The Politics of Exclusion
by Leland Saito.
Stanford University Press, 2009

Conclusion

Race in the Contemporary Era

Minority Elected Officials: Crafting Racial Images and Deracialized Campaigns

In Washington State in 1996, voters elected Chinese American Gary Locke as governor at a time when the state was 89% white, the first of his two terms in office. In his campaign Locke talked about being the child of poor immigrants, and in his inaugural address he noted that his grandfather had worked as a houseboy less than a mile from the capitol grounds. Locke said, "It took a hundred years to go one mile, but it's a journey that could only take place in America" (Egan 2000: 1A).

Los Angeles Mayor Antonio Villaraigosa, a Mexican American, declared during his 2005 inaugural address, "What a beautiful country. I am proof that the United States is a country of opportunity and liberty. In what other country of the world could I be in front of you as mayor of a great city?" (McGreevy and Garrison 2005: A1). Recognizing his roots in the nearby Eastside of Los Angeles, a collection of multiracial and immigrant neighborhoods of primarily working-class and low-income Latinos, Villaraigosa's speech echoed Locke's mention of the short journey in terms of geography but the long journey in terms of race and equality. Villaraigosa stated, "It may be a short way from City Terrace to City Hall, but, fellow Angelenos, we all know what a vast distance it truly is" (*Los Angeles Times* 2005a: A36). Stressing the American ideals of family and perseverance in difficult times, Villaraigosa went on to talk about his mother's life: "A true story, like those of countless Angelenos, past and present. A story of working hard, of loving your kids, of having a clear picture of a better

future in your mind's eye and driving for it with a sense of ferocious purpose" (*Los Angeles Times* 2005a: A36).

The stories of Locke and Villaraigosa without a doubt epitomize the immigrant success story and the social and political progress of racial minorities in the United States. Their life stories are testaments to the possibility of assimilation and the expansion of the mainstream to include Asian Americans and Latinos, as Alba and Nee (2003) have claimed. Locke's opponent in the 1996 Democratic gubernatorial primary was Norm Rice, mayor of Seattle and an African American. A Chinese American and an African American as the principal contenders in the primary in a state in which whites are the vast majority of the voters seemingly supports the idea that race no longer hinders minority candidates. Indeed, the election of minority candidates to political office is often noted as a clear indication of a color-blind society (Thernstrom and Thernstrom 1997). A deeper look into the lives and campaigns of Locke and Rice, however, reveals the subtle yet powerful ways that race continues to operate and influence politics.

We have clearly not entered a color-blind era in electoral politics, because race remains a highly influential force when voters enter the privacy of the voting booth. Candidates, both whites and racial minorities, understand that voters of all races continue to consider the race of candidates when voting. As a result, as the electorate becomes more diverse and as racial minorities seek office in areas with white voters, candidates must deal with race in ways that they believe will appeal to a wide spectrum of voters. For racial minorities, this usually means carefully crafted deracialized campaigns, but not the absence of race. Understanding that voters are cognizant of their racial identities, minority candidates must frame race in ways that overcome the reluctance of whites to vote for minorities.

Locke, speaking to an overwhelmingly white electorate, talked about the Chinese immigrant history of his family. His personal narrative emphasized positive racial images of Asian immigrants and Asian Americans as the model minority, countering the persistent negative stereotypes of the Chinese, in particular, the devious perpetual foreigner. His story touched on some of the cherished ideals of American society, such as hard work and perseverance to overcome difficulties and the openness of society, linking his life with the stories of mainstream America and the beliefs in individualism and assimilation. This was not going beyond race but understanding how to frame his race in ways that would be acceptable to voters. As Locke said, "You can't hide your race . . . people look at me and know I'm Asian" (Egan 2000: A1).

Norm Rice has had great success in politics, but as an African American, he has had to deal with a different set of stereotypes than Locke. A *New York Times* article described his performance in office in positive terms, stating that Rice was "one of Seattle's most successful mayors. Under Mr. Rice, the city rebuilt its downtown and improved its schools, the job and housing markets boomed, crime plummeted and tax revenue rolled into city coffers" (Egan 2000: A1). In the gubernatorial primary, Rice focused on the issues and did not discuss his personal biography, as Locke did, even though Rice commented, "I have a great story about how my family came to America. As good as Gary's. We just happened to have different travel agents" (Egan 2000: A1). For Rice, his decision was framed by the understanding that equivalent images of African Americans did not exist. There was no model minority image to counteract negative labels attached to African Americans, such as the undeserving poor or the underclass, and mentioning race might bring attention to such negative images rather than his impressive record as mayor.

Ron Sims, an African American, won election to the Metropolitan King County Council and the King County executive position to replace Gary Locke after Locke's election as governor. As with Locke and Rice, Sims's success in politics seemingly offers proof that race no longer matters in elections. Yet Sims has noted the ways in which race has shaped his campaigns and political platform. When opponents of Sims wished to attack him, one method was to make race salient. Using code words to bring attention to race without using racial terms, his detractors labeled Sims an "inner-city politician," although Sims was born in Spokane and grew up in eastern Washington in a white community (Egan 2000: A1). Understanding that race would be an issue in his political career, Sims heeded the advice of a senior politician and focused on important race-neutral concerns, such as fiscal, transportation, and environmental issues. For Locke, Rice, and Sims, their success is based on analyzing how race works in society and on using that knowledge to craft images of their political and personal lives that support core American values, build reputations as outstanding public officials through their skill and performance in office, and develop race-neutral policies rather than depend on voters going beyond race.

Beyond doubt, the election victories of candidates such as Gary Locke and Antonio Villaraigosa signal a major change in voting patterns. Although the race of a candidate may be of less importance today, the careful way each candidate dealt with race in his campaign demonstrates that race still matters. The importance of race in politics means that the configuration of districts directly

affects candidates' political campaigns and chances of winning elections. As the number of white voters increases, Asian American candidates in New York City's Chinatown or Latino candidates in Southern California face the obstacle of being labeled the Asian or Latino candidate, and running a deracialized campaign becomes more important. For officials such as Gary Locke, Norm Rice, and Ron Sims, who serve primarily white populations, once they were in office, focusing on nonracial issues did not affect their ability to serve their constituencies. For candidates and elected officials in places such as New York City or Southern California with large minority populations, however, officials who must win the favor of white voters to remain in office face the pressure of establishing and supporting a race-neutral political agenda and may have to modify their support of policies that address the unique interests of racial minorities.

Latinos in Southern California

In Villaraigosa's winning 2005 mayoral campaign against a white incumbent, James Hahn, Villaraigosa stressed that he would be a representative of all residents, regardless of race. Villaraigosa understood that he would have the support of Latinos because he had already laid a foundation of service in the community. What he needed to win was votes from African Americans and whites. In the election, a *Los Angeles Times* exit poll (2005b: A19) showed that 84 percent of Latinos, 50 percent of whites, 48 percent of African Americans, and 44 percent of Asian Americans voted for Villaraigosa. In his failed run in 2000 against Hahn, Villaraigosa's percentage of votes from whites was 41 percent, and he managed only 20 percent from African Americans. Villaraigosa became the city's first Latino mayor since 1872, joining in city office a number of other Latinos, including Alex Padilla, the first Latino city council president since 1868, and Rocky Delgadillo, the first Latino city attorney since 1851 (McGreevy 2005: A1).

These wins individually, and especially collectively, signal a major shift in the electoral power of Latinos and the ability of Latino candidates to appeal to non-Latino voters. These successes do not simply represent progress on the path of assimilation, however, because it is unclear whether the candidates have reached a political glass ceiling or whether Latinos will gain even higher elected positions. Although clearly both Latinos and whites are diverse groups with complex voting patterns and although whites show electoral support for Latino candidates, which was an important factor in the judges' decision in *Cano v. Davis*, racially polarized voting remains. The Latino vote for Villaraigosa was 34 points higher than the white vote in the 2005 victory, and in the 2006 Democratic primary

vote for state attorney general, 71 percent of whites voted for Jerry Brown, the former California governor and mayor of Oakland, whereas 74 percent of Latinos voted for MIT-educated Rocky Delgadillo (*Los Angeles Times* 2006: A10). Delgadillo is the first Latino Los Angeles city attorney in more than 150 years, but it remains to be seen if whites will elect him and Villaraigosa to higher offices, as with Margaret Chin in New York City and her repeated failure to win a city council seat in Manhattan after victories for a lesser elected position.

Latinos have not transcended their ethnicity, because all Latino candidates continue to be labeled as such, no matter how they attempt to frame themselves as representatives of all groups. After Villaraigosa's victory, for example, he was featured on the cover of *Newsweek* (May 30, 2005) with the caption, "Latino Power: L.A.'s New Mayor—And How Hispanics Will Change American Politics." By focusing on his Latino identity and the growing number of Latinos, the headline downplays Villaraigosa's successful effort to build a broad base of support among voters. At the same time, however, it is the changing demographics of the city and state and the rising Latino population that make Villaraigosa special. As a friend of Villaraigosa commented about the *Newsweek* coverage, "Antonio was upset. . . . To have that headline, after he'd worked so hard to run a campaign saying he is Latino but would be the mayor of all of L.A. But if it weren't for Latino power he wouldn't have been on the cover of *Newsweek*. So it cuts both ways" (Bruck 2007: 44).

In terms of ethnic politics and eventual integration into American society, the route of Mexican Americans is sometimes compared to the trajectory taken by Irish Americans (Rodriguez 2005). One major difference, however, is that although the first Latinos entered the United States long before the first Irish immigrants settled in the country, Latinos are still seen as newcomers and as nonwhite. True, Latin Americans continue to immigrate in large numbers, unlike the Irish and other European groups, but I would argue that, like Asian Americans, Latinos—even those who have been in the United States for generations—are seen as the perpetual foreigner, marked as people of color in a way that European Americans are not (Tuan 1998). Just as Ron Sims's opponents labeled him an inner-city candidate when they wanted to interject race into politics, in the 2000 election, Villaraigosa's first attempt at running for mayor, Hahn used racial images, such as graffiti and illegal drugs, in his negative attacks on Villaraigosa (Ayon 2001).

Villaraigosa operates in a political climate that stresses color-blind policies, especially with California voters passing the anti–affirmative action Proposition

209 in 1996, and he must present issues without framing them in terms of race. At the same time, however, through his personal experiences and knowledge of history as a Latino from the Eastside of Los Angeles, he is acutely aware of the significance of race. For example, on the night of the June 2, 1998, primary elections, Villaraigosa, the speaker of the state assembly at that time, visited the campaign headquarters of Gloria Romero, who was running for the state assembly in the 49th District. Both Villaraigosa and Romero shared a long history in the labor movement, especially with the United Farm Workers. It was early in the evening, and the initial vote tally had Romero's opponent, Judy Chu, ahead, although as more precincts from East Los Angeles reported later in the night, the vote would change in Romero's favor and she would go on to win in the general election.

The room was packed with campaign volunteers, staff, and other supporters, many wearing bright red United Farm Workers T-shirts. Surrounded by a wall of red shirts, Villaraigosa gave an impassioned speech in Spanish, and the crowd roared its approval of his talk of victory and electoral power. Villaraigosa grew up speaking primarily English, and he was not fluent in Spanish (Hernandez 2005), and many who wore the red T-shirts were not members of the United Farm Workers. As I stood in the crowd at Romero's campaign headquarters and listened to Villaraigosa speak, I could see and feel the power of the Spanish language and the union as potent symbols of struggle and success for Mexican Americans and Latinos in California. Villaraigosa also included Spanish in his mayoral inaugural address, clearly a way to be inclusive, recognizing the Mexican history of the city and the large number of Latino immigrants in the region. It was in Spanish that he declared that his life personified the American dream. "I am proof that the United States is a country of opportunity and liberty" (McGreevy and Garrison 2005: A1). Using the Spanish language in public, however, also carries political risk. Jaime Regalado, a noted analyst of Los Angeles politics, remarked, "If he is perceived as a bilingual-bicultural candidate, that will turn off Republicans or more traditionally conservative Democrats" (Hernandez 2005: A1). Proponents of English-only policies and practices criticize Villaraigosa's public use of Spanish, but this ignores the history of the country and the common use in schools and communities of languages other than English among the early immigrants, including those from Europe, Latin American immigrants eagerly filling English-as-a-second-language classes for adults, and the rapid acquisition of English by the children of immigrants. Villaraigosa's use of Spanish acknowledges that we live in a global society in which being bilingual or multilingual is a critical resource, and his personal life underscores the understanding among immigrants and their children that English is the language of the nation and the key to integration into society.

Translating Villaraigosa's claim to be a public official for all residents means that he pays careful attention to the unique needs of all communities, including those defined by race and ethnicity, and does not focus simply on so-called race-neutral policies. Racial minorities have built community institutions, such as museums, because mainstream organizations have not adequately addressed issues related to these communities, just as race-neutral historic preservation practices have ignored buildings related to the history of Chinese and African Americans in San Diego. Villaraigosa has a long history of supporting Asian American issues, and in 1999, for example, he was a featured speaker at the opening of a new building for the Japanese American National Museum in Los Angeles. He proudly stated that as a member of the state legislature, he helped pass legislation to provide funds for the museum.

The historical and contemporary government actions that have shaped Villaraigosa's childhood Eastside neighborhood are a clear reminder of the ways in which public policies give race meaning in the United States (Acuna 1984, 1996; Diaz 2005; Valle and Torres 2000). At the museum opening, Villaraigosa talked about his childhood in the nearby Eastside, just a few miles across the Los Angeles River, and that he remembered listening to his mother tell the tragic story of her good friends and neighbors who were rounded up by the government and sent to internment camps during World War II. From his mother's personal experience, Villaraigosa learned about the impact of race on those who lived around him. Internment was an egregious example of racism and violation of constitutional rights by the U.S. government, and adding to this injustice, as revealed decades later, staff at the Census Bureau used confidential census data to "facilitate and accelerate the forced relocation and denial of civil rights" (Prewitt 2000a, n.p.). Villaraigosa's life story was a reminder of the shared history of Mexican Americans and Japanese Americans, from their work as laborers in the agricultural fields to the restrictive covenants that created neighborhoods such as the Eastside peopled with racial minorities.

Sedimentation of Inequality: Racial Effects of Race-Neutral Policies

Melvin Oliver and Thomas Shapiro (1995) contend that to understand the effects of systemic discrimination on capital accumulation, it is necessary to take into account the range of government policies that have "promoted homesteading,

land acquisition, home ownership, retirement, pensions, education, and asset accumulation for some sectors of the population and not for others" (p. 4). Taken together, these factors contribute to the "sedimentation of inequality" (p. 51). It is not simply the individual factors that people bring to the marketplace that matter; the way that government policies structure opportunities must also be taken into account to understand racial differences in terms of wealth. As William J. Wilson (1980) suggests, however, government actions have undergone a transformation, from blatant racism to race-neutral policies. No longer do the issues raised by Oliver and Shapiro have such a prominent role in shaping people's life chances. The events that influenced the Eastside, such as the World War II incarceration of Japanese Americans, restrictive covenants that confined Latinos and Asian Americans to communities such as East Los Angeles, and interstate highways constructed to eliminate minority communities, would not occur in today's color-blind world, according to supporters of race-neutral policies.

Contemporary policies may appear to be race neutral and fair on the surface, but, as Cheryl Harris (1993) points out, such policies may in fact support racial outcomes because of the history of systemic racism in society. To understand the contemporary effects of race in the area of economic development that contribute to the sedimentation of inequality, current policies should be examined within the context of past and present actions that contributed to development and residential patterns in the United States. Segregation in the 1800s and early 1900s confined racial minorities to specific downtown areas. Federal mortgage policies and highway construction spurred development in the suburbs in the post–World War II era but explicitly reserved these areas for whites, enforcing segregation and the trend of minorities inhabiting urban areas and whites populating the suburbs. The growing political power of the suburbs and the downsizing of federal government programs resulted in a shift of resources to the suburbs and disinvestment in urban areas. With the effort to revitalize the cities, the urban renewal and highway construction programs of the 1950s through the early 1970s wiped out many multiracial and minority neighborhoods and forced the displaced residents into segregated areas. Now, as public and private funds pour into downtown areas across the country in a renewed effort to turn downtowns into corporate centers, cities such as San Diego are attracting affluent residents and new development to the urban core. Infrastructure projects to support this growth, such as highways and oil pipelines, produce health problems, destroy housing, and tear apart neighborhoods. As a result, low-income and minority residents face displacement and the problem of finding a new place to live, which in Southern California and New York City involves some of the most expensive housing markets in the country.

Community Activism and Infrastructure Projects

Events in Villaraigosa's boyhood community in the Eastside neighborhood of Los Angeles illustrate the impact of development on minority communities. The area has one of the highest concentrations of freeways in the region, and their construction destroyed close-knit communities and erected permanent barriers dividing neighborhoods, eliminated badly needed housing, displaced residents, and filled the air with carcinogenic diesel emissions. In the successful grassroots effort to block the construction of a state prison—which would have been the state's first erected in a "downtown urban" area—in the Eastside in the 1980s and early 1990s, part of the political education of the Mexican American women who led the effort came from the multiple displacements they had experienced during the construction of freeways (Pardo 1998: 53). The women working on the prison issue formed an organization called the Mothers of East Los Angeles (MELA), and Juana Gutierrez, one of the MELA leaders, explained why she grew suspicious of government development efforts.

> One of the things that really upsets me is injustice, and we have seen a lot of that in our community. Especially before, because I believe our people used to be less aware, we didn't assert ourselves as much. In the 1950s they put up the freeways, and just like that they gave us notice that we had to move. That happened twice. The people complied because the government ordered it. I remember that I was angry and wanted the others to back me up, but no one wanted to do anything. (Pardo 1998: 73)

Mary Pardo (1998: 75) points out in her study of MELA that the women developed an understanding of how their individual experiences reflected "group interests." Unlike the perspective of liberal individualism, the members of MELA recognized that they did not exist solely as individuals but instead collectively faced shared issues as working-class Mexican Americans. MELA later participated in the successful effort to block the construction of a toxic waste incinerator in the nearby working-class community of Vernon. Attacking the toxic waste incinerator and prison were not the results of narrow, self-interested NIMBYism ("not in my backyard"), as supporters of the projects attempted to characterize the protestors, but an awareness of the history of "dumping"

projects in low-income areas that communities with more resources and political clout have resisted (Pardo 1998: 63).

MELA also participated in protests against the construction of an oil pipeline through Los Angeles in the 1990s. At a community meeting, a woman asked why the pipeline should go through the city rather than along the coastline. The pipeline representative replied, "'Oh, no! If it burst, it would endanger the marine life.' The woman retorted, 'You value the marine life more than human beings'" (Pardo 1998: 132). In the final route of the pipeline, "89% of the census tracts have a higher percentage of minorities than the city average," but the pipeline representatives explained that the pipeline follows existing railroad and freeway routes (Martin 1997: B1).

As Aurora Castillo, another MELA leader, declared during discussion of the oil pipeline, "We just don't want all this garbage thrown at us because we are low-income and Mexican American" (Pardo 1990: 5). When the oil pipeline representative declared that the proposed pipeline route followed major transportation corridors, planning seemingly based on nonracial and rational principles, this ignored the way that earlier transportation routes were explicitly designed to act as barriers between white and minority communities or to wipe out minority communities, as when the urban interstates were used by local officials to "get rid of local 'niggertowns'" (Frieden and Sagalyn 1991: 28). Proposing to build the oil pipeline along the same transportation routes may appear to take advantage of existing infrastructure without regard to race, but doing so builds on past inequities and contributes to the disproportionate number of environmental hazards in racial minority communities (Bullard 2000, 2005; Pulido 2000).

Economic Development and Historic Preservation

Current economic development and historic preservation politics are guided by commissions and boards whose members clearly make an effort to avoid policies that contribute to racial inequality. Just as the oil pipeline officials believe that following established transportation corridors is based on race-neutral factors, because policymakers do not recognize the racial implications of their decisions, their actions may produce results with negative racial implications, as clearly demonstrated in the San Diego cases. To their credit, the San Diego Centre City Development Corporation (CCDC) carried out research to assess the importance of the Douglas Hotel, the Clermont/Coast Hotel, and the Chinese Mission, but the research failed to uncover or recognize the cultural and historical importance of the structures for their respective communities or for society in general.

The CCDC responded to the lobbying efforts of the Chinese American community and worked to preserve the mission and supplied a valuable piece of land for its new location. The Historical Resources Board, based on research carried out by the Gaslamp Black Historical Society (GBHS), declared the Clermont/Coast Hotel a local historical landmark in 2001, the first ever in San Diego associated with the history of African Americans. It also sponsored a comprehensive survey of downtown African American history and structures when the GBHS petitioned the city for action. The Historical Resources Board adopted the report in 2007 for use in the planning process in downtown San Diego. Although, on the one hand, these actions show a city willing to cooperate in important and meaningful ways, these examples also demonstrate that it takes extraordinary effort among people of color to mobilize and lobby for city actions that are institutionalized in city commissions and boards and carried out on a routine basis for whites in the city.

Structures and property owned by all, regardless of race, may be threatened, as demonstrated by the 2005 U.S. Supreme Court *Kelo v. New London* decision, which upheld a city's use of eminent domain for redevelopment purposes. A structure's economic contribution to an area's appeal as a site of tourism and entertainment is likely to be more important than historical value in the decision to preserve or demolish a building. The lists of historic structures for San Diego and Los Angeles and the results of the city of San Diego's research on the Douglas Hotel, the Clermont/Coast Hotel, and the Chinese Mission, however, clearly demonstrate that city agencies serving the public are less likely to recognize the social and historical importance of structures related to people of color.

Redistricting

In addition to development struggles, critical redistricting battles have focused on Villaraigosa's childhood neighborhood, the Eastside of Los Angeles. The 1990 *Garza v. Los Angeles County Board of Supervisors* court decision and the redistricting that followed addressed the fragmentation of Latino communities and vote dilution by joining East Los Angeles with Latino populations to the east, north, and south, followed by the election of Gloria Molina, the first Latino elected to the Board of Supervisors in more than a hundred years.

The 2000 redistricting of state assembly districts removed areas of East Los Angeles and added areas from the San Gabriel Valley to the 49th District. Although these changes resulted in only a slight demographic change, with a small decrease in the Latino population and a slight increase in the Asian

American population, by adding areas in the San Gabriel Valley while eliminating the predominantly Latino East Los Angeles area, the shift in population altered the politics of the new district. One of the major differences is that voters in the San Gabriel Valley are much more familiar with local elected officials, who gain experience in the area's numerous city councils and school boards and later run for state assembly and state senate seats. Thus the new boundaries create a district that is more favorable to San Gabriel Valley–based candidates and the many Asian Americans emerging from these locally elected positions. Recognizing the decrease in the Latino population in the region in relation to the Asian American population and the importance of this region for Asian Americans, because it was one of the few areas in the state that had such a high concentration of Asian Americans, Latino as well as Asian American statewide redistricting coalitions supported the new configuration for the district. The Latino redistricting group believed that other areas in the state offered better opportunities for Latinos and focused on those areas, even though the group faced opposition by some Latino elected officials who wanted to enhance the electoral chances of Latino candidates in the San Gabriel Valley.

Judy Chu, a former school board member and Monterey Park City Council member, was elected to the 49th District in 2001, and she reached the maximum allowed by term limits in 2006. Mike Eng, a Monterey Park City Council member and an established community activist as well as the spouse of Chu, won the Democratic primary election and general election to replace her. The recent election of Mike Eng shows the importance of redistricting and of creating districts that enhance the political power of minorities. Although the consolidation of the Asian American community in Eng's assembly district played a key role in his election, this same community was fragmented into three state senate and two congressional districts created in the 2000 redistricting for the region. Monterey Park was divided up into two congressional districts, violating the traditional redistricting standard of respecting established political boundaries. The new districts seriously diluted the political power of the region, including the Asian American population. One of the immediate effects of the new district boundaries in this era of term limits in California politics is the difficulty created for an assemblyperson who wishes to run for a state senate seat. If the assemblyperson has strong support from voters in his or her district, part of this base is eliminated in the state senate district because the assembly district is fragmented at the senate level.

Court decisions in such cases as *Shaw v. Reno* and *Cano v. Davis*, limiting the use of race in redistricting, have weakened the voting rights of racial minorities and their ability to shape districts in ways that enhance their political power. The decision in *Shaw v. Reno* demonstrates that translating voting rights issues into public policy is highly complex and subject to varied interpretations of the U.S. Constitution and federal policy. The close 5–4 vote in *Shaw v. Reno* shows the split among the Supreme Court justices and illustrates that such issues are not objective matters that will be decided in the same way by any fair and impartial individual. These court cases and the efforts of the statewide redistricting coalitions in California underscore the importance of supporting and strengthening existing legal and community organizations—such as the Mexican American Legal Defense and Educational Fund, the Asian Pacific American Legal Center of Southern California, the Asian Law Caucus of San Francisco, the Asian American Legal Defense and Education Fund of New York, the Committee Against Anti-Asian Violence of New York, and the NAACP Legal Defense Fund—and of building new ones to work for social justice and political equality.

The Voting Rights Act was renewed in July 2006, but even with strong support from President George Bush, who was eager to court minority voters, the approval process generated bitter debate in Congress and opposition from some Republicans who wanted to eliminate some sections of the act, such as the provision for bilingual voting material. Reflecting a focus on individual rights and a disregard for systemic discrimination that gives race meaning in contemporary America, Congressman Steve King, a Republican representing western Iowa, stated that "the party is engaged in group politics. I reject the idea of doing that. We are all created in God's image. He draws no distinction between race, skin color or national origin. It's an insult to him for us to do so in our public policy in America" (Wallsten and Neuman 2006: A15). Similarly, Congressman Dana Rohrabacher, a Republican from Orange County, stated that "what unites us is English. This is multiculturalism at its worse" (Neuman 2006: A20). In contrast, recognizing the diversity of the country and the effort of immigrants to participate in electoral politics, Congresswoman Linda Sanchez, a Democrat from southeast Los Angeles, noted that her mother, who is an English teacher, occasionally prefers a Spanish-language ballot to better understand the complicated measures on the ballot.

Rohrabacher's statement that "what unites us is English" ignores the reality that the 2000 census reveals: we remain a nation divided by race. A powerful indicator of this divide is that segregation driven by whites who seek all-white

neighborhoods continues at high levels. Racial segregation in Los Angeles County "has been increasing faster than integration since the 1960s" and "whites have had the freedom to settle wherever their wealth enables them to purchase a home. They have used that freedom to flee the growing diversity of the metropolis, either by moving out of the county completely or by retreating to its edges" (Ethington et al. 2001: 1–2). Racial segregation also continues at high levels in the New York City metropolitan area, and although African Americans have experienced a gradual decline in segregation in other parts of the country, John Logan (2001: n.p.) noted that "New York is an extreme case, one of very few where there was no improvement in black-white segregation in the last two decades."

Latinos and Asian Americans have experienced more residential mobility into the suburbs than African Americans, but the areas they have moved into often show a pattern of desegregation followed by resegregation (Ethington et al. 2001; Logan 2001). As with Monterey Park and other cities in Los Angeles County, areas that experienced segregation as all-white enclaves created through exclusionary policies and practices, these areas went through a period of integration as the policies were challenged and Latinos and Asian Americans moved in during the 1970s and 1980s. These areas now experience resegregation as whites greatly decline in numbers. New York City Charter Revision Commission member Bernard Richland explained the development of ethnic enclaves as the result of individual preference; although for many the concentration of services, stores, and entertainment serving a particular group is appealing, Richland's statement ignores the racial practices that continue in the real estate industry. A study by the National Fair Housing Alliance found that "illegal practices [including] denial of service, steering, illegal comments, and the use of schools as a proxy for the racial or ethnic composition of neighborhoods and communities" were common among workers in the real estate industry (NFHA 2006: 2). Rather than talking directly about the racial composition of a community, the report explains how "good" or "bad" schools become a substitute for race (NFHA 2006: 12). In this so-called color-blind era, many whites are very aware of race and prefer to live in all-white communities (Ethington et al. 2001).

Election Systems

Institutional processes configure political opportunities, and although African American, Latino, and Asian Americans share a subordinate position in a racialized political hierarchy, the New York City redistricting and charter reform process and the council elections that followed demonstrated that different political opportunities were created for these groups because of distinct demographic and political characteristics. The charter reforms focused primarily on the situation of African Americans and Latinos. Districts could be created in which these groups, with their large and concentrated populations, formed an effective voting bloc. Although such reforms have increased the number of Latino and African American elected officials in New York City, as well as in other cities across the United States, using a "one size fits all" strategy treats all racial minorities as the same and fails to take into account the particular histories and political and demographic characteristics of Asian Americans.

In New York City, Asian Americans joined in their support of Chinatown united within a council district. However, a majority Asian American district was impossible because of the limitations imposed by the census undercount, the smaller number of districts than requested by Asian American groups created during the charter reform process, and the dispersed and relatively small Asian American population. John Logan and John Mollenkopf (2003: 47) note that in the New York City council primary elections, candidates can win with a plurality of the vote, whereas in Los Angeles, if no candidate wins a majority, a runoff is held in the general election between the two top candidates. If New York changed to the Los Angeles model and added an additional feature, an "instant runoff" that allows voters to list their preference for candidates and that allows their votes to be transferred, this might help overcome the issue faced in District 1 with multiple Chinese American candidates fragmenting the Chinese American vote.

The Voting Rights Act of 1965 was designed principally to enfranchise African Americans in the South. With much larger and more highly segregated populations—compared to Asian Americans—African Americans, Latinos, and whites in New York City have been better served by single-member districts, as the New York City Council elections demonstrated. In New York City and much of the United States, in areas where the more dispersed populations of Asian Americans—and to a lesser degree, Latinos—make such districts problematic, alternative election systems could be considered (Aoki 2002). Such systems would allow greater opportunity for smaller and more dispersed populations to elect candidates of their choice. As Lani Guinier (1994) points out in her discussion of the problems associated with single-member districts, group interests may not coincide with district boundaries, gerrymandering plays a prominent role in redistricting, and the dominance of the majority

voters can lead to a "tyranny of the majority" in which the votes of the minority are unproductive. Judith Reed served as legal counsel to the New York City 1990 Districting Commission, and in a law review article following the process, Reed drew on the work of Guinier and discussed the limitations of single-member district elections for the Lower East Side. Reed (1992) concluded that alternative election systems should be considered, such as cumulative voting, a voting system in which voters can cast as many votes as there are open seats in districts with multiple representatives. Thus voters can strategically use their votes by spreading them among the candidates or by using all their votes for one candidate, and more readily form alliances with other voters based on shared interests.

The Myth of Whites as Race Neutral

The members of the New York City Districting Commission emphasized racial boundaries and labels for Asian Americans and Latinos and past white support for Asian American candidates. The commission's analysis assumed that whites would recognize the merits of Asian American political representation and would support a qualified Asian American candidate. This viewpoint, however, does not adequately consider the racial interests of whites and the active support of white racial privilege through the historic and contemporary practices of political exclusion used by whites against racial minorities. Certainly whites have joined with racial minorities to elect minorities, but this scenario primarily occurs when progressive whites need allies to supplant an entrenched group (Browning et al. 1984; Sonenshein 1993), not when they are a voting majority, as in District 1. To suggest that Asian Americans will be the "next whites," following the pattern of acceptance of formerly nonwhite groups, such as southern and eastern Europeans (Gans 1994), favors an assimilation model of political integration that ignores the "color line" and the fundamentally different racial experiences of Native Americans and groups from Asia, Latin America, and Africa. Successful politicians, such as Gary Locke and Antonio Villaraigosa, win because they run carefully sanitized, deracialized campaigns in which race is mentioned in ways that support accepted notions of assimilation and a color-blind society.

There is a fundamental difference between, on the one hand, ignoring the impact of race on campaigning and enacting outwardly color-blind policies that have a negative impact on people of color and, on the other hand, campaigning to build a multiracial coalition and enacting policies that are described as race neutral but have positive consequences for everyone. City officials can recognize the importance of issues that affect all residents, such as improving transportation systems, health care services, and employment opportunities, reducing pollution, and combating crime. Government programs can have unequal racial outcomes, as demonstrated by the history of displacement of communities of color by infrastructure development, vastly different levels of quality in public schools in affluent versus low-income neighborhoods, or concern over racial profiling by police officers. A different scenario is offered by policies that are important to all residents, such as the quality of public education or immigration regulation, but that consider the issues of particular groups, such as bilingual education or immigration reform. Villaraigosa's support for funding for the Japanese American National Museum recognizes that major public cultural institutions that are supposed to represent the public may neglect minority communities. Thus, assisting the Japanese American National Museum is a way to bring the history and culture of this community into public view, where it can be noted and appreciated by all, not an attempt to isolate or separate a community from society as critics of ethnic- or race-specific activities contend (Schlesinger 1998). Although support for the museum targets a particular group, living-wage ordinances offer an example of a race-neutral effort that helps racial minorities. Baltimore's city council passed the first living-wage ordinance in the United States in 1994, and in the decade that followed, 123 cities, counties, school boards, and other governing bodies passed similar ordinances (Luce 2005). Such changes can work to improve the condition of all affected workers, but considering the high number of people of color in the jobs covered by these ordinances in cities such as Los Angeles, these policies have a positive effect on minority workers.

With the increasing heterogeneity of the Asian American community in terms of such factors as class, nativity, and political ideology, is race a viable category for the construction of districts? Race remains important because whites at times organize to develop policies to protect white racial privilege. As a result government policies are shaped by race and ethnicity in ways that negatively affect minorites and become embedded in economic and political relations. (Lien 2001; J. Wong 2006). In accord with the history of political and economic exclusion faced by Asian Americans locally and nationally, AALDEF's exit poll showed that Asian Americans in Chinatown voted overwhelmingly for Asian American representation, and although some whites crossed over to support the Asian American candidates, most did not.

The racial politics of Lower Manhattan demonstrate that what it means to be Asian American, Latino, or white is highly situational, with personal meaning emerging from local contexts while also linked to larger social and economic factors. Race is not simply an identity tied to a racial label. Voters in the city council elections considered neighborhood issues, such as the personal histories of the candidates and the local organizations that supported them, changing community demographics, efforts to slow the growth of Chinatown, and gentrification. Voters also placed these local concerns within a larger context, connecting the issues to factors such as the history of political exclusion faced by Asian Americans in the city and nation, the global flow of capital and economic development, and city policies supporting gentrification in Chinatown.

Political reform, such as New York City's charter revision, is supposed to enfranchise minorities, as were government efforts to address civil and political rights in the 1960s. However, as George Lipsitz (2006) asserts in his discussion on the contradiction between civil rights legislation and the public policies that obstruct its implementation, the national discourse on issues of discrimination reveals the connection between a civil rights dialogue ostensibly about inclusion and fairness and the production, support, and extension of white privilege. As Kousser (1999) points out in his analysis of the U.S. Supreme Court redistricting decisions in the 1990s, such as *Shaw v. Reno*, the Court used "the Reconstruction Amendments to protect powerful whites rather than much less politically potent minorities, employed the language of equality and integration to promote inequality and exclusion, and established racial and partisan double standards while pretending to be colorblind and nonpartisan" (p. 377).

The serious and sustained efforts of Asian Americans to preserve their history in San Diego and to gain political access in Los Angeles and New York City demonstrate the difficulty and complexity of gaining access to and modifying institutions that have historically excluded racial minorities. Mari Matsuda (1995: 66) discusses the contrast between lived experiences and deeply held beliefs; she cites the contradiction faced by the Nisei who volunteered for military service during World War II while they and their families were locked up in internment camps, yet still believed in U.S. "constitutional democracy." By "looking to the bottom," as Matsuda (1995: 63) suggests, at those who have experienced oppression and exclusion, Asian Americans reveal their interpretation of society and struggle for inclusion and their commitment and desire to become a part of American society. Their efforts signify a continued belief in the possibility of inclusion and equality, in contrast to those who see political mobilization along racial and ethnic lines as a sign of the balkanization of American society (Huntington 2004; Schlesinger 1998). Looking up from the bottom also reveals the impediments, layer upon layer, that contribute to the sedimentation of political inequality. Recognizing these impediments, the community members who participated in the redistricting struggles in New York City and the Los Angeles region and in the historic preservation and economic development plans in San Diego are driven by the hope that conditions can be altered and improved and that the United States can address the American dilemma of racial inequality that has existed through the centuries.