There was a time, not too long ago, when race in America was synonymous with the black-white dichotomy. But since the United States reformed its immigration policy and reopened its borders to newcomers, immigrants and their children have transformed the racial landscape of this country. In the past decade or so alone, the immigrant population has grown tremendously, from thirty million at the turn of the twenty-first century to over forty million today. The Pew Research Center’s comprehensive study of Asian Americans, titled “The Rise of Asian Americans,” surprised many by pointing out that Asian Americans, not Latinos, constituted the fastest growing racial group, and much of the growth is due to international migration. More than a third (36 percent) of the new immigrants who came to this country in 2010 were of Asian American or Pacific Islander descent, compared to 31 percent of Latino origin.

Over the past half century, Asian Americans grew from fewer than one million (or 0.6 percent of the total US population) in 1960 to more than nineteen million (or 6 percent of the US population) in 2013. Although Asian Americans compose a tiny proportion of the US population, they form an increasingly visible racial minority group. Many Americans assume that Asian Americans congregate along the coastal states of the Pacific West, but in fact their numbers have increased most rapidly in new destinations of the US South, a region considered to be the “geographic center of black-white relations.” Asian Americans have now complicated Americans’ notions of race. By virtue of their presence all over the country, it is now impossible for nineteen million people of Asian origins to remain unseen.

As the contributors of the following chapters demonstrate, Asian Americans have carved out niches and made themselves visible within many arenas of American life—schools and colleges, community-based organizations, suburbs and ethnoburbs, neighborhoods and “gayborhoods,” political movements, and even professional sports leagues. Asian American immigrants and their children work in every echelon of the mainstream and ethnic labor markets—professional occupations, service sectors, hospitality industries, and health care and medicine—and have achieved measureable positive socioeconomic outcomes. Unlike the European and Asian immigrants of yesteryear, they excel in the education arena and fare well in American society on economic terms. They also have more resources and technology to intimately and economically tether themselves to the home countries they left behind. The emerging popularity of
social media has helped democratize American pop culture, and Asian Americans have used the Internet to raise social consciousness (e.g., 18millionrising.com, *Hyphen* magazine), blog about Asian American racial injustices (e.g., Angry Asian Man), and build a fan base for their music and comedy (e.g., The Fung Brothers of Monterey Park, CA). Historically touted as “forever foreigners,” Asian Americans throughout the United States are weaving themselves into the tapestry of American society and continue to be lauded as “the model minority.”

Yet despite significant advances in social mobility, Asian Americans have yet to achieve a social status in the United States that is on par with that of their European counterparts of yesteryear. In spite of the widespread popularity of the “model minority” trope, there are Asian Americans who are poor and struggle to make ends meet, who barely make it into community colleges because of both academic and financial challenges, who live in the shadows because of their legal status, and who continue to be subject to overt and covert forms of racial discrimination on a daily basis. No matter what their levels of cultural and economic assimilation, they are still considered the racial other because of their phenotype, even those who are adopted by and raised in white families and communities for their entire lives. They continue to face a bamboo ceiling that blocks their mobility to leadership positions. Their representation in upper-level management in corporations, college and university administrations, Hollywood televisions and films, and even the US Congress remains negligible. Despite the fact that American society is more open than ever before, and an Asian American basketball player in the NBA has evolved into a national news sensation, Asian America is still on the margin of mainstream America. As French writer Jean-Baptiste Alphonse Karr famously declared, “The more things change, the more they stay the same.”

Even the Pew Research Center report about the “rise” of Asian Americans was rife with controversy. To the credit of the organization, they consulted with several of the leading Asian American social scientists in the country; however, it was their *reporting* of the data that brought tremendous angst to Asian American leaders around the country. At its heart, the report seemed celebratory in nature—in total congruence with the model minority stereotype. In opting to highlight the successes, the report marginalized the segments of the community that were most in need. For every Asian American success story, there are many more Asian American families and communities who continue to suffer through the indignant effects of racism, sexism, homophobia, violence, and poverty. Given the scarcity of think tanks that address Asian American issues, the Pew Research Center report was a missed opportunity. In the eyes of many Asian American activists, scholars, and policymakers, they were “blindsided” by a one-dimensional depiction of what they know—and have proven with their life’s work—to be a culturally and socioeconomically heterogeneous population.
Like the Asian American population in the United States, *Contemporary Asian America* continues to evolve. We have enlisted an interdisciplinary group of sociologists, political scientists, psychologists, and ethnic studies scholars to contribute to this third edition new chapters that underscore the growing complexity of Asian American communities and social issues. Some of the chapters tackle new frontiers in Asian American studies. How is Latino immigration reshaping how Asian Americans think about race? How have gay Asian Americans carved out their agency in a time when LGBT individuals have reached unprecedented levels of acceptance? How has the age of Obama reshaped the political behaviors of Asian Americans? Other chapters address issues that Asian Americans continue to endure. How does race affect the everyday experiences of Asian American students and workers? What strategies do Asian Americans use to maintain their cultural and social ties to their home country? How do the historical, economic, and political relations of the United States across the Pacific affect Asian Americans’ experiences in this country today? These are complicated questions, to which our book does not propose to provide a solution. Nonetheless, this third edition does hope to inspire a new generation of students—Asian American or not—to critically consider these issues, rather than reduce a population of nineteen million rising to mere Orientalist stereotypes.

As the coeditors, we are incredibly thankful to New York University Press (NYUP), who not only provided the initial spark to develop this reader into the new edition, but, as a publisher, has also made itself an important ally to the growing field of Asian American studies. We are grateful for their continued willingness to provide an important space for contemporary Asian American issues to be debated in a critical fashion. NYUP editor Jennifer Hammer has offered her unending support and enthusiasm for this project, as she did in the previous editions. We thank Eric Zinner for playing a key role in providing this important scholarly space for Asian American studies. We also thank Constance Grady and Dorothea Stillman Halliday, who have patiently guided us through the necessary steps in the publishing process, and Joseph Dahm, who is our meticulous copy editor.

We are grateful for our contributors, both old and new, who have not only helped make *Contemporary Asian America* a repository of the multifaceted experiences of Asian Americans, but also given us an important set of tools for understanding the current state and the future of this ever-evolving community. Their brilliant chapters shed new light on the history and current state of Asian America and inspire scholars and students of Asian American studies. When it comes to this extraordinary group of passionate scholars, “the past isn’t dead; it's not even past,” to invoke the words of the American writer William Faulkner.

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