Introduction

The Role of Asian American Media Activism

Starring Mindy Kaling as a hopelessly romantic gynecologist, *The Mindy Project* premiered in the fall of 2012 on FOX. It was the first network TV show to ever star an actor of South Asian descent. With Kaling serving as the lead actor, creator, writer, and (sometimes) director, the show stood alone in an industrial landscape dominated by white men both in front of and behind the camera. Given these facts, it might seem like *The Mindy Project* would have been considered a clear victory to those interested in improving Asian American representation in the media—it showcased the abundant talents of an Asian American woman and brought her story onto network television to be enjoyed by mass audiences. Yet if we look at the way the show was received by different audiences, we can begin to see how the work of Asian American media activism is not always so straightforward. During its second season, an activist organization called Media Action Network for Asian Americans (MANAA) publicly criticized the show for its cast of all-white male leads and romantic partners, and chastised Kaling for failing to "give back" to the community (AsianWeek 2014). At a panel at South by Southwest, Kaling responded to the flurry of critiques: "I look at shows on TV, and this is going to just seem defensive, but I'm just gonna say it—I'm a fucking Indian woman who has her own fucking network television show, OK?" (Bailey 2014). Kaling questioned why her show was being held to a different standard than other shows and emphasized that she worked in television, not politics.

These debates about how best to represent Asian Americans in the media similarly flared up around the ABC sitcom *Fresh Off the Boat*, a series created by celebrity chef Eddie Huang about his experiences as a child of Taiwanese immigrants in the 1990s. It was the first all-Asian American family sitcom since Margaret Cho's unsuccessful *All-*

The Mindy Project has been praised for having an Indian American female lead in Mindy Kaling, but also criticized for failing to diversify its cast of male suitors for Mindy.

American Girl twenty years prior, and was championed by many Asian American bloggers, journalists, and social media users. Asian American activists implored audiences to support the show, since they feared its failure might set back network television another twenty years before they would try another Asian American family show. Yet when news broke that the sitcom had been picked up for ABC's 2014–2015 prime-time lineup, a different community of Asian Americans responded with criticism on Twitter. They questioned the use of the phrase "fresh off the boat," which is a derogatory title used to mock recent immigrants that many Asian Americans feel can only be used by the "in-group." As Twitter user @KaitlynYin stated, "#FreshOffTheBoat normalizes the term. Whites will think it's acceptable to use w/o realizing historical origins" (Yin 2014). Creator Huang countered by arguing that the show's title was an attempt to reclaim the term FOB as one of pride, and connected his use of the term "fresh" to the hip-hop culture of the 1990s. Yet even before the show premiered, others were complaining about the fact that the actors playing immigrants had to use fake accents for the role and

Eddie Huang's *Fresh Off the Boat* is the first Asian American family sitcom since Margaret Cho's unsuccessful *All-American Girl* twenty years prior.

that the show's casting reinforced the ideology that all Asian American peoples and cultures could be indiscriminately lumped together.

These two incidents remind us that discussions concerning race and representation are inevitably heated and difficult, and that even when images of minority communities succeed in gaining visibility there can be disagreement about what political gains have really been achieved. But it is also important to note that these debates reflect more than a simple disagreement between two individuals. Rather, the disagreements described here are between organized collectives who are strategically working to impact change in the representation of Asian Americans in the media. This is perhaps more evident in the first example, where MANAA seeks to serve as a representative Asian American voice when

asking FOX to make changes to the content of a show. But in the second example, we must also look at conversations on Twitter as more than just the voices of individuals each with their own opinions—in many cases, Asian Americans are actively using Twitter as a space for joining together, strategizing, and responding to media images as a collective. Activism that relies upon Twitter and other online tools does operate differently from more traditional face-to-face activism, and the culture of digital forms of activism is in a state of rapid development and flux. Nevertheless, it is important to take both these instances of media activism seriously and consider their motivations, strategies, and impact.

In exploring the work of those who see the media as a tool for impacting social change, we can better understand where these disagreements come from and what is at stake in the battle over the media. What kinds of representations of Asian Americans would be more or less problematic, and what counts as "Asian American" to begin with in a world where individuals embody multiple and shifting identities? How do we know what is gained in the fight to improve representation, and who benefits from this battle? Asian American media activists seeking to improve representations often take up positions that appear contradictory to the success of Asian American actors, shows, and storylines because they do not agree upon the answers to these questions. Yet if we simply rest upon the conclusion that representational politics are complicated, we foreclose the opportunity to use media activism to impact change. In this book I investigate not only how Asian American media activism takes place and evaluate what kinds of interventions might actually be effective, but I also use a media studies and cultural studies framework to argue that these disagreements about media representation reflect different understandings of what cultural citizenship looks like for Asian Americans. Battles over representations of Asian America reveal the way that activists seeking to improve the representation of Asian Americans in entertainment media are engaging in a fight for cultural citizenship, or a deeper sense of belonging and acceptance within a nation that has long rejected them. This argument advances our understanding of how cultural citizenship is connected to media representation, and in this investigation of the varied ways in which activists mobilize and deploy their strategies, what we discover are the different and potentially conflicting ways in which cultural citizenship is being claimed.

Sociologists and social movement theorists have explored a vast repertoire of activism and forms of protest, but media activism is a specific form of activism that demands the tools of media studies and cultural studies in order to best understand how it operates. As such, I do not purport to connect Asian American media activism to larger media reform movements or question how it functions as a social movement. Rather, when looking at the work of those fighting to improve the representation of Asian Americans in the media, I rely upon the core inquiries of media studies in order to make sense of what is occurring—asking how texts are imbued with ideology, how media industries are structured and controlled, and how audiences are actively participating in shaping meaning. More specifically, I look at how Asian American media consumers and producers deploy specific understandings of citizenship as a directive for shaping representation in mainstream entertainment media.

To argue that media activists are fighting for cultural citizenship implies that the latter can be actively claimed through activism, and through the specific examples of media activism that I explore here, we can more clearly see how activists and minority communities believe that empowerment will be achieved through cultural citizenship. Each community of activists relies on different understandings of what cultural citizenship will look like and how it will be achieved in structuring their media activism work. But despite their differences, I argue that they share one important similarity—Asian American media activists view cultural citizenship as a collective endeavor that cannot be accomplished at the level of the individual. This pushes back against assumptions that our neoliberal media landscape is inexorably moving citizenship toward the individual, and opens up a space for exploring the way that Asian Americans in particular are using media to create networks of cultural citizenship that seek to impact their broader community. This perspective on the way that Asian Americans are responding to media representations also serves to challenge a ubiquitous postracial media discourse that insists upon race as merely an individual quality. As Catherine Squire argues in her examination of the explosion of discourse about postracism in the media, a belief in the declining significance of race in today's society "[resonates] with neoliberal discourses because of their shared investment in individual-level analysis and concern with indi-

vidual freedoms" (Squires 2014, 6). My focus on cultural citizenship and media activism reaffirms the necessity of collective racial designations such as "Asian American" even in our increasingly globalized landscape, where such an amalgam of national and racial identity may be questioned for its continued usage.

Exclusion and Inclusion of Asian Americans in the Media

At its core, media activism for Asian Americans revolves around a very simple kind of injustice. Americans of Asian descent have historically been excluded from the media in multiple ways—the number of roles rarely reflects the actual percentage of Asian Americans in the United States, actors are forced to repeatedly embody tired and offensive stereotypes, and they are frequently relegated to the role of a sidekick or background character. Asian Americans are rarely shown with families, love interests, or well-developed back stories. Most egregious of all, they are almost never cast in starring roles. The problems inherent to Asian American media representation have been well documented within academic scholarship, beginning with Darrell Hamamoto's (1994) *Monitored Peril: Asian Americans and the Politics of TV Representation*, which presents an exhaustive survey of the racist depictions of Asian Americans from television's early days to the early 1990s. Robert Lee (1999) comes to similar conclusions in *Orientals: Asian Americans in Popular Culture*, in which he connects the history of the perception of Asian American immigration as a threat to the representation of Asian Americans in newspaper comics, songs, fictional stories, dramatic productions, and movies. Kent Ono and Vincent Pham's (2008) *Asian Americans and the Media* updates these works with an overview of the entire contemporary Asian American media landscape, including descriptions of the work of Asian American media producers and interventions by the community such as film festivals and media arts centers. Scholars have also delved into the nuances of how gender and sexuality are inflected within representations of Asian America, such as Gina Marchetti's (1994) examination of interracial relationships in *Romancing the Yellow Peril* and Celine Parreñas Shimizu's volumes on women in *The Hypersexuality of Race* (2007) and men in *Straitjacket Sexualities* (2012). While Marchetti focuses on textual analyses of the ways that power relations are upheld

through depictions of interracial romances, Shimizu works to dislodge straightforward stereotype analysis by theorizing the way that Asian American viewers must negotiate their identities against even the most problematic media representations.

Through these works on representation it becomes clear that media invisibility and mistreatment impacts Asian American communities in profound ways. The limited number of representations serves to fix a particular image within the public imagination and restrict possibilities—both aesthetically within the world of imagery and within society, where racism has clearly material consequences. These images are also critical in the formation of national identities and cultural notions of citizenship, as the erasure of non-white bodies from the media can lead to assumptions of exclusion from our imagined nation as well. Indeed, one of the primary impacts of the way that Asian Americans have been represented is to shore up institutionalized racism—reproducing structures of dominance as if Asian Americans are categorically different, and in fact inferior, to other Americans.

These linkages between media imagery and the lived experiences of Asian Americans clearly demand changes in the way that they have been represented. Yet what drew me to this research was the impulse to answer the question, "Now what?" If we can so ably recognize the problems, it is incumbent upon those interested in representation to move beyond mere critique to consider sites for change, pathways toward demonstrating agency or empowerment within media structures, and courses of action that can realistically be taken up. This is no easy undertaking. We can see from the example of *The Mindy Project* and *Fresh Off the Boat* that there is much disagreement about what kind of changes we wish to see, let alone how to accomplish them. As media studies scholars have long demonstrated, mere visibility does not necessarily lead to empowerment, and the renewed propagation of injurious representations is certainly not a desirable outcome. LeiLani Nishime (2014) reminds us of this in her exploration of images of multiracial Asian American representations, which are increasingly plentiful. She argues that media analyses should not rest upon simple categorizations of stereotypical or oppositional, celebrated or condemned; rather, she reads the visibility and invisibility of multiracial bodies in the media for what they reflect about the continued significance of racial hierarchies and power-laden

systems of value. These complexities remind us that images are always in flux, shifting beneath our feet. If we look at contemporary stories about Asian Americans in the media, we see that they continue to reflect the changing roles that Asians play in American society. This includes everything from the arrival of thousands of Asian immigrants in the years following the Immigration and Nationality Act of 1965, to shifts in popular culture toward embracing global forms of media, to the contemporary struggles to gain legal citizenship in a climate of increasing anti-immigrant hostility. In a famously risk-averse industry like network television, the fact that media executives took a gamble on these two programs featuring non-white stars reflects a media landscape irrevocably altered by demographic shifts in the United States and responding to changing perceptions of both Asian and American citizenship.

In recent years we have already begun to see many changes in the way Asian Americans have been portrayed. After *Fresh Off the Boat* debuted in February 2015, ABC greenlit a second Asian American family sitcom called *Dr. Ken*, starring comedian Ken Jeong, which premiered that fall. Mindy Kaling's *The Mindy Project* was canceled on FOX after three successful seasons and immediately picked up by Hulu, while ABC's *Quantico* debuted in the fall of 2015 with Indian actress Priyanka Chopra as the lead. Lucy Liu, Daniel Dae Kim, Grace Park, Ming Na, Aziz Ansari, Sandra Oh, Yun Jin Kim, and Danny Pudi have all been leads or prominent series regulars on network television programs ranging from sitcoms to medical dramas to musicals. In the world of film, Kal Penn and John Cho have shown that two Asian American men can anchor an extremely successful comedy franchise with *Harold and Kumar* and its sequels. There has also been an increase in the popularity and viability of movies that take place overseas and have entirely non-white casts, such as *Slumdog Millionaire* and *The Life of Pi*—both of which won Academy Awards. We can see that Asian Americans are slowly making inroads into mainstream representation with these specific roles. Each of these roles serves as a reminder that Asian American media activism chases after a moving target that cannot easily be reduced to a simple or universal set of demands.

Beyond the way that Asian Americans are represented within film and television, there are two other mediated realms that must be explored—advertising and online media. With regard to the former, we know that the images produced by advertisers swirl around us throughout our

daily lives, invading our personal space more insistently than any other media. Researchers estimate that we each see over five thousand ads a day, including commercials on television and radio, billboards, sidebars and pop-up ads online, spam e-mails and physical junk mail, and countless other forms. As a *New York Times* headline proclaimed in 2007, "Anywhere the Eye Can See, It's Likely to See an Ad" (Story 2007). Ads are being placed on subway turnstiles, motion sickness bags, toll booths, bridges, and doctors' examination tables, immersing consumers in their imagery. Given this ubiquity, it makes sense to consider the realm of advertising when thinking about the impact of media imagery. As a visual medium that depicts society, advertising contains narratives about race and portrays racialized bodies just as television programs and movies do—albeit with a decisively commercial intent and a condensed time frame. The advertising agencies who produce these images are thus in a position of power that must be viewed alongside the media producers at film and television studios.

For the specific case of considering how minority communities are portrayed in advertising, we can turn to the work of multicultural advertising agencies. Although general market advertisers may include some token faces of color, the real work of representing and providing advertisements to communities of color belongs to advertising agencies who focus exclusively on minorities. Yet research on multicultural advertising has been scant. There have been some racially specific investigations, such as Jason Chambers's (2009) history of black consumer marketing, Arlene Davila's (2001) investigation of the Hispanic marketing industry, and Shalini Shankar's (2015) insightful work on the role played by Asian American advertising agencies in creating consumer markets. While these studies have laid the groundwork for understanding the political complexities of the minority marketplace—including the ways in which advertisements have historically contributed to social change—many academics are hesitant to connect the work of advertisers to activism. Given the anticapitalist focus of much work in critical race studies, advertising is often the target of criticism rather than a site for potential contributions to social justice. In this project I seek to view Asian American advertising as an important site where negotiations between consumers and image producers take place, and in which notions of cultural citizenship are produced and engaged.

Using the same logic that we must consider all mediated spaces where images of Asian Americans are regularly being created, viewed, and interpreted as potential sites for media activism, of course we must include the online realm as well. The number of hours Americans spend online increases every year, with adults in 2013 averaging well over three hours per day online (eMarketer 2013). Within the online arena there are countless spaces in which Asian American stories are shared. YouTube provides the most obvious example, given the resounding success of a number of Asian Americans in accumulating subscriber bases such as Kevin Wu, Freddie Wong, Ryan Higa, and Michelle Phan. Each of these individuals have literally millions of fans who regularly view their video blogs and scripted stories online. YouTube has also begun to offer a platform for more organized media production companies, such as Wong Fu Productions and YOMYOMF (You Offend Me You Offend My Family), both of which focus on producing Asian American-themed videos. Beyond YouTube, the internet and online social media can be seen to more generally enable Asian American media producers to disseminate their work using blogs, forums, Facebook, Twitter, or personal websites. The rise of digital media has provided many opportunities for media creators to bypass the gatekeepers of the traditional world of film and television and lowered barriers to access so that those with the proper technology can more easily participate in sharing their work. Alongside traditional media such as television and movies, I will also investigate the way that Asian American media activists are making sense of these digital interventions and opportunities.

Citizenship through Media

This conversation about the ability to participate in sharing one's ideas and stories, build resilient forms of community, and express one's emotions and needs is connected to our understanding of what it means to be a citizen. At its most basic level, citizenship can be seen as the set of laws and procedures that prohibit or grant an individual legal status to reside within the nation-state. Someone who is a member of the citizenry is assumed to possess a basic set of rights and protections such as the right to free speech and protection from unjust imprisonment. Legal citizenship has been connected to race in the United States since as far

back as the birth of the country. Although founding documents such as the Declaration of Independence explicitly connected the concept of citizenship to notions of equality and freedom, in reality there were many restrictions and exclusions about who counted as a citizen. For blacks, women, and other minorities, the fight for the rights of American citizenship—including representation, the ability to vote, to possess land, and to live under the protection of the government—were long and arduous. Even the Fourteenth Amendment to the Constitution, which set forth a basic definition for citizenship that included birthright citizenship and therefore granted citizenship to African Americans, was not meant to apply to Native Americans or other nonwhite immigrants.

Yet these legal conflicts between citizenship and race do not embrace the full picture of how citizenship is lived out. Beyond legal rights and restrictions, we can also think of citizenship being granted through the fulfillment of certain cultural practices. For instance, citizens are those who participate in their civic duties and contribute to the upkeep of the national body by voting or volunteering their services, speaking up about important issues, or helping to police the community against wrongdoing. A citizen can also be culturally demarcated by their feelings of identification or belonging with the nation and its people. Given that citizenship encompasses such a broad range of concepts, it follows that the processes of granting and denying citizenship are similarly complicated. For each of these ways of viewing citizenship, there are particular identities and practices that can activate and close down membership and participation.

Although at its core the logic of citizenship assumes that those who possess citizenship ought to be treated equally, the reality is that many groups of people are systematically denied the privileges that citizenship is assumed to accord, and many groups constantly struggle for an equal share in what we might call "first-class citizenship." In his work on minority groups in Southeast Asia and Latinos in the United States, Renato Rosaldo (2003) points out that "when one enjoys the status of belonging to the national community, this belonging can easily be taken for granted and trivialized; but when such belonging is denied, its absence can prove devastating" (2). One arena in which these different degrees of citizenship can be seen at work is within cultural practices. In terms of culture, it is often assumed that the cultural practices of a citizen match

those of the dominant culture. This means that people can be excluded from first-class citizenship for having non-normative cultural practices, such as ethnic traditions, sexual preferences, or religious practices. Indeed, many individuals whose cultural practices do not align with hegemonic norms—gays and lesbians, Muslims, or African Americans, for example—are made to feel as though they do not belong and that their lifestyle is somehow antithetical to the ideals of the nation. It is within our everyday lives that cultural citizenship is evidenced—by the way that one is treated and respected, whether one is allowed to speak up for oneself and his or her community, or whether one can participate in the public sphere. As Toby Miller claims, "citizenship has always been cultural" (2007, 51), as states have always demanded that citizens meet cultural requirements with regard to things like language, knowledge, allegiance, and behavior.

Yet the borders policing citizenship are a moving equilibrium, always shifting and allowing for redefinition. Just as the rules for who counts as a legal citizen have drastically changed in the last century, so too have definitions for who counts as a cultural citizen. William Flores and Rina Benmayor (1998) point to the efforts of Latinos in particular to redefine the shape of American culture. Latino immigrants who might not be legal citizens nonetheless strive to be "recognized as legitimate political subjects claiming rights for themselves and their children, and in that sense as citizens" (11). Such striving takes on many different forms in post–9/11 America for young immigrants of color, as Sunaina Maira (2009) finds in her exploration of the diverse ways in which cultural citizenship is produced in the lives of South Asian Muslim youth. For them, expressions of their relationship to the state can be flexible, multifaceted, and even reflective of dissent. Beyond simply a means for exclusion, then, cultural citizenship more importantly can be seen as offering a route toward restructuring and reordering society in such a way that minority groups can move in their own ways toward claiming these kinds of cultural rights. Thus cultural citizenship stands in opposition to normative assumptions about the necessity of assimilation. Those who stand on the margins remind us that we must widen our understanding of citizenship to include and embrace those whose cultural practices and identities do not match up with the mainstream, rather than assuming it is always best to conform and adopt the practices of the majority in

order to be accepted. Through this recognition, we can begin to see how the kinds of cultural practices that are included within the category of "American" are always in motion, being slowly transformed through the process and performance of cultural citizenship.

Cultural citizenship is, then, intimately connected to media practices and images. In order for individuals to feel like their cultural practices are accepted and that people like them are included within the nation, they must see themselves and their specific communities represented within the media. When they are absent, sidelined, or mistreated, there is a real impact on the ability of communities to feel recognized and validated. Joke Hermes (2005) argues that popular culture and media consumption have "the power to make people bond and feel that they belong" (2), and in her audience ethnographies she traces the ways that people take up their role as cultural citizens through their interpretive practices. She argues that we do not have much agency over media production, so we must turn to interpretation as a viable source for creating citizenship. Similarly, Jillian Baez (2008) and Vicki Mayer (2003) have called for a turn to actual audiences as a site for identifying the production of cultural citizenship. Within their work we can see how studies of audiences show how individuals make sense of media in ways that resonate with their own cultural identities.

Yet these studies of how audiences make sense of media texts in relation to cultural citizenship also contribute to a widening division between citizenship at the level of the individual and citizenship for the collective. In *The Well-Tempered Self: Citizenship, Culture and the Post-Modern Self* (1993), Toby Miller argues that media and other popular culture serve as forms of discipline, tempering the individual into well-behaved citizens and consumers. In our increasingly neoliberal media culture, this focus on the individual begins to shape citizenship as something that everyone must attain for herself—whether through private enterprise, choices of what media to consume and how to interpret it, performances of participation, or other individual acts. Laurie Ouellette (2008) finds that reality television consistently emphasizes the neoliberal ideologies of self-reliance and taking care of oneself. Her exploration of television as a cultural technology reminds us of the profound impact of neoliberal ideologies on the shape of our society—including the move toward relying on businesses rather than government, privatizing social

welfare, and connecting individual responsibility and self-empowerment to the attainment of citizenship. Within the realm of neoliberalism, the ideal citizen is one who is self-governing and independent.

This focus on the individual becomes particularly pronounced within discussions of new media, where the concept of Web 2.0 leads to the conclusion that everyone is a producer, capable of engineering his or her own destiny (Ratto and Boler 2014). What is lost in this focus on the individual is the potential to view cultural citizenship as a collective endeavor. John Hartley (2012) draws attention to this distinction in his discussion of Do-It-Yourself citizenship, or DIY citizenship. Although the idea of doing citizenship on your own harkens to this focus on the individual, he emphasizes the existence of a similarly framed "Do It With Others" citizenship. As he states, "DIY/DIWO citizenship is more individuated and privatized than previous types, because it is driven by voluntarist choices and affiliations, but at the same time it has an activist and communitarian ethic, where 'knowledge shared is knowledge gained'" (144). This framework points more clearly to what is at stake in the distinction between attaining citizenship for oneself and taking on a more community-minded activist goal of attaining citizenship for one's community.

In this book I argue that within the work of Asian American media activists we can see a fight for a specific kind of cultural citizenship—one that relies on a collective notion of cultural citizenship. All collectives are made up of individuals, but thinking about mediated cultural citizenship through the lens of activism helps to shake us free from this exclusive focus on the individual. I do not purport to contradict the notion that dominant media programming promotes the individual as responsible for his or her own citizenship; this has certainly been the case. Nor do I seek to criticize the works of scholars who have focused on the ways in which individuals have made sense of cultural citizenship, as this is a valuable contribution to our understanding of how media texts shape citizenship. Rather, I simply seek to shift our attention to a new arena that has yet to be fully explored—sites where mediated cultural citizenships are being deliberately engaged, formed, and re-created through the body of the collective. In doing so, I argue that there are ways to resist the harm to cultural citizenship that neoliberalism has wrought. Asian Americans provide a particularly important case for

making this argument, as it is through those whose citizenship has been challenged at the level of the legal, political, and cultural that the need for collective action is required. Indeed, there are more ways to interact with media than simply to consume it. Media activism demonstrates a way that Asian Americans can and do interact with texts with the goal of changing them. For Asian Americans and other politically disenfranchised minorities, it isn't enough to simply take up individual forms of citizenship through cultural practices. Citizenship is a concept that must always connect back to collective forms of political action that contribute to social justice—whether that is by attaining legal citizenship, or simply working toward better living conditions for Asians in America. Through media activism, Asian Americans demonstrate their ability to perform cultural citizenship while working to achieve a broader movement toward cultural citizenship for others.

The Contradiction of Asian American Citizenship

This focus on Asian Americans is particularly important given that they have had a contradictory relationship with the concept of citizenship in both legal and cultural terms. On the one hand, Asian Americans have consistently been seen as "alien" throughout their history in the United States. As Mae Ngai (2004) argues, Asian Americans are uniquely marked by the category of the "alien citizen." Asians born in the United States hold birthright legal citizenship, and yet all Asians are nevertheless seen "as racially unassimilable and hence ineligible to naturalized citizenship" (170). In her examination of the treatment of Japanese Americans and Chinese Americans during World War II and the Cold War, she finds moments when alien citizenship is produced and sustained until 1965 when immigration restrictions are lifted. Lisa Lowe (1996) further examines the notion of Asian American citizenship in *Immigrant Acts*, arguing that "the American citizen has been defined over against the Asian immigrant, legally, economically, culturally" (4), and these anxieties of the U.S. nation-state come to be represented in images of Asians as "exotic, barbaric, and alien . . . a 'yellow peril' threatening to displace white European immigrants" (4). She examines the various exclusion acts and naturalization laws that have worked to regulate the national body of the United States within an Orientalist discourse

that consistently marks Asian Americans as the enemy despite their role as a necessary labor force in maintaining the U.S. economy. Edward Said's (1979) concept of Orientalism, wherein "the East" is positioned as inherently inferior to "the West," emerges within such discourses and confirms the superiority of whiteness. Although many Asian Americans are native-born citizens or have become citizens through naturalization, Lowe argues that their conditions within the nation-state are so marked by these laws and policies that the idea of citizenship for Asian Americans remains a perpetual contradiction. Leti Volpp (2001) further explores the contradiction of Asian American citizenship by distinguishing between the different facets of citizenship—legal status, rights, political activity, and identity. Although each of these discourses possesses unique histories and relationships to one another, she finds that "race cuts against the promise of each of these citizenship discourses" (58). We can see that Asian Americans have not been conceptualized as American citizens for a number of reasons ranging from legal prohibitions to citizenship, the realities of white privilege, assumptions that Asian Americans are politically inactive, or the blatant assumption that immigrant communities are disloyal.

Yet the contradiction of Asian American citizenship is that Asian America as a cultural body is simultaneously rejected and embraced. Although Asian Americans have been considered unfit for legal citizenship, in many ways they are also seen as culturally desirable. One way of understanding this contradiction is in terms of Robert Lee's distinction between the "alien" and the "foreign" (Lee 1999, 3). While both terms point to someone distinctly "other," the foreign is perceived as benignly temporary while the much more threatening alien desires to stay and become a pollutant. Thus, although the foreign still serves to bar outsiders from cultural assimilation, foreignness can nevertheless be fetishized and even admired because it does not pose a threat.

We can see both sides of this contradiction embodied within media representations. On the one hand, Asian Americans have historically been portrayed as noncitizens—as unassimilable perpetual foreigners, and the foreboding threat known as the yellow peril. This kind of ideology can be seen materialized in fictional characters like Fu Manchu (Mayer 2014), the Chinese villain who appeared in countless British and American movies, radio programs, books, graphic novels, and television

shows from 1912 to the 1960s. Fu Manchu embodied the mysterious, inscrutable, mystical power of the East, always plotting new ways to take over the world. As international relations between the United States and Asia shifted, different Asian populations served as the enemy—Chinese during the Gold Rush as they flooded the United States with cheap labor; Japanese during World War II, Koreans during the Korean War, and Vietnamese during the Vietnam War (Shim 1998). Threats of Asian Americans as the alien coincided with imagery of Asians in American media as grotesque beasts incapable of humanity.

But we can also see the way that Asian Americans have been conceived of as foreign—transitory outsiders who merely serve to amuse and entertain. This portrayal is visible in the stereotype of the model minority, or the racial group who has somehow managed to "make it" and serves as a supposed model for blacks and Latinos to aspire to (Wu 2014). The model Asian American is passive and nonconfrontational, possesses an aptitude for math and science, and is the picture of discipline and obedience. Frank Chin and Jeffery Paul Chan (1972) tie the yellow peril together with the model minority in two succinct images: "For Fu Manchu and the Yellow Peril, there is Charlie Chan and his Number One Son. The unacceptable model is unacceptable because he cannot be controlled by whites. The acceptable model is acceptable because he is tractable. There is racist hate and racist love" (Chin and Chan 1972). Asian Americans are poised at the intersection of this racist hate and racist love, both of which are made visible within media imagery.

Portrayals of Asians in mainstream U.S. media may make the notion of cultural citizenship in the United States seem tenuous at best, but Asian Americans can also be seen to create their own sense of cultural citizenship that relies on a more global sense of community. Many Asian Americans participate in the media cultures from Asia, particularly within countries where they have significant cultural ties. In examples such as Indian Americans keeping up with the latest Bollywood movies, Korean Americans participating in the Korean wave of interest in K-pop music, Vietnamese Americans partnering with film producers overseas to produce Vietnamese comedies, or Japanese Americans trading and translating anime and manga, many different communities of Asian Americans are laying claim to different cultural identities and feelings of belonging through the transnational flow of media between

Asia and the United States. The possession of competing cultural citizenships serves to undercut the assumed primacy of so-called American citizenship, as it offers routes to participation and acceptance other than those that are American-centric. If cultural citizenship includes participating in the normative cultural practices of a nation and therefore allowing for feelings of belonging and inclusion, then we must consider that many Asians moving through diasporic spaces can possess this kind of citizenship in places other than the United States. Media creation and media consumption offer particularly important moments for enacting this kind of citizenship. This helps us to see how the fight for legal citizenship within America needs to be viewed as only one desired result of the way that Asian Americans are interacting with media texts and representations—leaving open the possibility for other interpretations and desires for citizenship that exceed these limited perspectives.

The Roots of Asian American Media Activism

The fight for cultural citizenship through changing media representations has a long history within Asian America. In his exploration of the history of film censorship, Charles Lyons (1996) describes protests of Asian American portrayals as early as 1973. Those who were closest to the problem were among the first to take a stand—Asian American actors and industry professionals. First, a Chinese American actor complained about the use of the word "chink" in the film *Charlie Varrick* and got the line removed. A group of Asian American artists also protested the 1973 film *Lost Horizons* for its use of yellowface, which was the standard practice within the industry of white actors wearing make up to take on the role of Asian characters.[1] In subsequent protests, activist collectives also fought against the stereotyped performances of characters like Fu Manchu and Charlie Chan, demanding that Asian American roles be cast with Asian actors who spoke proper English and did not live in crime-infested Chinatowns. In 1985, the stereotype-ridden film *Year of the Dragon* inspired the first nationally organized protest by a number of different Asian American organizations. The numerous protests and rallies around the film's premiere culminated in a $100 million class action lawsuit against the film's producers at MGM/UA. They responded to the lawsuit with a disclaimer that ran before the film, stating:

> This film does not intend to demean or to ignore the many positive features of Asian-Americans and specifically Chinese-American communities. Any similarity between the depiction in this film and any association, organization, individual or Chinatown that exists in real life is accidental. (Harmetz 1985)

The moderate success of the protests against *Year of the Dragon* and the community organizing that took place laid the groundwork for the founding of the Media Action Network for Asian Americans (MANAA) in 1991, which remains the only watchdog group dedicated to responding to Asian American representations today.

Members initially joined together to protest news stories during the fiftieth anniversary of the bombing of Pearl Harbor that revisited old antagonisms between the Japanese and the United States. Almost immediately, they turned their advocacy away from just news in order to focus on the world of entertainment media. As part of the Asian Pacific American Media Coalition (APAMC) and the larger umbrella organization of the Multi-Ethnic Media Coalition (which also includes the National Latino Media Council and American Indians in Film and Television), MANAA also participates in the annual awarding of Diversity Report Cards to the top four television networks. Since 1999, the coalition has met to analyze statistics on how many Asian Americans are hired by the major networks, and this information is then discussed during individual meetings with the networks, as well as publicized in press releases. But as we can see in MANAA's mission of "advocating balanced, sensitive and positive portrayals of Asian Americans," its work largely consists of calling attention to the same antagonisms seen in previous decades—offensive stereotypes employed to the exclusion of any other kinds of roles for Asian Americans, the use of yellowface to allow white actors to play Asian characters, and the exclusion of Asian Americans from starring roles.

It is not a coincidence that Asian Americans began organizing to protest racist media imagery in the early 1970s, as this was when a collective and politicized Asian American identity began to form. Prior to 1969, Asian immigrants tended to hold firmly to their distinct ethnic identities and to "disidentify" with any Asian ethnic community being politically or economically targeted. This was the case for Japanese dur-

ing the Chinese Exclusion and for Chinese during the Japanese American internment (Espiritu 1992). But this act of disidentification and its dampening impact on intraethnic coalitions stood in contrast to the fact that non-Asians still ascribed a collective identity to all Americans of Asian descent. Indeed, individuals of all Asian backgrounds were being treated in the same discriminatory ways—they had been allowed to immigrate because of the labor power that they could provide, but suffered from hostility and violence, as well as discriminatory anti-immigration laws.

As Asian immigrant families continued to settle in the United States throughout the twentieth century, ties to their home countries began to dissipate or transform. A sense of shared history and circumstance within the U.S. context began to come together under the title of "Asian American." This group identification was propelled by a burgeoning social movement that united many who aligned themselves with Third World organizations fighting against poverty, war, and racism. Despite the flaws inherent in the term "Asian American" and the vast community it could potentially blanket, activists mobilizing under its collective umbrella began to organize and mobilize. Asian immigrants had begun building alliances with labor organizers and other racialized communities, and their organizational infrastructure allowed them a space to develop their own consciousness and awareness of their common experiences. As Daryl Maeda (2009) states, "Asian American identity contested Asian nationalism, liberal assimilationism, and narrow ethnic and class-based radicalism by embracing multiethnic, interracial, and transnational solidarity" (39). In his examination of important moments such as the Third World Liberation Front strike at San Francisco State College, alliances of the Red Guard Party with the Black Panthers, and protests against the Vietnam War, Maeda finds that Asian American identity is intimately connected to both antiracism and anti-imperialism. Activists within the Asian American movement in the 1960s linked the struggles of working-class communities to Third World struggles, and in the process sought to mobilize Asian Americans across the country in their efforts to challenge a number of norms, including "systems of rank and privilege, structures of hierarchy and bureaucracy, forms of exploitation and inequality, and notions of selfishness and individualism" (Omatsu 2010, 304).

Although the forging of a collective Asian American identity in the 1970s was imbued with this kind of radical critique, the meaning of Asian American activism has shifted in recent decades. In some ways, the growth of the Asian American neoconservative class and the influx of Asian American professionals and business executives who have taken up the banner of Asian American identity have pushed the politics of the movement away from its radical counterhegemonic roots (Omatsu 2010). Instead of seeking to overthrow the structures of dominance that lead to oppression and inequalities, Asian American community groups who survived the economic turbulence of the 1980s and use the term now are often conspicuously lacking in the populations who first came together as activists—youth without college degrees, immigrant workers, gang members, the elderly, and the poor. This does not mean that all Asian American activists have shifted in this direction; there are many grassroots organizations and collectives of activists who continue to work from the margins (Das Gupta 2006). Yet it must be acknowledged that Asian American activism has never been and is certainly not today a monolithic or unified force, and discourses of the "model minority" who resists disruptions to the status quo can work to dampen politicization.

In pointing to the story of how this identity has shifted since its origination, I do not seek to deprive the term of meaning or political efficacy; on the contrary, I trace its lineage so that we can continue to more accurately chart its continued salience today. Given the transformation of the communities using the term "Asian American" and the wide diversity of communities who might fall under its indiscriminate umbrella, it is important to consider the political significance of continuing to use such a term. Gayatri Spivak's theories are helpful in understanding the significance of the strategic use of essentialism, where a master concept is strategically deployed for political action. Spivak acknowledges that there is a risk inherent in deploying essentialism in this way, as the strategy can serve to solidify an identity as if there were indeed a unifying essence to all those encompassed within it. But she hopes that "the strategic use of an essence as a mobilizing slogan or masterword like *woman* or *worker* or the name of a nation is, ideally, self-conscious for all mobilized" (Spivak 1993, 3). In bringing together different Asian communities, the term "Asian American" was constructed to strategically destabilize the exist-

ing racial order and empower individuals to speak out on behalf of their marginalized community.

In accordance with Spivak's hopes for only temporary alliances, Kent Ono (1995) has called for the "re-signing" of the term "Asian American" because of its failure as a collective assignation. As part of an effort to either re-sign or resignify the term, Ono asks us to think about what purpose the term still serves, and how it can be used in an era when the incommensurability of the diverse community to which it refers has not been addressed. As a broad category, the term "Asian American" has always served to exclude many of its members, and in looking at contemporary formations, has been dominated by only a minority of the community's most privileged participants. For instance, the larger East Asian ethnic groups of Chinese, Japanese, Filipino, Vietnamese, and Korean Americans are often recognized. Yet communities from South Asia such as those from India, Sri Lanka, Pakistan; the indigenous people of Hawaii and other Pacific Islands; ethnic groups such as the Hmong; and others have been neglected. As Ono argues, now more than ever the term needs to be reconsidered so that it can come to terms with changing social conditions without sacrificing dissent from within its ranks. It is my hope that media activism as I define it within this project can provide a site for such a re-signing, helping us to better understand the diversity of those encompassed by the term Asian American, as well as some of the practices—including participation in consumer culture, explicitly activist or political actions, and media production—that enable us to widen and redefine its boundaries.

Indeed, the fight for media representation that I examine here is not taken up as a radical act designed to rewrite the structures of American society. The activists in this book include organizers, policy makers, media producers and professionals, and everyday consumers—each of whom identify as Asian American, relying on the collective notion that their diverse and disparate voices are stronger when united than divided. As evidenced by the fact that many Asian American media activists have been active professional members of media industries—actors, filmmakers, and crew—it is clear that their model of activism falls under this more conservative, contemporary model. Rather than seeking to wholly remake the film industry or challenge the system of media structures that uphold racial hierarchies and inequalities, media activists are

simply fighting for access to greater participation and a recognized voice in the process that already exists. In this way, media activists take on the collective political identity that developed out of the Asian American movement from the 1960s but do not share in its radical critiques.

Yet this is the labor of fighting for cultural citizenship—the recognition that there are political processes and identities that even privileged bodies are still seeking to claim, and that the fight to do so might look different from what our revolutionary forefathers imagined. Today's media activism is by no means free from criticism; indeed, throughout my investigation of Asian American media activism, I outline some of the limitations of what I consider to be a more conservative, assimilationist Asian American politics. Yet I also work to identify political potential in a mode of activism that relies on deep engagement with even the most devalued forms of popular culture—becoming an impassioned fan of a media franchise, creating advertisements, or partnering with McDonalds—as a vehicle for social change. It is important that this potential be acknowledged, as my examination of these different processes of activism serves to counter a romanticism for a kind of "authentic" or "real" activism that is limited in who it can stem from or what kinds of actions and alliances it can include. Moreover, in calling the disparate engagements depicted here "activism," I also expand the category of media activist to participants who might not normally be considered. In doing so, this book shows that the fight for cultural citizenship through media activism is one that can potentially benefit all the different communities within Asian America, including those who are most privileged and those who are most disenfranchised.

Expanding Definitions of Activism

Through this book I am interested in refining the definition of media activism so that the term can more accurately be deployed in conversations about who is participating in creating change in the media beyond those that affect Asian Americans. Academics and practitioners have long debated what should count as activism, given that activism-related activities span a broad range from those that are designed to bring about awareness or act as symbolic gestures, to governmental or legislative action, to activities that endeavor to actually bring about

structural or institutional change. All activism begins with the identification of a social problem based on inequality, injustice, or harm to society. After identifying this core problem, activists engage in any number of activities designed to bring about social change. Such a project can be focused on just one facet of a social problem and may be limited in scope, but centers on a cause or set of causes with the goal of achieving societal change. Some examples of social causes that activists have organized around include AIDS, animal rights, environmental, gay and lesbian, feminist, and labor issues. The Asian American media activism described thus far includes tactics such as protesting problematic representations and organizing meetings with media producers to convey concerns.

I define activism as intentional participation in a political act designed to remedy a social injustice. Of course, the definition of what counts as political is not clear-cut, and within cultural studies there is a tendency to see nearly all social activity as being imbued with political meaning. But at the very least this definition helps to clarify that activism is intentional, meaning that activists must be aware of the intended consequences of their actions with regard to a cause. Unintentional consequences are of course inevitable and important to at least consider, but it is intention that marks one as an activist. If we are trying to understand who is involved in media activism, we can look for what I have defined as the necessary elements of activism—the identification of a social problem that exists within the media and the intentional action taken to remedy this mediated problem. Thus, my investigation of media activism depends upon the fact that media activists explicitly connect media representations to social realities; they are not simply seeking change because of a personal desire or preference. Their goal is to make meaningful, long-term change in the media landscape—whether that means changing the images that have been created, the structures that produce those images, or the way that images are understood by viewers.[2]

This book argues that while the stated goals of media activists might seem immediate—to recast a role, to demand an apology from producers, to hire an Asian American consultant or director, to produce more images of Asian Americans—what goes unstated is the connection between these achievements and the ultimate goal of cultural citizenship for Asian Americans. Activists who organize to improve the represen-

tation of Asian Americans in the media are critical of the second-class treatment of Asian Americans within American society, where Asian Americans are still routinely subject to discrimination and violence. This problem is attributed to two factors: first, the fact that images of Asian Americans fall into problematic and limiting categories in our visual imagination, reflecting a lack of respect and subordinate social status, and second, that Asian Americans are often distanced from the ability to control, direct, or even participate in telling their own stories. Thus, media activists seek to remedy the social problem of the oppression of Asian Americans by changing media representations. Although media activists can also be fans who share affective connections to the images that they seek to change, what I argue here is that activists are working first and foremost toward actualization as citizens, and fighting oppression through media is a necessary component of working toward this goal. Although the specific activist collectives and projects that I examine here cannot be understood outside an Asian American context and identity, the broader potential for using media activism to comment upon and redefine cultural citizenship is one that can be productively utilized in a variety of different communities. Although the specific cultural context for each community would impact what that citizenship looks like and means, my intention here is to identify who is participating in media activism so that we can better understand the broader cultural forces shaping media industries and our interactions with them as citizens.

In the chapters that follow, I look at Asian Americans in a variety of roles—as members of corporate advisory councils, cable channel owners, owners of advertising agencies, YouTube videographers, Twitter users, bloggers, and others. For each case, we can consider the theory of change being utilized and the kinds of actions being taken in the hope of leading to a better future for Asian Americans. Although not all the cases I examine fall under the category of activism as defined here, I am still interested in the individuals and organizations who are contributing to the same vision of social change through media representation that is so clearly defined by traditional activist groups. In doing so, I paint a more accurate picture of who it is that is actually contributing to the larger project of improving images of Asian Americans and what those improvements mean in terms of cultural citizenship. By mapping

the intersections of these different agents and activities we can better understand what it takes to bring about change in the media, and thus in society.

When talking about organizations and individuals who are intentionally changing the image of Asian Americans in the media, there is an obvious category of activists I do not want to leave out—artists and creators from within the independent Asian American filmmaking world. From documentary filmmakers like Renee Tajima-Peña and Tad Nakamura to narrative filmmakers like Wayne Wang and Mira Nair, there is a rich history and tradition within the Asian American community of creative expression through moving images. These films are supported and screened at a wide array of Asian American film festivals across the country, with the two largest located in San Francisco and Los Angeles and smaller festivals held yearly in New York, Washington, D.C., San Diego, Austin, Eugene, Chicago, Pittsburgh, Philadelphia, Houston, and other locations. Despite the importance of these films and their impact on the way the community is portrayed and represented, there is a well-developed body of research on this particular aspect of Asian American media activism. An extensive anthology of essays written by artists within the independent Asian Pacific American media arts movement from 1970 to 1990, edited by the UCLA Asian American Studies Center and Visual Communications, describes these artists' work in their own words (Leong 1991). *Screening Asian Americans* (2002), a collection edited by Peter Feng, tackles the same subject matter from a more distinctly academic perspective, with essays on topics such as the history of Asian American Media Arts Centers to specific investigations of Filipino/a American, Chinese American, and Korean American women's cinema. Glen Mimura's *Ghostlife of Third Cinema: Asian American Film and Video* (2009) additionally considers the perspective of international and queer cinema in its exploration of Asian American independent media, while Jun Okada's (2015) book *Making Asian American Film and Video: History, Institutions, Movements* examines the institutional history that undergirds the creation of such films.

Asian American artists and filmmakers have made incredibly important contributions to the way that Asian American bodies and identities have been inscribed, and their contributions to representational change have been well documented in the works mentioned above. Yet in many

ways, the productions described in these works remain sequestered within the niche market of Asian American film festivals and Asian American Studies classrooms, seen only by patrons of these events and those who belong to the Asian American independent cinema scene. It is rare for even the most popular, award-winning films screened at Asian American film festivals to find mainstream distribution, which means that everyday film-going audiences almost never have the opportunity to see such work playing at their local theater or even being available for rental. It is not necessarily the size of the audience that limits such works but the low level of accessibility, since much of the work of Asian American independent filmmakers is only available to privileged audiences in specific geographic locations for a small amount of time. Thus I briefly theorize the connection between Asian American independent media and online videographers in chapter 5, but I do not explore independent film in any detail. In this book I investigate the organizations and individuals who set their sights on improving mainstream media and other forms of media that are widely available and accessible to general audiences. These activists hope to take part in a broader social justice movement that extends beyond Asian American audiences to impact the way that Asian Americans are perceived and treated as cultural citizens.

The Research Process

This project is based on a three-year ethnography of Asian American media activism organizations in Los Angeles, as well as in-depth interviews with individuals who were associated with such activism.[3] Research began in the fall of 2008 when I started attending the general meetings for the Media Action Network for Asian Americans. Although I identified myself as a researcher who studied the representation of Asian Americans in the media, it was clear that the boundaries between participant and observer would be indelibly blurred in my relationships with members of the organization. I became a regular participant within the business of the organization and eventually was asked to serve on its board of directors, which I did for almost two years. When I returned home from my meetings I would jot down field notes and transcribe the observations I had scrawled in the margins of my meeting agendas, but I would also take on the regular work of the organization—editing drafts

of letters to movie studios, creating and updating the organization's blog, and offering my opinions and suggestions whenever called for.

This book is not wholly ethnographic; I did not spend significant time in the field studying some of the organizations profiled in this study, such as the advertising agencies and policy centers. For those chapters, my analysis relies on a combination of interviews, archival research, attendance at events, and brief visits to their offices. But it was my time with MANAA from 2008 to 2011 that is at the heart of this study, as it was through MANAA that I became well-acquainted with the other subjects of my study and was able to fully immerse myself in the world of Asian American media activism. Leaders from the fledgling organization Racebending.com started attending MANAA meetings in the fall of 2009 to present their case for protesting the casting of *The Last Airbender*. After meeting and working with them, I began closely following their online communities, communicating regularly with the leaders online. Members of MANAA's leadership were also among the select few invited to meet with the television networks as part of the Asian Pacific American Media Coalition (APAMC) and engage with the policy work that overlaps with that of the Asian American Justice Center. In the fall of 2010, I was invited to attend the annual network meetings with ABC, NBC, CBS, and FOX because of my status as a board member. Although I conducted formal interviews with members of these organizations and told them that I was studying organizations like theirs for my research, it is safe to say that they did not see me as an objective or neutral participant in their cause—they understood that I was an activist alongside them, even if I was occasionally presenting my thoughts about their work at academic conferences or publishing papers about them in academic journals.

Within ethnographic work, there has been much debate and discussion about the advantages of being an "insider" versus an "outsider" to the community one is studying. If the researcher belongs to the community he or she studies, there is often a fear of the researcher "going native," as anthropologist Bronislaw Malinowski (1922) has called it. By this he means the researcher becomes so immersed in the lives of his or her subjects that he or she loses the capacity for analysis and insight. As Duncan Fuller (1999) states, the dreaded consequences of going native include "the apparent loss of validity, integrity, criticality, necessary

distance, formality, and ultimately, reputation." Moreover, Robert Labaree (2002) argues that being an insider creates a number of ethical dilemmas that can overcomplicate the research project, such as how to enter a field one already belongs to, how to position oneself in order to maintain trust with respondents, and how to negotiate friendships with informants, all the while balancing a research agenda.

While these can be valid concerns in many situations, I would argue that my research has been strengthened by the access afforded to me by virtue of my identity as both activist and scholar. Although I would not go so far as to claim that being an insider necessarily offered me a position of "epistemological privilege," as is often the case with feminist research or research on other disempowered groups (Griffith 1998), there are still many ways in which this study could not have been written had I remained outside these organizations. In particular, it would have been limiting to only be able to observe what went on during public meetings or during scheduled interviews. As a full participant in the lifeblood of these organizations, I was able to gain a much more detailed portrait of the way they functioned—including the strategic planning that occurred in instant messages online, the daily emails shared between organizational leaders, the exasperations expressed in the late hours after a meeting had ended, and the epic struggles and heartaches that would never have been exposed to anyone but an insider. On a practical level, the network meetings with the APAMC are extremely exclusive and the information discussed within them is proprietary. Because I was a board member of MANAA, I was allowed access to these rare meetings, and while participating in them I took on the role of activist, not scholar. Although I could not report any of the actual content of the meetings, my participation within them helped me to more deeply understand the kind of work that was being conducted there.

It is also worth considering how my own identity impacted my research. Within qualitative studies growing importance is being attached to the identity of the researcher, given that subjects might position their own stories differently depending on who is asking and listening. In Elizabeth Chin's (2001) ethnography of black children and consumer culture, she admits that her own racial ambiguity helped her remain somewhat outside the black/white boundaries that were so central to her participants' communities. Moreover, her status as a researcher often

prompted others to see her as a "teacher" figure rather than as a threatening agent of the state or an outsider completely lacking in authority. In many ways, my own identity tends to occupy a liminal position that says more about the one identifying me than any static truth about my position as insider or outsider. When asked about my racial background, my response is that I am mixed race, Japanese and white. For some, this means that I belong wholly to the Asian American community. But many others do not ask me about my background, and it is possible that from my physical appearance I pass as white—or even Latina, given my Hispanic last name. For yet others, my racial identity is simply a question mark.

This liminality bleeds over into discussions of my identity as a scholar and activist. I was often asked to take on leadership positions within the various organizations I interacted with, but they were also interested in using my academic work as evidence of their own legitimacy and significance. In these examples it becomes clear that there can be important overlaps between activists and scholars, even within the same work—scholarship can be seen as activist and the work of scholars can be seen to contribute to activist efforts. Within the fields of cultural studies, Asian American Studies, and even media studies, the position of siding with marginalized communities and attempting to use scholarly works to have a positive impact on their realities is a heartily championed position. As George Lipsitz (2008) describes it, "scholar activists have been disseminating the situated knowledge of communities in struggle for many years" (90), including individuals from fair housing movements, prison reform movements, environmental justice movements, AIDS research, international antiviolence coalitions, labor organizers, and queer theorists. In each of these projects, academics have been able to call attention to the work of these activists in ways that create new kinds of knowledge and lead to social mobilization. Cultural studies theorists have also long implored scholars to impact the power structures that they study. As Jennifer Slack and Laurie Anne Whitt argue, "cultural theorists, consciously and emphatically, aim not merely to describe or explain contemporary cultural and social practices, but to change them, and more pointedly, to transform existing structures of power" (Slack and Whitt 1992, 572). For myself I hope to embrace the challenge of creating a work that "does something," rather than simply standing on

the sidelines describing what I see, even if that makes my position as a researcher more complicated and demands more careful introspection.

Ethnography is the work of the researcher "being there," spending significant amounts of time immersed in the social world, observing and absorbing everyday cultures. It is immersive and messy, involving critical examinations, but also bodily engagements. Although ethnography has traditionally been considered the central methodology of anthropologists seeking to understand foreign peoples and cultures, researchers from cultural studies and countless other fields have now taken up the practice of ethnography as a way of understanding their own cultures of everyday life. By undertaking an ethnography of these organizations as a participant who was not afraid to take a stand and get dirty in the trenches alongside the other participants, I hope to be in a position to reveal insights about the realities of media activism that accurately portray those most closely involved, but also useful to those still in the field trying to make a difference. If this book seeks to make sense of the struggles in which these individuals have been engaged by applying the framework of cultural citizenship to Asian American media activism, I hope that the knowledge produced in doing so will assist future media activists in a way that continues to positively contribute to justice and equality for Asian American communities.

The Structure of the Book

This book is structured around specific sites of media activism that deploy different understandings of what cultural citizenship looks like in activists' fight to impact media practices. I move from groups that are most easily identifiable as media activists, such as MANAA and the APAMC, to groups that take more untraditional positions in the fight for representation. I begin by presenting a cultural history of media activism in Asian American communities that originated with actors in Los Angeles in the 1960s. This history provides the context for examining the work of MANAA, one of the most long-standing contemporary organizations engaging in Asian American media activism. By examining some of their campaigns, we can begin to take a deeper look at the traditional tactics that media activists use. As with all Asian American politics, media activists are faced with a changing landscape both

in terms of who constitutes Asian America, what citizenship entails, and what kind of representation they are most interested in impacting. For the members of MANAA, cultural citizenship is based on the idea that Asian Americans need to be treated "just like everyone else." This results in a set of strategies that demand the expulsion of all stereotypes and negative depictions of Asian Americans in film and television, and pushes toward a strict definition of Asian America as being bounded within national borders. Yet this exploration of their strategies shows that the assumption that cultural citizenship is predicated on assimilation has served to limit the purview of their activism. By laying out some critiques of the way traditional advocacy organizations operate, we can see that there is a call to investigate other potential sites of media activism and rethink the possibilities for impacting change on a systemic level.

Chapter 2 examines media activism at the level of policy and governmental intervention. My interviews with individuals at the Asian American Justice Center and the APAMC show what an important tool media policy has been in shaping the idea of cultural citizenship as part of a system rather than simply an individual experience. By taking a more systematic perspective I am able to highlight the different ways that Asian Americans have fought for change at the level of media industries—creating relationships through the APAMC with the television networks, through the rise and fall of Asian American cable channels, the merger of Comcast and NBC Universal in 2010, and changing the way that the Nielson Company measures minority viewers. Each of these policy battles demonstrates that the Asian American consumer-citizen has a voice in speaking up for the policies that shape the way the community is represented, and shows the different ways in which Asian Americans have worked to voice their concerns to these powerful bodies.

Chapter 3 begins to more explicitly explore the connection between the project of Asian American media activism and consumer movements. Given the reality that media images are commercial products and that those who produce them are motivated by financial incentives, it is important to position Asian Americans as more than simply cultural citizens—they must be seen as powerful consumer citizens. This chapter focuses on the work of Asian American marketing and communications

firms like IW Group, AAAZA, and other members of the Asian American Advertising Federation (3AF). These companies work to strengthen and promote the idea that Asian American consumers are a target audience for corporations. This reframing of how Asian Americans should be viewed, as well as their work in producing images and advertisements that feature Asian Americans, is clearly connected to the larger project of Asian American activism as described in previous chapters. Yet this chapter also begins to refine the definition of "media activist," given the goals that often motivate advertisers in this kind of work. In assessing the different strategies of those who hope to impact media industries, we can begin to see that nonactivists play an important role alongside the avowed activists described in chapters 1 and 2.

Chapter 4 continues to challenge who it is that we might consider part of Asian American media activism by looking at some of the most popular Asian Americans on YouTube. Indeed, Asian Americans are often perceived as being on the forefront of adopting digital media practices, with their high rates of internet and mobile phone usage. The lively community of Asian Americans using online social media can be seen to be participating in shaping new spaces for the creation and dissemination of Asian American imagery. In many ways these participants are simply following in the footsteps of Asian American independent filmmakers who saw self-representation as an important mode of cultural citizenship. Yet I argue that the affordances of online media also provide a different kind of platform for users to engage with Asian American media. First, we can examine the way that online media has contributed to the development of an Asian American celebrity culture surrounding its most popular participants. These individual celebrities use the online networks facilitated through new media to connect with one another in an act of transmedia branding, creating bridges between online media and the mainstream realms of film and television. Their doing so leads to the emergence of an Asian American popular culture that plays an important role in furthering the goals of Asian American media activists by echoing the work of advertisers who seek to reify a collective identity for Asian American audiences.

Chapter 5 follows up on this investigation of the use of online tools and social media by looking explicitly at activist and political projects. I begin with an analysis of hashtag activism on Twitter, where Asian

Americans have developed the ability to call attention to issues of importance to them by means of digital participation. The widespread interest of news media outlets in the phenomenon of Asian American hashtag activism—particularly in #NotYourAsianSidekick and #CancelColbert—clearly demonstrate the way that Asian Americans are fighting for recognition, better treatment, and belonging as a collective. These two campaigns also emphasize the centrality of media representation in realizing these desires. Although the high percentage of Asian American participants on Twitter clearly played a role in facilitating this dialogue, this kind of visibility is not always reliant on numbers—individuals also must have an affective connection to the issue at hand, and feel that their contributions matter. I conclude this chapter with an exploration of the media activism surrounding *The Last Airbender*, which relied heavily on fans of the Nickelodeon television show. In examining the tactics of the activists who sought to protest the discriminatory casting of M. Night Shyamalan's 2010 film we can begin to see how media activism is shifting in a new media environment.

This investigation of different sites for media activism shows that many different communities are working toward improving the image of Asian Americans in the media beyond traditional activist organizations. Some of these communities have yet to fully embrace their connection to activist movements and ideologies while others continue in an unbroken activist tradition stretching back to the 1970s. Together their work must be recognized for its role in shifting the way that Asian American cultural citizenship is imagined, desired, and achieved.