceptional opportunity to explore the extent to which resistance is shaped by domination.[5] To adequately explore this question, however, I needed to analyze how and why various populations of color are racialized in distinct kinds of ways. What are the processes of differential racialization, and what do they look like on the ground? To what extent are these processes shaped by racial dynamics and class relations, and how are these two factors linked?

Finally, assuming that different peoples of color are racialized in different ways, what does this mean for the larger racial landscape? In particular, how do these processes translate into racial positions and hierarchies, and how do they change over time?

COMPARATIVE RESEARCH: TALKING TO EACH OTHER

Although comparative research within ethnic studies is hardly new, scholars have only recently begun seriously theorizing differences and relationships between various racial/ethnic groups. When ethnic studies first became a formal discipline in the early 1970s, each racial/ethnic group, including African Americans, American Indians, Asian Americans, and Chicanas/os and Latinas/os, operated from a largely bipolar racial approach centered on whites. In other words, the experience of, say, Asian Americans, was studied relative to the dominant white population. This meant both exploring how white society contributed to the subordination of Asian Americans and documenting various outcomes and indicators—educational, social, health related, and political—relative to whites.[6] From a historical perspective, this approach is understandable given that whites were considered the norm.

Thirty years later the struggle for ethnic studies continues at the institutional level, but the intellectual content and focus of the discipline have changed considerably.[7] While the initial focus of ethnic studies was corrective, challenging previous racist assumptions and scholarship,[8] ethnic studies scholars have begun engaging each other in new ways. Researchers have come to appreciate that power relations, particularly racial and class dynamics, cannot be understood in a bipolar framework. Accordingly, there has been a growing effort to develop alternative approaches that capture the complexity of how race and class work in the United States.

One catalyst in the development of new strategies to the study of race and ethnicity came from the humanities. Heavily influenced by theoretical developments in literature, social scientists, including historians, began in the 1980s to conceptualize race and racial/ethnic groups not as given and natural but as socially constructed. To say that race is a social construction simply means that the idea of race has no real biological significance and is largely the product of human social systems. This does not imply that race is not "real" or a powerful force shaping our lives. But by recognizing it as the product of human activities and imagination, we can shift the focus of our inquiry to questions of process: *How* are racial/ethnic groups constructed? What are the boundaries for inclusion and exclusion, and how do

they shift over time? How do groups and individuals challenge and (re)produce processes of racialization? By asking such questions scholars began to realize that individual groups could not be understood in isolation. Whereas before the emphasis had been on whites, researchers began looking increasingly to other groups of color in order to sort out the complex processes and meanings that produce racial dynamics and patterns.[9]

The work of historians has been especially helpful to me in developing a comparative approach. In *Racial Fault Lines,* Tomás Almaguer showed not only how white supremacy worked to dominate all people of color historically in California but also how each group fared differently. He illuminated the particular meanings associated with various racial/ethnic groups, as well as the economic resources and/or opportunities they presented to white aspirations. This text was critical in forcing a reconsideration of the history of particular places and in insisting that racial positions are shaped by both discursive meanings and economic structures. Building on this work was Neil Foley's *The White Scourge,* which focuses on the central Texas cotton belt and analyzes how the racial meanings and attitudes associated with poor whites, Mexicans, and Blacks translated into particular economic outcomes, as well as how they played off each other. Thus the meanings attached to poor whites could not be understood outside the meanings and economic purpose embodied by Mexican workers.

The political scientist Claire Kim has sought to clarify this growing body of literature by developing a model to explain complex racial hierarchies. She argues that the racial position of "intermediary" or ambiguous minorities, such as Asian Americans, can be ascertained only through a process of triangulation. That is, it can be understood only relative to whites, as the universal dominant, and Blacks, as the universal subordinate. She conceptualizes the racial landscape as a field in which various groups have fluid but distinct positions.[10]

This work has been invaluable in my efforts to build a comparative framework to explain the distinct forms of activism that developed among the Third World Left. But before launching into that discussion, I would like to take a step back and say a few words about race itself.

RACE AND RACIAL IDEOLOGY

Having established that race is a social construct, we can define it more specifically as an ideology that functions to separate the human population into various groups based on supposedly significant biological features, including skin color, hair texture, and eye structure. Although many of us

were taught about race in school (I recall learning about Caucasians, Mongoloids, and Negroids and wondering where I fit in), racial groups and ideology are fairly recent developments. Humans have always found ways to distinguish ourselves, but only within the last five hundred years or so have we created the notion of inherent biological difference. The problem with the idea of race is that the closer one looks, the less viable the concept is. Numerous writers have demonstrated that there is more biological diversity within any given racial group than between racial groups. And when one examines how societies interpret these biological "facts," especially with regard to categorizing people, the contradictions mount. Our historical practice, for example, of categorizing as Black any person with as little as one drop of "Black" blood suggests that more is at work than rational scientific practice. Moreover, the fact that some people who are categorized as "non-white" but *appear* to be white can at times "pass" in order to access greater opportunities suggests the complex ways racial ideology is constructed and employed toward particular ends.[11]

Because of such manipulations race is best understood as a relationship of power. The idea of racial groups and race itself is rooted in attempts to assert control over particular populations in order to enhance the position and well-being of others. The idea of race essentially developed as an ideology in conjunction with imperialism and colonization. A justification was needed to help rationalize taking over other countries and peoples, whether by usurping their resources, appropriating them as colonies, or enslaving them. The notion of biological difference and, more specifically, the corollaries of biological inferiority and superiority gave conquering forces ideological tools to dehumanize their victims and legitimize their actions.[12] That racial ideologies are still with us, despite a radically different global political economy, not only indicates the longevity and deeply entrenched nature of such ideologies but also suggests that they are still useful in shaping contemporary power relations.

As we go about creating our world as humans, we cannot help drawing upon prevailing ideologies in the production of everyday life. This occurs both consciously and unconsciously. Hegemonic ideologies, or what Gramsci calls "common sense," are ideologies that become so widespread and accepted that they not only become naturalized but determine the boundaries of acceptable thought.[13] Appreciating hegemonic ideologies is necessary for understanding how race works in the contemporary United States, as they help explain why racial inequality persists in a society that advocates equality and has made some forms of discrimination illegal. This is not to deny that, as George Lipsitz has pointed out, discriminatory poli-

cies and practices that accrue to the benefit of whites exist and play a role in perpetuating inequality. But it is meant to stress that unless individuals develop an explicitly antiracist consciousness, they will inevitably reflect and act upon hegemonic racial ideologies, which, in turn, reproduce structures of inequality.[14]

Although I have defined race as an ideology, it is important to appreciate its material dimensions as well. Race is composed of both ideological and material components that are manifest in the creation of structures, institutions, and practices. One example of how racialized discourses and structures work together to produce racial inequality is that of urban housing markets, particularly housing segregation and property values. Urban housing markets, which are considered to be free markets, produce highly skewed and racialized outcomes that can be seen in the urban landscape. It is well known that U.S. cities are highly segregated, particularly in terms of Blacks and whites. Many whites do not wish to live in Black communities, and while many will accept Black neighbors, Black *neighborhoods* are a different story.[15] The widespread nature of this pattern reflects pervasive and deeply held prejudices that translate into real material structures: segregated cities. Segregation, in turn, translates into real material disparities that perpetuate inequalities between Blacks and whites and further reinforce racist ideologies. For instance, Black property is less desirable and therefore is worth less than white property. This fact has enormous implications for the distribution of wealth and resources. Because real estate is the basis of most individual wealth in the United States (including intergenerational transfers of wealth), white property owners benefit from the devalued nature of Black property in the form of higher property values and greater wealth.[16] But the white community benefits as well in the form of enhanced resources, such as better schools. Urban segregation and inequality are predicated on racial ideologies, or "common sense," that is enacted by millions of people every day, resulting in the sedimentation of racial inequality in the physical environment. Yet although Blacks are clearly disadvantaged, the majority of whites rarely consider their greater wealth to result from any sort of privilege; instead, they assert that it is entirely due to their own industriousness.

Differential Racialization and Racial Hierarchies

Differential Racialization   As a geographer I am keenly interested in how racism plays out across various landscapes. In different places and times and at various scales, particular groups may be subordinate, dominant, or in some intermediate position. Two ideas in particular can help us understand how race varies over time and space: differential racialization and racial hier-

archies. Differential racialization refers to the fact that different groups are racialized in distinct kind of ways. What this means is that a particular set of racial meanings are attached to different racial/ethnic groups that not only affect their class position and racial standing but also are a function of it. Thus there is a dialectic between the discursive and the material.

Today, the word *racism* is used so frequently, particularly among progressives and the left, that I sometimes feel there is a loss of nuance. While *racism* is a powerful word, and many people correctly understand it to mean the production of inequality between various racial/ethnic groups, I am frustrated that there is insufficient attention directed to *how* different communities of color may experience racism. People of color are not homogenous and do not experience the same types of racialization. The concept of differential racialization can help us understand these subtle and not-so-subtle differences.

The process by which a people becomes racialized is highly specific. The particulars of history, geography, the needs of capital, and the attributes of various populations all contribute to it. In analyzing contemporary forms of differential racialization, one must always consider a group's history of incorporation and economic integration. Under what conditions and circumstances did they become part of this country—undergoing what Espiritu calls "differential inclusion"?[17] Were they already here and conquered by Anglo Americans, as in the case of indigenous people or Mexicans in the Southwest? Were they brought here in chains as forced labor? Or did they come as immigrants in search of better opportunities? In each case, we need to determine the political economic forces that led to the initial contact. Was a particular fraction of capital in need of workers? If so, what was the structure and culture of the existing working class? Or was capital in need of new workers because the existing ones were organizing or dying due to inhumane conditions? Alternatively, it could be that the state and capital wished to expand and acquire the land and resources of another people. Each scenario can engender a distinct racialization process, depending upon the political economic specifics and available racial ideologies.

Another factor in differential racialization is the "cultural distance" between the groups in question. Almaguer's study of California found that in the nineteenth century whites were far more amenable to accepting Mexicans than to accepting Indians and the Chinese: both of the latter were considered to be heathen savages, whereas Mexicans, though problematic, could be included on the margins of society due to their Christian background, Spanish tongue (a European language), and racial diversity and whites' general familiarity with Mexican and Spanish culture, given its long

presence in the region.[18] Such readings have enormous implications for a group's relationship to the nation. If, drawing on Benedict Anderson, we define a nation as an "imagined political community," it becomes clear that the United States as a nation has historically been defined in explicitly racial terms.[19] In particular, citizenship has been reserved for those categorized as white. Not only did such practices supposedly protect the racial purity of the nation but, perhaps more importantly, as Anthony Marx has argued, the subordination of nonwhites has allowed the state to appease and consolidate potentially marginalized and fragmented whites. The somewhat arbitrary nature of acceptance into the nation in turn profoundly affects the racialization process. If the dominant group is willing to accept the minority group as part of the nation, this bodes well for a relatively smooth incorporation process and works against the most dehumanizing forms of racialization. If, on the other hand, the dominant population sees the minority group as objectionable or a threat to the nation—despite the needs of capital—then the group in question is likely to be highly marginalized and to experience a brutal form of racialization. In short, differential racialization affects how each group is treated legally, socially, and economically and can even determine life and death.

Racial Hierarchies   A racial hierarchy is a specific configuration of power relations in a given place and time based on racial ideology. Racial hierarchies are the mapping of power relations: Who is on top? Who is on the bottom? Who is in between? And how are racial groups related? By connecting the lines between various locations and nodes we can ascertain the status of various racial/ethnic groups and their positioning relative to each other. Racial hierarchies are composed of several elements, including local demographics, history, and economic structures, as well as national racial narratives. They can be relatively simple, such as the hierarchy of whites over Blacks in the South during slavery, which featured clear dominant and subordinate groups whose inequality became increasingly codified over time.[20] More complex racial hierarchies existed in many eastern industrial cities during the late 1800s, when, in addition to Blacks and whites, there were a number of "not quite white" groups, including Jews, the Irish, and Italians.[21] The same was also true for California starting at the time of Spanish conquest, when a racially mixed group of conquerors and settlers—who brought with them their own complex racial order—confronted the indigenous population. The resulting hierarchy was further complicated by the arrival of various Asian peoples and later African Americans. Because California has historically been so racially diverse, with populations that

could not readily pass into whiteness, it remains an exceptional place to study complex racial hierarchies.

Racial hierarchies are not static: they respond to both geographic and historical processes. One example of the transformative capacity of racial hierarchies is the case of Chinese and Japanese Americans in California. In the late 1800s and early 1900s, Asian Americans were arguably the most despised racial/ethnic group in the state. They were regularly lynched, occasionally massacred, excluded from large sectors of the economy, prohibited from living among and marrying whites, denied citizenship, and eventually banned from immigrating. Although California was home to a large and varied population of color, Asians received the brunt of racial animosity. This is in dramatic contrast to today, when Chinese and Japanese Americans are no longer the most detested racial/ethnic group. They have experienced not only economic mobility but improvement in their racial position. In some circles, Asian Americans are almost considered "honorary whites."[22] A century ago it was inconceivable that the hostility directed toward Asian Americans could ever change—but it did. Thus, whenever we speak of racial hierarchies, we must be sensitive to issues of temporality.

Regional Racial Hierarchies. The case of Chinese and Japanese Americans also illustrates the importance of spatiality to racial hierarchies. Racial hierarchies exist at multiple geographic scales.[23] We can discern the general contours of a global racial hierarchy in the admittedly crude division between the "First" and "Third" Worlds, which correspond roughly to patterns of colonization. But racial hierarchies also exist at smaller scales. For example, while Asian Americans were under attack in California, the national racial hierarchy was structured along largely Black/white lines. The influence of the national racial narratives could be seen in the fact that many of the discriminatory tools and techniques directed against Asian Americans had been originally deployed against Blacks. On the other hand, regional racial hierarchies can also affect the national one, as when problematic "regional minorities" become national threats.

While we must always be cognizant of national racial narratives, studying racial hierarchies solely at the national level poses several problems. In particular, it precludes a fine-grained analysis of the relationship between economic structures and racial ideologies because economic processes get worked out and shape individual lives primarily at the regional and local levels. Although national economic patterns and policies certainly matter, the importance of regional variation should not be underestimated. One need only reflect on the historical importance of slavery to the South, indus-

trialization to the Northeast, and mining to the West to appreciate the significance of regional economies.[24] Hence it is primarily at the regional or local scale that more nuanced discussions of the relationship between race and class emerge. Such scaled analyses allow us to see the intersection of labor markets, class relations, and racial ideologies—all of which contribute to racial hierarchies. These hierarchies, in turn, can have profound implications for the nature of regions themselves.

Class and Racial Hierarchies. Let us look more closely at how local labor markets are racialized, as this is key to the creation of racial hierarchies. Labor markets are significant not only because are they fundamental to the process of class formation but because they are primarily regional and local phenomena. Most people commute to home and work on a daily basis, so this activity sets the potential geographic parameters of labor markets and divisions of labor. The exact nature of local labor markets is determined by the needs of capital, the nature of the commodity or service, state policies, the available labor pool, and racial and gender ideologies. These last two factors are instrumental in suggesting which groups will occupy what positions.[25] It is at the intersection of economic processes and racial discourses that racialized class structures and divisions of labor are created.

The intersection of labor markets and racial ideologies can have profound consequences reaching far beyond the local labor market. Consider, for example, the intimate relationship between Mexicans and farm work, which has been central to the racialization of many Latinas/os in the western United States. Over time California farmers decided that Mexicans were an ideal workforce and generated a whole set of stereotypes and ideologies to justify their intensive exploitation. For example, it was believed that Mexicans, in addition to tolerating stoop labor better than whites (because they were relatively short and thus would not have to bend down as far as a white person would), would work long hours for cheap wages without complaining, would have no ambitions (or capabilities) beyond farm work, and would "disappear" when the harvest was over. They were thought to be content with illiteracy and dirty living conditions. These attributes, it was felt, rendered them an efficient and pliable workforce ideally suited to the shifting conditions of California agriculture.[26] Such ideas, regardless of their accuracy, developed into a racial ideology that justified the treatment of farmworkers and was extrapolated to many Mexicans and Mexican Americans throughout the Southwest, regardless of their actual class positions. Thus we can see the dialectic nature of racial ideologies and processes of class formation.

Today, Mexican labor has expanded far beyond California's fields. There is even a growing professional class, yet these stereotypes and images linger. We can see their staying power in the fact that the vast majority of Mexicanas/os are located in the working class, receive inferior educational opportunities, are poor, and continue to face discrimination in many arenas. In effect, these ideologies, combined with immigration flows and a postindustrial economy, produce highly racialized outcomes. Care must be taken not to suggest that such is the plight of all Latinas/os. I myself, for example, am a professor at a research university. Yet despite a radically different class position I am affected by prevailing racial ideologies, as some students resist seeing me as a legitimate professor. Not infrequently I am asked, "Are you a *real* professor?" For some, it is difficult to believe that a Mexican American woman can have a position of authority. Certainly, the racial hierarchy has not dictated my economic position, but it does inform my daily experience.[27]

I have suggested that racial hierarchies change over time. I now wish to consider *how* that happens and the role of crisis in change. Crises, which are endemic to capitalism, can be defined as moments when the prevailing formation can no longer reproduce itself. At such times racism may be used to help "work out" the crisis, with profound implications for the racial hierarchy.[28] In such instances racial hierarchies not only become more vivid but also can be transformed. Typically, during a crisis, as large numbers of people are being dislocated and are feeling pain and uncertainty, so-called leaders may channel the resulting anxiety into hostility toward those at the bottom of the racial hierarchy. Scapegoating is nothing new and can fall on any marginalized group depending upon how the lines of difference are drawn. In California, both today and in the past, they are primarily drawn racially. As Omi and Winant have pointed out, race remains a central organizing principle in U.S. society.[29] Scapegoating a racial/ethnic group serves to subordinate that group, but it also contains the possibility of movement for others. Groups that are not held responsible for the current crisis may attain an improved status and position within the racial hierarchy.

One recent example of a change in the racial hierarchy is California's Proposition 187. In the late 1980s California entered a deep and painful recession, leading then-Governor Pete Wilson to make immigrants, particularly undocumented immigrants, the centerpiece of his 1994 re-election campaign. He argued that California could not afford the cost of undocumented immigrants and that they were responsible for the recession. This resulted in tremendous public hostility toward immigrants, particularly Latina/o immigrants and by extension those who looked Latina/o. According to the immigrant-rights activist Susan Alva, "The immigration

issue, particularly in California, has very much turned into a Latino issue." This sentiment eventually culminated in Proposition 187, which sought to ban undocumented persons from a whole range of social, educational, and health services.[30]

What was significant about this episode was not that it demonized Latinas/os but that it provided a fleeting opportunity for both Blacks and Asian Americans to improve their racial position. Conservative pundits catered to the African American vote, emphasizing that Blacks were negatively affected by immigration and that they were citizens and thus included in the body politic. In short, part of the politics of Proposition 187 was about giving Black people a chance to be "Americans," something they have systematically been denied because of the extent to which the nation has been defined as white.[31]

For Asian Americans the situation was somewhat different. Proposition 187 ostensibly targeted all undocumented persons and thus would have certainly affected the Asian/Pacific Islander population. Various progressive Asian groups knew this and saw the occasion as a valuable opportunity to ally with Latinas/os. In the public's mind, however, Proposition 187 was not about Asian/Pacific Islanders. It was a referendum on the Latinization of California. In fact, both Asian Americans and Blacks voted for the initiative in fairly highly numbers: 57 percent and 56 percent, respectively (compared to 31 percent of Latino voters). In short, Proposition 187 reworked the racial hierarchy insofar as it exerted downward pressure on Latinas/os' position while offering a temporary reprieve to Blacks, who were suddenly part of the nation, and to Asian/Pacific Islanders, who were rendered a much less problematic immigrant population.[32]

To summarize, the racial hierarchy is an ever-changing landscape composed of distinct racial positions. Racial hierarchies are shaped by local demographics, regional economies, local history, and national racial narratives. Differential racialization is key to the production of racial hierarchies, as it produces a variety of racial meanings, all of which are in continuous engagement with each other. Finally, although the racial hierarchy is in a continual state of flux, moments of crisis are pivotal to its transformation. However, racial hierarchies may also be transformed from the bottom up by activism.

RACE AND POLITICAL ACTIVISM

To Act or Not to Act

Because racial hierarchies are predicated on inequality and domination, they are also sites of resistance and contestation. People struggle not only to

change their own positions but in some cases to dismantle the structures of inequality that oppress others as well as themselves. Within ethnic studies, much energy has been directed at unearthing the rich but often obscured histories of racial resistance. Such instances of political awareness and mobilization beckon researchers, not only because we wish to uncover submerged histories but because such accounts provide historical linkages with more contemporary forms of activism.[33]

While this work has been invaluable, we must not give the impression that all people of color are poised for revolution.[34] Only a small number of people take the step from private individual to public actor and become activists. For various reasons, most persons choose not to act publicly, regardless of how exploited or oppressed they may be. This does not mean they are content with the injustice; it means only that they are not willing or able to openly challenge it. Fear is one of the most powerful forces that prevents people from acting. Depending upon how repressive the situation is, people may fear, with good cause, retribution in the form of unemployment, the denial of basic services and needs, the destruction of their property, and, in some instances, violence and death.[35] Another factor is the pervasive nature of hegemonic discourses and the internalization of self-hate. It never fails to amaze me how many people, in the face of grave injustice and inequality, will justify their marginalized positions by drawing upon "common sense." They, in effect, buy into dominant discourses that have been deployed by more powerful actors to justify what may be an immoral set of arrangements, often by naturalizing the conditions of the most subordinated.[36] Finally, many people choose not to act because of apathy and a limited faith in their ability to effect change. Disillusion and cynicism are widespread throughout U.S. society, and people of color are no exception. It takes an enormous amount of time, energy, hope, and creativity to initiate change from below.[37]

Consequently, some writers, such as Gregory Rodriguez, have questioned the significance of social movements and political activism, pointing out that the vast majority never participate in them: "The Mexican American experience has largely been interpreted through the actions of advocacy groups. No matter that surveys find that Mexican Americans are much less likely to join civic groups than are, say, Anglos, most writers still adhere to the rule that the collective, organized minority activity is the only minority behavior that's worth writing about. . . . With few exceptions, the history of an organized few has obscured the more revealing story of the lives and daily struggles of the unorganized mass of people."[38] Rodriguez's point, though true enough, reflects a limited understanding of *how* social

change occurs. Among dominated communities, fundamental change does not occur through the ballot box, or even through mass uprisings, although both can play important roles. Rather, it centers on producing a shift in consciousness— an alternative vision of what the world might look like, an expanded sense of personal efficacy (often called empowerment), and a clear set of demands—and on systematically mobilizing. Such changes constitute the beginnings of a movement. Creating these changes, or at least the conditions for them, is the job of the political activist and organizer.

Changing Racial Hierarchies through Racial Projects

Over the course of history, millions have initiated countless attempts to create a more socially just society. Some have done so out of anger and a refusal to be dehumanized, others have responded to the suffering of fellow human beings, and still others have been motivated by an awareness that not to act is to support a particular social formation. Just as motivation may vary, so do the content and form of resistance itself. Some individuals have acted alone, some have banded together in acts of rebellion, and some have built elaborate organizations and movements to help them achieve freedom, liberation, and equality.[39]

The Third World Left, which existed at the intersection of the New Left and the more nationalist movements embedded within communities of color, constituted a social movement. The sociologist James Jasper defines a social movement as "conscious, concerted, and relatively sustained efforts by organized groups of ordinary people (as opposed to, say, political parties, the military, or industrial trade groups) to change some aspect of their society by using extrainstitutional means."[40] The Third World Left sought to dismantle the racial hierarchy and alter the class structure of U.S. society, particularly as it related to people of color. It engaged in what Howard Winant calls a racial project: that is, an "interpretation, representation or explanation of racial dynamics and an effort to organize and distribute resources along particular racial lines."[41] In the case of the Third World Left, this project sought to end numerous discriminatory practices that were part of the racial hierarchy and class structure. Activists targeted such issues as police abuse, unfair treatment of immigrants, exclusion from social services, the exploitation of workers of color, U.S. domination of Third World countries, and the general marginalization of communities of color. They did this by challenging policies, withholding cooperation, mobilizing large demonstrations, educating and politicizing others to take up the struggle, and, in some cases, arming themselves. Ultimately, their hope was to create a radically different society, which would feature a redistribution of economic

and political opportunities along both class and racial lines in the United States.

The extent to which activists or organizations are successful is decided not only by their skills and abilities but also by the forces arrayed against them. While there will always be resistance to oppressive conditions, the precise nature and content of that resistance are often determined by history. The alternatives people envision, the methods they employ, and the way they mobilize all occur within a particular historical and cultural milieu. Thus, during the Cold War, antiracist activists were able to mount only relatively small challenges to the racial formation, given the pressure to conform and be patriotic.[42] The 1960s and 1970s presented a very different set of possibilities. George Katsiaficas has described this era as a "world historical moment" when seemingly the entire world was rising up and challenging imperialism, economic and racial inequality, and societal norms and conventions.[43] Hence the boundaries of what seemed possible were greatly expanded, and people engaged in behavior and practices that may sometimes be difficult to understand today. But, for many, revolution *was* in the air, and within this context the Third World Left was born. The following quote from a New Left activist describes how many perceived the world at the moment.

> Every left idea is winning right now. That's very important for people to understand about not rewriting history. . . . King is moving on the war [and] towards the Black working class and trying to build a multiracial movement of the poor. The Vietnamese are winning in Vietnam. The Panthers are saying armed struggle. SDS chapters that used to have a hundred people now have five hundred people in them. There was the Harvard strike—1967–68—everyone thought that a world revolution was happening and there was no limit to what was possible at that point. All of Latin America, all of Asia, all of Africa was going communist, the protests in France, the French workers' strike. So we were part of this world historical moment.[44]

Given that so much was going on, the task of analyzing the political activism and social movements of the 1960s and 1970s presents a challenge. Not only is it difficult to distinguish between various political tendencies, but establishing causality or priority in terms of race and class is no easy task. Was the Third World Left equally committed to struggles against racism and class exploitation, or did it tend to privilege one over the other? How do we untangle and make sense of these multiple forces? Is it accurate to depict activists as engaged in a racial project? Or should such activism be more appropriately categorized as anticapitalist? Although I argue that the

Third World Left was simultaneously about race and class, I locate this activism in racial terms, a decision some may disagree with. Stuart Hall's work, in particular, has furthered my conceptualization of such activism by pointing out the extent to which class may be lived through race (and I would add, gender): "Race performs a double function. It is . . . the principal modality in which the black members of that class 'live,' experience, make sense of and thus *come to a consciousness* of their structured subordination. It is through the modality of race that blacks comprehend, handle, and then begin to resist the exploitation which is an objective feature of the class situation."[45] Hall indicates that, especially for the working class in a highly racialized society, one's class position is largely *experienced* through race. This is meant, not to reduce class to race, but to show the extent to which they intersect in shaping the everyday life of the poor and colored and to suggest the important work that race does in creating a particular social formation.

I find this analysis compelling insofar as activists in the Third World Left did in fact organize along racial lines. Although there were many multiracial (or multinational, as they were called) groups, all the organizations I studied were composed overwhelmingly of a single racial/ethnic group and focused their efforts on that community, in particular the poor, marginalized, and lower-class members of that community. Thus, although activists developed elaborate class ideologies and were anticapitalist, their frame of reference was always their racial/ethnic position. It was through race that they came "to a consciousness of their structured subordination." Indeed, the emphasis on race was what distinguished the Third World Left from the larger New Left. Numerous individuals departed from the New Left precisely because of their discomfort with its approach to race. The Third World Left gave expression to activists' longing and need to articulate a politics centered on their understanding of the racialized nature of capitalism.

Clarifying the nature of this relationship is crucial because I argue in this book that the distinctive nature of each organization's politics is linked to the larger process of racialization and the racial position of each racial/ethnic group. Without being too reductionist, I hope to show throughout the remainder of the book the extent to which the unique concerns, ideology, and cultures of the various organizations were produced by a particular racial and economic experience, as well as by a selective borrowing from other movements and places, ranging from Cuba and Vietnam on the international scene to the ghettos, barrios, and Nikkei clusters of Los Angeles at the local level.