Cold War Orientalism

Asia in the Middlebrow Imagination, 1945–1961

Christina Klein
For my mother
and
my father
Musicals and Modernization

Rodgers and Hammerstein’s King of Siam held a powerful appeal for postwar Americans: Yul Brynner spent the rest of his life playing the leader of a developing nation who welcomes the West into his country and willingly dies rather than impede the process of modernization. *The King and I* made the transition to modernity seem painless, as long as native elites followed the West’s instructions and knew when to step aside. But nine years after first playing the King, he starred in *The Magnificent Seven*, in which he played an American who must force modernization and freedom on a developing people almost against their will. These two roles suggest a fundamental ambivalence that always existed at the heart of modernization theory: while the peaceful transformation of the developing world was most desirable, it would be achieved through violence if necessary. Walt Rostow, like Yul Brynner, expresses this ambivalence in his own career: the academic planner of Third World development was also a hawk on Vietnam. This ambivalence allows us to see how the ideals of integration and containment, community formation and violence, polkas and gunfights always existed side by side in both the politics and the culture of the Cold War. By thinking about *The King and I* and *The Magnificent Seven* together, we can see how both sides of this ambivalence circulated throughout postwar culture in two of the most popular and distinctively American genres, the musical and the Western.

CHAPTER 6

Asians in America

Flower Drum Song and Hawaii

Hawaii will be the first state with roots not in Europe but in Asia. This is bound to have a profound effect on America’s future in the entire Far East.... in Asian eyes, the U.S. is the land of the white man, and all too frequently it is tarred with the brush of “colonialism.” Hawaii the 50th state could change all this.

“Enchanting ‘State,’” *Newsweek*, 1959

James Michener, after publishing *Tales of the South Pacific* with Macmillan in 1947, decided he wanted a different publisher to bring out his second book. Years later he described his decision to move to Random House as an expression of social conscience. “I had visited the Random House offices,” he explained,

and had noted that their receptionist was a charming young Negro girl (she later appeared in the musical *Carmen Jones*). Most publishing houses at that time did not even employ Negroes in their shipping rooms. I imagined that Random’s choice of a receptionist might cost some patronage, and I felt that an outfit willing to risk prejudice by such an act of faith would be a good one to associate with. So I got on the Fifth Avenue bus at Washington Square, rode up to 50th Street, and handed that Negro girl the manuscript of *The Fires of Spring*.

Michener criticized the export of American racism in much of his writing about Asia and the Pacific during the 1940s and 1950s. In his anecdote about Random House, he shows that he was also concerned with racial inequality within the United States and eager to put his social criticism into practice by working with a publisher that shared his convictions.

In exploring the role of race in the Cold War, it is useful to think in terms of racial formations—the historically specific and socially con-
structed racial categories within which people live their lives. Racial formations are a product of both social structures and ideas: they result from the process of defining how race is organized socially and legally and what race means. In the centenary prior to World War II, racial formation in the U.S. largely revolved around the process of racialization, which separated peoples into distinct and incompatible biological categories called races. The racialization of African Americans was achieved, in part, through the system of segregation, which separated black people from whites legally, physically, socially, and politically. The racialization of Asian Americans, in contrast, was achieved through a series of laws regulating immigration and naturalization. Congress passed the first Chinese Exclusion Act in 1882, restricted Japanese immigration in 1907 with the so-called Gentlemen's Agreement, and created the Asiatic Barred Zone, which prohibited immigration from South Asia and the Pacific Islands, in 1917. The 1924 National Origins Act sealed off virtually all immigration from Asia, while the Tydings-McDuffie Act of 1934 closed the last loophole that had allowed immigration from the Philippines, which was still a U.S. colony. Restrictions on the naturalization of Asians already in the U.S. followed a similar trajectory, beginning in 1870 with the Chinese and culminating in the Supreme Court's 1923 ruling that the "free white persons" criterion for naturalization categorically excluded all Asians. Collectively, these laws established the meaning of Asianness as foreign, as unassimilable, as "alien." 

In the 1930s and 1940s the racial formation of people of color within the U.S. began to change, as racialization gave way to ethnicization. With ethnicization, the socially and culturally defined category of ethnicity replaced the biological category of race as the preferred way to explain differences among populations. During World War II, official and unofficial propagandists celebrated America as a racially, religiously, and culturally diverse nation, and in the process they transformed the ethnic immigrant from a marginal figure into the prototypical American. This vision of America, as Nikhil Singh has suggested, served as one of the ideological foundations upon which the U.S. claim to world leadership rested, both during and after war. As a democratic nation of immigrants, this reasoning went, America alone possessed the ideals and the experiences to lead a multicultural world of independent nations in which imperialism had lost all legitimacy. Only America contained the principle of internationalism within its own borders: it alone could claim to be what Gunnar Myrdal described as "humanity in miniature" and what Carey McWilliams called "a nation of nations." 

The pervasive racial discrimination against African Americans and Asian Americans undermined this claim of world leadership, however, creating what Myrdal in 1944 called the "American dilemma." In order to justify the claim, the social organization of race within the U.S. had to be brought into alignment with professions of equality for all. Recognizing this imperative, the federal government instituted a series of legal and legislative reforms that, over the course of the 1940s and early 1950s, partially transformed the economic, political, legal, and social structures that regulated race in the United States. In a series of reforms aimed at African Americans, the federal government forbade racial discrimination in defense industries, prohibited the white primary, ordered the desegregation of the military, invalidated restrictive housing covenants, desegregated interstate travel, and ordered the desegregation of public schools. During this same period, a separate series of legislative reforms reopened the door to Asian immigration and allowed Asians within the U.S. to become naturalized citizens. Congress repealed the Chinese Exclusion Acts in 1943, passed laws allowing the immigration and naturalization of Filipinos and Indians in 1946, and in a 1947 amendment to the War Brides Act it allowed Asian Americans serving in the military to bring home Asian-born wives. In 1952 the McCarran-Walter Act abolished the principle of Asian exclusion by invalidating the racial bar to naturalization; it also created annual quotas for immigrants from the Asia-Pacific area, and added a family reunification provision. Several pieces of special legislation allowed the entry of Chinese refugees from communism after 1949 and allowed Asian children to come in as adoptees. By 1952, and for the first time in U.S. history, all Asians were allowed to become immigrants, and all Asian immigrants inside the U.S. were allowed to become naturalized citizens. Together, these reforms had as their ultimate goal the integration of Asian and African Americans into the political and social mainstream of American life. 

These changes in the social regulation of race were both real and limited: their significance often derived more from the legal precedents they overturned or established than from any dramatic social changes they ushered in. School desegregation did not follow automatically from the 1954 Supreme Court's Brown vs. Board of Education decision, nor did the 1952 Immigration and Nationality Act entirely eradicate the principle of Asian racial difference. Although the act did officially remove the racial bar to naturalization citizenship, it also perpetuated the racially discriminatory aspects of the 1924 law in a disguised form: Asians would be allowed into the country under what Neil Gotanda has called "quasi-
racial, ancestry-based quotas" rather than the strictly national quotas that applied to Europeans. This meant that the tiny Chinese quota would apply to all persons of at least 50 percent Chinese background, regardless of their national origin. Nevertheless, the 1952 law had a significant effect on immigration from Asia. Even though the quota for Japan was set at only 185 immigrants per year and China's was set at 205, the combined legal changes enabled about 45,000 Japanese and 32,000 Chinese immigrants to enter the U.S. over the course of the 1950s. These legal reforms and increased immigration began to change the meaning of Asian-ness within the United States: no longer legally aliens, Asians could begin to claim the status of "immigrant" at the very moment that it was being held up as a privileged category of American national identity.5

These legal reforms allow us to see the double meaning of integration in the postwar period: the domestic project of integrating Asian and African Americans within the United States was intimately bound up with the international project of integrating the decolonizing nations into the capitalist "free world" order. Many of the proponents of these reforms recognized this connection, as did middlebrow cultural producers, Michener's anecdote about choosing Random House because it employed a black receptionist and his reference to Oscar Hammerstein's all-black musical, Carmen Jones, allow us to see how the same cultural producers who narrated the international integration of the United States and Asia also grappled with the question of the integration of minorities within the United States. As the social structures organizing Asian people within the United States changed, the meaning of Asian-ness did as well. Hammerstein and Michener, through the musical Flower Drum Song and the novel Hawaii, participated in the changing racial formation of Asian Americans by articulating some of the new meanings that Asian-ness carried.

FLOWER DRUM SONG

In 1942 C. Y. Lee, the son of an impoverished gentleman landlord, left war-torn China to attend graduate school in the United States. Lee started at Columbia and then transferred to the creative writing program at Yale, where he received an MFA in 1947. After graduating, Lee left New Haven and headed west; he planned to return to China and write for the film industry there, but news of Mao's successes in the Chinese civil war interrupted his journey. Getting as far as California, he settled in San Francisco's Chinatown, where he took a job as a journal-
Daughter (1950); and C. Y. Lee’s Flower Drum Song. Each of these works was published by an established East Coast publishing house, garnered glowing reviews in the national press, and found a large readership across the country. Pardee Lowe’s novel and Jade Snow Wong’s autobiography, as the first book-length works published in English by American-born Chinese writers, were groundbreaking achievements; Wong’s book enjoyed enormous longevity, and was the most financially successful book by a Chinese American author until at least 1982. All three works share certain similarities of theme and character, including a focus on the family. Each narrative revolves around generational conflicts between immigrant parents, who uphold many “traditional” aspects of Chinese culture and life, and their American-born children, who struggle to integrate themselves into white American society. Each of these authors also embraced the role of cross-cultural mediator: they used their writing to introduce non-Chinese readers to the people and customs of San Francisco’s Chinatown.8

Lowe’s, Wong’s, and Lee’s narratives each have a touristic quality. Motivated by an educational and sociological impulse, they guide their readers like privileged tourists through the inner workings of Chinese families, businesses, social relations, and customs. Chinatowns, of course, had been tourist destinations for white Americans since the 1880s and had appeared as such in musicals, magazine fiction, travel narratives, tourist guides, and journalistic exposés. These early works usually represented Chinatown in terms of absolute foreignness, constructing a trip there as either a visit to an exotic land or as a dip into a world of social pathology and vice. The narratives of the 1940s and 1950s, written when racial restrictions on Asian immigration and citizenship were being eased, offered a fundamentally different vision of Chinatown. They need to be seen, in part, as domestic counterparts to the postwar literature of international tourism in Asia: like Michener’s The Voice of Asia, they introduce Americans to a people whose integration has become a geopolitical imperative. These three narratives ethnicize Chinese Americans by representing their difference in cultural rather than racial terms. It is in the display of ethnic culture—conceived in Boasian terms as a whole way of life—that the touristic nature of these narratives is most visible. Jade Snow Wong, for instance, brings the reader into a garment factory and an herbalist’s shop, elucidates New Year’s rituals and marriage customs, provides recipes for steamed rice and tomato with beef, and explains Chinese family structure and attitudes toward education. Pardee Lowe explains the importance of gift exchange and how Chinese lan-


guage schools operate, while C. Y. Lee enumerates the distinctions between Chinatown restaurants aimed at tourists and those that cater to local tastes. These displays of Chinese ethnicity are balanced by displays of Americanization, as characters’ consciousness and behavior are gradually transformed along American lines. Noteworthy scenes include those in which characters attend American schools and universities, enter into a Western hospital, become engrossed in a baseball game, use a commercial bank, and graduate from citizenship school. Chineseness in these texts thus becomes a matter of culture rather than race, and ceases to be a rationale for exclusion from an American society that increasingly defines itself in terms of cultural pluralism.9

The process of ethnicization can also be seen in these books’ reliance upon the literary conventions of the family-centered, ethnic-immigrant narrative that had been established by Euro-American authors in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Families, both nuclear and extended, figured centrally in the experience and literature of white ethnic immigrants. In contrast, the Chinatowns of the 1930s and 1940s—the period that Lowe’s and Wong’s texts cover—were bachelor societies composed largely of a single and male population. U.S. laws prevented Asian immigrants from forming families by restricting the immigration of Asian women, stripping the citizenship of American-born women who married noncitizens, and criminalizing miscegenation. By presenting Chinatown families as somehow representative, when in fact they were a rarity, Lowe, Wong, and Lee construct a similarity between Chinese and European immigrants around one of the issues that most clearly marked the racialization of Asians. This cultural work of ethnicization that these texts performed was a product not only of the authors, but of the entire literary apparatus of editors, publishers, and reviewers who selected which narratives would be published and shaped how they were promoted and received. The equation of Chinese Americans with white European immigrants became one of the lessons that these works taught. As one reviewer of Father and Glorious Descendant noted, “If the story it unfolds is at all typical, the development of Chinese Americans is much the same as that of many other immigrants.”10

The commercial success of Lee’s Flower Drum Song in 1957 attracted the attention of numerous film and theater producers, including Joseph Fields, Richard Rodgers, and Oscar Hammerstein. Their enthusiasm about the novel derived in part from their familiarity with the conventions of white ethnic theater. Producer Joseph Fields, who read Lee’s novel first and approached Rodgers and Hammerstein about it, was the
son of Lew Fields, a former member of a German-dialect vaudeville team that had been very successful in the turn-of-the-century ethnic theater. Rodgers and Hammerstein, in turn, had in 1944 produced I Remember Mama, John Van Druten’s heartwarming play about a Norwegian immigrant family growing up in San Francisco, and their 1943 musical Oklahoma! featured an ethnic character who assimilates into a quintessential American frontier community. Together Rodgers, Hammerstein, and Fields won out over the competition, and in 1958 their musical version of Flower Drum Song opened on Broadway. The show was a respectable success, although not as overwhelming a hit as its predecessors South Pacific and The King and I. It played on Broadway for a year and a half, toured nationally for another year and a half, and played in London for a year. In 1961 Hollywood producer Ross Hunter released a film version of the show that was nominated for five Academy Awards.

Flower Drum Song should be read as both a cultural narrative and a social practice—as a popular story and as an investment of capital, a body of hiring practices, and a series of marketing decisions. As it circulated around the country on stages and movie screens, Flower Drum Song created a focal point around which the integration of Asian Americans was enacted, performed, promoted, and publicized. It became a forum for the articulation of liberal views on race and for the repudiation of the older racial formation of racialization, and it created a cultural space in which Asian Americans could be publicly embraced as “real” Americans.

Rodgers and Hammerstein’s version expanded the novel’s work of ethnicization in a number of ways. In reworking Lee’s story into a libretto, Hammerstein emphasized the ethnic elements in the story while cutting out Lee’s limited, but significant, exploration of the racial discrimination experienced by Chinatown’s residents. Amid an otherwise comic framework, Lee had included a number of episodes that revealed the intersecting exploitations based on race and class that Chinese Americans experienced. Lee’s novel forced the reader to confront racism in the labor market, when college-educated Wang Ta could find no job other than as a dishwasher; it illustrated the proletarianization of educated workers, when a character with a Ph.D. in political science could only find work in a grocery store; and it depicted the sexual and emotional frustrations of life in a bachelor society, in which immigration restrictions had made marriage and family formation extremely difficult. Hammerstein omitted these discomforting scenes and instead crafted a narrative about the relative ease with which Chinese Americans were integrating into America. He pushed the character of the father into the background and, in keeping with the conventions of the musical genre, focused the story on the formation of two heterosexual couples: the elder son, Wang Ta, and Mei Li, a picture bride from China; and nightclub owner Sammy Fong and Linda Low, a singer and stripper in his club. When Hammerstein wrote the lyrics for “Chop Suey,” which the characters sing at a party celebrating Madame Liang’s graduation from citizenship class, he produced a paean to a pluralistic American society. Hammerstein takes “chop suey” as his metaphor for an ethnically and culturally diverse America, and gives it form in a musical number that the Chinatown residents perform in a shifting variety of Western dance styles, from the square dance to the waltz. As a spectacle of assimilation, the number celebrates the permeable boundaries of cultural difference and the pleasingly “mixed-up” quality of contemporary American life.

Rodgers and Hammerstein understood this narrative of ethnicization as a liberal message about American race relations. Rodgers, when asked in an interview to explain the show, replied: “What’s the show about? Well, it’s the story of the confrontation of the Far Eastern and American civilizations, told in terms of the conflicts between first- and second-generation Chinese Americans in San Francisco. The usual thing you hear, you know, is East is East, and West is West, and all that nonsense. We show that East and West can get together with a little adjustment.” In rejecting Kipling’s dictum, Rodgers repudiates the prewar racial formation of Asians as absolute Other. Like the advertisement for the Saturday Review travel photo contest, Rodgers rejects the colonial mindset that insists on the absolute difference between East and West. Now that Americans have taken over from Europeans the mantle of the “West,” he implies, such differences can be bridged. Rodgers’s belief that East and West can “get together with a little adjustment” positions the show firmly within the postwar politics of cultural pluralism and liberal universalism and within the global imaginary of U.S.-Asian integration.

Rodgers and Hammerstein’s commitment to Asian American ethnicization evoked a variety of responses from reviewers. A number of them recognized and drew attention to the show’s recycling of the conventions of earlier white ethnic narratives: the New York Times critic, for instance, saw the film as reproducing “the characters and comedy that used to bloom in any number of plays about German or Swedish or Jewish immigrants coming from the old to the new country . . . in years gone by,” while the New Yorker’s reviewer noted that “back of the dragonish
false front... we catch the oddest glimpse of 'The Jazz Singer' and 'Abe's Irish Rose.' Other reviewers emphasized the show's racially liberal message, praising it as a "tuneful lecture on tolerance and good manners" and singling out the number "Chop Suey" as "a witty ode to U.S. pluralism." A number of reviewers, however, condemned the musical as "patronizing" and took it to task for inauthenticity. The New Yorker chastised the show as a "stale Broadway confection wrapped up in spurious Chinese trappings" and dismissed the film as a "preposterous" and "pseudo-Oriental" "fraud," in which the "phony Chinese protagonists flow like tiger-bone wine, and the settings are every bit as authentic as Fu Manchu." Variety rejected the film as "distasteful" and unlikely to amuse Chinese American audiences: "It is as if we are being asked to note 'how darling' or 'how precocious' it is of them to undertake the execution of American dances,... to comprehend the science of baseball, or to grapple with U.S. idioms." Even Time, which had publicized the Broadway show assiduously, took a swipe at the movie version. Criticizing its use of Asian actors of various ethnicities to play Chinese characters, it protested, "Honestly, fellows, they really don't all look alike." These comments indicate the extent to which, by 1958 and even more so by 1961, Rodgers and Hammerstein's mild brand of liberal anti-racism was coming to be seen as inadequate and outdated.13

Flower Drum Song must be seen, however, not just as a narrative of integration but as a material and social practice that enabled the integration of real people. The late 1950s saw a proliferation of Asian-themed plays and movies: Rashomon, Katakí, Cry for Happy, The Cool Mikado, and The World of Suzie Wong were all playing on New York stages when Flower Drum Song opened in 1958, and Hollywood had recently released Love Is a Many-Splendored Thing (1955), Tea House of the August Moon (1956), and Sayonara (1957). But Rodgers and Hammerstein did what no other Broadway producers had done before: they told an Asian American story and they told it using Asian American actors. Of the original cast of fifty-nine, only two were non-Asian; one was white and the other black. Flower Drum Song remained until The Joy Luck Club (1993) the only major Hollywood film—and until David Henry Hwang's new version of the show in 2002, the only mainstream Broadway musical—to feature an almost exclusively Asian American cast. Because of these casting decisions, the musical was also a source of pleasure for many Asian Americans. Young people especially enjoyed the rare opportunity of seeing versions of themselves represented positively as Americans who could speak without accents and who participated in contemporary social and cultural life.14

In a manner similar to Hammerstein's all-black Carmen Jones, the stage and film versions of Flower Drum Song gave work to hundreds of Asian Americans at a time when these actors had limited professional opportunities. Over the course of its New York run and national tour, the producers scoured cities, towns, and Chinatowns across the country for fresh Asian American talent, checking out small nightclubs, local theaters, YWCAs, and beauty pageants. As had been the case with Carmen Jones fifteen years earlier, the producers tapped into a pool of talent whose access to the Broadway stage had been restricted because of race. The show provided exposure to amateurs who were appearing on a commercial stage for the first time, and it boosted more established performers to stardom. The burst of Asia-themed narratives on Broadway and in Hollywood in the late 1940s and 1950s had created a small pool of experienced performers. The Broadway cast included Pat Suzuki (the first U.S.-born Japanese American to achieve popular music success), Miyoshi Umeki (the first Asian American woman to win an Academy Award), Jack Soo (later of TV's Barney Miller), and Keye Luke (who played the number one son in the long-running Charlie Chan film series); the film version added Nancy Kwan (who had recently starred in The World of Suzie Wong) and James Shigeta (the first Japanese American man to attain star status in theater, television, and music and the first to be groomed by Hollywood since Sessue Hayakawa in the early 1900s). Like Carmen Jones, the musical expanded the cultural space allotted to actors of color in mainstream theater and movies, allowing them to play a wide range of roles, including those, such as romantic male lead, usually reserved for whites. The movie version of Flower Drum Song also called attention to Chinese American painter Dong Kingman, a well-known watercolorist whose work had appeared on the cover of the Saturday Review, by using a series of his paintings in its opening credit sequence. In cover stories in Time and Newsweek, in a photography spread in Life, on the stages and screens of countless Asian American cities and towns, Flower Drum Song made Chinese Americans visible as ethnic Americans, and not as an alien "yellow-peril" threat, at the very moment when immigration from Asia was starting up again after a quarter-century hiatus (Figure 21).15

The Flower Drum Song programs that theater audiences received furthered the show's narrative construction of Asian Americans as immigrants and as "real" Americans; like the program for Carmen Jones in 1945, they played an important role in the circulation of meaning around the show. Where the biographical sketches in the program for Carmen Jones had, in keeping with its Popular Front cultural politics, emphasized
the working-class identity of the show's performers, the programs for *Flower Drum Song* identified the actors in terms of their ethnic mix, their immigrant origins, and their place of birth. Instead of simply noting each actor's previous stage work, the biographies identified the actors as "native Japanese, ... Californian, ... part Chinese and part Hawaiian, ... from Shansi Province in North China, ... native of Seattle, ... born in Manila, ... American or Korean extraction," and so on. Some programs even called attention to the citizenship status of the actors' parents: Pat Suzuki's parents were identified as "Californians of Japanese birth and American citizenship," Keye Luke's were simply "American citizens," and the father of Cely Carrillo from Manila was identified as "a retired Lt. Colonel in the U.S. Armed Forces, who fought in Bataan." Others acknowledged the internment of Japanese American actors during the 1940s and explained how some actors had changed their names—from the Japanese Goro Suzuki to the Chinese-sounding Jack Soo, for instance—as a way of avoiding the anti-Japanese racism.

In some sense, the need to identify these actors as American exposes the depth of the assumption that Asian Americans are inherently foreign. Such a national identification of the black actors in *Carmen Jones* would have been unthinkable, since the racialization of black Americans did not involve a denial of their Americanness. One can also read these programs, however, as extending the mediatory social function of Lowe's, Wong's, and Lee's Chinatown narratives. They introduced audiences not just to a fictional narrative about Chinese Americans, but to a large and ethnically diverse group of Americans with roots in countries throughout Asia. By naming national origins, the programs identified some actors as belonging to the emblematic American category of immigrants; by describing others as "natives" of the states in which they were born, they asserted an Americanness not identified in racial terms; and by defining some as Americans of a particular national "extraction," they emphasized how American nationality supersedes but does not eliminate ethnic identity. By including the citizenship status of foreign-born parents, the program called attention to the newly established race-neutral criteria for U.S. citizenship, and when it identified one father's service in the U.S. military, it hinted at the links between the growing presence of Asian Americans and the history of U.S. expansion in the Pacific. Perhaps most important, these mini-biographies created a continuity between the fictional characters on stage and the real actors who performed them, thereby expanding the show's narrative of inclusion to encompass the real actors. If audiences could accept a story about Chi-

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Figure 21. *Flower Drum Song* made Asian Americans visible as ethnic Americans. Miyoshi Umeki and Pat Suzuki appeared on the cover of *Time*, December 22, 1958. (TimePix)
nese becoming Americans, the program suggested, they should also be able to accept these flesh-and-blood Korean, Japanese, Filipino, and Hawaiian Americans as real Americans, also.

One could read this process of ethnicization that occurs within and around Flower Drum Song as a process of “whitening”: by depicting Chinese Americans in the same terms used to represent European immigrants, and by ignoring the history of race-based exclusion, proletarianization, and ghettoization, the musical and the surrounding publicity imply that there were no racially specific differences in the experiences of European and Chinese immigrants. One could argue that the show and the film construct Asians, like Europeans, as racially unmarked —“white”—as they assimilate into a national American identity that ostensibly renders racial identities obsolete. The power of the show to elevate a national over a racial identity and to extend its narrative of integration into the lives of its actors affected even Juanita Hall, the show’s black actress, who played Madame Liang. A story about Hall in Ebony recounted how C. Y. Lee had once asked Hall, who had also played the Tonkinese Bloody Mary in South Pacific, if she had much “Chinese blood,” because she seemed so Chinese on stage. “There was a time,” the reporter wrote, “when she quickly corrected such a mistaken impression by explaining proudly, ‘I am a Negro.’ Now, a little older, wiser, more tolerant, she smiles, says, ‘I’m an American.’” Hall, in keeping with the show’s vision of tolerance and integration, rejects the racial label and defines herself in the ostensibly racially unmarked—and increasingly inclusive—terms of nationality instead. Like her character Madame Liang, who graduates from citizenship class during the show, and like the thousands of black civil rights activists, Asian immigrants, and newly naturalized Asian American citizens, Hall stakes a claim to an Americanness that is becoming less restricted on racial grounds.16

The film version of Flower Drum Song makes this whiteness reading an easy one to make. The story focuses on eldest son Wang Ta’s romantic choice between two women: the American-born and wholly assimilated Linda Low, played by actress Nancy Kwan (who has a Chinese-Scottish background), and the recent immigrant Mei Li, played by actress Miyoshi Umeki (who was born in Japan). The terms of his choice are laid out in two musical numbers that develop the character of each woman.

Linda Low’s character-defining number, “I Enjoy Being a Girl,” makes a visual spectacle out of the equation of assimilation with whiteness. The number takes shapes as Linda, dressed only in a skimpy wrap-around, sings about the social and sexual pleasures of being a “girl,” such as her “curvy” silhouette, the “whistle” she attracts from men, and her future life with a “brave and free male.” Set in her boudoir before a multi-paneled mirror, the number is overwhelmingly white: the furniture, the carpeting, the walls, her costume, the phone are all blazing white. In a quasi-surreal moment, three separate Lindas appear in the mirror, each one wearing a different stylish outfit. The number presents Linda Low as the epitome of the assimilated, Americanized, Asian woman. There is nothing particularly “Chinese” about this number: her clothes, or lack thereof, are standard issue for a white star in a Hollywood film, and her body conforms to mainstream standards of beauty—she’s tall, leggy, has fine features—and no modesty prevents her from displaying it (Figure 22). Her song defines her in gendered rather than racial or ethnic terms. She sings about being a “girl” rather than being “Chinese,” and she cares about what all “girls” in the 1950s are supposed to care about: clothes, hairdos, and dates with a boy named “Joe or John or Billy.” The number does not present her as fundamentally different from any other Hollywood bombshell—Marilyn Monroe or Doris Day could perform this number without any real changes. It is hard not to read this scene as a visual representation of Chinese American whiteness—the overwhelming paleness of the costume and decor seems to literalize her assimilation.17

Linda Low’s character and visual presentation stand in marked contrast to the film’s other instance of Chinese femininity, the immigrant Mei Li. Mei Li’s signature number is “A Hundred Million Miracles,” which she sings in a street-corner park. She has just arrived in San Francisco with her father, fresh off the boat from Hong Kong, and is trying to track down the man to whom she has been betrothed as a picture bride. This number presents Mei Li as typically “Chinese”: her costume is Hollywood’s version of traditional dress—black satin pants, a smock with a mandarin collar, a cap, and black slippers. She even wears her hair in a long queue, the stereotypical emblem of Chineseness in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. She sings with a noticeable accent, her demeanor is modest, she doesn’t expose much of her body, and she bows often. The song she sings, like the flower drum she performs with, is a putatively traditional Chinese one, and in introducing it to the audience, her father invokes the traditional ideal of “filial piety” and the foreign images of “ghosts” and “loyal officials.” The staging of the number also emphasizes her separateness from the Chinese Americans who surround her as an audience and who wear Western clothes and hair-
styles. In contrast to Linda Low, Mei Li's musical number marks her heavily as Chinese, as ethnic, as foreign (Figure 23).18

Wang Ta, the young male protagonist, starts out in love with Linda Low but ends up marrying Mei Li. The comparison of these two scenes raises the question—why choose the one over the other? In a show that celebrates the process of becoming American, why privilege a character that highlights foreignness over one that emphasizes assimilation? One possible answer comes from reading these two characters as the two poles of the stereotypical Asian American woman. Linda Low is the hyper-eroticized sexual expert, the kind of woman Nancy Kwan had portrayed the previous year in The World of Suzy Wong. Mei Li, on the other hand, is the docile, subservient Asian woman, similar to the character
Miyoshi Umeki portrayed, and won an Oscar for, in Sayonara four years earlier. According to the logic of Hollywood, a decent leading man might fool around with Linda Low, but he has to marry the more domestically inclined Mei Li.

A different, and more historically grounded, reading would be that what the film values in Mei Li is precisely her Chineseness, her strong marks of ethnicity. The problem with Linda Low is that she is too assimilated, she is too “white,” she has lost any significant ties to China. Her romance with Wang Ta collapses because she does not adhere to what the show has defined as traditional Chinese values: she offends his family with her materialism, her explicit sexuality, and her lack of family ties, all of which come together in her job as a nightclub stripper. Although Mei Li adopts numerous Americanisms—she picks up some slang and learns how to kiss from watching TV—she never loses all her conventional markers of Chineseness: her halting speech, her quiet modesty, her way of dressing and bowing. She is the heroine because she holds assimilation in balance with ethnicity. Mei Li offers an example of what literary critic Frank Chin has described as “dual identity”: her consciousness contains both Chinese and American elements. Chin, as well as many other Asian Americanist scholars, condemns dual identity for perpetuating the idea that Asian Americans are permanent foreigners, racialized aliens forevers identified with countries they may never have seen. The literary work that Pardee Lowe, Jade Snow Wong, and C. Y. Lee produced during the 1940s and 1950s abounds with dual-identity characters like Mei Li who bridge the gap between Chineseness and Americaness. Their privileged position in these popular narratives suggests, however, that they represent something more complex than simple alienness.19

I want to suggest that in the 1940s and 1950s it was precisely the dual identity—the foreignness—of Chinese Americans that gave them value as Americans. Flower Drum Song hardly advocates the “melting” of Asian difference into a homogenous sameness of postwar American whiteness. The idea of dual identity—as opposed to wholesale assimilation—was crucial to the changing racial formation of Asian Americans and other ethno-racial minorities during the 1940s and 1950s and had everything to do with the global imperatives driving the reformulation of American national identity as a pluralistic nation of immigrants. Dual-identity characters like Mei Li possess cultural and political value precisely because their non-American parts connect America to the rest of the world. Although they are not exclusively foreign, their partial for-
Taiwan, Hong Kong, the Philippines, Singapore, Thailand, and Malaysia. When he returned, he submitted his report to the State Department in the form of a forty-foot-long painted Chinese-style scroll, which Life magazine reproduced.\(^{21}\)

In 1952 Washington sent Jade Snow Wong, author of *Fifth Chinese Daughter*, on a forty-five-stop speaking tour through Asia. Wong was the first Chinese American sent overseas by the State Department, and she received a hearty welcome, in part because the department had previously arranged for her book to be translated into a number of Asian languages, including Chinese, Burmese, and Thai. The State Department had originally booked Wong for a two-month tour, but American embassies were so eager to have her visit their posts that they extended her visit to four months. Wong stopped in Japan, the Philippines, Hong Kong, Malaya, Thailand, Burma, India, and Pakistan, where she spoke about the United States and the life it offered for Chinese Americans. As she later explained, Wong understood her “dual heritage” as a political asset for the nation, one that allowed her to internationalize the role of cultural mediator that she had constructed in her autobiography. She embraced the role that Washington offered her because she felt “a moral obligation to interpret what she knew of the United States to fellow Asians.” She also felt her tour “would be good for the image of the United States” and “inspiring” to Asians who were “searching for identities” in the midst of decolonization: it might encourage wavering and nonaligned peoples to decide to look more favorably at the United States. Wong used her speeches, as did many of the cultural ambassadors of color, to defend America from the ubiquitous charges of racism. When asked about prejudice, she acknowledged that she had experienced it, but emphasized that “racial prejudice had never stopped her from getting where or what she wanted.” She defended America as a racially inclusive country and shifted the blame for the effects of discrimination onto Asian Americans themselves: the “fear of prejudice,” in her view, ultimately proved more “damaging” than any white bigotry because it offered an “excuse” for “personal failure.” Wong put the ideals of cultural pluralism and assimilation on display for audiences throughout Asia and, as a representative of the nation, performed her integration into American society.\(^{22}\)

In *Fifth Chinese Daughter*, Wong had constructed herself as a discursive tour guide to Chinatown for American readers; in 1956 she turned this literary fiction into a social practice when she and her husband guided a group of American tourists on a trip to Hong Kong and Japan. Two years later the flow of American tourists to Asia had increased to the point that Wong and her husband started a travel agency and began organizing regular tours to Asia, where they introduced Americans to Madame Chiang Kai-shek in Taiwan, Buddhist monks in South Vietnam, and indigenous art in Cambodia. As a tour guide and travel agent, as well as a cultural diplomat and Chinese American, Wong facilitated the flow of persons and information between the U.S. and Asia that many Americans believed would help foster closer ties between these parts of the world. In becoming a travel agent, she transformed her status as an ethnic mediator within the U.S. into a new role as an international mediator between the U.S. and Asia.

Washington valued these “ethnic” Americans as protectors, representatives, and explicators of the nation precisely because it saw them as being, in some way, still Navajo, Sicilian, African, and Chinese, as well as American. It sought to tap into and mobilize their ethnicity and cultural difference in support of internationalism and expansion. This is not to suggest that all expressions of ethnic identity found favor in the government’s eyes. To the contrary, only those that could be safely subsumed to a larger national identity and that did not question the fundamental principles of foreign policy were encouraged. This is also not to suggest that all people who participated in these efforts served as simple propagandizers for U.S. globalization; while some of them certainly did, others forged alternative understandings of internationalism or found their awareness of American racism heightened by encountering Third World criticisms of it firsthand. What we do see in these examples is the U.S. government drawing upon and encouraging a sense of ethnic identity as a means of advancing the material and ideological projects of international integration.\(^{23}\)

**STATEHOOD FOR HAWAII**

Like Oscar Hammerstein, James Michener in the late 1950s turned from writing narratives about the international integration of America and Asia to write a narrative about the domestic integration of Asians within American society. While Hammerstein focused on San Francisco’s Chinatown, Michener wrote about the territory of Hawaii. For Michener, as for many observers, Hawaii more than any other place in the country affirmed America’s status as a “nation of nations” and as “humanity in miniature.”

The Hawaiian Islands had played a material role in America’s expan-
sion into the Pacific since the early nineteenth century. American sailors involved in the China trade began stopping at the islands in the late nineteenth century, and Nantucket whaling ships followed soon thereafter. New England missionaries arrived in the 1820s, riding the first wave of evangelical zeal that carried Americans into China, India, and Southeast Asia. Together with merchants, they began transforming the social, political, and economic structure of the islands along American lines. By the 1880s American sugar planters had led the islands securely into the U.S. economic orbit, and in 1893, acting with the support of the U.S. minister to the islands, they overthrew the native government of Queen Liliuokalani. Washington annexed Hawaii five years later during the Spanish-American war, incorporating the islands into a territorial empire that encompassed the Philippines, Puerto Rico, and Cuba. In the twentieth century the U.S. developed Hawaii as the anchor of its string of Pacific military bases, and during World War II Hawaii became a major jumping-off point for operations in the Pacific.²⁴

Hawaii's role as a staging area for U.S. expansion into Asia and the Pacific increased dramatically with the Cold War. The islands became ever more militarized as the U.S. occupied Japan and waged war in Korea and Vietnam; with sixteen major military installations on Oahu alone, it became the central supply node in America's network of military bases spanning the Pacific. Defense dollars poured into the islands and became a pillar of the post-plantation economy, providing a livelihood for fully one-fourth of the islands' population; more than any other state, Hawaii depended financially upon the continuation of the Cold War. The U.S. government also treated Hawaii as an important location from which to wage the struggle for the hearts and minds of Asia. In 1959 Washington launched the East-West Center in Honolulu, which the Saturday Review hailed, in yet another reworking of Kipling, as the place "Where the Twain Will Meet." (In 1964 it offered the job of directo to Norman Cousins, who turned it down for personal reasons.) The East-West Center promoted both cultural policies of integration and military policies of containment. Designed as a counterpart to Moscow's Friendship University, it brought Asian, Pacific, and American students together in one setting; at the same time, it coordinated grants for Indonesian military officers who were undergoing small-arms training before the 1965 military coup that, with the goal of eradicating communism, left a half-million Indonesians dead. Hawaii also facilitated the postwar flow of American civilians into the East, serving as a jumping-off point for tourists traveling to Asia and the Pacific.²⁵

The growing material significance of Hawaii after 1941 was matched by its increasing visibility in American culture. The islands had been familiar to the mainland since the 1920s as an elite vacation destination and source of popular music, but the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor fixed the territory in the public mind as an integral part of the nation. Both the militarization of the islands and the advent of commercial jet service in 1959 made Hawaii increasingly available to middle- and working-class mainlanders. Tourism to the islands grew exponentially during the 1950s, making it one of the foundations of the islands' economy: tourist spending jumped 350 percent between 1950 and 1959, from $24 million to $109 million, while the number of tourists increased from 34,000 in 1945 to 243,000 in 1959. Hawaii proliferated throughout popular culture in travel essays, advertisements, and movies such as From Here to Eternity (1953) and Elvis Presley's Blue Hawaii (1961), and contributed to the postwar fascination with all things Polynesian that found expression in Pacific-themed restaurants and hotels. It also provided a material basis for much of the cultural representation of Asia and the Pacific in general during the postwar period: William Lederer, Reader's Digest's roving editor in Asia and coauthor of The Ugly American, lived in Hawai and used the islands as a base for much of his writing about Asia; Dr. Tom Dooley polished his draft of Deliver Us from Evil there; South Pacific was filmed in the islands; numerous around-the-world travel narratives, such as Philip Wylie's The Immortal Ambassadors and Horace Sutton's 1959 series in the Saturday Review, used the islands as their gateway between Asia and America; and a number of Flower Drum Song's cast members, including James Shigeta, the film version's leading man, came from Hawaii.²⁶

Hawaii's campaign for statehood, which ran more or less continuously from 1945 to 1959, kept the territory alive in the nation's political culture. It also served as one of the primary sites in which the changing racial formation of Asian Americans became visible. As a U.S. territory, Hawaii enjoyed a liminal status. An integral part of the nation legally, its residents paid federal taxes, were subject to the laws of the United States, and, if they met national eligibility requirements, were U.S. citizens. At the same time, however, residents of Hawaii could not vote in presidential elections, the president appointed their governor, and their elected representative to Congress had no voting power. Although the statehood debate involved a number of questions, such as whether the nation could include a noncontiguous state, race was the big issue: people of Asian and Pacific background outnumbered whites
three to one. Plantation owners had begun importing Asian laborers in the mid-nineteenth century, and by 1959, 54 percent of the population was Asian. The Japanese formed the largest group at 35 percent, followed by Filipinos at 12 percent, Chinese at 6 percent, and Koreans at 1 percent. Full or part native Hawaiians accounted for 18 percent of the population, while 2 percent was Puerto Rican. Only 25 percent of the population was white. There was no legal segregation on the islands and intermarriage was common, with about 10 percent of marriages before World War I and more than 30 percent in the 1950s taking place between people of different races. The territory of Hawaii was thus simultaneously Asian, in terms of its population, and American, in terms of its political relationship with the U.S. The debate over Hawaii's statehood, which raged in the national press and in the halls of Congress for fourteen years, was largely a debate over the relationship between these two categories, Asian and American: Were they mutually exclusive? Could a people be both Asian and American? Could America in some way be an Asian nation? The struggle over Hawaiian statehood became a struggle to define both the meaning and the social organization of Asianness in America.

As a pivotal moment of Asian American racial formation, the post-war statehood movement should be seen in relation to the black civil rights movement that was taking shape in the American South during the same years. Both movements raised similar issues about the legal rights of racial minorities, and both were fueled by the demands of veterans—blacks in the South and Japanese Americans in Hawaii—for full access to the benefits of citizenship that they had defended with their lives during the war. At the same time, significant differences distinguished them. The civil rights movement was a grassroots mass movement that challenged the legal organization of race as it structured daily life in the South, and this challenge provoked confrontations, such as the Montgomery bus boycott, the march on Selma, the freedom rides, and the conflict over school desegregation in Little Rock, that captured the nation's attention. The Hawaiian statehood movement, in contrast, was neither a mass nor a specifically race-based movement; spearheaded by the elected officials of Hawaii and waged peacefully in the halls of Congress, it did not seek to restructure the everyday organization of race in the islands per se, but to secure for all the territory's residents the full rights of U.S. citizenship.

Supporters and opponents of statehood often made their arguments by discursively mapping Hawaii onto a national and global geography.

Physically, the Hawaiian islands are isolated in the midst of the Pacific Ocean: they are located 2,000 miles west of the continental U.S. and 4,000 miles east of Japan; Alaska looms 3,000 miles to the north, while the nearest major Pacific islands are 2,000 miles to the south. Part of the statehood debate involved determining where Hawaii “belonged” politically, culturally, and racially. All sides agreed with Joseph R. Farington, Hawaii's Congressional delegate in 1949, that Hawaii stood as the “gateway to the South Pacific and the Far East” and the point “where east meets west.” They parted company, however, in the meanings that they assigned to this position of U.S.-Asian convergence.

Opposition to statehood, as to the civil rights movement, came primarily from Southern Democrats such as Senators James Eastland of Mississippi, Strom Thurmond of South Carolina, and Herman Talmadge of Georgia. Struggling to maintain the legal separation of races in their own states, they were threatened by the prospect of a multiracial state that eschewed legal segregation and would likely elect nonwhite and pro-civil rights senators. Strom Thurmond argued against statehood by mapping Hawaii in relation to Asia and denying its ties to the United States:

There are many shades and mixtures of heritages in the world, but there are only two extremes. Our society may well be said to be, for the present, at least, the exemplification of the maximum development of the Western civilization, culture, and heritage. At the opposite extreme exists the Eastern heritage, different in every essential—not necessarily inferior, but different as regards the very thought processes within the individuals who comprise the resultant society. As one of the most competent and certainly the most eloquent, interpreters of the East to the West, Rudyard Kipling felt the bond of love of one for the other; but at the same time he had the insight to express the impassable difference with the immortal words, “East is East, and West is West, and never the twain shall meet.”

Thurmond emphatically embraces, rather than reworks, Kipling's emblematic phrase. He constructs Asia and America as mutually exclusive categories which represent the “extreme,” and by implication pure, categories of East and West. Because Hawaii is Asian, Thurmond suggests, it cannot possibly also be American. Thurmond uses the phrases of culture rather than race—he speaks of “civilization” and “heritage,” and disavows the idea that the East is inherently “inferior”—but he makes a racialist and segregationist point, namely, that the difference between Asians and whites is absolute and “impassable.” In arguing that the Chinese, Japanese, Filipinos, and Koreans of Hawaii are fundamentally
unassimilable, Thurmond resurrects the racializing logic of the exclusionary immigration laws which deemed Asians to be aliens ineligible for citizenship. The specter of miscegenation haunts Thurmond's view, so that in spite of the "bonds of love," the racial separation must be maintained. With his positive invocation of Kipling, Thurmond also maps America in relation to Britain: America has Northern European roots that must be maintained. 

Other opponents of statehood mapped Hawaii in relation to the Soviet Union. In the late 1940s, labor leader Jack Hall organized Hawaii's mostly Asian plantation and dock workers into the radical International Longshoremen and Warehousemen's Union. Hall's success drew the attention of Washington's communist hunters to the islands, and in 1953 he and six other union leaders were convicted under the Smith Act of conspiring to overthrow the government. (The decision was overturned on appeal in 1958.) Opponents of statehood latched onto these accusations and, linking the union's nonwhite membership with its political radicalism, charged Hawaii with being irredeemably "tainted with Communism." The American Communist Party's well-known commitment to racial equality made this equation of integration and communism easy to make in Hawaii as it was in the rest of the country, where HUAC investigators, Southern segregationists, and FBI members regularly accused civil rights activists of being party members and fellow-travelers. Senator Hugh Butler launched this anticomunist argument in 1949—the year Mao took power in China—when he announced that the American Communist Party supported Hawaiian statehood and was working for a state constitution that would be "dictated by the tools of Moscow in Hawaii." Imagining Honolulu as bound to Moscow, Butler saw Hawaii's position as gateway to the East as a point of national vulnerability: he accused the islands of being "one of the central operations bases and a strategic clearinghouse" for the worldwide communist campaign against America. Four years later, as the Korean War wound down to its unsatisfying conclusion, Senator John Pillion likewise represented Hawaii as a doorway through which communists could enter the nation at will. He warned against statehood as a Russian plot and declared that admitting Hawaii into the Union would be to "actually invite two Soviet agents to take seats in our U.S. Senate." 

Statehood advocates, in turn, turned Hawaii's racially diverse people—and the relative harmony in which they lived—into a benefit that the islands would bestow upon the rest of the nation. Where statehood opponents argued in the increasingly legitimate terms of racialization, sup-

porters mobilized the increasingly dominant terms of ethnicization. Already in the 1920s social scientists began applying the principles of the ethnicity paradigm to the islands and pointing to their polyglot population as proof that multiple races could live together in harmony. By the 1930s Hawaii had earned a reputation as a racial paradise and the "melting pot of the Pacific." After World War II the mainstream media seized upon Hawaii as the place where the American promise of equality for all was being worked out in practice. In 1945, for example, Life published an effusive article, entitled "Hawaii, a Melting Pot, a Score of Races Live Together in Amity," that rejected the principle of biological racial difference and praised the islands as "the world's most successful experiment in mixed breeding, a sociologist's dream of interracial cultures." With so many races and mixtures, the article insisted, prejudice had become "simply impractical." The article rejected the racializing notion that intermarriage produced inferior hybrids and applauded that "a new race"—"tolerant, healthy and American"—is "emerging and stabilizing" in the islands, a claim that it illustrated with numerous photographs of attractive women accompanied by captions identifying their ethno-racial backgrounds. While articles such as these acknowledged the racial conflict that did exist in the islands—Life noted that only a week before a race riot had broken out between white sailors and people they attacked as "gooks," and other magazines mentioned the racially charged Thalia Massie rape and lynching case of 1931—they tended to downplay such incidents as deviations from a normal state of racial harmony. Life also deemphasized racial difference by constructing gender difference: by depicting Hawaii in the form of attractive women, it imagined statehood as a kind of sexual union between a feminized Hawaii and an implicitly masculine mainland.

James Michener became an outspoken advocate of statehood. In 1953 he published his first essay on Hawaii in Holiday magazine, which Reader's Digest condensed, and he went on to write additional pieces for the New York Times Magazine, Reader's Digest, Look, and the Honolulu Star-Bulletin, many of which combined the conventions of travel writing with pro-statehood arguments. Michener's arguments did not differ significantly from those of others who advocated statehood. Rather, he used his literary skills, celebrity, and status as an expert on Asia and the Pacific to bring the pro-statehood arguments into greater prominence.

In much of his writing Michener promoted statehood as a strategic move in the Cold War. International politics had always impinged upon the race-and-statehood debate: in the 1930s and early 1940s, when an
expansionist Japan threatened U.S. interests in the Pacific, many Americans saw the Japanese American population of Hawaii as an undesirable element, a potential fifth column. In the postwar period, however, the need to secure the allegiance of the decolonizing nations changed the political currency of Hawaii’s people. Michener saw Hawaii’s Asian-Pacific population as having an enormous geopolitical value: by granting them the full rights of citizenship, the U.S. would do much to invalidate the charges of racism and imperialism that so damaged its reputation abroad. Michener advocated statehood as a way for Washington to prove the racially inclusive nature of American democracy. “In Asia, Hawaii has become a symbol of the fair and just manner in which we treat Orientals,” he wrote in a 1958 Reader’s Digest article. “Quietly, the word has circulated that in Hawaii Chinese do well, that Japanese get elected to office, that Filipinos get a fair shake. If now we slap Hawaii in the face and say, ‘You cannot have statehood,’ the slap will reverberate.” Statehood would also ease the memory of U.S. imperialism in the Pacific and establish a clear distinction between the United States and the European colonial powers, by making Hawaii’s territorial status seem a temporary stage in the development toward full inclusion in the nation, rather than a permanent colonial condition suitable for a nonwhite population.32

In contrast to statehood opponents, Michener mapped Hawaii in relation to the mainland. He specifically constructed Hawaii as an alternative to Little Rock, as a positive instance of a multiracial society. In a 1959 article in the New York Times Magazine, Michener noted that the “bad publicity stemming from Little Rock” had been “a serious bar” to American efforts to win the support of “uncommitted or wavering nations.” Statehood for Hawaii would offer concrete proof to these nations that Americans do not “hate Orientals” and could “accept men of varying colors.” It would facilitate the integration of the decolonizing world by making “the job of every State Department official in Asia and Africa . . . a little easier” and “the words of every U.S. Information Service man . . . a lot more persuasive.” Michener also imagined the Asians of Hawaii as healers of the South’s bitter racial conflicts. He cast Hawaii’s future congressmen as rescuers of America from the “grave internal problems arising from race relations.” Michener constructs the Asian Americans of Hawaii as reasonable figures who will mediate the highly charged and long-simmering racial conflicts between blacks and whites. Part of the value of Hawaii’s statehood, then, becomes its ability to smooth over the racial divisions within the nation by interjecting Asian Americans as a third term between the poles of black and white.33

Michener also mapped the islands in relation to Asia. To Michener, Hawaii’s familial and cultural ties to Asia made it worth incorporating into the union. He saw the people of Hawaii as an exploitable natural resource who could facilitate U.S. global expansion by serving as native informants and guides: they were a “splendid resource from which our government can draw in these difficult days of trying to work with many foreign governments.” Other statehood advocates shared this view. Businessweek in 1950 explained that “the islands have brought to the U.S. a new national resource—a population that is the logical stepping stone between the U.S. and the Orient” and went on to praise these people as the “logical intermediaries to carry an understanding of U.S. democracy to the Orient.” One of the Congressional committees investigating statehood came to a similar conclusion: “Many of her people have their racial background in that Asian area, giving the nation a unique medium of communication and understanding with Asiatic peoples”; as a result, Hawaii could become a “natural training ground for leaders to administer American interests in this area.” In the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, Americans looking for a stepping stone to China valued Hawaii for its geographical location. In the second half of the twentieth century, it was Hawaii’s Asian population that held out the promise of securing access to the markets and resources of Asia.34

If Hawaiian statehood rendered America a little less white and Western in its national identity, that was apparently fine with many statehood advocates. Businessweek, noting that “America has always had cultural ties to Europe,” appreciated that the “thousands of citizens of Chinese, Japanese, Korean, and Filipino ancestry, who understand the customs, and, in some cases, speak the language of the country of their fathers and grandfathers,” could now bestow upon the nation those same ties with Asia. Newsweek in 1959 similarly noted that “Hawaii will be the first state with roots not in Europe but in Asia” and looked forward to the “profound effect” that this would have on America’s future in the Far East: no longer would America be known as a “land of the white man” and “tarred with the brush of ‘colonialism.’” Time in turn celebrated statehood as an act through which America “leaped over its old, European-rooted consciousness of Caucasian identity.” The incorporation of Hawaii into the union, in the eyes of these advocates, would benefit America’s role as world leader by making the nation at least partially Asian.35

While opponents of statehood succeeded in blocking legislation for many years, their views were not widely held. By 1954, 78 percent of
Americans approved of Hawaii's efforts to join the union, as did the Departments of State, Defense, and Justice, the Democratic and Republican parties, and the eleven Congressional committees that had investigated statehood. In 1959 the racial arguments of statehood opponents finally lost their persuasive power, and Congress approved legislation making Hawaii the nation's fiftieth state.36

**MICHENER'S HAWAII**

Michener's interest in Hawaii culminated in 1959 with the publication of *Hawaii*, his first epic historical novel, his first book to approach one thousand pages in length, and his last major work on the Asia-Pacific region. *Hawaii* took shape at the intersection of the discourses of statehood, racial integration, and tourism. Excerpted in *Reader's Digest* and *Life*, chosen as a main selection by the Book-of-the-Month Club, and re-published as a Reader's Digest condensed book, *Hawaii* quickly became a bestseller, selling five million copies by 1978. The novel capped Michener's decade-long promotion of Asia and the Pacific as tourist destinations and as a primary arena in the Cold War. Written as a manifesto for statehood and published a few months after that goal was achieved, *Hawaii* served as an expanded tourist guidebook to the new state and became the definitive representation of the island for millions of people around the world for years to come. In 1962 Hawaii's Congressman Daniel K. Inouye praised the novel from the floor of Congress as "the semi-official guide to our lovely shores." "Today," he said, "when a ship or airplane deposits visitors on our shores, sometimes as many as half of them arrive with copies of his book under their arms. And the important thing about this is that they all have derived from Michener's writing an appreciation of the wonderful strains of the human family that have blended together to build our paradise." *Hawaii* was not simply a representation of the islands, but part of a cultural-educational apparatus that deployed the islands as a means through which Americans could learn the value of racial tolerance. It was both a representation of racial integration and a device for achieving that integration in practice. With this novel, Michener took on the task of teaching his readers the political and racial lessons of Hawaii.37

In keeping with his didactic view of literature and his guidebook inclinations, Michener constructs his novel as a history of Hawaii. After announcing in a brief prelogue that his work of fiction is "true to the spirit and history of Hawaii," he builds the novel's skeleton around the major events that have shaped the islands' history. The novel begins with the islands' birth in a series of volcanic eruptions and goes on to narrate all the high points of the islands' social, political, and economic history, from the migration of the native Hawaiians from Polynesia in the ninth century, through the annexation by the U.S. in 1898, to the aftereffects of World War II. He fictionalizes key figures in Hawaii's history, from the missionary Hiram Bingham to the insurgent Democratic party leader John Burns, and he incorporates major episodes from the islands' social history, including the spread of leprosy in the 1870s, the plague-induced burning of Chinatown in 1900, the creation of the Japanese American 442nd Regimental Combat Team during World War II, and the labor strikes of the 1940s. He explains the climate and the plant and animal life of the islands, and provides the kind of local information, on things like the origins of the ukulele and the multiple uses of the coconut palm, that tourists like to know. Reviewers described the novel as a "comprehensive social history of our 50th state," praised its "wealth of scholarship," and located it in literary-historical terms as an heir to the "documentary novel of the Nineteen Thirties."38

Around this framework, the novel traces the history of the islands' four major racial and ethnic groups—native Hawaiian, white American, Chinese, and Japanese—via the formula of the multigenerational, multifamily saga. The novel consists of six chapters: the first focuses on the island's geological history, the next four on each major ethno-racial group, and the last brings together the main characters from the previous chapters. The novel covers, with some large gaps, fifty-six generations of the native Hawaiian Kanakoa family, six generations of the white Whipple and Hale families, fifty generations of the Chinese Kee family, and three generations of the Japanese Sakagawa family. Eight pages of genealogical charts help the reader keep track of the relationships among dozens of characters.

Through this multifamily formula, *Hawaii* translates the ethnicity paradigm into a compelling narrative, as each group lives out sociologist Robert Park's four-stage race relations cycle of contact, conflict, accommodation, and assimilation. Michener does not shy away from the islands' history of racial conflict and exploitation: he documents the brutal conditions on the ships that transported Chinese laborers, the systematic exclusion of Japanese children from public schools in order to keep them on the plantations, and the limited education received by native Hawaiians in white-sponsored schools that trained them for work in menial jobs. (The implicit comparison, of course, is with the experi-
ences of black Americans on slave ships, in segregated schools, and in vocational education programs such as those offered by the Tuskegee Institute. But the novel universalizes this history by locating it within a global context. During World War II various characters encounter British imperialism in Fiji, segregation in Mississippi, and Nazism in Europe, after which they appreciate anew Hawaii's high degree of racial harmony. The novel also charts a progression away from this structurally embedded racism and toward the institutionalization of racial egalitarianism. Michener ends the novel in November 1954, at the very moment when the white minority is losing its historic control over the islands' political and economic life. Newly naturalized Asian-born residents have turned out to vote in record numbers, the multiracial Democratic party has won control of the legislature from the white Republican elite, and Japanese Americans have been elected to a majority of seats in the territorial legislature. Michener suggests that Hawaii, while clearly not a racial paradise, is closer than any other multiracial society to putting the ideal of racial integration into practice.

The novel also narrativizes the ethnicity paradigm by unfavorably contrasting characters who think in narrowly racial terms with those who have embraced the more flexible terms of culture. The novel's heroes are those who can select the best elements of each group's culture and combine them to create something new. The home of the Chinese matriarch Nyuk Tsin embodies this Hawaiian ideal of cultural hybridity: "In food, language and laughter the establishment was Hawaiian. In school-book learning, business and religion it was American. But in filial obedience and reverence for education it was Chinese." The narrative structure itself communicates the ideal of liberal universalism by drawing parallels between each of the different ethno-racial groups, in everything from their shared experience of a nightmarish ship journey to the islands, to their tendencies toward ancestor worship and quasi-incestuous marriage. Michener, like Hammerstein, articulates his message that "all men are brothers" in a manner difficult to miss. Many readers of the novel understood this message and liked it: the Chicago Sunday Tribune reviewer, for instance, praised Hawaii as "one of the most enlightening books ever written, either fact or fiction, about the integration of divergent peoples into a composite society." 39

Michener makes sense of this vast narrative and this proliferation of characters by organizing the book spatially: he uses his generation-and continent-spanning families as the skeins that knit America together with the rest of the world. Michener's families are in motion, traversing the vast expanses between the American mainland, Hawaii, the islands of the Pacific, and Asia. Immigrants and travelers, their routes map Hawaii as the center of a complex web of flows that bind Asia, the Pacific, and America together.

Michener organizes the novel according to three sets of flows, each of which has Hawaii at its center. The first set consists of the flows of migration that span a thousand years and that carry the characters away from their original homes in Bora Bora, New England, central China, and Japan. Michener emphasizes this first set of flows in his chapter titles—"From the Sun-Swept Lagoon" (Polynesians), "From the Farm of Bitterness" (Americans), "From the Starving Village" (Chinese), "From the Inland Sea" (Japanese)—and in the full-color map that forms the book's frontispiece (Figure 24). Rendering his project of transnational mapping literal and visual, this map, titled "The Coming of the Peoples," charts the flows of each of his four ethnic groups out from their places of origins in North America and Asia and into Hawaii. Together with the genealogical trees at the back of the book, this illustration maps the family
structure of the narrative onto the space of the Pacific basin. Michener's families are international entities.

As the map makes clear, all of the novel's groups are immigrants, but Michener inflects each group's travel with different meaning. He frames the Polynesian characters' travel as an adventure narrative: setting sail in big canoes, they travel for thousands of miles using only the stars to navigate and establish a new society on uninhabited islands. The white New Englanders' travel is cast as a narrative of national expansion: fired by missionary zeal, they leave the United States in order to spread American culture, values, and institutions beyond the nation's borders. The Chinese and Japanese characters follow the literary path of the classic ethnic immigrant narrative. Driven from their homes by economic hardship and limited opportunity, they travel to Hawaii in search of expanded opportunities. Once arrived, they begin the slow but steady process of integrating themselves into and rising up through Hawaii's Americanized society: while the first generation begins as servants and plantation laborers who maintain their original languages and traditions, their Hawaiian-born offspring imbibe American culture, attend public school, become successful businessmen, and eventually enter into political life.

Casting the Chinese and Japanese stories as familiar ethnic narratives was key to the novel's political argument: Michener wanted to show that the islands' majority Asian population was composed not of unassimilable racial Others but of familiar immigrant types who, like previous generations of European immigrants, embraced the traditional virtues of hard work, loyalty to family, and love of education. By making them familiar immigrants, Michener's work does culturally what the 1952 McCarran-Walter Act did legally: it shows that Chinese- and Japanese-born people can be Asian and American at the same time. The family bonds established by this first set of flows enable Michener to trace the roots of Hawaii, and by extension America, back to multiple origins in the Pacific islands, New England, China, and Japan. Michener directs his educational impulse to these places as well as to Hawaii itself, and he teaches his readers about religious tensions in Bora Bora, ethnic differences among the Chinese, and courtship traditions in rural Japan. The effect of this is to render New England, traditionally the birthplace of the nation, as only one among many originary sources of the nation's identity. He makes the South Pacific, China, and Japan into equivalent "old countries" to the more familiar white ethnic homelands of Ireland, Italy, and Eastern Europe. In doing so, he introduces his mainland read-

ers not only to their new fellow citizens, but to their Asian-Pacific cultural roots as well.

The novel's second set of flows reinforces and sustains these ties to Asia and the Pacific by sending characters back, either literally or figuratively, to their ancestors' homelands. Unlike many immigrant narratives, Michener's does not sever the characters' ties with their points of origin: their Americanization does not require the loss of all contact with their ancestral homes. Rather, after mapping their flow into Hawaii, Michener posits a partial flow back out of Hawaii as his fully assimilated characters recognize, maintain, or reestablish the unbreakable bonds of family and culture that tie them to Asia and the Pacific.

In keeping with Michener's views of the people of Hawaii as a national "resource" upon which Washington could draw, his Japanese and mixed-race characters return to their Asian and Pacific origins as agents of U.S. expansion. Hoxworth Hale, a part-Hawaiian member of the white elite, travels to the South Pacific as a military officer during World War II. Claiming Tahiti as the "islands from which his people had come," he describes Bora Bora as "like a sacred home." When he fathers a child with a native woman—at her invitation—he asserts that he will be "forever a part of Bora Bora." This episode recapitulates a typical imperial fantasy of sexual conquest and colonization. Yet Michener complicates this fantasy by making his white man part-Polynesian, which frames his sexual encounter not as an imperial gesture of control and domination, but as a migrant's return to his roots. Hale's racial hybridity thus works to obscure the imperial nature of the military expansion he enacts. Establishing the bonds to Japan requires a more careful negotiation. Michener does sever ties based on national loyalty: Kamejiro Sakagawa's devotion to the Emperor leads to penury, unhappiness, and "schizophrenia" and must eventually be renounced during World War II in favor of loyalty to the United States. But his sons' cultural tie to Japan, specifically their ability to speak Japanese, enables them to return to their parents' homeland as part of the U.S. occupation forces and work as translators for General MacArthur's land reform expert. The biological and cultural ties to Asia and the Pacific that these characters possess make their presence there, and by extension that of the U.S. government, which they represent, that much more natural and thus legitimate. With this return set of flows out of Hawaii and back into Asia and the Pacific, Michener constructs the immigrant bonds of his characters as two-way roads, routes through which Americans can flow out into Asia and the Pacific as easily as Asians and Pacific Islanders can flow into
America. These immigrants bestow upon the nation at large the very thing that political observers feared was lacking in America and undermining U.S. foreign policy in Asia: a familiarity with Asia rooted in the intimate bonds of family and common culture.\textsuperscript{40}

Michener's third set of flows consists of populations migrating around the world over the course of millennia. This flow is at once more abstract and more all-encompassing, and more than any other it establishes America, through Hawaii, as a "nation of nations" located within a truly global matrix of family ties. The novel culminates in a chapter that celebrates Hawaii as the incubator of a glorious new type of person, whom Michener dubs the Golden Man. Although Michener invented this term for the novel, the narrator ascribes it to a group of sociologists who in 1946 perfected a concept whose outline had preoccupied them for years. The sociologists' Golden Man, as a figure who first appears earlier in the century but does not fully mature until after the war, is thus the apotheosis and embodiment of the ethnicity paradigm, the incarnation of changing ideas about race and culture. The Golden Man is primarily an intellectual, rather than a racial, hybrid who combines the best of both Eastern and Western cultures: "He was a man influenced by both the west and the east, a man at home in either the business councils of New York or the philosophical retreats of Kyoto, a man wholly modern and American yet in tune with the ancient and the Oriental."\textsuperscript{41}

Michener focuses on four such Golden Men, one from each of his ethnorracial groups, and they bring to fruition the themes of cultural relativism, pluralism, and syncretism that have been developing over the course of the novel: like the heroic figures in earlier chapters, they are characters who can understand, embrace, and learn from other cultures.

Michener uses the Golden Men to discredit biological theories of racial purity and hierarchy. Although each of his four characters thinks of himself as racially pure, Michener invalidates their narrowly racial thinking by tracing their genealogies back centuries and connecting them to all the races of the world. Hoxworth Hale, his ostensibly white Golden Man, for instance,

Hong Kong Kee, his Chinese Golden Man, has a similar background. His "ancestors had picked up a good deal of Mongolian blood, and Manchurian, and Tartar, plus a little Japanese during the wars of the early 1600's, plus some Korean via an ancestor who had traveled in that peninsula in 814, augmented by a good deal of nondescript inheritance from tribes who had wandered about southern China from the year 4000 B.C. on." Ultimately, Michener connects all his Golden Men, and the separate groups they represent, back to a single mythic family, which he imagines alternately as "two ancient Malayan brothers" or "three ancient Siberian brothers," whose descendants form the populations of Polynesia, New England, China, and Japan—that is, the original homes of Hawaii's four major population groups. These Golden Men embody the ideal of the "brotherhood of man" so popular among middlebrow intellectuals, from Edward Steichen to Pearl Buck: when Hammerstein, in an insensitive moment, referred to the children of Welcome House as "half-castes," Buck snapped, "We don't use that ugly term around here: we're all half-castes if you trace it back far enough."\textsuperscript{42}

The Golden Men are the means through which Michener achieves the novel's central ideological project of redeeming the United States from the accusations of racism and imperialism. Michener presents these Golden Men as the ultimate benefit that Hawaiian statehood can bestow upon America. Spanning the globe through their multiple bloodlines, these new Americans represent a globalization that is natural and inescapable, not imperial or coercive. They allow the reader to see America and the world not only as fundamentally interconnected, but as always having been so. They take the ideal of U.S.-Asian integration out of the realm of contemporary foreign affairs and project it back into the mists of prehistory and biology. It becomes a result of sex and marriage, of migrations and flows, rather than politics. The hybrid Golden Men, as emblems of Hawaii, deflate the accusation of imperialism by showing that America already and harmoniously contains all the world's people within itself.

With Nyuk Tsin, the Chinese matriarch, Michener creates the novel's quintessential immigrant and most memorable character. In doing so, he establishes the Asian immigrant woman as an emblematic figure of the domestic integration of Asian Americans—a cultural counterpart to the jungle doctor, white mother, and tourist who serve as the era's figures of international U.S.-Asian integration. Michener makes hers a classic immigrant story: a poor village girl who is kidnapped and sold into prostitution, Nyuk Tsin arrives in Hawaii as the second wife of a Chinese gambler; she works hard, educates her sons, and gradually builds up and
oversees a huge financial empire run by her children and grandchildren. Her values, while presented as traditionally Chinese, are also comfortingly familiar: she values thrift, education, private property, and the basic principles of capitalism. Her immigration to Hawaii, rather than threatening the U.S. by injecting into it alien customs, strengthens the nation's social and moral foundations. The progenitor of ninety-five descendants (according to her genealogical tree) who travel the world and intermarry Scendants across many racial and ethnic lines, Nyuk Tsin becomes, in effect, the mother of a new multiracial and global America.

The novel's three sets of flows come together in Nyuk Tsin. As an immigrant, she participates in the initial flow out of China and into Hawaii. She participates in the second flow back to China when she sends money to her husband's first wife, who remained behind in the ancestral village, and when she sends her children's and grandchildren's names back to be registered in the village's records. In these ways family ties are maintained across the Pacific, so that even though none of the family has ever physically returned to China, when the eldest Kee child goes to college on the mainland, "he was not only head of a burgeoning family left behind in Honolulu, but also the member of a powerful clan whose existence had continued in the Low Village for thousands of years." Nyuk Tsin embodies the third, more global, flow when she names her five sons after the continents of Asia, Africa, Europe, America, and Australia. In this way, she extends her family like a web around the globe, making it coterminous with all the other peoples of the world. In the final pages of the novel, her immigrant trajectory comes to its ultimate conclusion as she takes advantage of the naturalization provision in the 1952 McCarran-Walter Act and, eighty-eight years after immigrating, becomes a U.S. citizen. With this episode Michener injects the novel's only direct reference to the Cold War in Asia: as Nyuk Tsin takes her citizenship test, a bevy of newsreel cameras, brought in by the immigration officials, film the interview as a "dramatic" event that they can "use for publicity in Asia." Having completed the cycle from immigrant to citizen, and having facilitated the integration of Asia and America in many small ways, Nyuk Tsin dies at the age of one hundred and six.43

Hawaii in the 1950s had an ideological value unmatched by any other part of the United States. For one reason, it was a multiracial society that contained a negligible number of African Americans. It thus allowed Michener and other commentators to recast American race relations in Asian-white terms rather than in the more fraught black-white terms. Writing about Hawaii enabled Michener to champion the ideal of racial equality and the practice of racial integration without having to grapple with the entrenched and often violent racism, rooted in the history of slavery, that the black civil rights movement was revealing in the American South and bringing to the forefront of national consciousness. By using Hawaii as "proof" that racism was not permanently entrenched in the American psyche and society, Michener effectively "solved" the nation's race problem by excising blacks from America.

Hawaii's other main ideological advantage was that it allowed Michener to sidestep the single greatest act of anti-Asian racism: the internment of Japanese Americans during World War II. As Caroline Chung Simpson has argued, the fact of internment and its public remembering during the postwar years threatened, as did other well-known instances of racial injustice, to destabilize the nation's claims to being a democratic, tolerant, and pluralist nation. To remember internment was to risk remembering that Americans had until very recently been committed to the idea of Asians as unassimilable foreign Others. Hawaii offered Michener the possibility of acknowledging the history of internment while limiting its ideological damage: while California, Washington, and Oregon forcibly interned 120,000 of their residents of Japanese background, most of whom were U.S. citizens, Hawaii interned only 1,444. The difference resulted from widespread opposition to internment among Hawaii's elite, from logistical considerations and, most important, from self-interest: to lock up or evacuate one third of the islands' population and a high proportion of its agricultural and skilled work force would have devastated the economy and endangered the security of the islands. Because internment did not dominate the history of Asians in Hawaii, Michener was able to contain its ideological threat by embedding its remembering within a larger narrative of Asian integration.44

Flower Drum Song offered a similar opportunity to publicly raise and contain the memory of internment by locating it within a larger narrative of Americanization. In its 1958 cover story on the show, Time presented the life stories of stars Miyoshi Umeki and Pat Suzuki as two models of how Asians could also be Americans. Umeki, whom the article described as "American by solemn determination," offered a model of Asians becoming American though the process of U.S. global expan-
sion. Born and raised in Japan, Umeki’s Americanization was set in motion by the postwar occupation of her country. Encouraged to sing by American Gls who befriended her family, she began performing with GI bands in their service clubs; later she learned to copy the style of singers such as Doris Day whom she heard on the U.S. Army radio and became a hit on Japanese radio and TV. Her success prompted her to move to the U.S., where she found work in nightclubs, on TV, and in Hollywood. She married an American and settled in the U.S. permanently. Time presented the California-born Pat Suzuki, on the other hand, as “American by instinct”: temperamentally as well as legally American, she was filled with wanderlust as a child and “chafed by restrictions, careless of customs, and in a hurry” as an adult. The article presented her childhood as a typical one, noting that she sang songs like “I Am an American” at county fairs. The bombing of Pearl Harbor derailed this uneventful life: she and her family were “shipped to the Amache relocation camp at La- mar, Colo.,” and after the war they spent a year working on a Colorado sugar-beet farm before finally returning home. Time acknowledged but downplayed the significance of Suzuki’s incarceration, presenting it as an interruption of an otherwise average American life story. The article did not mention racism, the violation of civil rights, or the economic exploitation of people forced to abandon their homes and property. Instead it described Suzuki’s life in the camps as “a matter of school as usual,” and implied that the experience made little impression on her, claiming that her only memories were of the weather and of the Nisei Boy Scouts who raised the American flag each morning. The article presented Suzuki as completely American even as she was ethnically Japanese, and it never suggested that internment entailed any denial of her American- ness. The article cast her experiences as a rough spot in an American childhood, but refused to read it as evidence of a widely held view that people of Japanese background were fundamentally foreign. In doing so it contained, as did Michener’s novel, the destabilizing potential that public rememberings of internment threatened to raise.

Hawaii and Flower Drum Song make clear that the racial formation of Americans has never been a simple domestic process. The meanings and the regulation of ethno-racial difference within the nation have always taken shape in relation to events and processes occurring beyond the nation’s borders. The foreign and the domestic spheres, far from being neatly separated as they have been in most accounts of American political and cultural history, impinge on each other in unexpected ways. The racial formation of Asian Americans shifted between the early 1940s,