



Journey of HopeTM

CHARLOTTE'S ASIAN AMERICANS+PACIFIC ISLANDERS



Our Legacy of Resilience Fuels Our Optimism for the Future

The story of Asians and Pacific Islanders in America is one of perseverance, resilience, and hope. In and around Charlotte, those of us in the diverse and fast-growing AAPI community often live between two worlds. In so doing, we remain proud Carolinians and loyal Americans, while continuing to honor our traditional cultures and values. The artifacts in this exhibit are a collection of personal items from your neighbors who belong to one of the more than 25 distinct Asian American communities that live, work, and play in greater Charlotte.



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Asians in the Americas

Spain's Pacific "Manila Galleon Trade" was a global trade network between 1565 and 1815 that connected the economies of Asia, the Americas, and Europe. Beginning in the 1580s, some 40,000 to 100,000 Asians (mostly sailors and slaves) from the Philippines, China, Japan, and South and Southeast Asia, crossed the Pacific from Manila to Acapulco. Upon arrival, they were categorized as a single group, thus establishing the inaccurate and harmful perception of Asians as a homogeneous and unassimilable race. Some jumped ship and made their way into the New World, primarily in Mexico and along the West Coast, where they worked as fishermen, farmers, and laborers.



This 1570 map, from what is considered to be the first world atlas, by Abraham Ortelius, features Spanish galleons sailing from the Philippines to Hispania Nova, or "New Spain."

Courtesy David Rumsey Map Collection, David Rumsey Map Center, Stanford Libraries

"Exotic Curiosities"

In 1834, U.S.-China traders, brothers Nathaniel and Frederick Carne, brought Afong Moy, a 19-year-old woman from Guangzhou, China, to New York City. There, she was exhibited to the general public among "various Chinese curiosities" for 8 hours a day—for the price of 50 cents. She later toured the country and met President Andrew Jackson.



Afong Moy

Courtesy The Miriam and Ira D. Wallach Division of Art, Prints and Photographs, Print Collection, The New York Public Library

Her treatment as an exotic curiosity helped reaffirm the false notions of the West's superiority and of Asians as being fundamentally different.

Filipinos in America: Morro Bay

On October 18, 1587, the first Filipinos landed in what is now the continental United States at Morro Bay, California. They arrived as slaves, prisoners, and crew aboard the *Nuestra Señora de Buena Esperanza*, but they did not stay. After an encounter with the native Chumash and the death of a crew member, the ship returned to sea and headed to its intended destination of Acapulco, New Spain.

Saint Malo, Louisiana

The earliest documented Asian settlement in the U.S. was the Filipino fishing village of Saint Malo on Lake Borgne in Louisiana.

Oral tradition suggests that Filipinos arrived as early as 1763. The Manilamen, as they became known, revolutionized the shrimping industry in the South by

introducing such preservation methods as the Shrimp Dance, a process of separating shrimp shells from the meat by dancing (and stomping) in a circular motion on the piles of shrimp.



An image of a wood engraving from the March 31, 1883 edition of *Harper's Weekly* depicts the fishing village of Saint Malo.

Library of Congress



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Chinese in the Early West

In the mid-1850s, the number of Chinese (mostly men) arriving in California grew significantly. One reason was political and economic unrest in China. Another was the 1848 discovery of gold in northern California. The Chinese first found work in the mines. Some found gold. Almost all found hostility.

“The Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882” was the first U.S. law enacted to prevent members of a specific national group from immigrating to the United States. While the number of Chinese in the U.S. initially dropped, about 300,000 were admitted into the country from 1882 to 1943. Some fought in U.S. courts for fairer treatment, often winning cases. Many entered the U.S. using false papers, establishing a legacy of illegal immigration.



The massacre of Chinese at Rock Springs, Wyoming, *Harper's Weekly*, September 26, 1885

Drawn by T. de Thulstrup, Library of Congress

The Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882

Over the next 30 years, demand for Chinese labor increased, and with it, a growing resentment against those providing it. Anti-Chinese movements sprang up throughout the West, often leading to violence. Chinese families were driven from their homes, often attacked, and sometimes lynched by mobs. The anti-Chinese movement also took hold in the federal government, leading to ever-increasing restrictions until the government passed “The Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882.”

The Transcontinental Railroad

The transcontinental railroad laid the path for the United States to emerge as a global power. But the tracks themselves were mostly built by Chinese laborers. By 1867, 12,000 Chinese were building the tracks—90% of the work force. The work was dangerous, and the Chinese workers were often abused and always underpaid. They received no credit—only continued discrimination—for their successful efforts.



Chinese Camp at Brown's Station, Nevada

Photograph by Alfred A. Hart, between 1865–1869, Library of Congress



You wouldn't know it from Andrew J. Russell's famous “East and West Shaking Hands at Laying Last Rail, 1869,” but it was mostly Chinese men who completed the railroad.

Photograph by Andrew J. Davis. Courtesy Oakland Museum of California



“Yellow Peril”

The Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882 only heralded the beginning of increasingly harsh treatment of Asians in the U.S. by both the government and its citizens. “Yellow Peril” became a common racial epithet directed against persons of Asian descent. Fashionable in both Europe and America in early 20th Century, its persistent theme in Western culture claimed that “barbarian hordes” of Asia, a “yellow” race, were always just at the point of invading and destroying Christendom, Europe, and Western civilization itself.



Germany’s Kaiser Wilhelm II commissioned a painting, *Die Gelbe Gefahr*, which helped to coin the term “Yellow Peril.” Reproduced in *The Review of Reviews* (London), December 12, 1895, it became one of the most influential political illustrations of the late 19th century.

From the collections of the University of Minnesota Libraries



Harvesting pineapples on a Hawaiian plantation.

Ca. 1910 and 1925, Library of Congress

Japan Opens Its Doors

To protect itself from European colonialism, the Japanese banned emigration in 1639. By the mid-19th century, the U.S. was looking to expand its influence in the Pacific. It forced Japan to open its ports, and the ban on emigration was lifted. Between 1885 and 1924, 200,000 Japanese emigrated to Hawai’i, and 180,000 more came to the continental U.S. Like the Chinese, they faced discrimination and were unable to become naturalized citizens. By the early 20th century, many Chinese and Japanese had established a measure of economic success. As they began to prosper, the Yellow Peril became an increasingly central topic in American popular culture.

The Boxer Rebellion (1899–1901)

The Society of the Righteous and Harmonious Fists (called the “Boxers” in the West) was an anti-colonial martial arts organization that blamed the problems of China on the presence of Western colonies there. Manchu Prince



Chinese Christians leaving Peking (Beijing), China.

H. C. White Co., circa 1902, Library of Congress

Zaiyi allowed the Boxers into Beijing to kill Westerners and Chinese Christians. Most of the victims were Chinese Christians, but news of Boxer atrocities against Westerners fueled Yellow Peril racism in the U.S., where the short-lived rebellion was proclaimed as evidence of a race war between the “yellow race” and the “white race.”

The Pacific Islands

In the mid to late 1800s, the U.S. — driven in large part by its desire to protect the trade it established with China a century earlier — developed a growing interest in the Pacific. The U.S. established consulates in Fiji in 1844, Samoa in 1856, and the Marshall Islands in 1881. The Kingdom of Hawai‘i was sovereign until 1893, when resident American and European capitalists and landholders overthrew the monarchy. The U.S. annexed the strategically-located islands in 1898. After the Spanish American War ended in the same year, The U.S. gained Spain’s Pacific colonies of the Philippines and Guam. Of course, that didn’t mean native populations of those islands had full rights as U.S. citizens. Hawai‘i did not become a state until 1959. To this day, U.S. citizens in places like Guam and American Samoa are not allowed to vote for president, and their congressional representative is a non-voting member.



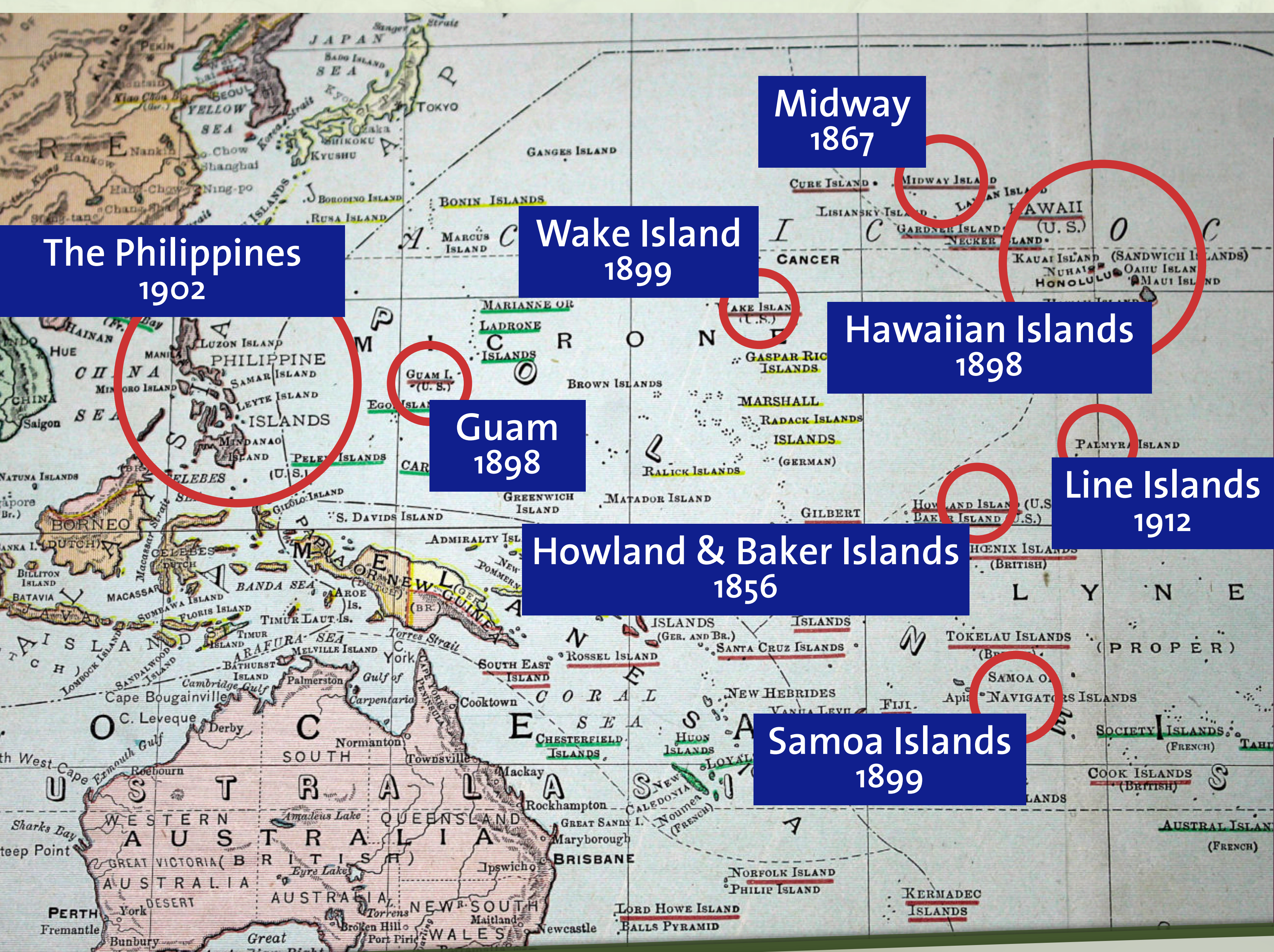
U.S. Minister to Hawai‘i Harold M. Sewall (right) accepts the transfer of Hawaiian state sovereignty from President Sanford Dole, August 12, 1898 on the steps of ‘Iolani Palace.

Frank Davey, Courtesy Hawai‘i State Archives



Ladrone Islands, Guam, main street of Agaña or Hagåtña, ca, 1899–1900.

National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration



The U.S. in the Pacific, Early 1900s

Prior to its annexation of Hawai‘i and colonialism in the Philippines, Guam, and eastern Samoa, the U.S. began bolstering its maritime security by annexing small islands and atolls in the Pacific. In the mid-1800s, it also experienced a craze for guano (the accumulated excrement of seabirds or bats). Guano was prized as an agricultural fertilizer, as well as a source of saltpeter for gunpowder. In 1856, the “Guano Islands Act” enabled U.S. citizens to take possession in the name of the United States, of unclaimed islands.



The “Hindu Invasion”

From 1910 to 1932, just over 8,000 South Asians came to America, many from Bengal, Punjab, Kashmir, and regions in present-day Pakistan. (Nearly 420,000 came to the British colonial West Indies from 1838 to 1918 as indentured laborers.) Despite their small numbers in the U.S., by the 1910s, newspaper headlines were already screaming about a “Hindu Invasion.” To combat this “growing Yellow Peril,” the Immigration Act of 1917 imposed literacy tests on immigrants, created new categories of inadmissible persons, and, with a few exceptions for certain professions, barred immigration from China, British India, Afghanistan, Arabia, Burma (Myanmar), Siam (Thailand), the Malay States, the Dutch East Indies, the Soviet Union east of the Ural Mountains, and most Polynesian islands.

The U.S. Colonizes the Philippines

By the beginning of the 1900s, the United States was a world power, and maritime expansion in the Pacific was a key strategic goal. Spain, after its defeat in the Spanish-American War of 1898, ceded its colony of the Philippines to the U.S. Two days before the U.S. Senate ratified the treaty, fighting broke out between American forces and Filipino nationalists led by Emilio Aguinaldo. The ensuing Philippine-American War lasted three years and resulted in the death of more than 4,200 American and over 20,000 Filipino combatants. At least 200,000 and as many as 1 million Filipino civilians died. The Philippines became a U.S. colony, and back in the States, the anti-Filipino movement used that status to paint the Philippines as a backward place and Filipinos as uncivilized and dangerous.



Eugene Hwangbo demonstrating for Korean independence, 1939.

© University of Southern California Korean American Digital Archive

A “shrimp” among whales

Korea was ruled as a part of the Empire of Japan from 1910 to 1945, though an 1882 treaty between the U.S. and Korea allowed Koreans to immigrate to the U.S. In the 1900s, Hawaiian sugar plantation owners wanted an additional source of labor, and Koreans provided it. Many left Hawaii for California, and though their lives in the U.S. were complicated by the fact that they were subjects of Japan, they used their growing presence to promote an independent Korea.



Filipinos in front of the Manila Pool Hall, Stockton, California (1929–1934).

Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley



“Militarily Necessary”



Civilian exclusion order #5, posted at First and Front streets (San Francisco), ordering the removal of all persons of Japanese ancestry.

1942, Library of Congress



The evacuation of Japanese Americans from West Coast areas under the U.S. Army war emergency order.

Russell Lee, Library of Congress

The repercussions of Japan’s December 7, 1941 attack on Pearl Harbor were swift. Issued in February 1942, Executive Order 9066 authorized the evacuation and relocation of “any and all persons” of Japanese ancestry from “military areas.” Within months, all of California and much of Washington and Oregon had been declared military areas. Over 120,000 Japanese Americans—two-thirds of whom who were American-born Japanese with U.S. citizenship—were sent to concentration camps. Located in remote, desolate, inhospitable areas, camps were surrounded by barbed wire borders and guards in watchtowers. Despite the unprecedented wholesale incarceration, more than 30,000 Japanese American men enlisted in the armed forces. The all-Japanese American 442nd Regiment became the most decorated unit of its size in U.S. history.



Following evacuation orders, this store at 130th and Franklin Street in San Francisco was closed. The owner was a University of California graduate of Japanese descent.

Dorothea Lange (March 1942), Library of Congress



Japanese Americans work in the fields at Tule Lake Relocation Center, Newell, Calif.

1942 or 1943, Library of Congress

Asians in America Support the War Effort

Japan invaded China in 1937, and after Pearl Harbor, the U.S. and China became allies in their war against Japan. The enactment of the 1943 Chinese Exclusion Repeal Act ended 60 years of Chinese exclusion. Filipino Americans also contributed greatly to the war effort. As citizens of an American commonwealth, Filipino soldiers were legally American nationals. The Luce-Celler Act of 1946 granted Filipinos the right to become naturalized citizens, and two days after President Truman signed the act, the U.S. officially granted independence to the Philippines. As (unwilling) subjects of Japan, though, Korean Americans were classified as enemy aliens. Despite their loyalty to the U.S., their assets were frozen, and they were often mistakenly attacked as Japanese. Perceptions of South Asians improved, as the Indian Army helped halt Japanese progress in Central Asia and the Pacific.



The U.S. and China fought together in their war against Japan.

U.S. National Archives and Records Administration



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The Cold War

The end of World War II changed the United States' relationship with Asia, and with American Asians, in significant ways. As European colonial powers began to pull out of Asia (to some degree) and nationalist movements sprang up, a new threat to U.S. interests appeared in the form of communism. Stopping its spread became the U.S. government's primary foreign policy objective. That focus changed its immigration priorities, and the 1952 Immigration and Nationality Act repealed measures that excluded Asian immigrants. Further, Chinese and Japanese Americans in particular were now lauded for their ability to assimilate in American society and celebrated as assets in the U.S. government's battle against communism.



What could be more American than church ladies? Issei (first generation Japanese American) women at the Japanese Methodist Episcopal, South Church, Alameda, CA, 1948

Alameda Japanese American History Project



U.S. servicemen were not supposed to fraternize with Japanese women, but they did.

Courtesy Life archives

Interracial and International

In 1945, the U.S. began an occupation of Japan that brought 400,000 to 600,000 American soldiers to the country. Some married Japanese women, and from 1947 to 1975, nearly 67,000 Japanese women entered the U.S. as wives of U.S. servicemen. The marriages faced opposition on both sides of the Pacific. In Japan, the relationships were viewed as a symbol of Japan's defeat. In the U.S., many states still banned marriages between whites and nonwhites. And many Japanese brides landed in communities with no other Japanese around for miles.

Korean War (1950–1953)

Since 1945, U.S. troops have been deployed to South Korea to protect its interests in the region. The Korean War claimed millions of lives and left the Korean peninsula devastated. Though it never declared war, the U.S. intervened and its massive presence in South Korea after the war also had an effect on U.S. immigration. Nearly 100,000 Korean women immigrated to the U.S. between 1950 and 1989. They often later sponsored family members, and were responsible for an estimated 40 to 50 percent of all Korean immigrants since 1965.



A Korean girl with her brother on her back moves wearily past a stalled tank near Haengju, in Kyonggi Province, Korea, June 9, 1951

U.S. Army



The Model Minority Myth

As the calendar turned to the 1960s, a new identity was thrust upon Asian Americans: the model minority. Japanese Americans were valorized for their family values, work ethic, and respect for authority in a 1966 *New York Times* article by sociologist William Petersen, who coined the term. The new label was quickly deployed as a racial wedge between Asian and Black Americans.

From the initial wave of Chinese in the 1850s, Asians had been portrayed as a monolithic group that was dirty, lazy, inferior, exotic, deviant, and unassimilable. Now, they were still viewed as a homogenous group, but as hard working, respectful, self-determinative, and successful. This stereotyping has resulted in increased depression and suicide among Asian American youth and contributed to the failure of Asian American communities to receive needed support. The model minority myth ignores the vast diversity within the Asian American community and limits Asian Americans to being perpetual foreigners: better than other minorities, but never quite fully American.

A New Identity Emerges: Asian American

In 1968, Yuji Ichioka and Emma Gee, two graduate students at the University of California, Berkeley, formed the Asian American Political Alliance (AAPA)—believed to be the first use of the term “Asian American.” Adopting the ideals of racial pride and self-determination pioneered by the Black Power movement, Ichioka, Gee, and others from Chinese, Japanese, Filipino, and Korean backgrounds united around their opposition to the Vietnam War. Other Asian American groups organized to engage in the battle for civil rights and other common causes.



President Lyndon B. Johnson signs the Immigration Act on Liberty Island, October 3, 1965.

Yoichi Okamoto, courtesy the LBJ Library

The Immigration Act of 1965

The Immigration Act of 1965, also known as the Hart-Cellar Act, changed the course of Asian Americans and resulted in the racial restructuring of American society. It abolished the national origins quotas and ushered in a new era of mass immigration unseen since the predominantly European wave of 1911–1920. The law also created immigration preferences based on family reunification and professional skills. And it established a global cap on immigration and new restrictions on immigration from the Western Hemisphere for the first time.



AAPA members at an anti-Vietnam War march in San Francisco, 1968.

V. Wong, AAPA Archive



In Search of Refuge

In 1975, communist government takeovers in Vietnam, Cambodia, and Laos precipitated a massive refugee crisis. Over the next 25 years, more than 3 million people undertook the dangerous journey to become refugees rather than face torture or “reeducation.” Most Vietnamese escaped in leaky, overcrowded boats. The “boat people” encountered storms, food and water shortages, and Thai and Malay pirates. They were often rejected by the countries where they set shore. Eventually, refugee camps were established in places like Malaysia, the Philippines and Indonesia. Some families spent years there. Once they were resettled, the vast majority came to the U.S. From 1975 to 1997, the U.S. resettled 883,317 Vietnamese (including Montagnards and Hoa) and 251,334 Lao (including Hmong and other highlanders) and 152,748 Cambodians.

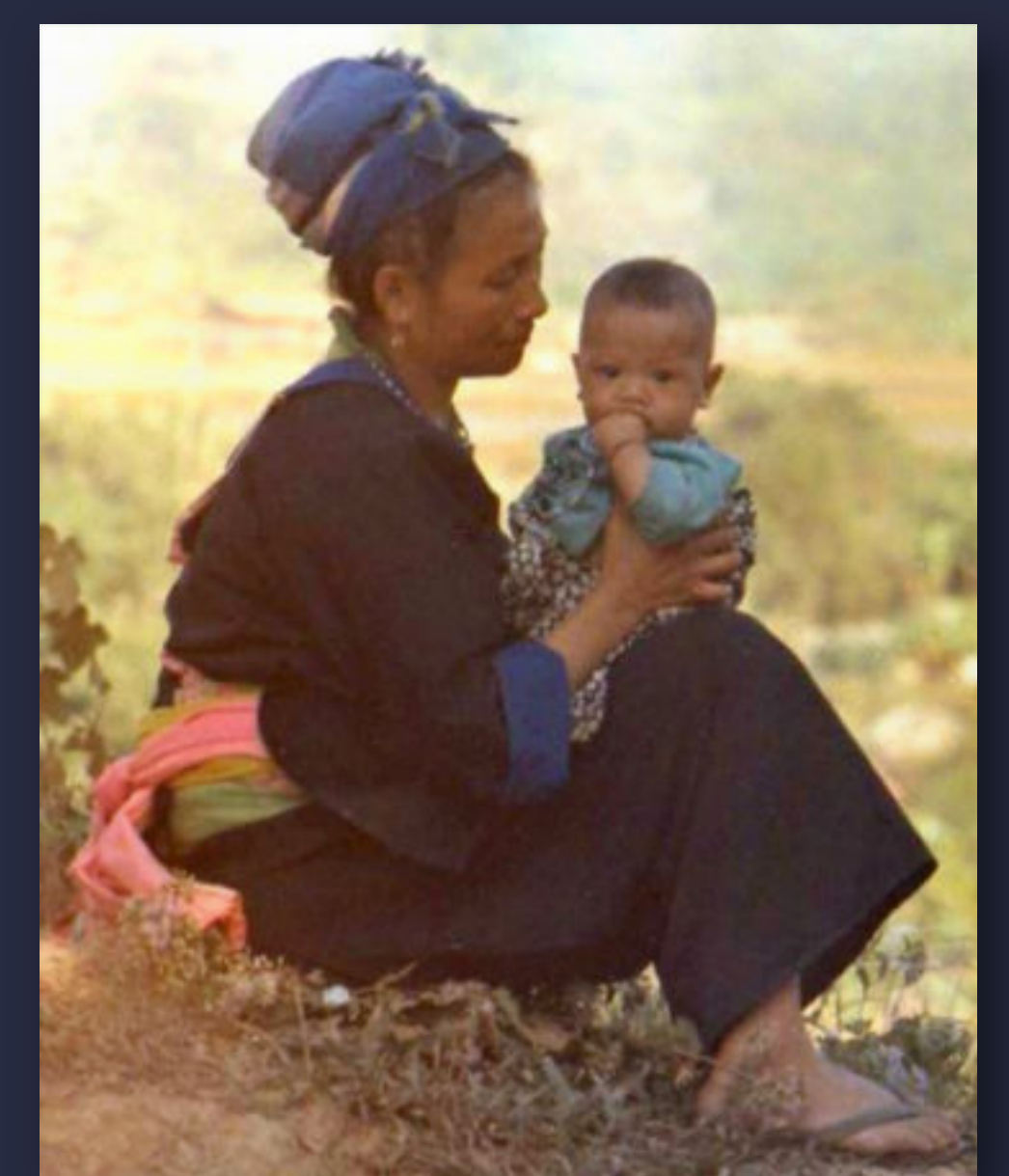


Crewmen of the amphibious cargo ship USS Durham take Vietnamese refugees aboard a small craft in the China Sea, April 3, 1975.

Department of Defense. Department of the Navy. Naval Photographic Center

The Secret War

U.S. military activity in the 1970s in Laos was called “the Secret War” because the CIA conducted it and kept it hidden from the American people. The U.S. bombed Laos heavily, and the CIA also recruited the Hmong and other highland peoples to fight—promising to take care of them in victory or defeat in the Laotian Civil War. A majority of Hmong men signed up. In May 1975, though, when communist takeover of Laos seemed imminent, the U.S. arranged to airlift only about 2,000 Hmong into Thailand. By December 1975, when the Lao People's Democratic Republic was formed, an estimated 44,000 Hmong had fled to Thailand as refugees. Since 1975, more than 200,000 Hmong have fled Laos. Despite an initial reluctance, the U.S. has taken in most nearly 140,200 refugees.



Hmong woman and child at Long Tieng, Laos military base, 1973.

Garry Jenkins, Wikimedia Commons

Resettling in America

How well refugees adapted to life in the U.S. depended in large part on the circumstances of their arrival. For example, the first wave of Vietnamese refugees that arrived in 1975 were well-educated, spoke some English, and were welcomed by a nation with a guilty conscience. The boat people arriving in 1978 were generally poorer, less educated, and had survived additional trauma. Many found it difficult to adjust to a nation whose support for refugees had waned.



Young women are seated on stage during a celebration to mark the Khmer New Year in Lithonia, Ga., 2010

Sam Sith, Wikimedia Commons



Making an Impact

Asian Americans have been contributing to this country since the 1500s, despite ongoing discrimination and racism. In the years following World War II, opportunities began to open up for Asian Americans, and, not surprisingly, their influence and achievements grew accordingly. While systemic challenges continue to exist, the individuals pictured here are among the many post-war pioneers who not only made an impact in their lifetime, but also blazed a trail for Asian Americans who are making their mark today.

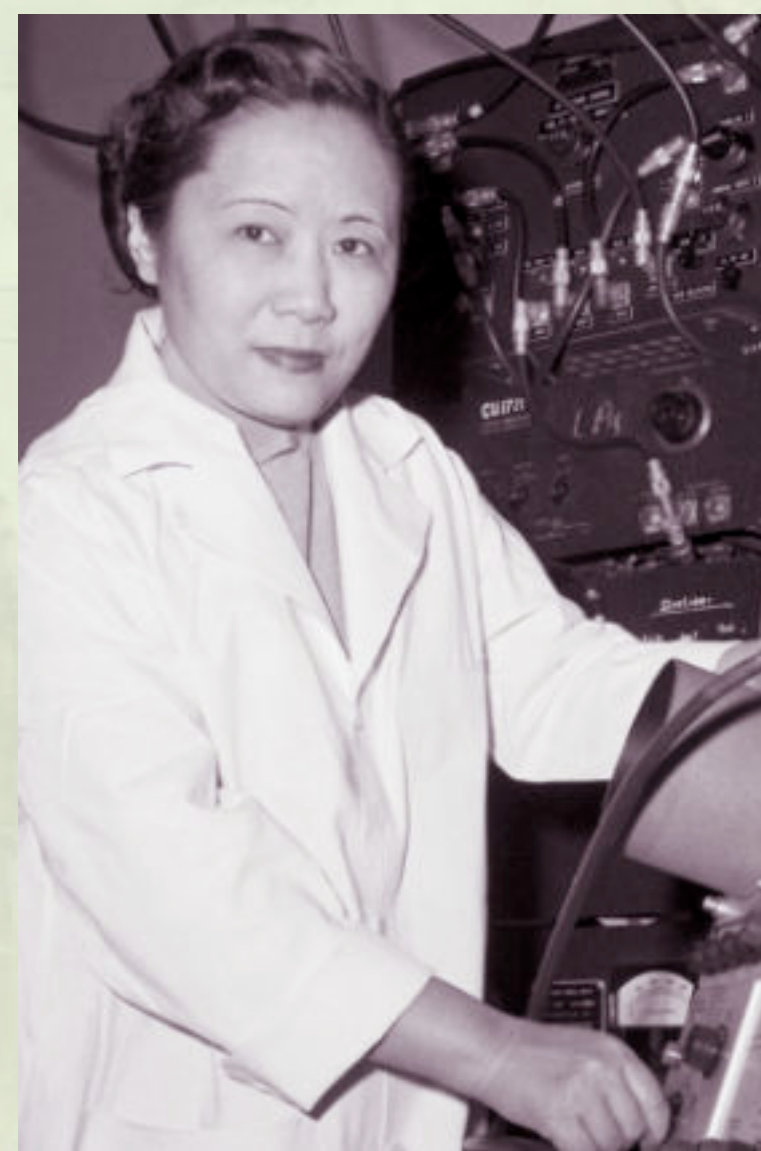


Tsung-Dao Lee

First generation Chinese American b. 1926

Physicist who in 1957, at the age of 30, won a Nobel Prize. Later naturalized as a U.S. citizen, Lee is the youngest American to have ever won the Nobel Prize.

Alan Richards, Institute for Advanced Study

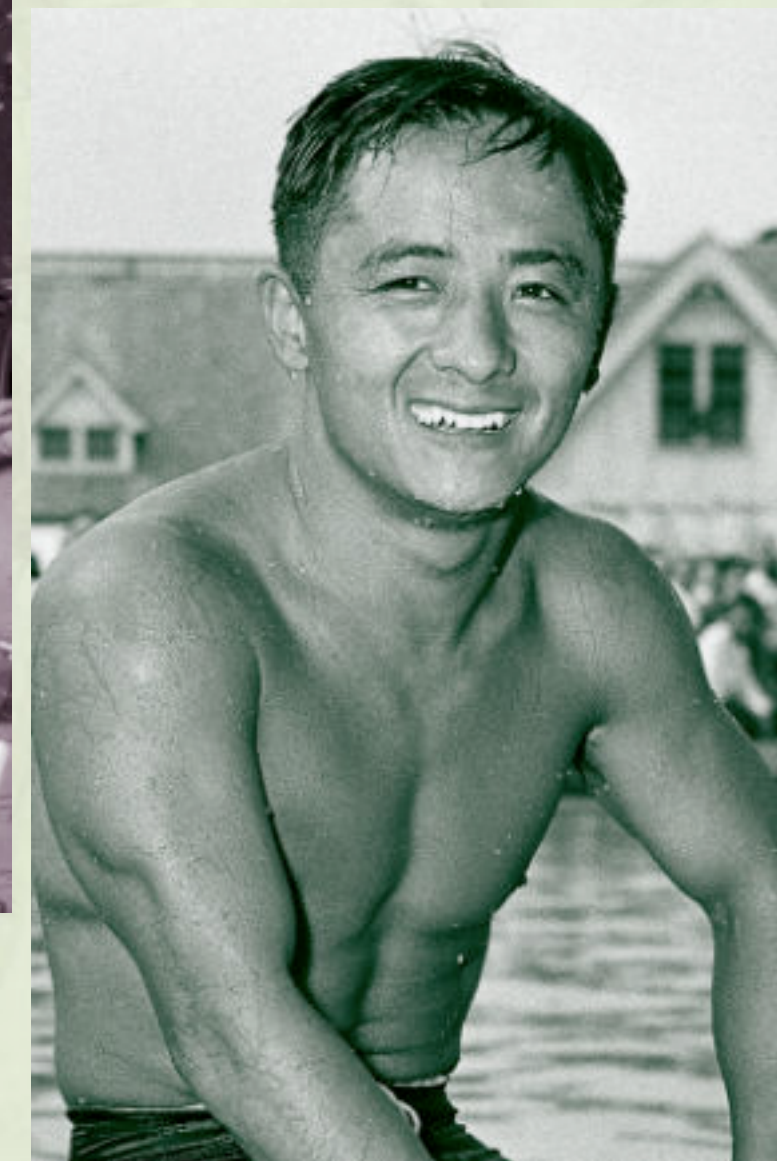


Chien-Shiung Wu

First generation Chinese American 1912–1997

Particle and experimental physicist who worked on the Manhattan Project and made significant contributions in the fields of nuclear and particle physics.

Smithsonian Institution Archives



Sammy Lee

Second generation Korean American 1920–2016

The first Asian American male to win an Olympic gold medal (1948), Lee later coached the U.S. diving team in the 1960 Summer Olympics.

Preston Stroup, AP



Bruce Lee

First generation Chinese American 1940–1973

Martial artist and actor who popularized martial arts in the U.S. and helped reverse the systemically unflattering portrayals of Asian Americans in film and television.

Business Wire photo



Larry Itliong

First generation Filipino American 1913–1977

One of the fathers of the West Coast labor movement, Itliong organized farm workers starting in the 1930s, and rose to national prominence in 1965 with the successful Delano grape strike.

Welga Archive, Bulosan Center for Filipino Studies



Patsy Mink

Third generation Japanese American 1927–2002

First woman of color (and Asian American) elected to the U.S. House of Representatives, Mink was a key author for Title IX, a law that advanced gender equity within federal funding policies for education.

University of Hawaii Manoa Library



Paramahansa Yogananda

First generation Indian American 1893–1952

The first major Indian yoga teacher in the U.S., whose long-standing influence in the American yoga movement led him to be considered by yoga experts as the “Father of Yoga in the West.”

Self-Realization Fellowship



Miné Okubo

Second generation Japanese American 1912–2001

Artist and writer, whose book *Citizen 13660* chronicled her experiences in World War II Japanese American internment camps. She later won acclaim as both an artist and as the winner of the 1984 American Book Award.

Asian American Nobel Laureates

Physics: Tsung-Dao Lee, Samuel Chao Chung Ting, Daniel Chee Tsui, Steven Chu, Charles K. Kao, (Chinese American); Yoichiro Nambu, Shuji Nakamura, Syukuro Manabe (Japanese American)

Chemistry: Yuan T. Lee (Taiwanese American); Roger Y. Tsien (Chinese American); Charles J. Pedersen, Korean American; Venki Ramakrishnan (Indian American)

Physiology/Medicine: Har Gobind Khorana (Indian American)

Economics: Abhijit Banerjee (Indian American)

Peace: Maria Ressa (Filipino American)

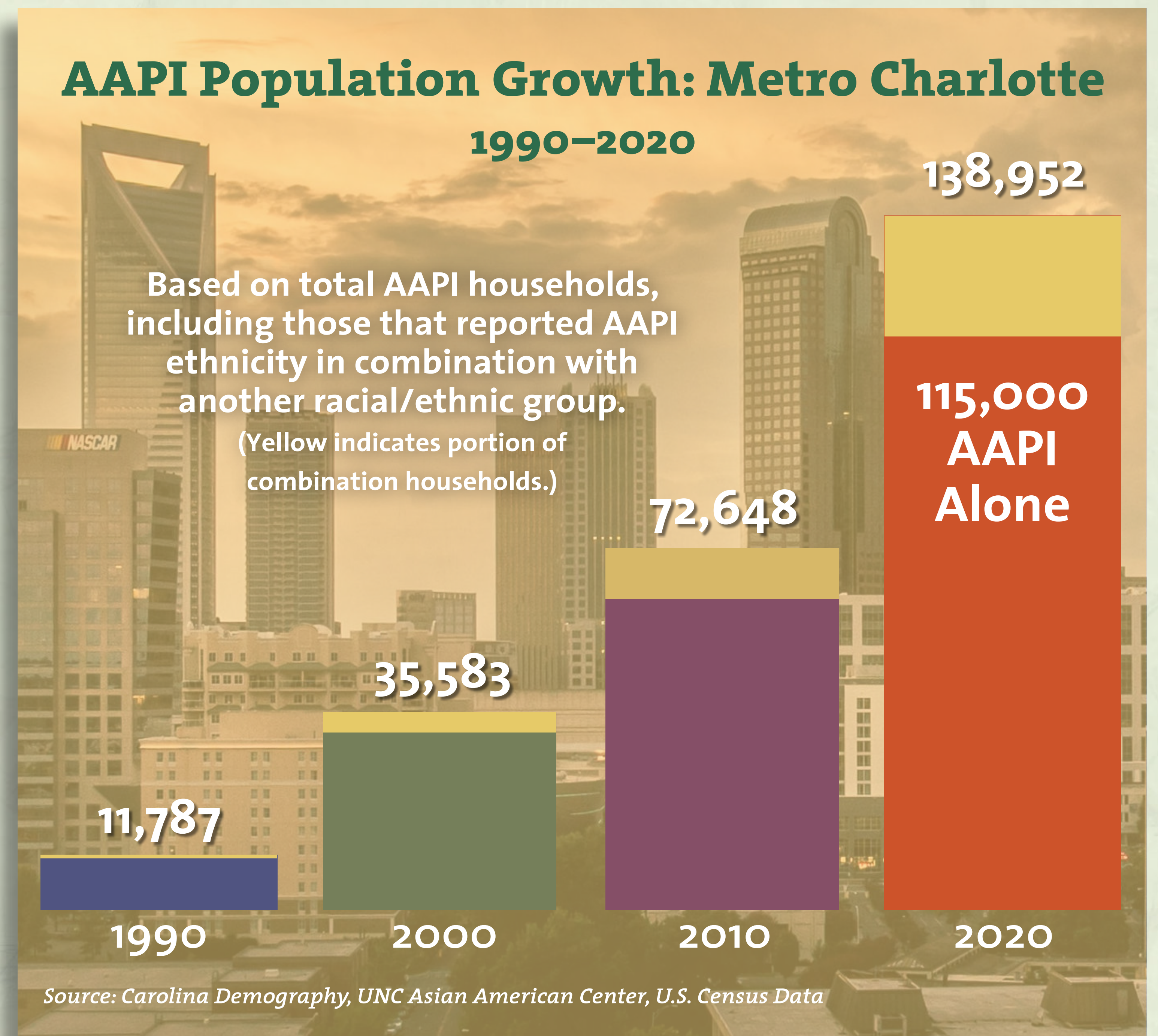
Two Ends of the Economic Ladder

The Asian American population is over-represented at both extremes of the socioeconomic ladder. U.S. immigration law has long had preference categories, which has helped prospective Asian immigrants who come to fill professional positions or reunite with family already here. This has created a skilled, professional class of economically successful Asian Americans. At the other end are those who have arrived here as refugees or entered the country illegally. Any conversation about Asian Americans needs to recognize the vast differences in the Asian immigrant experience.



The New Face of Charlotte

Since the Immigration Act of 1965, each decade has seen increased immigration, with most immigrants coming from Latin America and Asia. The 2020 Census indicates that 20.6 million people in the U.S. identify as Asian, Native Hawaiian, or Pacific Islander, making up 6.2 percent of the total population. Additionally, Asian Americans recorded the fastest population growth rate—a whopping 81%—among all racial and ethnic groups between 2000 and 2019. Six origin groups—Chinese, Indian, Filipino, Vietnamese, Korean, and Japanese—make up 85% of all Asian Americans.



A Place to Call Home

With 89% growth between 2010 and 2020, the Asian population is the fastest-growing racial/ethnic group in metro Charlotte (which grew at 19%). The largest contingent are Indian, followed by Chinese, Vietnamese and Filipino, Korean and Japanese, and 20 other AAPI nationalities and ethnicities. Challenges remain, but Asian Americans have become and continue to be a vital part of the business, social, artistic, and religious tapestry of the greater Charlotte region. We live, work, and play here, and we are proud to call this place home.

Charlotte's Asian Restaurants: Since 1924

The most venerable Asian restaurant in Charlotte was The Oriental Restaurant, a Chinese restaurant that opened on Trade Street in 1924, and then moved in 1967 to Independence Boulevard. The Ming Tree, another upscale Chinese restaurant, operated from 1950 to 1964 at 520 Providence Road. The 1960s brought a number of Chinese restaurants, including the Dragon Inn on E. Morehead, The Rice Bowl on Park Rd., and House of Jung on Montford. Nakato Japanese Steakhouse opened in 1976 on Independence and is now in the University area. The 1970s brought Indian restaurants such as Raga, on Independence, and Maharaja, on Eastway. The late 1980s added restaurants that are still open today, including Lang Van (Vietnamese) on Shamrock, Thai Taste on Monroe Rd. (now on East Blvd.), and Wan Fu (Chinese) on Kettering. Choi's Korean Kitchen opened on Arrowood in 1996.

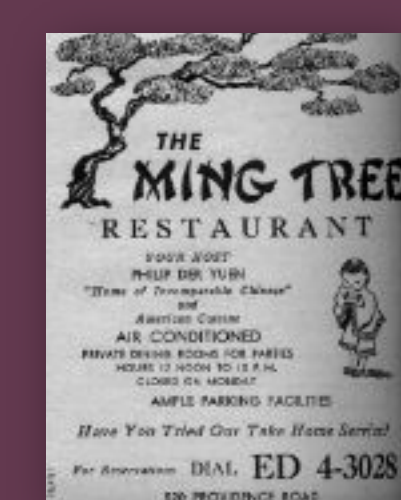


< The Oriental Restaurant opened on September 16, 1924

Advertisement in The Charlotte Observer



The Oriental Restaurant (1924–c. 1987/1990)



The Ming Tree Restaurant (1950–1964)



Dragon Inn c. 1979



House of Jung c. 1979



Raga Indian Cuisine c. 1981



1976



1988



1989



1990



1996



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