

TIMELINE



1587

“Luzon Indios” Filipinos are considered the first Asians in what would be known as America when they arrived in Morro Bay, California.

1790

The first recorded immigrants from India arrive in Massachusetts.

1815

The first recorded immigrants from China arrive in San Francisco.



1848

The California Gold Rush leads to the first large-scale immigration of Chinese to the U.S. due to the aftermath of the Opium Wars when the British levied high taxes against Chinese peasants and farmers and drove them from their land. In addition to military intervention and rampant opium addiction, alternating periods of floods and droughts in China exacerbated the already destabilized region, leading many desperate Chinese people to sail for California in the hopes of survival.

1854

Yung Wing graduates from Yale College, becoming the first Chinese person to graduate from a U.S. college. He goes on to champion higher education for other Chinese by establishing the Chinese Educational Mission, which helps send other Chinese students to U.S. schools. He also writes a memoir, *My Life in China and America*, where he outlines how the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882 impacted his life.

In *People v. Hall*, the California Supreme Court rules that Chinese people (and anyone who “looked Chinese”) cannot testify against whites accused of murder, just as Native American and Black people could not.

1869

The first transcontinental railroad is completed. The Central Pacific crew is made up of primarily Chinese immigrants, while the Union Pacific crew is made up of primarily Irish immigrants. These sides often clash. The laborers work as long as 15 hours a day in treacherous conditions to complete the project. The first Japanese settlers arrive on the U.S. mainland in California.

1870

The Naturalization Act of 1870 restricts citizenship to whites and Blacks, making Chinese people ineligible. Naturalized American citizens of Chinese descent also had their status revoked.

1871

The Chinese Massacre of 1871: 500 white and Hispanic people ran through Old Chinatown in Los Angeles, killing 500 Chinese people — the largest mass lynching in U.S. History.

1875

The Page Act of 1875 (a preamble to the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882) prohibited Chinese women from entering the U.S. under the pretense of “population control.”

1878

A California circuit court rules that *In re Ah Yup* and other residents of Asian descent were not eligible for naturalization, emphasizing that “Orientals” were unfit to participate in government.

1879

California adopts a constitution prohibiting the employment of Chinese immigrants by corporates, states, county or municipal governments.

1882

The Chinese Exclusion Act, the first and only law banning the immigration of a specific ethnic/national demographic, prohibited Chinese immigrants from entering the United States for “10 years.”

1885

Soh Jaipil (anglicized as “Philip Jaisohn”) arrives in the U.S. as a political exile. He becomes the first Korean to be naturalized as a U.S. citizen and the first Korean American medical doctor. He returns home in 1896 and becomes a well-known political activist.

The Rock Springs Massacre: On Sept. 2, white immigrant miners killed 28 Chinese immigrant miners, injured 15, and burned down 78 Chinese homes because they felt Chinese miners were taking all the mining jobs.

The Tacoma Riot: A mob of nearly 500 prominent businessmen, police and political leaders drove 200 Chinese residents out of Tacoma, Washington. The anti-Chinese sentiment was so strong at the time that none of the mob members faced any repercussions.

In *Tape v. Hurley*, the California Supreme Court ruled that the exclusion of Chinese American students from public school based on their ancestry was unlawful, becoming a precursor to *Plessy v. Ferguson* in 1896 and *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka* in 1954.

1886

In *Yick Wo v. Hopkins*, the Supreme Court rules that any law with unequal impact on different groups is discriminatory.

Seattle Riot of 1886: local chapters of the American labor federation, Knights of Labor, methodically expelled 200 Chinese civilians due to labor competition.

1887

The Hells Canyon Massacre (also known as the Snake River Massacre): 34 Chinese gold miners were ambushed, robbed, murdered and mutilated in May 1887.

1892

The Geary Act of 1892 extended the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882 and included provisions such as carrying a “Certificate of Residence” or face detention or deportation.

1893

Hawaii’s monarchy was overthrown by a group of American-backed businessmen, forcing Queen Liliuokalani out of power. Five years later, the United States annexed Hawaii and in 1959 Hawaii became the 50th state.



1898

Guam becomes a U.S. territory after the United States wins the Spanish-American war and The Treaty of Paris is signed.

The U.S. assumes control of the Philippines upon winning the Spanish-American War. The U.S. also illegally annexes Hawaii. In *United States v. Wong Kim Ark*, the Supreme Court upholds the 14th Amendment: that all people born in the U.S., even if they are of Chinese descent, are citizens.

1900

American Samoa officially became a U.S. territory. The Department of Interior was given authority over American Samoa in 1956.

1900-1904

The San Francisco Plague: an epidemic of the bubonic plague occurs in San Francisco’s Chinatown. Medical authorities were aware of the disease, but then-California Gov. Henry Gage denied its existence for more than two years. His reluctance to act on it led to widespread outbreaks throughout the city, including cases identified in Oakland. Originally, 121 cases were identified and 119 people died, but four years later, 160 more cases and 78 more deaths linked to the initial outbreak were documented.

1906

The San Francisco Board of Education segregates Chinese, Japanese and Korean schoolchildren in newly formed “Oriental Schools.”

1907

Theodore Roosevelt issues Executive Order 589, preventing Japanese and Korean people from entering the U.S. mainland. Fueled by anti-Asian sentiment from the Asiatic Exclusion League, the Pacific Coast Race Riots of 1907 occurred in San Francisco, Bellingham, Washington, and Vancouver, Canada.

1910

Angel Island opens in California's San Francisco Bay. Known as the Ellis Island of the West, the immigration station served as the country's major port of entry for Asian immigrants.

1917

The Immigration Act of 1917 was passed to restrict immigration by imposing a literacy test and thus creating new categories of inadmissible persons. One section of the law specified an "Asiatic barred zone," which included immigrants from China, Myanmar (then Burma), Thailand (then Siam) and most Polynesian islands. Occupational exceptions included those who were lawyers, physicians, chemists, civil engineers and merchants.

1922

In *Takao Ozawa v. United States*, the Supreme Court rules that Japanese migrants cannot be naturalized.

1924

The Immigration Act of 1924 effectively prohibits the immigration of all Asians to the U.S.

1927

In *Lum v. Rice*, the Supreme Court ruled that exclusion by race of Chinese American students from school did not violate the 14th Amendment — creating a precedence that would exclude minority children from schools reserved for whites.

1942

After the Attack on Pearl Harbor in 1941, Franklin D. Roosevelt's Executive Order 9066 results in 120,000 Japanese Americans being sent to internment camps.

1943

Congress repeals the Chinese Exclusion Act and grants naturalization rights to some Chinese immigrants already residing in the United States with the Magnuson Act.

1946

The Luce-Celler Act permits 100 Filipinos and 100 Indians to immigrate and become naturalized per year. Wing Ong becomes the first Chinese American not born in the U.S. to be elected to state office. He serves in the Arizona State House of Representatives.

1949

The U.S. grants 5,000 educated Chinese people refugee status after the Communist takeover of China.

1955

The Vietnam War begins, ultimately sparking resistance from many Asian Americans. The Asian American Movement, made up of several grassroots organizations, goes on to reach its peak in the 1960s and '70s.

1956

Dalip Singh Saund of California becomes the first Indian American in Congress.

1958

Japanese American Miyoshi Umeki wins Best Supporting Actress at the 30th Academy Awards for her role in "Sayonara" — the first actor of Asian descent to win an Oscar for acting.

1959

Hiram Fong of Hawaii becomes the first Chinese American in the Senate. Daniel K. Inouye of Hawaii, a World War II veteran, becomes the first Japanese American in Congress. In 1962, Inouye became the first Japanese American elected to the Senate.

1964

Patsy Takemoto Mink of Hawaii becomes the first woman of color in Congress. She is a third-generation Japanese American who grew up in Maui.

1965

Immigration and Nationality Act of 1965 eliminates the national-origins quota system, which had previously provided immigration visas to 2% of the total number of people of each nationality — a quota that largely affected Asians and non-Northwestern Europeans.

1968

The term “Asian American” was coined by historian-activists Yuji Ichioka and Emma Gee during the founding of the Asian American Political Alliance.

1973

The Organization of Chinese Americans (now known as the Asian Pacific American Advocates) is founded to advance the social, political and economic well-being of Asians and Pacific Islanders in the U.S.

The film “Enter the Dragon” is released, making Bruce Lee the first Asian American Hollywood action superstar.

1974

George Ariyoshi becomes the first Asian American governor of a U.S. state — Hawaii.

1975

The war in Vietnam ends, leading to a large migration of Southeast Asian refugees to the U.S.

1979

The first Asian Pacific American Heritage Week is celebrated on May 4. Capitol Hill staffer and member of the Organization of Chinese Americans, Jeanie Jew, is credited for spearheading the initiative along with Ruby Moy.

1980

The U.S. census first uses the term “Asian American.”

1982

The Vietnam War Memorial is dedicated in Washington, D.C., honoring the 57,939 Americans killed in the war.

1985

Ellison Onizuka becomes the first Asian American — and first American of Japanese descent — in space.

1988

The Civil Liberties Act of 1988 pays surviving Japanese American internees \$20,000 each in reparations.

1990

President George H.W. Bush issued a Presidential Proclamation designating May 1990 as the first Asian Pacific American Heritage Month. Two years later, Congress passes legislation making the designation permanent.

1992

Jay Kim of California becomes the first Korean American elected to Congress.

1994

“All American Girl,” starring comedienne Margaret Cho, was the first network sitcom to feature a predominantly Asian American cast.

1997

Astronaut and engineer Kalpana Chawla becomes the first woman of Indian descent to go into space during NASA’s Columbia mission. In 2003, during the second mission, she was one of the seven crew members who died during the Columbia disaster.

1999

Chinese Canadian Andrea Jung becomes the first woman of color CEO of a Fortune 500 company, Avon.

2000

Norman Mineta becomes the first Asian American Cabinet member when he briefly served as President Clinton’s Secretary of Commerce. Mineta goes on to become the Secretary of Transportation for the Bush administration in 2001 — the only Democrat Cabinet member.

2001

September 11th attacks lead to a wave of anti-Asian sentiment and the Patriot Act, which is linked to the unfair detainment of South Asian people in the U.S.

Elaine Chao, who was born in Taiwan, becomes the first woman Asian American Cabinet member. She served as the Secretary of Labor under the Bush administration and goes on to serve as the Secretary of Transportation under President Trump.



2004

The Indian Ocean earthquake and tsunami was one of the deadliest disasters in modern history, killing nearly 230,000 people in countries including Sri Lanka, Thailand and India. Losses were estimated at \$10 billion.

2006

At the 78th Academy Awards, Ang Lee becomes the first person of color and first Asian to win Best Director for "Brokeback Mountain."

2007

Bobby Jindal of Louisiana becomes the first Indian American governor. The National Queer Asian Pacific Islander Alliance is founded to connect Asian American, South Asian, Southeast Asian and Pacific Islander LGBTQ+ organizations and support LGBTQ+ AAPI rights and visibility.

2009

President Obama appoints three Asian Americans to the Cabinet: Gary Locke, Secretary of Commerce; Steven Chu, Energy Secretary; and Eric Shinseki, Veterans Affairs Secretary.

Far East Movement is the first Asian American group to earn a number-one hit on the Billboard Hot 100 chart for the song, "Like a G6."

Speed Skater Apolo Anton Ohno, who is half Japanese, earns eight Olympic medals, becoming the most decorated winter Olympian.

Nikki Haley of South Carolina becomes the first female Indian American governor.

Jeremy Lin becomes the first Taiwanese American player in the NBA, who signed him out of Harvard University into a two-year deal with the Golden State Warriors. He goes on to sign with the Toronto Raptors in 2019, becoming the first Asian American to win an NBA championship.

2013

Kevin Tsujihara, of Japanese American heritage, becomes the first non-white CEO of a major Hollywood studio, Warner Bros. At the 85th Academy Awards, Ang Lee wins his second Oscar for Best Director for "Life of Pi."

2014

Pakistani Activist Malala Yousafzai becomes the youngest person to win the Nobel Peace Prize. She became an advocate for girls' education after 2012 when a Taliban gunman shot her in the head for attending school.

2015

House of Representatives unanimously passes legislation to remove all references to "Orientals" in federal law and replace the term with the more accurate and inclusive "Asian American/Pacific Islanders."

2016

California Attorney General Kamala Harris, who is half Indian, is elected as a Senator. She is the first Indian American to serve in the Senate.

Iraq War veteran Tammy Duckworth becomes the first Thai American woman and the first woman with a disability elected to Congress. In addition to being the first female double amputee in the Senate, Duckworth is also the first Senator to give birth while in office.

The U.S. government formally banned the use of the derogatory term "Oriental" from federal law, replacing it with the term Asian American.

The Disney film "Moana" premieres and grosses \$247 million in the U.S. To ensure a culturally accurate representation of the film's main character, a Polynesian princess, Disney enlists the help of anthropologists, linguists, historians, choreographers and cultural practitioners from islands including Samoa, Tahiti, Mo'orea and Fiji.

2018

Korean pop group BTS reaches No. 1 on the Billboard 200. The band grows a dedicated fanbase and an interest in K-pop music stateside.

2019

Sandra Oh wins the Golden Globe for Best Performance in a Television Series – Drama for her role in "Killing Eve."

2020

Nora "Awkwafina" Lum becomes the first Asian American to win Best Actress at the Golden Globes for her role in "The Farewell."

At the 92nd Academy Awards, Korean filmmaker, Bong Joonho's "Parasite" wins four Oscars, including Best Picture — the first non-English language film to win the category.

Stop AAPI Hate is founded to track the surge in anti-Asian hate crimes in America stemming from the COVID-19 pandemic.

2021

Kamala Harris is sworn in as the first woman Vice President of the United States, becoming the highest-ranking female official in history. Half Filipina singer H.E.R. wins the Grammy for Song of the Year for “I Can’t Breathe” — inspired by the nationwide protests over the death of George Floyd.

At the 93rd Academy Awards, in addition to one of the most diverse slate of nominees, it’s a banner year for Asian representation:

Beijing-born Chloé Zhao becomes the first woman of color, first Asian woman and only second women ever to be nominated and win Best Director for her film, “Nomadland.” Along with nominations for Best Picture, adapted screenplay and editing, Zhao is also the first woman ever to receive four nominations in a single year. Zhao is joined by Korean American director of “Minari,” Lee Isaac Chung — the first time two directors of Asian descent were nominated for Best Director.

Korean American Steven Yeun became the first Asian American nominated for Best Actor for his role in “Minari.” He is joined by British-Pakistani Riz Ahmed for his role in “Sound of Metal.” For the first time, two actors of Asian heritage were nominated for Best Actor in the same year.

Youn Yuh-jung becomes the first Korean actress to win Best Supporting Actress for her role in “Minari.”

“Raya and the Last Dragon” is Disney’s first animated movie featuring a Southeast Asian princess. The film is voiced by Kelly Marie Tran, the first Southeast Asian actor to lead an animated feature from the studio.

Marvel’s “Shang-Chi and the Legend of the Ten Rings,” starring Simu Liu, is the first big-budget American blockbuster to feature an Asian superhero.

2022

Frederic Aspiras, who styled Lady Gaga in the film “House of Gucci,” is the second Asian American to be nominated for a hair and makeup Oscar.

Actress Anna May Wong became the first Asian American to appear on U.S. currency.

Patricia Lee was the first Asian American and African American woman to serve on the Nevada Supreme Court.

Aruna Miller became the nation’s first South Asian woman elected state lieutenant governor of Maryland.

Rob Bonta was elected California’s first Filipino American attorney general.

2023

Michelle Yeoh made history as the first Asian woman to win the Oscar for best actress for her performance in “Everything Everywhere All at Once.” Ke Huy Quan also wins a best supporting actor Oscar for his role in “Everything Everywhere All at Once.” The distinction makes Quan, who is Chinese Vietnamese, the second actor of Asian descent to win in this category.

The Biden-Harris Administration released its first-ever National Strategy to Advance Equity, Justice and Opportunity for Asian American, Native Hawaiian and Pacific Islander communities.

