

AAPI Heritage Month Timeline

1587

“Indios Luzones” 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 arrived in Massachusetts.

1815

The first recorded immigrants from China arrived in San Francisco.

1848

The California Gold Rush led to the first large-scale Chinese immigration to the United States. Due to the aftermath of the Opium Wars, 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 graduated from Yale College, becoming the first Chinese person to graduate from a U.S. college. He championed higher education for other Chinese by establishing the Chinese Educational Mission, which helped send other Chinese students to U.S. schools. He also wrote a memoir, *My Life*

in China and America, outlining how the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882 impacted his life.

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

1869

The first transcontinental railroad was completed. The Central Pacific crew was primarily made up of Chinese immigrants, while the Union Pacific crew was made up of primarily Irish immigrants. These sides would often clash. The laborers worked as long as 15 hours a day in treacherous conditions to complete the project.

The first Japanese settlers arrived on the U.S. mainland in California.

1870

The Naturalization Act of 1870 restricted 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. This event stands as 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

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

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1879

California adopted a constitution prohibiting the employment of Chinese immigrants by corporations, states, counties 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 U.S. for “10 years.”



1885

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

The Rock Springs Massacre: On September 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, WA. 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 excluding 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 ruled 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 facing 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 U.S. annexed Hawaii and in 1959 Hawaii became the 50th state.

1898

Guam became a U.S. territory after the United States won the Spanish-American war and The Treaty of Paris was signed.

The U.S. assumed control of the Philippines upon winning the Spanish-American War. The U.S. also illegally annexed Hawaii.

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In *United States v. Wong Kim Ark*, the Supreme Court upheld the 14th Amendment: 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 occurred in San Francisco's Chinatown. Medical authorities were aware of the disease, but then-California Gov. Henry Gage denied its existence for over 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 segregated Chinese, Japanese and Korean schoolchildren in newly formed "Oriental Schools."

1907

Theodore Roosevelt issued 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, CA, Bellingham, WA and Vancouver, Canada.

1910

Angel Island opened 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 ruled that Japanese migrants cannot be naturalized.

1924

The Immigration Act of 1924 effectively prohibited 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 precedent 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 resulted in 120,000 Japanese Americans being sent to internment camps.



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1943

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

1946

The Luce-Celler Act permitted 100 Filipinos and 100 Indians to immigrate and become naturalized yearly.

Wing Ong became the first Chinese American not born in the U.S. to be elected to a state office. He served in the Arizona State House of Representatives.

1949

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

1955

The Vietnam War began, sparking resistance from many Asian Americans. The Asian American Movement, which was made up of several grassroots organizations, reached its peak in the 1960s and '70s.

1957

Dalip Singh Saund of California became the first Asian American, first Indian American and first Sikh to serve in Congress.

1958

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

1959

Hiram Fong of Hawaii became the first Chinese American in the Senate.

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

1965

The Immigration and Nationality Act of 1965 eliminated 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.

Patsy Mink of Hawaii was sworn in as the first Asian American woman and the first woman of color to serve in Congress. She was a third-generation Japanese American who grew up in Maui.

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) was founded to advance the social, political and economic well-being of Asians and Pacific Islanders in the U.S.

The film "Enter the Dragon" was released, making Bruce Lee the first Asian American Hollywood action superstar.



1974

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

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1975

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

1979

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

1980

The U.S. Census first used the term “Asian American.”

1982

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

1985

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

1988

The Civil Liberties Act of 1988 paid 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 passed legislation making the designation permanent.

1992

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

1994

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

1997

Astronaut and engineer Kalpana Chawla became 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 became the first woman of color CEO of a Fortune 500 company, Avon.

2000

Norman Mineta became the first Asian American Cabinet member when he briefly served as President Clinton’s Secretary of Commerce. Mineta was also the Secretary of Transportation for the Bush administration in 2001. He was the only Democrat Cabinet member.

2001

The September 11th attacks led 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, became the first woman Asian American Cabinet member. She served as the Secretary of Labor under the Bush administration and Secretary of Transportation under President Trump.

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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 million.

2006

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

2007

Bobby Jindal of Louisiana became the first Indian American governor.

The National Queer Asian Pacific Islander Alliance was founded to connect Asian American, South Asian, Southeast Asian and Pacific Islander LGBTQ+ organizations and support LGBTQ+ AAPI rights and visibility.

2009

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

Far East Movement was 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, earned eight Olympic medals, becoming the most decorated winter Olympian.

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

Jeremy Lin was the first Taiwanese American player in the NBA, who signed him out of Harvard University in a two-year deal with the Golden State Warriors. In 2019,

he signed with the Toronto Raptors and became the first Asian American to win an NBA championship.

2013

Kevin Tsujihara became the first non-white CEO of a major Hollywood studio, Warner Bros.

At the 85th Academy Awards, Ang Lee won his second Oscar for Best Director for “Life of Pi.”

2014

Pakistani Activist Malala Yousafzai was 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

The House of Representatives unanimously passed 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, was elected state senator. She is the first Indian American to serve in the Senate.



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2020

Nora “Awkwafina” Lum became 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 Joon Ho’s “Parasite” won four Oscars, including Best Picture – the first non-English language film to win the category.

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

2021

Kamala Harris was sworn in as the first female, first Black and first Asian American vice president of the United States.

Half-Filipina singer H.E.R. won the Grammy for Song of the Year for “I Can’t Breathe,” inspired by the nationwide protests over the death of George Floyd.

The 93rd Academy Awards, in addition to having one of the most diverse slate of nominees, was a banner year for Asian representation:

Beijing-born Chloé Zhao became the first woman of color, the first Asian woman and the second woman 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 was 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 was joined by British-Pakistani Riz Ahmed for his role in “Sound of Metal.”

Iraq War veteran Tammy Duckworth became 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” premiered and grossed \$247 million in the U.S. To ensure a culturally accurate representation of the film’s main character, a Polynesian princess, Disney enlisted the help of anthropologists, linguists, historians, choreographers and cultural practitioners from islands including Samoa, Tahiti, Mo’orea and Fiji.

2018

“Crazy Rich Asians” broke box office records, becoming North America’s highest-earning romantic comedy in a decade.

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For the first time, two actors of Asian heritage were nominated for Best Actor in the same year. Youn Yuh-jung became the first Korean actress to win Best Supporting Actress for her role in “Minari.”

“Raya and the Last Dragon” was Disney’s first animated movie featuring a Southeast Asian princess. The film was 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, was the first big-budget American blockbuster to feature an Asian superhero.

2022

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

Patricia Lee became 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 became the first Asian woman to win the Oscar’s Best Actress award for her performance in “Everything Everywhere All at Once.” Ke Huy Quan won a Best Supporting Actor Oscar for his role in the film. 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.

2024

Netflix’s “Beef” won the Golden Globe for best television limited series. The comedy-drama, which stars actor Steven Yeun and comedian Ali Wong, made history and became the first show created by and starring Asian Americans to win in its category.

