It was no small coincidence that the US population hit the three-hundred-million mark just as we were putting the finishing touches on the second edition of *Contemporary Asian America* in October 2006. For most Americans, this unique historical moment was fairly anticlimactic. There were no visible signs of celebration—no parades with colorful floats and marching bands, no fireworks, not even a public gathering. President Bush—a politician who has an unusual way of speaking to the moment—delivered what can only be described as a tepid response to the demographic change. In a press release issued by the White House, the president lauded that people were “America’s greatest asset,” and praised the American people for their confidence, ingenuity, hopes and for their love of freedom. He concluded that “we welcome this milestone as further proof that the American Dream remains as bright and hopeful as ever.”¹ This brief blip in the news cycle disappeared almost as suddenly as it came. To be certain, any celebrations that might have occurred were dampened by an ongoing debate in the United States about immigration and its impact on the environment, natural resources, public services, and quality of life.

By contrast, the arrival of the two-hundred-millionth American in November 1967 was a more splendid affair, marked by celebrations and extensive news coverage. Addressing the nation while standing before a giant census clock, President Lyndon Johnson delivered his own message of hope and caution for the future. As Haya El Nasser recounts, President Johnson’s words were broken on several occasions by the sounds of applause from the crowd of onlookers who had converged on the Department of Commerce to hear the president speak.² Among the many events that celebrated the two-hundred-million mark was a contest of sorts, sponsored by *Life* magazine. The editors at *Life* sent teams of photographers to twenty-two cities across the United States, finding the baby who arrived closest to the hour appointed by the US Census Bureau when the two-hundred-millionth American would arrive. The winning baby was a fourth-generation Chinese American, Robert Ken Woo, Jr., born at Atlanta’s Crawford Long Hospital at 11:03 AM, November 20, 1967, to Robert and Sally Woo. Woo’s story was—to paraphrase the writer Gish Gen—“typically Asian American.” Bobby’s great-grandfather had come to Georgia after the Civil War to work on the Augusta Canal. His mother’s family had fled the Communist Revolution in China and settled in Augusta in 1959 after several years of waiting for permission to emigrate. Both of parents were college graduates; his father worked as a

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² President Lyndon Johnson, press release, November 20, 1967.
certified public accountant in Georgia. Bobby Woo was one of a small number of Asian Americans growing up in the suburb of Tucker. He attended Harvard University as an undergraduate and as a law student. Today, he is a practicing attorney (and the first Asian American partner at King & Spalding, one of the most prestigious law firms in America), an advocate for immigrant rights, and the father of three children.

Woo’s story is both fascinating and symbolically appropriate. Even though it was by happenstance, Woo’s selection as the two-hundred-millionth American anticipated drastic changes that had altered the country’s demographic, social, and political landscape since his ancestors first arrived in America nearly a hundred years before his birth. Woo’s parents and Woo himself were beneficiaries of the growing educational and economic opportunities that were made available to them and other racial/ethnic minorities only within a relatively short span of time—the repeal of the Chinese Exclusion Act in 1943, the Immigration and Nationality Act of 1952 (also known as the McCarran-Walter Act), the Civil Rights Act of 1964, and subsequent changes in public policies and public attitudes toward racial/ethnic minorities as a result of the civil rights movement. The passage of the 1965 amendments to the Immigration and Nationality Act (Hart-Celler Act), two years before Woo’s birth, made possible the coming of hundreds and thousands of immigrants from all over the world, especially from countries in Asia and Latin America that had legally been excluded. Consequently, the face of America has changed dramatically. Asian Americans, barely visible on the American scene in the 1960s, have experienced unparalleled growth, largely through immigration, from 1.5 million in 1970 to 14.3 million as of today.

At a time when the United States is now the third most populous country on earth after China and India, one wonders what the future of Asian America will look like. With the exception of Woo’s story, Asian Americans and their contributions to American life were hardly mentioned by the American public either at the two-hundred-million celebration in November 1967 or at the quiet passing of the three-hundred-million milestone during the third week of October 2006. This absence is a glaring one. Since the arrival of the first immigrants from Asia in the mid-nineteenth century, Asian Americans have played and will continue to play a critical role in this country’s future. Their American stories need to be unfolded further and understood deeper. The second edition of Contemporary Asian America: A Multidisciplinary Reader grows out of this urgent need. We have thus worked assiduously to compile a new reader that delves into contemporary Asian America in its fullness and complexity; to assemble a selection of readings and documentary films that offer an excellent grounding for understanding many of the emerging trends, issues, and debates in the community and in Asian American studies; and to organize topics that lend insight into the future of this ethnically diverse Asian American community.
Listening to students, instructors, researchers, and others who have used the first edition of our reader for their studies, teaching, and research, we aimed to make the second edition of *Contemporary Asian America* more user-friendly by reducing its size and revamping it with the best and most up-to-date works that reflect contributions—and changes—that have occurred within the field of Asian American studies since 2000. Our goal proved challenging: How do you reduce the number of articles and yet retain the breath and depth? How do you retain the “classic” works most utilized by survey courses in Asian American studies and at the same time introduce new topics, concepts, and perspectives that are sensitive to the changing terrains of contemporary Asian America and essential for the continual development of Asian American studies today? We have addressed these questions rather substantively through a reconfiguration of certain sections from the original volume and the incorporation of original and recently published works that concern twenty-first-century Asian America, including the impact of September 11 on Asian American identity, citizenship, and civil liberties; globalization as a dynamic force shaping the contemporary Asian American community; theoretical debates that continue to inform Asian American studies; and an emphasis on diversity of Asian American experiences along lines of class, ethnicity, nativity, gender, and sexuality. Of particular importance to the new edition is the movement away from nation-centered models of identity formation (a core component of Asian American studies as it existed in the 1960s through the 1990s) to a model governed by fluidity, cosmopolitanism, and flexible identities rooted in global citizenship.

Of course, our interpretation of Asian American studies is just an interpretation, and perhaps a limited one at that. While no reader can be all things to all people, this new edition strives to achieve a balanced coverage with the range and depth that reflects our commitment to multiple interpretations of the Asian American experience(s) and the shared vision of the many possibilities and promises that is one of the defining features of Asian American studies. Along the way, we ask more questions than we answer, offering what we hope will be the framework for a larger discussion within and beyond the classroom. We believe that this second edition has met our intended goals. It also meets the growing expectations of our users. Instructors who have used the original edition of *Contemporary Asian America* should be able to comfortably adopt this new edition whether they choose to teach their courses the same way or differently. Those who have not used *Contemporary Asian America* before may now consider adopting it as it will surely stimulate much intellectual and personally reflexive discussion in classrooms.

We, as coeditors, are appreciative for the encouragement and support of so many individuals who made the original edition of *Contemporary Asian America* a great success and this second edition a real possibility. First and foremost, we thank our editor, Jennifer Hammer, at New York University Press (NYUP).
Hammer has been a champion of this edition. Her enthusiasm, encouragement, and editorial insight have made this project as intellectually challenging as fun. We thank Eric Zinner, the editor-in-chief at NYUP, for his steadfast support and for his vision of the possibilities of Asian American studies. We also thank our copy editor, Emily Wright, for her careful reading and meticulous editing of the entire manuscript. We are especially grateful to NYUP’s anonymous reviewers who offered additional suggestions after carefully reading our second edition prospectus.

We are much indebted to many of our colleagues, friends, and students, who offered invaluable feedback, insightful comments, and thoughtful ideas, and copious suggestions for our second edition based on their own research and classroom experiences using the original edition of *Contemporary Asian America*. Among these are Christina Chin, Meera Deo, Lane Ryo Hirabayashi, Russell Leong, Valerie Matsumoto, Don Nakanishi, Kyeyoung Park, and Nancy Yuen at the University of California, Los Angeles; Robert Lee, Evelyn Hu-DeHart, Danielle Antoinette Hidalgo, and Karen Inouye at Brown University; Carl L. Bankston III, Yen Le Espiritu, Demetrius Eudell, Matt Guterl, Christopher Lee, Lynn Mie Itagaki, Elaine Kim, Susan S. Kim, Jennifer Lee, Sunaina Maira, Edward Melillo, Gary Okihiro, Rhacel Salazar Parreñas, Edward Park, John Park, Paul Spickcard and his students, Leti Volpp, Ellen Wu, and Judy Wu at other institutions. We are extremely fortunate to work with our authors whose contributions were absolutely first-rate and whose cooperation was incredibly generous and timely. We thank Jason Gonzales, Ly P. Lam, Jesse Lewis, Ravi Shivanna, Tritia Soto, and Yang Sao Xiong who provided tremendous technical support and research assistance.

We would like to acknowledge the institutional support from the Department of Sociology, Department of Asian American Studies, and Asian American Studies Center at UCLA, and the Department of American Civilization and the Center for the Study of Race and Ethnicity in the Americas at Brown University. The Asian American Studies Center, the Social Sciences Division of the College of Letters and Sciences, and the Academic Senate at UCLA provided partial funding for the project. The Center for Advanced Studies in the Behavioral Sciences awarded a fellowship to Min Zhou during the academic year 2005–2006, which freed up much time for her to concentrate on developing this project.

Last—but certainly not least—we thank our wonderful families who continue to inspire us and our endeavors. Min Zhou dedicates this book to her husband Sam Nan Guo and son Philip Jia Guo. Jim Gatewood dedicates this book to his wife, Jules, to his mum, June Gatewood, and to his pugs, Boo and Moses.

Min Zhou and J. V. Gatewood
Los Angeles, October 2006
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