I use “Protestant” and “Catholic” throughout this book much as my subjects used them: as broad categories whose meaning emerges, in part, in opposition to one another. Throughout the book, men and women from a variety of denominations and embracing different forms and levels of religious commitment identify themselves as Protestant when talking about the value of celebrating Catholic missionaries. Similarly, both Catholics and Protestants identify figures such as Junípero Serra or Jacques Marquette as Catholic when talking about the importance of a cross-confessional commemorative culture.

These broad categories mattered to the subjects of this book, but they also obscure as much as they reveal. American Protestantism is characterized by vast denominational diversity and wide ranges of religious devotion and commitment. The people featured in this book tend to fall into two groups: those who would claim a Protestant background but who were not actively religious, and those who were actively religious and more theologically liberal than conservative, often explicitly committed to ecumenism. Where I can find evidence of a subject’s denominational identity I include it: it is clear that the people featured in this study vary considerably in denomination, though Unitarians are particularly heavily represented.

Similarly, the term “Catholicism” or “Catholic pasts” can obscure the specificity of what was being celebrated. In broad terms, I follow the subjects of this book in using “Catholic” as a shorthand for “Roman Catholic,” even though, in Julie Byrne’s succinct phrasing, “not all Catholics are Roman Catholics.” Furthermore, as the ensuing chapters show, in celebrating Marquette,
Serra, and the Spanish friars in the Philippines, U.S. Catholics and Protestants were idealizing Jesuits, Franciscans, and other men in religious orders—not laypeople, not women religious, and not (most of the time) parish priests. Indeed, these celebrations were embedded in a series of longer discursive traditions about friars, Jesuits, and Franciscans in particular.

This book attempts to acknowledge those particular differences when they arise, but also to reflect the fact that—especially given the prevalence of anti-Catholicism in the Gilded Age and Progressive Era United States—the broad categories of Protestant and Catholic were themselves significant. In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, an Episcopalian missionary in the Philippines, a defrocked Methodist minister in California, and a Unitarian president would all identify themselves as Protestant in contradistinction to a Catholic other. And, when they came together with Catholic laypeople, priests, and prelates to celebrate the history of a Jesuit or a Franciscan, all of them often described what they were doing as celebrating Catholic people and history. My use of “Protestant” and “Catholic” is intended to reflect this binary, while simultaneously remaining attentive to its ideological work and historical elisions.
The Imperial Church