Race and the City

Shanti Fernando

Race and the City: Chinese Canadian and Chinese American Political Mobilization

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To Mary Agnes Fernando

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Preface

There was no single impetus for this book and the project that was its precursor. Instead, there were several things driving my work, including my need to explore how the Canadian and, in comparative terms, the American political systems were dealing with increased cultural heterogeneity. It seemed that the pace of change in both political systems was slow and that even modest gains were increasingly met with a backlash. It was clear this was something that should be examined, but it was not obvious how I could best conduct this examination. I wanted to shed light on the position of racialized minorities, many of whom were concentrated in a few large urban centres. I also wanted to see how they dealt with their lack of formal inclusion in the political system.

I have explored these issues and written this book as part of a continuing project to consider the political systems of multicultural cities in Canada and the United States, the political participation of racialized minorities, and the ethnospecific community groups that act as both bastions of cultural preservation and defensive institutions in the context of systemic racism. I have concentrated on racialized minorities' achievement of substantive citizenship in the form of full access to political institutions, and I have attempted to come to terms with the lack of formal participation by Chinese Canadians and Chinese Americans in the political institutions of Canada and the United States. This has required me to come to terms with the fact that social difference is not viewed as a political resource but as a cause of dissent and various social ills – and many racialized minorities have been denied opportunities for political participation because of this perception.

I believe a book such as this is necessary because of the gaps in the literature on participation and Canadian politics and because of the nature of some of the arguments that I have studied in political science, which do not reflect the reality of many racialized minorities. But I also hope that it will help in the development of an anti-racist strategy that will identify systemic

racism and work to eliminate it as a barrier to the political participation of racialized minorities. This goal is increasingly relevant in the current climate of suspicion of non-whites and recent immigrants. If political participation – and political power – continues to be restricted to a small segment of the population, it will challenge democratic principles and the achievement of full political, social, and civil rights for all the population, but it will be felt most keenly in the non-white population.

This book is not only an academic and political project, but is also part of a personal journey. I came to Queen's University in Kingston, Ontario, as a doctoral student in 1996 to study the comparative politics of the United States and Canada in a fairly traditional way. I wanted to understand the differences in social policies and to assess data that would illuminate some of the differences between the two countries. This seemed a straightforward project and one that I could handle easily. Then everything changed.

Kingston is a very white town. I had lived in such places before, but this time it was different. People were looking at me. They appeared to be scared of me or confused by me, and they spoke to me very slowly, as if they thought I wouldn't understand them. I was studying and working at an upper-class school with upper-class students who were overwhelmingly white and overwhelmingly sure that racism did not exist in Canada. In the course of my first few years as a doctoral student, it became clear that I could no longer avoid, personally or professionally, the topic I had avoided most pointedly in my work to that date: race.

I wanted and needed to address race in the context of my life and my research as something important, especially in terms of anti-racist education. Researching and writing this book became a journey that made me confront my own discomfort with issues of race in Canada so that I could learn, and thereby teach lessons, about how to deal with racism. I had no choice but to confront it. It is part of the reality of politics in this country, and I am a political scientist. I had been taught that politics was about the structures of government and the political and economic institutions. They were what structured and defined Canadian political life. I was not taught about the other structures of Canadian political life, the structures of oppression: race, class, and gender. These were characterized to me as not really part of the public life of Canada, but issues of private life. Yet I myself began to see no public/private distinction. Structures of oppression were indeed part of the political life that I saw and knew, whether explicitly or implicitly. They shaped the relations within political life in a profound way. We had not been taught about these structures or processes, but as a Canadian woman of colour I was very well aware of them. It became necessary for me to look at these structures in order to get a full picture of Canadian political life. Could I ignore poverty, sexism, and racism and claim that a

neutral state existed when I did not believe this to be true? It did not seem a fair representation of the realities of political life or the political system. I therefore decided to look at political participation and one structure of oppression, race and racism.

At this point, another question might come to mind for people reading this book. I am not looking at "my own group," but at another racialized minority group. Why? Throughout the time I spent doing research for and writing this book, I have been asked "Why are you studying Chinese people?" I continue to be asked that question. Surprisingly, I had not expected this question. I don't know whether this lack of expectation resulted from naïveté or lack of foresight.

There are various reasons I made the choices I did in my research. First, I was still endlessly fascinated by the Canada/US comparison, as all Canadians seem to be. I was looking at two cities. I chose Toronto because I knew it and it was close at hand. I needed a comparative US city, which had to be as multiethnic as Toronto and a gateway city for immigration. Los Angeles became my comparison site, and I went through all the various racialized groups to find one that would work for both cities. Blacks and Latinos had such different histories and numbers in the two cities. Asians seemed to fit the bill. In Toronto, the largest non-white group at the time was Chinese Canadians. I had lived in Toronto and seen a great deal of racism towards them. Even friends who would never think to make a derogatory remark about blacks, South Asians, Aboriginals, or gays and lesbians would make comments about Chinese Canadians being "foreign" and would display racism towards them. Why was anti-Chinese racism more "acceptable"? Why did members of this group seem so "foreign"? Perhaps the perceived "success" of Chinese Canadians had "lost" them their status as a disadvantaged minority and they were now seen as fair game. There had to be more to this phenomenon. These thoughts led to the birth of a project.

It never occurred to me that I should study people from my own South Asian background, even though it occurred to almost everyone I spoke to about the project. I was studying race and political participation, and the experiences of Chinese Canadians and Chinese Americans seemed to fit. I was obviously naïve. For me, the question was "Why not study the experience of the Chinese Canadian and Chinese American populations?" To me, anti-racism meant fighting for human rights, not just rights for those who looked like me. Championing only those who are of the same background as oneself seemed to be part of the problem.

I then had to realize that I was not the neutral white researcher free to research any community I wished. I was a racialized subject who was not free from that racialization even in my capacity as a political scientist. This was a revelation. In the book *Racing Research, Researching Race,* Troy Duster

wrestles with his colleagues' comments about their frustration with black, Latino, Asian American, and Native American students who do "auto-biographical" work: "They are referring to the fact that many students of Asian ancestry want to study problems of Asian-Americans, or that African-American students tend to study African-American issues, or that Latino students wanted to study Latino American concerns. One of these colleagues pronounced with some passion that he would never want to study 'his own group' because he was afraid of the implicit bias. What is remarkable is that his white students were routinely studying the lives of white Americans with no consciousness, no reflexivity, and little awareness that race was a feature of their studies as well."[1]

I was not researching "my own group," but the fact that I was not, in itself, racialized my legitimacy as a researcher. Moreover, many people did not perceive race as an "issue" in Canada. Why was I studying racism in a racism-free place like Canada? More questions. More problems. More self-doubt. Should I study "neutral" white populations? Does a racialized researcher talking about racism always risk being seen as having an "axe to grind"? Would I be taken seriously as a researcher presenting legitimate and important facts? Would I be labelled as someone who is not doing real political science? These questions plagued me, but the more I thought about it, the more I came to realize that once I had found the topic and its importance, I could not pretend to lose it.

The complacency bred by "multiculturalism" has prevented many Canadians, including me at times, from moving forward and championing a society that has real respect for diversity and acceptance, rather than mere tolerance. Explicit anti-racism can structure our political institutions in place of implicit racism. Cities in Canada and the United States are becoming more ethnically diverse, and more non-whites are part of these societies. However, at a time when it is becoming even more pressing to deal with the systemic inequalities determined by race, there seems even less generalized inclination to do so on the part of both racialized and non-racialized groups. It seems we are being told more often that inequality does not exist, even though those of us who are members of racialized minorities do not notice this inequality disappearing. It seems the conservative backlash and conservative politics now prevalent in both countries are trying to quash any dissent from racialized minorities among equality-seeking groups. Why is this assault on existing rights occurring when there is such an urgent need to re-examine the systemic racism and systemic inequalities in these societies and to address the quest of many groups to expand their rights?

To answer the question "Why are you studying Chinese people?" I studied "Chinese" people because I am studying more than a racialized group. I have studied, and continue to study, the ways in which people are able or unable to access the political system of liberal democratic states. This is a

necessary and vital question for a political scientist to ask. Therefore, the personal and professional have met, and my obligations in both led me to the study of the political participation of racialized minorities. I believe that posing relevant questions about equal access to the political process can help us come closer to some constructive results in the future.

I hope that this type of research will lead to a greater awareness of systemic racism and will broaden our understanding of democracy in terms of political participation and the achievement of substantive citizenship for racialized minorities. This speaks not only to racialized minorities, but to all groups that are concerned, and those that should be concerned, with democratic accountability and the growing perception of a "democratic deficit." Also, I must say that I was personally dismayed by much of the backlash following the attacks of 11 September 2001. At that time, openly racist statements were made in my presence about "others," as if this was now more acceptable. This made me realize that I had to continue to teach and research on emotionally difficult racial issues. It also scared me into recognizing, once again, that gains in equity that have been made are not as solid as we think. There can be backlash. There can be a reversal of progress.

In Canada and the United States there is a growing presence of non-whites, but they do not seem to be visible in mainstream political life. This seems especially true in the case of Asian Canadians and Asian Americans. When the field of view is narrowed to Chinese Canadians and Chinese Americans, there seems to be even less visibility. What has emerged from my examination of the political participation of these two groups is that they represent a small part of mainstream political life. Their achievement of substantive citizenship, the right of full access to political, social, and economic institutions, has been hampered by the systemic racism that Chinese Canadians and Chinese Americans face. They have been racialized as "foreigners" and have thus been excluded from full political participation. My perception continues to be of a substantial Chinese Canadian and Chinese American presence demographically, socially, and economically but not politically.

The interviews that I conducted in both Toronto and Los Angeles gave me further insight into how Chinese Canadians and Chinese Americans actually do participate, and also revealed some of the reasons why their political presence felt more limited than one might expect given their demographic presence. These interviews were extremely important in giving me an overall picture of participation in Toronto and Los Angeles and making me feel a part of the communities that I was examining. I very much appreciate the way in which all my interview subjects welcomed me so graciously into their "world" and gave me their time and the benefit of their wealth of experience. Their hard work and dedication inspired me, and I think it is this inspiration that is their gift to their communities. This is what helps to motivate people to act, and there is a great need for more

action. My interviews were great conversations that were full of stories, and I hope I am able to convey this in *Race and the City*. I hope this book, a story of two countries and two cities, will create more great conversations and inspire others.

One can look at numbers of formal participants in the political process and try to draw some conclusions about the political participation of Chinese Canadians and Chinese Americans or racialized minorities in general, but it is a difficult task. What is needed is both a broader definition of political participation, which includes community-level participation by groups and individuals like the ones I interviewed, and an understanding that political status is an important consideration. If one is part of a racialized minority and accorded a lower political status, how is it possible to view politics as a level playing field? Some people have explained away the low numbers and visibility as matters of culture or disinterest. However, the reality is that the barrier of systemic racism and the racialization of certain minorities has denied them full access to political participation, and it is with this reality in view that I proceed.

Acknowledgments

This project has had a long genesis and has had many contributors besides myself. I am responsible for the content but the inspiration, guidance, and support for the project have come from a wide variety of sources. I cannot begin to thank everyone who has contributed because in terms of help and encouragement for this study I am fortunate to have an embarrassment of riches.

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The constant source of support throughout this project has been my friends, my parents, and my brother- and sister-in-law. In particular, my mother, Dr. Mary Agnes Fernando, has been my main source of inspiration as well as a constant source of love and support. She never wavered in her belief in me or her belief in this project. She is the standard by which I measure both my work and my actions. I appreciate the fabulous role model.

Race and the City

1
Introduction: Racing against Time and Place

This project is about "racing" politics, by which I mean advocating for the inclusion of "race" as a central concern for Canadian politics in general and for cities in particular. It is a project ultimately about time and place because racialization is about the historical and geographical contexts within which ethno-racial groups come to be seen as the "others." I wrote *Race and the City* to contribute to an ongoing and developing dialogue about what constitutes political participation and how racialized minorities could become part of that dialogue. Some of the alternatives suggested in this dialogue include informal avenues such as community groups, lobby groups, NGOs, activism, and involvement in programs that seek to educate citizens about racism and the positive aspects of diversity. These can allow political dialogue and the creation of political and social capital, especially for racialized minorities. This dialogue includes a focus on the importance of civic politics and political participation in cities, especially since large cities are where recent immigrants tend to settle and where important changes and grassroots movements are taking place that will affect recent immigrants and racialized minorities. This offers them opportunities for political mobilization.

I also want to add to the growing debate on cultural and ethnic studies and the inclusion of critical race theory, especially in the Canadian context. Critical race theory is important because it seeks to expose systemic complicity in racialization and encourages systemic examination and change. I have used this theory as a framework because it is this systemic complicity and the existence of systemic racism that form the basis of my argument. I hope to encourage further research and analysis, especially comparative research and analysis, in this area. Research based in critical race theory goes beyond debates and literature reviews to reflect the lives of racialized minorities in North America. These are lives of challenges, possibilities, and frustration.

I do not set out to say everything about Chinese Canadians and Chinese Americans or their community groups, nor do I put myself forward as their spokesperson. Rather, I give examples of racialized minorities that are affected in the same way many non-white groups are affected by systemic racism and the frustration born of their members' inability to be included in the social, political, and economic infrastructure of their countries. I hope to show how political mobilization is difficult yet possible and absolutely necessary if people are to become part of those structures in the multicultural city and elsewhere. This mobilization is necessary because of the challenge of systemic racism, made even more pressing since the attacks of 11 September 2001 and the resulting anti-terrorism measures that can make racialized minorities feel more vulnerable than before. I hope to encourage this mobilization and to encourage, along with my fellow researchers and scholars in this area, further development of the research and dialogue that can facilitate political mobilization.

Systemic racism is a force that can impinge upon the political participation of racialized groups, such as Chinese Canadians and Chinese Americans, though it takes diverse forms and produces different effects in each country, particularly at the local level in large multiethnic cities. The tensions displayed in these cities should not be seen as "problem cases," but as examples of what Iris Marion Young refers to as the political resource and opportunity of social difference.[1] Social differences "create complexity and reveal conflicts that can change structural relations."[2] They can be viewed as obstacles to political communication or as opportunities to seek mechanisms that will facilitate increased communication and increased political participation. According to Young, "especially where there are structural relations of privilege and disadvantage, then, explicit inclusion and recognition of differentiated social positions provides experiential and critical resources for democratic communication that aims to promote justice."[3] However, the opportunity to improve conditions for equality and democratic ideals is sometimes lost, and the supposed costs of increased diversity are emphasized. Rather than placing some of the blame on a society that is unable to accept the experience of diversity as a political resource, racialized minorities are blamed for dissent. A society can confirm its commitment to justice and equality only by testing these tenets, taking up the opportunity of diversity and playing out the role of a just society. If there is no difference or need for accommodation, equality remains an untested, abstract concept.

Understanding equality in terms of social differences, such as "race," is necessary to critically assess how democracy is functioning in terms of citizenship and equality claims. I use the term "racialization," rather than the more static "race," because it highlights the constant change and the social

process of creating identity. Many scientists have dismissed the term "race," arguing it is not biologically significant, but it is socially and politically significant given its prominent place in the construction of hierarchy. Racialization refers to the assumptions, attitudes, beliefs, and behaviours of individuals that characterize a certain group, usually with negative connotations associated with a designated "race." This racialization process also posits a connection between race and culture; in the Canadian and American contexts, non-white groups are negatively racialized.

We need to recognize negative racialization and use this understanding as a means to achieve "fairness, equal opportunity and political inclusion."[4] The goal of all racialized groups is to be able to participate on a level playing field, where their ethnicity is not a barrier to participation and their citizenship is constructed in the same way as that of non-racialized groups. Their access to substantive citizenship and equality must therefore go beyond official doctrine and take practice into account. Engin Isin and Myer Siemiatycki explain that "this is why we conceive of citizenship broadly – not only as a set of legal obligations and entitlements which individuals possess by virtue of their membership in a state, but also as the practices through which individuals and groups formulate and claim new rights or struggle to expand or maintain existing rights."[5] The state, however, may conceive of new citizens' struggle for new rights as a hegemonic crisis, and it may move against such a struggle to maintain the social order. The contradictory nature of the state that claims to be democratic, but then denies rights and equality to certain citizens, is a further challenge both to those seeking greater equity and to others committed to greater democratic accountability of government.

The Contradictory Nature of the State: A Challenge to Democratic Accountability and Equity

The state's contradictory nature is often expressed in national myths. In Canada there is a pervasive myth that immigrants are viewed as the backbone of the country and given equal opportunities. Officially, all immigrants, including those who are non-white, are equally welcomed legally. In practice, however, recruitment policies show a preference for European and white immigrants, a pattern that has been in place since Canada's inception.[6] Despite identifiable lasting patterns, over time there have been changes in Canada's immigration system. Originally, preference for a white Canada was overt, and (non-British) diversity was not formally accommodated, but over time changes in Canada's immigration system have made this preference less overt.[7] The legacy of these origins means that those non-white groups who have arrived over the last 150 years are not recognized as builders of the country.[8] This is especially true for Chinese Canadians. Their history

is commonly forgotten or distorted; instead they are seen as recent immigrants who are "taking over" the country.

The United States also sees itself as an immigrant country, where the hard work of immigrants is rewarded by a neutral system. The picture currently presented by the dominant media in the United States, however, characterizes Chinese Americans and other racialized minorities, especially recent immigrants, as a cause of social unrest and problems rather than as positive contributors to their country and its economy. This view tends to be rooted in the popular discourse of moral panic and an "us versus them" mentality; it is based on fear and racist stereotypes rather than facts. An alternative view, which I put forward in this book, stresses the contributions of Chinese Americans and recent immigrants, including the fact that they have helped the American economy and, indeed, are necessary for its success.

The current fears play into an old discourse familiar to governments in Canada and the United States. In this discourse, the state accommodates racist views by placing undue importance on the fear expressed by a section (often a minority) of the white populace, thereby increasing its credibility. This legitimizes the "immigrant fear," which in turn victimizes all those people, whether they are immigrants, citizens, or long-time residents, who do not "look like" a stereotypical white "Canadian" or "American." Non-white immigrants and minorities are made justifiable targets of those who wrongly see them as "taking away jobs," "getting into the country illegally," causing "social unrest," or, since 11 September 2001 in particular, "acting as agents of terrorism."

The governments of Canada and the United States have increased restrictions on immigration and supported the idea of "good immigrants" – commonly those with money – and "bad immigrants," who are motivated primarily by family concerns. As Abu-Laban notes, "these restrictions colour the nature and extent of possible integration, inclusion and equality."[9] Non-white immigrants feel the greatest impact of these policies because they now represent the largest group of immigrants in Canada and the United States. They are also vulnerable to established race and class biases and are at risk of being denied permanent residence status, employment, or educational opportunities. All of these factors contribute to a lack of legitimacy and support for non-white immigrants, which calls for a careful examination of the beliefs that underpin these racist assumptions. Systemic racism continues to be a pervasive factor and the main barrier to full political participation for racialized minorities and society's denial of its existence is a barrier to anti-racist political change.

The gap between the equality that is promised and the inequality that is experienced by Chinese Canadians and Chinese Americans, and visible minorities in general, is present in many areas and institutions, and there is

qualitative and quantitative evidence to prove it exists.[10] This gap accounts for some of the difficulties faced by certain minorities that wish to participate in these institutions. The presence of systemic racism, although well documented, is also highly contested. To accept systemic racism as a reality is to challenge the legitimacy of a democracy founded on the principles of universalism. Acknowledging its presence also acknowledges systemic flaws and lack of governmental legitimacy. Systemic racism is the result of keeping various forms of racism alive in a democratic structure that should, theoretically, reject it.

Many of today's political and social institutions, especially those in multicultural cities, no longer fully reflect the society in which they exist. When these structures were originally set up, they mirrored the society of the day. In the case of the United States, slavery existed when it became a nation and at the same time principles of equality were enshrined in the US constitution. In Canada, the concept of a "White Canada" was promoted because it was thought, from the time of Confederation until after the Second World War, that non-whites would not be able to "adapt" to Canadian life either legally or politically.[11] Despite formal changes, in both countries the legacy of this ideological tradition of a white-dominated society remains in modern political institutions. The question is whether or not these institutions can be adapted to the changing population, and to normative legal opposition to racism, in a way that would welcome people from other traditions and racial backgrounds. This kind of adaptation requires structural change that is more complex than it may appear at first glance. In Canada, multiculturalism policies and pluralistic principles, part of the Canadian "ethos," have been advanced to ensure equality, yet it is often precisely these policies and practices that have masked the problems and thereby served to allow them to continue. In the United States there is a persistent faith in and promotion of the ideal of equality, despite the fact that historic and current injustices in the area of ethnicity, as well as of class and gender, are well documented.[12] The pervasiveness of systemic racism has its roots in hegemonic assumptions about the political systems in Canada and the United States that ignore systemic marginalization based on culture and ethnicity.

Systemic racism that is both practised and denied by the state is dangerous because its practice creates an atmosphere that excludes racialized minorities, while its denial delegitimizes the claims of racialized minorities and obstructs the implementation of any structural change that would allow their inclusion. Systemic racism is legitimized through "the justification of the inherent conflict between the egalitarian values of justice and fairness and the racist ideologies reflected in the collective mass-belief system as well as racist attitudes, perceptions and assumptions of individuals."[13] This makes it difficult to combat systemic racism because the justifications deny

the conflict between reality and democratic ideals. It is difficult to address problems that are not supposed to exist. However, a system which maintains that racist attitudes inherent in its institutions do not disadvantage minority groups is not rooted in reality, nor is it fully committed to equality and democratic accountability. The barrier to political participation it creates is visible in the historical legacy of Chinese Canadians and Chinese Americans. The history of racism faced by the Chinese in North America, in often perilously difficult circumstances, emphasizes both the development of systemic racism and the organization and struggle against that racism.

People of Chinese origin have lived in North America for over one hundred years. However, throughout most of the history of Canada and the United States there were concerted efforts to prevent them from immigrating and to exclude them from basic rights while they were in North America. Many Chinese came to North America as labourers and to escape harsh conditions in their own country. They were welcomed conditionally and used as cheap labour but not given credit for their contribution. The history of Chinese immigrants in North America is set against a background of fear and hostility that is not to be forgotten. This history comprises what Peter Li has chronicled in *Chinese in Canada* as the development of systemic racism, which took place over one hundred years.[14] Li contends that "the historical image of the Chinese as culturally distinct and racially foreign has become a deep-seated cultural stereotype in Canada."[15] This view is echoed in the United States by critical race theorists such as Robert Chang, who claims that it is "this sense of 'foreignness' that distinguishes the particular type of racism aimed at Asian Americans."[16] Their continuing exclusion and their racialization as foreigners have caused both Chinese Canadians and Chinese Americans to be disenfranchised and marginalized and have hindered their access to the full political participation that is the basis of substantive citizenship and political rights. Their disenfranchisement is further compounded by the perception that this racialization and marginalization do not exist. The fact that they do exist represents a troubling paradox involving democratic ideals and reveals the contradictory nature of both Canada and the United States as democratic and equality-driven countries that tolerate undemocratic inequalities within their political systems. It is helpful to develop a theoretical framework using critical race theory with which to examine these systemic problems and develop strategies to combat them.

The Use of Critical Race Theory

Critical race theory comes out of a legal critical tradition in the United States, but it attempts to go beyond mere criticism towards change. It began in earnest in the 1970s with Derrick Bell, who used it to critique the conventional civil rights discourse, and it continued to gain momentum in the

1980s. It is premised on an understanding of the legal and structural barriers to American non-white inclusion, but it can also be used to show general principles for race discourse beyond the borders of the US state, in which law *constructs* race. Critical race theory has two common interests: "The first is to understand how a regime of white supremacy and its subordination of people of color have been created and maintained in America, and in particular, to examine the relationship between that social structure and professed ideals such as 'the rule of law' and 'equal protection.' The second is a desire not merely to understand the vexed bond between law and racial power but to *change* it."[17] Using this theory to analyze political institutions helps to provide evidence of the systemic racism that is perpetuated through the re-creation of societal hierarchies that are based upon that law. An awareness of how this uneven systemic power privileges certain topics and viewpoints can be used as a springboard to mobilization and advocacy.

Although much of the critical race theory literature has traditionally focused on the black experience, other racialized minorities have also used the theory to develop their own ethnic studies and to show legal complicity in the maintenance of political and social barriers. More recently, Asian Americans have been included, and their unique experiences and place in American society are being recognized through their efforts and the efforts of others. This goes well beyond merely grafting the black-white experience onto Asian American-white experiences. Different stereotypes and histories are in place for different cultural groups, so in order to fully understand the Chinese American experience, theoretical debates must take into account these specific interactions and myths.

Critical multiculturalism is a branch of critical race theory that does much to explain the Canadian context, with its oft-used but more vague concept of multiculturalism. Both theories reject the nonconflictual ideal contained in concepts such as multiculturalism. Theorists such as Lisa Ikemoto and Robert Chang show that one problem with the wish for less conflict is that it expressly associates nonconflictual society with "whiteness." Ikemoto claims that the non-white immigrant's failure to assimilate is used as an example of that immigrant's failure to help keep society harmonious. The result is that "whiteness becomes symbolic of order and race becomes symbolic of disorder."[18] Cultural minority groups such as Asian Americans are expected to blend into a pre-existing norm if they wish to integrate both politically and socially into their new country. Yet they are also seen as a source of conflict, as they cause unrest by their very presence. Specific stereotypes are constructed to ensure they are seen as presenting a particular threat to the status quo. Asian Americans, for example, are constructed as having a pervasive "sense of 'foreignness' that distinguishes the particular type of racism aimed at" them.[19] Yet such stereotypes are often contradictory. Asians in the United States are also plagued by the image of a "good" minority that

can keep order. The model-minority myth is associated with certain Asians, such as those of Chinese origin, who are seen as hardworking and successful. This "model minority image, while masquerading as a compliment, is then used to marginalize their needs by denying any present day discrimination or effects of past discrimination and to legitimise oppression of other racial minorities who do not measure up to the myth."[20] This is further complicated in the sense that this "positive" view is seen as non-racist; however, a stereotypical view that assumes people of a certain origin are a homogeneous group is certainly a racist view. This positive view can also slide into a cultivated jealousy of the success of non-whites at the expense of the alternatively constructed "white" success. Nor does it take into account Asian American poverty, so it allows this problem to be ignored both methodologically and politically.

Critical multiculturalism (also known as resistance multiculturalism), as described by Peter McLaren, takes a position different to what he calls the premise of homogeneity of the right, and diversity of the left. According to McLaren, "resistance multiculturalism also refuses to see culture as non-conflictual, harmonious and consensual. Democracy ... [is] not seamless, smooth, or always a harmonious political and cultural state of affairs. Resistance multiculturalism doesn't see diversity itself as a goal, but rather argues that diversity must be affirmed in a politics of cultural criticism and a commitment to social justice."[21] This theory tries to break down myths of a harmonious past that must be preserved, and it challenges the possibility of a totally consensual present. Critical multiculturalism supports the right of all members, including minorities, to full inclusion in society. If diversity is accepted rather than seen as a problem, it enhances the legitimacy of immigrants' political views and their participation and influence in policy and politics. Chinese Canadians and Americans, as well as all non-white minorities, can further the cause of acceptance by adhering to the principles of social justice and accepting a critical perspective. If a non-white minority distances itself from these principles, it risks isolation and does not profit from coalition building. This coalition building helps to create a commonality in which the goal is not Chinese rights but human rights. The result is an inclusive agenda that goes beyond the celebration of diversity, as prescribed by multiculturalism, to a celebration of commonality and human rights. Systemic change can then be fostered based upon these principles of fundamental fairness and social justice.

Critical multiculturalism and critical race theory counter views that would exclude Chinese immigrants as well as Chinese Canadians and Americans from participating fully in their respective societies. This current exclusion is an example of systemic racism. In order to create structural change that effectively includes Chinese Canadians and Americans, and other non-white

minorities, in their respective political and social systems, they need to be seen as individuals, but also as the collective subjects of systemic racial constructs and forms of discrimination. Change is not possible if they are seen as a threat or are assigned stereotyped characteristics that are used to invalidate their participation and opinions.

In both Canada and the United States, the multicultural city provides a smaller, more diverse context in which to explore systemic racism and the possibility for change. Such cities offer a testing ground for stated goals of equality and democratic ideals. Within the more limited city context, the role of the ethnoculturally specific community group has been a source of strength, survival, and navigation for non-white minorities and recent immigrants. We need to re-cast and expand our understanding of political participation to include the role of such community groups and other informal avenues as a means to challenge the barriers of systemic racism. Expanding the definition of political participation in this way will also provide a more complete picture of involvement that contributes to political knowledge and action. This is especially important for groups such as Chinese Canadians and Chinese Americans, which still lack formal and visible political representation in mainstream institutions.

This lack of representation becomes clear when one examines the political life of Toronto and Los Angeles, cities that have a large enough Chinese population to warrant expectations of such representation. If there is no obvious formal and mainstream participation, what types of democratic involvement can be found to examine? In the case of various racialized groups, we can look at alternative avenues of participation such as ethnoculturally specific community groups and services that involve them in a way that mainstream groups do not. This necessitates the use of a broader definition of political participation that can capture the formal and informal avenues of involvement and give a fuller picture of how it occurs.

Expanding the Definition of Political Participation and Equity

In Canada and the United States, political participation is often defined narrowly as formal participation in voting, membership in political parties, and election to office. However, the mainstream political system and its institutions are resistant to real structural change, which is why many groups that are a large part of a city's political, economic, and social landscape are excluded from, or only minimally included in, its mainstream politics. Looking beyond the formal mechanisms of voting, parties, and legislatures helps us see political participation that would be invisible if one used the narrower definition.

In order to create a complete picture of political participation and expand the definition of political participation and equity, one must concentrate

on the achievement of substantive citizenship, which includes not just formal rights, such as voting, but also substantive civil, social, and political rights that are borne out by democratic practice.

Here a distinction must be made between "formal citizenship" and "substantive citizenship." The former is defined as the formal membership in a nation-state; the latter articulates rights that go beyond formal guarantees, "an array of civil, political, and especially social rights, involving also some kind of participation in the business of government."[22] The concept of "substantive citizenship," originally derived from the work of T.H. Marshall, emphasizes how three elements – civil, political, and social rights – are central to the creation of a fully developed set of rights that collectively constitute substantive citizenship:

> The civil element is composed of the rights necessary for individual freedom; liberty of the person, freedom of speech, thought and faith, the right to own property and to conclude valid contacts, and the right to justice. The last is of a different order from the others, because it is the right to defend and assert all one's rights on terms of equality with others and by due process of law ... By the political element I mean the right to participate in the exercise of political power, as a member of a body invested with political authority or as elector of the members of such a body ... By the social element I mean the whole range from the right to a modicum of economic welfare and security to the right to share to the full in the social heritage and to live the life of a civilised being according to the standards prevailing in society.[23]

This definition of "substantive citizenship" acknowledges that citizenship rights must go beyond formal membership of a state to ensure full participation and enjoyment of rights within that state. Formal rights and the commitment to equality are meaningless if there is no corresponding right to exercise substantive citizenship rights within the political system and if the state is not committed to equality in citizenship that ensures this. On the other hand, "that which constitutes citizenship – the array of rights or the pattern of participation – is not necessarily tied to formal state-membership. Formal citizenship is neither a sufficient nor a necessary condition for substantive citizenship ... That it is not a sufficient condition is clear: one can possess formal state-membership yet be excluded (in law or in fact) from certain political, civil, or social rights or from effective participation in the business of rule in a variety of settings."[24]

The concept of "substantive citizenship" is highly relevant to the study of political participation; it includes political rights as one of its key elements. It is also a more meaningful gauge than formal citizenship of whether racialized minorities have opportunities for full membership in the state

when all of these elements are taken into account. In this study, the goal of "political participation" for racialized minorities is broadly defined as the exercise of what T.H. Marshall referred to as substantive citizenship and access to "effective participation in the business of rule."[25] This expanded definition covers participation in ethnically specific community and political groups, systemic racism as part of the lived politics for minority groups (in this case Chinese Canadians and Chinese Americans), and challenges to systemic racism displayed through the minority's participation in these community groups.

Formal political participation is an important indicator of integration for all racialized minority groups, including Chinese Canadians and Chinese Americans, because widespread participation shows the group has been accepted into the larger society and its institutions. According to Pei-te Lien, "scholars generally agree that there are three normative values of participation: legitimacy, instrumentalism, and self-development. Participation, first of all, is assumed to enable the system's legitimacy and stability by establishing a link between public opinion and public policy. Second, participation can promote representation by giving citizens a say in the decisions of public policies. Third, participation may facilitate the development of deliberative and moral character which is intrinsic to democratic citizenship."[26] Given these values, if racialized minorities are denied full access to political participation, they are also denied democratic and substantive citizenship.

When members of a racialized minority do participate in formal political institutions, it represents one step in a society's long-term structural adjustment to their presence and indicates they have breached one of the last barriers to their acceptance into that society on a political and systemic level. The National Economic Research Council of the United States affirms the place of formal representation in the process of acceptance and political mobilization of minority groups. However, the council does not see the need for structural change, but presumes that change and acceptance are inevitable within the current structure: "Representative political institutions are assumed to empower all groups as potential members of the electorate, once voting rights are guaranteed. Even if these economic and political processes are imperfect and limited, they will erode the boundaries of separate and traditional ethnic groups, although the process may take several generations."[27] This position stems from the belief that formal political participation will break down the barriers between ethnic groups. Despite legal guarantees of equal access to and participation in political institutions, however, systemic racism means this current version of equality is imperfect, and this imperfection is what has previously been described as the gap between formal and substantive citizenship. As T.H. Marshall has theorized, the civil, political, and social rights of substantive citizenship go beyond formal guarantees and allow one to exercise those rights, but racialized

minority groups need to be able to access the political process and institutions in order to achieve substantive citizenship and narrow the gap between legal guarantees and lived politics. Racialized minorities' need for political participation goes beyond the need to vote or take part in mainstream organizations.

Community Groups: Contributing to the Democratic Process

Ethnoculturally specific community groups can represent an important element of political participation. Initially, these community groups served as an enclave for protection. Later they were a means to continue to serve, preserve, and promote the interests of Chinese Canadians and Chinese Americans within the political processes that for the most part formally excluded them. These groups can be considered part of an overall strategy of resistance to marginalization within the political process. This resistance has as its goal increased opportunities for political participation that systemic racism has denied the groups' members. Therefore, while it is clear that these ethnoculturally specific community groups have certain limitations, their importance as a present alternative, a comfort zone in which they have a higher level of respect and control than they have in the mainstream political system, and a precursor to greater political participation and representation in a more formal sense must be recognized. Participation in community groups can be seen as a stepping stone to taking part in a larger political democracy, but these groups should not be mistaken for a permanent solution. They are a defensive reaction to the conditions created by the barrier of systemic racism rather than mechanisms for real structural change based on an anti-racist agenda.

When one looks at ethnocultural community groups, it is necessary to remember that they are highly varied groups that serve many different purposes. They are responsible for various services, including counselling, legal advice, and support within the wider institutional processes of government services and employment searches, while their purposes range from group survival to development to advocacy and human rights work. After examining these groups and interviewing leading members, I would not characterize them as homogeneous in type, class, or political affiliation. They are not all progressive, nor do they all espouse an anti-racist message. I do believe, however, that they all provide a place where political participation can occur in various guises and on a level playing field. I identified three general categories of ethnoculturally specific community organizations and institutions.

1 **Survival and adjustment groups** tend to look inward and concentrate on developing survival skills and cultural adaptation within their community. It is mainly recent immigrants who seek out these organizations

to find out where to look for housing, where to find jobs, and how to access government services. The fact of continuing immigration means that there will always be a need for these organizations. They provide an important buffer between the immigrant and mainstream organizations.

2 **Civic and political resource development groups** are still inward looking, but they tend to focus not just on survival and adjustment, but also on community development. These groups can help members develop leadership and professional skills. They also include associations of professionals and groups that attempt to increase political awareness and acumen within the community.

3 **Advocacy and civil rights groups** have an outward view. They may become civil rights organizations or establish relationships with other organizations. This provides an opportunity to deal with society at large through coalitions and political activism. These groups foster coalitions and create dialogue on areas of commonality with other minority groups to create solidarity as well as a critical mass to further civil rights causes.[28]

The number, influence, and strength of such community groups at each level can determine the level of political participation of specific communities that are otherwise excluded or challenged by barriers of systemic racism. The first type of organization provides a buffer between the new immigrant and mainstream society. It helps with adjustment and provides a comfortable space in which language and understanding of culture are not as much of a problem as they are outside the group. The second type of organization helps to develop political skills and knowledge that will improve the civic life of racialized communities. The first and second types of organizations are important to the development and growth of their communities in very practical ways. They also help to empower the community to a point where members can become more civically involved and aware. The third type of community group is also necessary for the growth and acceptance of a community, but its focus goes beyond practical skills and support to civic advocacy and activism. Coalition building and political activism on behalf of civil rights protection are examples of activities in which racialized groups can work together for common causes.

Although ethnoculturally specific community groups are helpful in serving the needs of their community and preserving its culture, they are not always effective in terms of political participation. At their best, community groups provide a place where, for example, Chinese Canadians and Chinese Americans can become part of a process that is not structured by race and systemic racism, where they are not "token Chinese" but enjoy in microcosm a sense of substantive citizenship rights equal to non-racialized political citizens. It is within such organizations that racialized groups can build political and civic resources in order to fight for common goals, and

where they are accepted as legitimate members of their society. However, these organizations still represent a democratic process that is on the margins and that does not affect state structure and policy directly. The state relies upon these groups to serve communities when in fact those communities should be served by and represented in mainstream institutions more effectively. Ethnoculturally specific community groups should guard against being used by the state as a legitimation device, partially meeting the needs of racialized communities and relieving the state of its duty to accommodate them in its own agenda.

Throughout the history of Chinese immigration to Canada and the United States, it has principally been the community groups that provided comfort, protection, social support, and varying degrees of means to access certain features of citizenship for a group that was excluded from most mainstream organizations and institutions. The groups provided various social services that were unavailable through the state, and they helped a new immigrant community deal with the pressures from the outside community. These "Chinese associations provided some relief from hardship and some alternatives to blocked opportunities in Canadian society."[29] In the United States there were similar reactions to exclusion. During the late 1800s and early 1900s, community groups within the Chinese American community were concerned with the very survival of their members, which motivated them to form various associations. Chinese American settlers were willing to assert themselves and to organize their community in opposition to an assault on their rights.[30] This tradition of community organizing continues for the Chinese communities in Canada and the United States as a means to overcome political exclusion due to systemic racism. It is also a method used by the ethnospecific community groups of various racialized minorities.

Given the fact that many Chinese Canadians and Chinese Americans are not involved in the mainstream politics of their cities, how do they make their voices heard? What are their strategies of resistance against this political marginalization and pervasive "foreignness"? One strategy, which is evident in the case of the Chinese Americans in Los Angeles and Chinese Canadians in Toronto, is a reliance on ethnoculturally specific community groups in these cities that create a parallel democratic process. In both cities there is a network of Chinese – and in Los Angeles, pan-Asian – groups that facilitate their communities' increased involvement in civic politics and help them voice their concerns.

Transformation can be effected by community groups through their involvement in grassroots movements, activism, and the development of alternative progressive political voices. Over time, the activities of these community groups create a counterhegemonic discourse about political

participation. In terms of mainstream political action, community groups can potentially help develop a progressive base from which to draw individuals who will vote, run for elected public office, or lobby. This base can best be supported by progressive community groups that encourage ethnic and class solidarity by forming coalitions of groups and individuals who support human rights and social justice concerns. This potential is not always achieved, but I believe it should be seen as a goal in order to facilitate change. From the resulting position of strength, community groups and coalitions can help increase democratic accountability, reinforce commitments to equity, and, in the long run, expand this racialized minority's access to substantive citizenship.

The Use of Comparison to Facilitate an Examination of Systemic Racism

Comparing Canada and the United States is a standard feature of comparative politics, but this is usually implicit rather than explicit. In terms of racialized political participation and systemic racism, both countries, at the national level, had formal legal barriers to non-white immigration and/or participation in the domestic political process until the 1960s. In Canada, however, this issue is not widely covered by most history or politics texts. Most Canadian histories gloss over struggles against racism, unlike most US histories, which at least describe slavery and the civil rights movement. The approach I am taking highlights Canada's differences from and similarities to the United States, to make it clear that both countries have a historical legacy of racism that must be overcome.

In order to create a spatial analysis appropriate for the study of the effects of systemic racism on non-white political participation, I used two large cities – the Canadian city of Toronto and the American city of Los Angeles – as the focal points for my comparison. These cities are atypical in their respective countries because they are both multicultural centres containing immigrants from many countries and regions in the world. In a sense, they can be seen as testing grounds for the ideals of racial equality in the Canadian and American systems. In these cities, social differences are gathered in unique levels of intensity that bring forth either tension or co-operation among the various ethnic groups.[31] A two-city study of Toronto and Los Angeles captures this intensity. These multicultural cities will serve as examples of their respective countries' inclusion or exclusion of non-white minorities as participants within the wider political structures. The barriers encountered by non-white minorities, in this study specifically Chinese Canadians and Chinese Americans, are indicative of structural inequality that supports, and is supported by, systemic racism in Canada and the United States.

Such a city-based spatial analysis is also important in the current era of increased globalization and international migration. It is commonly argued that globalization and migration have produced both a loss of national identity and a strengthening of global and local identities, as well as a recognition of the increasing importance of the city as a site of political action.[32] This local space is more than a backdrop. It provides a certain politics of location that is appropriate to an exploration of the politics of difference. When cities are located in countries with a history of systemic racism, as Toronto and Los Angeles are, local political and social reactions to increasing difference must be understood within a wider context. This history of racism is institutionally expressed in the operation of the national and regional states. Today there is officially a non-racist policy in both Canada and the United States, but the Chinese were seen as unwanted foreigners in "white man's country" during the formative years of both states. The local context of two multicultural cities, Toronto and Los Angeles, shows that even in a potentially progressive context, with demographic pressure from racialized minorities, there is systemic racism that prevents those minorities from fully participating in the political system.

Changes in Migration

The increased international migration of people has created transnational identities. While the implications of this migration are many and varied, increased benefits for those countries that are preferred destination points are accompanied by growing tensions. In the case of Canada and the United States, some of this tension arises from the resistance to cultural changes that are taking place. Since the early 1990s, the majority of immigrants arriving in both countries have been non-white and have increased the heterogeneous nature of these countries. In Canada, this represents a change from an earlier period (between the mid-1800s and the 1990s) when the majority of immigrants were white. In the United States, the concentration of non-white groups such as Latinos is turning cities like Los Angeles into places without a majority ethnic group. This continuing non-white immigration has exposed longstanding prejudice and racism among sectors of the population and within political systems that have historically been predominantly white and oriented to white constituencies. In the past, the systemic nature of this racism was expressed legally by openly preventing non-white immigration, preserving a majority white culture. The option of such formal open and legalized racism does not exist today.

In the United States, modern racism finds more subtle, less overt, forms of expression. Many people engage in symbolic racism, which highlights the unattractive cultural traits of a certain minority group, rather than their origin or colour, as a reason for their lack of acceptance. Symbolic and other forms of racism continue to be given a high profile by politicians and the

media in response to immigration. Some blame non-white immigrants for not "fitting in" with the "American" culture and thereby creating social tension. This does not acknowledge that there is systemic and societal racism that creates barriers for non-white immigrants who want to participate fully in their new country. It also does not explain why non-white Americans, who have been in the country for generations, still do not "fit in" or participate as fully as many of their white counterparts. The "American dream" of unlimited opportunity for success and happiness is falsely touted as being available to all people regardless of colour, gender, or class if they only work hard enough. To preserve this illusion of universal opportunity, people must deny the systemic racism that currently exists. They hold up the constitution and its guarantees as evidence of equal protection and opportunity for all those within the United States, but these guarantees continue to be tested in the wake of the attacks of 11 September 2001, as America sometimes justifies suspension of constitutional protection in the name of national security.

In Canada there is also a hegemonic denial of systemic racism, which supports the image of Canada as an open country, accepting of all cultures, where racial tensions are not a worrisome issue. Academic authors and governments alike cite Canada's current multicultural policy, along with the *Charter of Rights and Freedoms,* as evidence that all minority groups have equal rights that are protected and preserved. The "Canadian dream" is of a cultural mosaic in which one can be Canadian and still preserve one's own heritage.

This notion that equal rights for minority groups are a fait accompli in these countries is not borne out by many experiential or quantitative studies in Canada and the United States that reaffirm race as a factor in political participation, social integration, and treatment in legal and educational institutions. The fact that systemic racism exists means that many non-whites, including immigrants and naturalized or native-born non-white Canadians and Americans, are isolated and marginalized in the Canadian and American economic, social, and political systems. This marginalization translates into many forms of under-representation, including low political representation and participation for many minorities. Such marginalization poses a challenge to the basic democratic concept that all citizens participate freely and equally on a "level playing field" in the political, social, and economic realms. The ability to uphold basic democratic principles, including equality for all citizens, is an essential element in state legitimacy. That legitimacy is threatened if equality does not exist. The gap between legal equality and the widespread experience of systemic racism grounded in inequality renders the political system inherently anti-democratic; this gap is both a reflection of and a contribution to marginalization.

The mainstream view is that government offers opportunities for political participation to those who are able and willing to be involved. This view

emphasizes the great strides that have supposedly been made and subscribes to the belief that there is no substantial remaining vestige of racism in the contemporary state.[33] People who hold this view see education and gradual change over time as the best remedies for remaining racial barriers that exist in society. This argument presents change as a linear progression.

The alternative argument, which I present in this book, maintains that the current system is an ethnic- and class-constructed hierarchy and that class and racial/ethnic hegemony advantage certain groups. Even the supposed gains made by the election of various Asian American officials do not automatically lead to systemic change. These officials, either through unwillingness or inability to facilitate change, may serve to enforce systemic racism.

There is a great need for specific kinds of political participation. This includes progressive political participation that comes with a realization that an anti-racist strategy will be of greatest benefit to all, especially to racialized minorities, and that it is necessitated by the tenets of democracy that guarantee equality. Participation that stresses this agenda will push the system towards structural change that can eliminate the barriers to substantive citizenship caused by systemic racism. It is this type of political participation that must be encouraged because the mere act of voting or participating in a system that has hegemonic assumptions about race which disadvantage racialized minorities will never truly serve them or anyone who believes in equality.

To this end, I focus on three major areas of concern: the racialized nature of Canada and the United States and the institutions and processes within these countries that undermine racialized minority groups' full access to political participation and substantive citizenship; the histories of Chinese Canadians, Chinese Americans, and Chinese immigrants to these countries, the difficulties they faced, and the racialization that has taken place; and the importance/role of ethnoculturally specific community groups in the life of racialized minorities.

I looked at Chinese Canadian and Chinese American community groups in Toronto and Los Angeles in order to show how their parallel democratic process works. In both cities I chose to interview groups that were associated with a more central organization, even though this might have left out smaller groups. In Los Angeles I interviewed individuals in organizations associated with the Asian Pacific Policy and Planning Council (A3PCON). In Toronto I interviewed community groups and individuals associated with the Chinese Canadian National Council. This provided some comparability between the two cities, albeit a loose connection. I examined the community groups using information I gathered by interviewing individuals who work for these groups. The examination is helped by their insights and given depth by their experience with members of their communities and their

own personal struggles. These interviews and the surveys of the political landscape of the two cities and countries enable me to begin a critical assessment of political participation and democratic accountability and how formally stated equity commitments are being carried out. This is meant to help both governments and citizens alike to realize the dangers of systemic racism for equality and political participation and to encourage progressive political mobilization in support of political equality.

In the following chapters I survey Canadian and American systemic racism, the politics of two large multicultural cities, and the political participation of racialized groups. I examine both the usefulness and limitations of community groups to increase this participation and further political mobilization.

I have made an effort to avoid generalizations, with a view to going beyond traditional explanations of ethnocultural participation. The methodology I use provides a way to examine the political participation of Chinese Canadians and Chinese Americans and their community groups. It also allows me to explore ways in which these groups' activities can fill in the gaps where the state fails to provide services and opportunities, and ways in which they can offer a challenge to state practices and hegemony. Participation in community groups has been largely ignored or given little serious consideration as part of a political or democratic process.

Race and the City is a snapshot, albeit one taken over a number of years, of two multicultural cities at the beginning of the twenty-first century. Their past and present are discussed, but the hope is for the future – a future in which there are more choices. These are choices about how to create a democratization process in which multicultural cities will try to increase inclusiveness, responsiveness, and equity to give racialized minorities a chance to thrive within them.