



Finding a Path Forward

**ASIAN AMERICAN PACIFIC ISLANDER
NATIONAL HISTORIC LANDMARKS THEME STUDY**

Edited by Franklin Odo





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AAPI Political Mobilization and Participation

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This essay focuses on the emergence and participation of Asian American and Pacific Islanders (AAPIs) in the United States (U.S.) political landscape. Chinese immigrants arrived in the U.S. as low wage workers with limited knowledge of the nation they were entering and found they were denied virtually all political rights. As part of this political assault, in 1882 Chinese laborers were singled out for immigration exclusion, as they were viewed as an economic threat by white working people and the larger society that viewed them as unassimilable to U.S. values. However, despite being marginalized by discriminatory laws, Chinese Americans and, later, other Asian immigrants were undeterred and engaged in ethnic group political activities, sought civil rights guaranteed by the U.S. Constitution, and some second-generation Asian Americans began to vote and participate in traditional political activities by the 1930s. World

The First Japanese Embassy to the United States was photographed at the Washington Navy Yard in May 1860.
Photo courtesy of National Archives and Records Administration.





Crowd in front of 'Iolani Palace, circa 1900. Photo #1501, Hawai'i War Records Depository; courtesy of the University Archives & Manuscripts Department, University of Hawai'i at Manoa Library.

World War II was a watershed for Asian Americans politically, as for the second time in the U.S. an Asian ethnic group was singled out for the denial of civil rights. This time it was Japanese Americans, who were forced to leave their homes and farms on the west coast, including Hawai'i, interned in isolated camps with few political rights, and guarded by the military throughout the war. During this same period, the U.S. government eliminated the exclusion of Chinese American labor as part of its war efforts against Japan, with no apology or acknowledgement of the harm it caused.

Asian Americans emerged from World War II politically marginalized in communities isolated from the larger society. Yet in a single generation, many Asian Americans moved from the margins to political activism and active participation in the 1960s and 1970s in electoral politics and civil rights advocacy. The passage of the 1965 Immigration and Nationality Act liberalized U.S. policy and started a large migration of Asians and Pacific Islanders to this nation that has contributed to the growth and diversity of the AAPI population. Beginning in the mid-1970s, thousands of political refugees from Southeast Asia fled their homelands and came to the U.S.; they have struggled to affirm their identity in the midst of numerous economic, linguistic, and cultural challenges. These two streams of migrants and refugees have participated in both grassroots and electoral politics. Today, AAPIs have achieved some of the highest elected and appointed positions in the political world,

while many still live in communities with limited political participation and access to resources. To overcome these obstacles, AAPIs are in the process of building the organizational capacity and resources to advance their political aspirations and address the social and economic problems that confront their community.

EARLY POLITICAL PARTICIPATION EFFORTS

Upon their arrival to the U.S. as sojourners seeking better lives and economic opportunities from the mid-1800s to the 1920s, Asian immigrants, including Chinese, Japanese, East Indians, Koreans, and Filipinos, were confronted with harsh and low-paying working conditions, racism and violence, and the denial of basic political rights. Asian immigrants were denied citizenship through the naturalization process that European immigrants obtained during the same era. Numerous laws were passed designed to prevent Asian immigrants from being treated equally, including the right to vote. The lack of citizenship did not deter Asian immigrants from challenging the lack of political rights. Chinese immigrants filed hundreds of legal cases challenging the denial of their disenfranchisement of their rights, including the case of Wong Kim Ark, a native-born American citizen of Chinese descent whose case reaffirmed birth-right citizenship for people born in the United States, regardless of race (*United States v. Wong Kim Ark*, 1898).

In the period before World War II, although limited by anti-Asian laws that disenfranchised immigrants from traditional political activities such as voting by first generation settlers, Asian immigrants were active in both homeland politics and various political mobilizations, including the 1905 anti-American boycott organized by Chinese reformers in exile and merchants in China who were opposed to how Chinese immigrants were abused and discriminated against in the U.S. Later, Chinese Americans and others organized boycotts of Japanese goods following the invasion of China by Japan in the 1930s. There were also protests and boycotts by Korean immigrants against Japanese occupation of their homeland, and South Asian immigrants were active in anticolonial campaigns to end British rule in India. These protests were early forms of group political protest and were often coordinated with groups in their countries of origin.

In addition to group protests, Asian immigrants

initially formed fraternal associations usually based on their occupation or the region of the country they came from, and often these associations served as vehicles for advocating for group rights, such as the Laundrymen's Association, in various cities. For example, in New York City, Chinese workers formed the Hand Laundryman's Alliance in the 1930s to challenge policies that favored white workers. During this same period, civil rights organizations, such as the Chinese American Citizens Alliance (CACA) and the Japanese American Citizens League (JACL), were formed to advocate for civil rights. Some second-generation Japanese Americans formed Young Democrat clubs to participate in local party politics. Asian immigrants were also active in homeland politics, such as opposing the occupation of China and Korea by Japan. Second-generation Chinese Americans, including women, began to vote in cities such as San Francisco, although they had virtually no political representation on the mainland. In Hawai'i, on the other hand, the children of Asian immigrants began to participate and run for political office in the territorial government by the 1930s.

Following WWII, many AAPIs sought ways to participate in the political system. A few Asian Americans began to seek elected office and were early political pioneers. An early effort in 1956 was by Dalip Singh Saund, a successful businessperson; he was elected to the U.S.



Shiro Kashino, a decorated veteran of World War II, stands with his family and Senator Daniel Inouye during the dedication of the Nisei veterans memorial. Left to right: Shiro Kashino, Debbie McQuilken, Senator Daniel Inouye, and Louise Kashino. Photo by Akio Yanagihara, 1988; courtesy of the Densho Digital Repository, Yanagihara Family Collection.

Congress from the Riverside and Imperial Valley areas of California. Congressman Singh Saund was a trailblazer in many respects. He was born in 1899 in a rural village in Punjab Province, India. He came to the United States in 1920 to attend the University of California and graduated in 1922 with both an M.A. and Ph.D; he went on to become a farmer in the Imperial Valley. Mr. Singh Saund became a citizen of the United States in 1949, and in 1952 he was elected as a local judge and served until his resignation in 1957. He was a delegate to the Democratic National Conventions in 1952, 1956, and 1960; he was elected as a Democrat to Congress in the 85th district and to the two succeeding Congresses (January 3, 1957-January 3, 1963). He died in 1973 in California.

In Hawai'i, Native Hawaiians and Asians participated in territorial politics before WWII, although they were politically marginalized and only held a few seats. The Republican Party was the dominant political power for decades while it was a territory of the United States. In 1954, the Democratic Party was able to achieve electoral victory in legislative races and win the majority of seats in the territorial houses. In 1959, when Hawai'i became a state, Asian Americans, who were the majority of Hawaii's population, were elected to numerous state and local offices including the House and Senate seats.

A notable elected official from Hawai'i in this period was Hiram Fong. He was born in Honolulu, Hawai'i in 1906. His parents immigrated from China to Hawai'i. Mr. Fong became the Deputy Attorney for the City and County of Honolulu from 1935 to 1938. He also served 14 years in the Legislature of the Territory of Hawai'i from 1938 to 1954. He was Vice-President of the Hawaii State Constitutional Convention in 1950 and was a strong supporter of statehood for Hawai'i. After statehood was established, Hiram Fong was elected to the U.S. Senate in 1959 and became the first American of Asian ancestry to be elected. Fong, a Republican, was re-elected until he retired in 1977. He remains the only Chinese American elected to the U.S. Senate.

The most well-known Asian American elected



U.S. Representatives, including Nita Lowey, Pat Schroeder, Patsy Mink, Jolene Unsoeld, Eleanor Holmes Norton and Ileana Ros-Lehtinen, walking by the U.S. Capitol on their way to the Senate. Patsy Mink is second from the right. Photo by Maureen Keating, 1991; courtesy of the Library of Congress.

leader was Daniel K. Inouye who was also from Hawai'i. He was born in the City of Honolulu in 1924 and fought in World War II as a member of the 442nd Infantry Regimental Combat Team. He was wounded and received several military decorations, including the Medal of Honor. When he returned to Hawai'i, he was elected to the territorial House of Representatives in 1953 and to the territorial Senate in 1957. When Hawai'i became a state in 1959, Inouye was elected as its first member of the U.S. House of Representatives. In 1962, he was elected to the U.S. Senate, where he remained until he died in 2012. He was the first Japanese American to serve in the U.S. House of Representatives and later became the first Japanese American in the U.S. Senate. He was undefeated in 58 years as an elected official.

In this early period, mostly in California where the largest numbers of AAPIs lived following WWII, Asian Americans began to be elected to office in small numbers as city council members and on school boards. For example, in Oakland, California, the first Japanese American to sit on a city council on the mainland was Frank Ogawa, who was appointed to the city council in 1966 and was followed closely by Raymond Eng, a

Chinese American, who was elected in 1967. The plaza facing Oakland City Hall is named after Frank Ogawa for his many civic accomplishments.

An additional Asian American political pioneer was Alfred H. Song. He was born in Hawai'i of Korean ancestry and moved to the mainland to attend the University of Southern California where he obtained a B.A. and a law degree. He began his political career in the City of Monterey Park as a city council member in 1960 and soon after was elected to represent the San Gabriel Valley in the California State Assembly in 1962; he was the first Asian American elected to the California legislature. He was elected to the State Senate in 1966 and stayed in office until 1978; he began a long line of Asian Americans elected in the area east of the City of Los Angeles.

Another location of early political activism was Seattle, Washington, where Wing Luke was an early pioneer in electoral politics. Wing Luke was elected to the Seattle City Council in 1962; he became the first Chinese American from a major mainland city to hold elected local office. Wing Chong Luke was born in a village near Guangzhou, China, in 1925 and soon moved with

his family to Seattle in 1931. Although Wing Luke was a recent immigrant, he became a student body president at a local high school and fought in World War II. After the war ended, Wing Luke attended the University of Washington for his B.A. and law degrees. Before being elected to the Seattle City Council in 1962, he served as an Assistant Attorney General from 1957 to 1962. He died at the age of 40 in a plane crash. In honor of Wing Luke's contributions, in 1966 the Wing Luke Asian Museum was established in Seattle's International District and still exists today as a testament to his legacy and serves as a focal point of the Asian and Pacific Islander experience in Seattle.

AAPI WOMEN ELECTED OFFICIALS EMERGE

The initial political leaders that were elected to office were not only men; in Hawai'i, Washington, and California, strong Asian American women were elected in this earlier era. In Hawai'i, Patsy Mink joined the efforts of other second-generation Japanese Americans who mobilized Democrats to take control of the state government from the Republican Party in 1954. She was elected to the territorial House in 1956 and territorial Senate in 1959. Mink served in the Hawai'i State Senate from 1962 to 1964, when she was elected to the U.S. House of Representatives. She served with distinction from 1964 to 1977 and again from 1990 to 2002. Ms. Mink also held numerous other leadership roles at the local and national level throughout her career. Also, she was a co-sponsor of a groundbreaking piece of legislation, Title IX of the 1972 Amendments to the Education Act, which prohibits sex discrimination in education, and the bill was later renamed in her honor.

Another AAPI woman pioneer was March Fong Eu; she was a third generation Californian and was born in the small Central Valley community of Oakdale in 1922. She moved to the San Francisco Bay Area and earned a B.A. at the University of California, Berkeley, an M.A. at Mills College, and an E.D. at Stanford University. She taught and worked in education and served for three terms on the Alameda County Board of Education. In 1966, Fong Eu was elected to the California State Assembly from the 15th District, representing the Oakland area. Fong Eu was later elected Secretary of State of California in 1974, becoming the first Asian American woman elected to a state constitutional office in the United

States. Later, in 1994 to 1996, she served as the U.S. Ambassador to the Federated States of Micronesia.

Ruby Chow, a Chinese American pioneer, was born on Seattle's fishing docks in 1920 and was one of 10 children. Ruby Chow grew up poor; however, she rose to become a restaurant owner. In 1973, she was elected to the King County Council, where she served three terms before retiring in 1985. She also became the first woman elected president of a local chapter of the Chong Wa Benevolent Association, an international organization that advocates for Chinese immigrants.

These women pioneers and others who became active in local electoral political activities established a presence and visibility of Asian American women leaders in Asian American communities that have grown and flourished in succeeding generations.

BIRTH OF THE ASIAN AMERICAN MOVEMENT IN THE 1960S-1970S

While Asian Americans were beginning to participate in local and state elections and other forms of traditional political activities, beginning in the 1960s, a new generation of activists emerged on university campuses and in the Civil Rights Movement who began to speak out on issues of the day such as the Vietnam War, the Civil Rights Movement, and other concerns. A popular issue raised by young people was a demand that the study of Asian American history should be offered in universities, so people of Asian descent and others could learn the history of Asian Americans in the U.S. and why their ancestors migrated to this country. To learn about their communities, many young Asian American students went into ethnic community hubs in Chinatowns, Japantowns, and Manilatowns to learn from the community residents and seniors who lived in the U.S. before World War II. This diverse group of young and veteran activists joined together to create the Asian American Movement to form pan-ethnic identity efforts and address issues confronting Asian American and Pacific Islander students, workers, and communities, such as affordable housing, access to health care, and worker rights.

Veteran Filipino labor activists, including Phillip Vera Cruz and Larry Itliong, helped form the United Farm Workers Union with Cesar Chavez and Dolores Huerta, and they were an inspiration to the young generation of activists who supported efforts to unionize

farm workers and provide decent working conditions. Other Manongs joined with young activists to preserve the International Hotel in the remnants of a once flourishing Manilatown in San Francisco. There were similar efforts to preserve Japantowns and Chinatowns by young people and elders in numerous cities across the country. The veteran labor and community activists were instrumental in educating the 1960s to 1970s generation of young people about their own histories in this country and their struggles for political participation and worker rights and against racism. Out of these efforts grew several community institutions that still exist today, including law centers, health centers, as well as youth and elderly service providers. These newer institutions complemented the previous civil rights organizations, ethnic associations, and some community churches that provided an institutional infrastructure for political efforts.

AAPI ELECTORAL GROWTH

The challenge for AAPIs is to build beyond a legacy of AAPI political pioneers and develop the capacity for political succession of subsequent AAPI elected officials. AAPIs have worked to build an ongoing pipeline of future generations of elected leaders in the U.S. For example, it took 35 years from 1966 to 2000 for two more AAPI women, Wilma Chan and Carol Liu, to be elected to the California State Assembly after March Fong Eu was first elected. This was followed in 2001 by the election of Judy Chu to the California Assembly; Ms. Chu was later elected to the U.S. House of Representatives in 2009 and became the first Chinese American woman elected to this position. Currently she chairs the Congressional Asian Pacific American Caucus (CAPAC). Today, AAPI women have been elected in cities and to school boards and to state and federal level positions throughout the U.S.; in fact, they outnumber their AAPI male counterparts in Congress.

Another early Asian American pioneer is Norman Mineta, who served in many elected and appointed positions in government, including Mayor of the City of San Jose, U.S. Congressman, Commerce Secretary in the Clinton Administration, and Transportation Secretary in the Bush administration. Mineta and his family are among the 120,000 Americans of Japanese ancestry who were incarcerated in camps during World War II. After

the war, Mineta became active in civic affairs and served as a San Jose City Council member from 1967 to 1971 and mayor from 1971 to 1974. He was the first Asian Pacific American mayor of a major U.S. city. From 1975 to 1995, he went on to serve as a member of the U.S. House of Representatives. While serving in Congress, Mineta played a key role behind the passage of H.R. 442, the Civil Liberties Act of 1988. With this act, the U.S. government officially apologized and provided reparations for the wrongs suffered by Japanese Americans during the war years. Following his service in Congress, Mr. Mineta then served as Secretary of Commerce under President Bill Clinton and became the first Asian Pacific American to serve in the Cabinet of the United States. In 2001, he became the Secretary of Transportation, appointed by President George W. Bush, where he also served with distinction until stepping down in 2006. Mr. Mineta remains active in Asian Pacific Islander affairs, and he is a bridge between the elected leaders of the pioneer generation to today's contemporary era of AAPI political leaders.

GROWTH OF AAPI POPULATION AND AAPI ELECTED AND APPOINTED OFFICIALS

The first systematic study of the numbers of AAPIs in electoral positions was conducted in 1976 by Professor Don Nakanishi at the University of California, Los Angeles; at the time, there were relatively few AAPI elected officials in the states and localities outside of Hawai'i. In 1970, the U.S. Census Bureau counted only 1.4 million Asian Americans; more than 40 percent were Japanese American, and 32 percent were Chinese American. By 1980, the number of Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders had increased to 3.7 million, and in 1990, the number grew to 7.3 million, reflecting both growth as well as migration from Asian countries and the entrance of large numbers of political refugees from Southeast Asia. The AAPI population increased not only in its size but also in its diversity. Groups that did not even appear on the 1970 Census—including Asian Indian, Vietnamese, and Korean Americans—are now among the five largest AAPI populations in the U.S. The numbers of people that identify as Southeast Asian Americans, including Cambodian, Laotian, Hmong, and Mien, have grown in size as have the populations of Pacific Islander Americans, including Native Hawaiian, Samoan, Ton-

gan, and Guamanian.

By 1995, there were over 230 AAPIs elected, including one governor, two U.S. senators, 20 mayors, 204 judges, and other local elected seats, such as the election of Tony Lam from Westminster, California, the first Vietnamese American elected to office in the U.S. While Hawai'i dominated the numbers of AAPIs elected to office, there were AAPIs elected in 31 states, including Alaska, Arizona, Texas, and Ohio. In 1996, a presidential election year, Asian Americans launched a first-ever national voter registration campaign to enfranchise Asian Americans, and thousands of AAPIs were registered for the first time. Gary Locke was also elected as Governor of Washington, becoming the first Chinese American to win the highest elected position in any state; he previously served in the state assembly and as King County's Executive. Also, in 1996, the election of Mike Honda of San Jose to the California Assembly was important as he became only the second AAPI elected to the California legislature.

Unfortunately, the 1996 elections were marred with allegations of illegal campaign finance activities directed at a few Asian and Asian American donors and fundraisers. There were fears that the intense media and partisan attention paid to potential campaign violations would have a detrimental impact on turnout and future involvement of AAPIs in electoral politics. However, as noted in the 8th Edition of the Asian Pacific American Almanac, there was a 10 percent increase in the number

of AAPI elected officials nationally in 1996. Also in 1996, AAPIs were elected in 33 states; they included new immigrants and refugees who arrived in the U.S. over the past three decades beginning in the 1960s.

Following the 2000 elections at the national level, George W. Bush was elected U.S. President, and he appointed two Asian Americans to the Presidential Cabinet, Norman Mineta, as Secretary of Transportation, and Elaine Chao, as Secretary of Labor, the first time two AAPIs served simultaneously in the Cabinet. The numbers of AAPIs had grown to 2,200 elected and major appointed officials from more than 30 states. There were also AAPI officials from American Samoa, Guam, and the Northern Mariana Islands who served in local, state, and federal roles.

In 2002, Mee Moua became the first Hmong American elected to office in the U.S.; her election to a Minnesota State Senate seat is an example of the new generation of AAPI elected officials in non-traditional locations. Ms. Moua was born in Laos, lived in a refugee camp for three years in Thailand, and came with her family to Wisconsin and later to Minnesota. She attended law school and then became involved in local politics before winning a special election to represent the east side of St. Paul. Mee Moua is currently President and Executive Director of Asian Americans Advancing Justice (AAAJ). The rise of Hmong Americans, such as Mee Moua and others that have followed into elected office, is a testament to this community's perseverance to have



Representative Patsy Mink announces the formation of the Congressional Asian Pacific American Caucus at a press conference, with (left to right) Representatives Don Edwards and Norman Mineta, Guam Delegate Robert Underwood, and Representatives Nancy Pelosi and Neil Abercrombie. Photo by Laura Patterson, May 20, 1994; courtesy of the Library of Congress.

a voice in the U.S. political process as refugees.

By the 2000s, AAPI politics were growing in suburban areas of the U.S. beyond the traditional gateway cities. AAPIs were traditionally elected in the large urban centers where significant numbers of AAPIs reside; however, due to political competition with other ethnic minorities and difficulties of creating districts with high concentrations of AAPIs, in many cases they were unable to be re-elected. However, due to immigration patterns of middle class immigrants from Taiwan, China, India, South Korea, and refugees from Southeast Asia, many have settled in the suburbs. This has resulted in a dramatic shift in population in places such as Monterey Park, California, which became an Asian American majority population in the 1980s. By the 2000s, cities such as Daly City, Cupertino, Fremont, Sunnyvale, Irvine, Torrance, Westminster, and Garden Grove in California all saw large growth in the Asian American population. The largest numbers of AAPIs still live in the large urban centers such as New York City, Los Angeles, San Francisco, San Jose, San Diego, and Philadelphia. Both of these trends reflect the rapid growth of the AAPI population and their political participation in both types of localities as well as increasingly on the state level.

By 2010, the AAPI population had grown to 14.7 million and more than 17.4 million, if Asians alone and in combination with persons of other races are included. In 2014, there were over 4,000 AAPI elected and major appointed officials at all levels of government. This includes 360 federal representatives, state representatives, governors and lieutenant governors, mayors, county and city council members, and an additional 304 judges. The AAPI elected and appointed officials are located in 39 different states as well as American Samoa, Guam, and the Northern Mariana Islands. Among the notable firsts was the election of two Indian Americans as Governors, Nikki Haley in South Carolina and Piyush “Bobby” Jindal in Louisiana. Also, several new AAPI Congressional members were elected, including Dr. Ami Bera and Mark Takano both from California, Tammy Duckworth from Illinois, and Grace Meng from New York City. The election of Maizie Hirono as U.S. Senator from Hawai‘i was also another landmark, as she became the first Asian American woman elected to the Senate. After humble beginnings in Japan and later in Honolulu, she became an attorney and rose through the

ranks of Hawai‘i politics as a State legislator and Congresswoman before being elected U.S. senator.

In 2011 and 2012, there were more local successes for AAPIs; the election of two Chinese Americans in major U.S. cities broke ground as the first Asian Americans elected as mayors in their respective cities. Edwin Lee was elected in San Francisco, and Jean Quan was elected in nearby Oakland. These two local leaders were both instrumental in moving economic development and job creation during the extremely difficult recession beginning in 2008.

AAPIs have taken significant steps forward from their humble beginnings to advance politically in this nation. They have grown from a handful of elected officials in a few cities and state offices, to holding office in numerous states in virtually all regions of the country, as the population has dispersed from the traditional gateway cities on the west and east coasts. Whereas in the 1970s, most Asian American elected officials were born and raised in the United States (California U.S. Senator, S.I. Hayakawa, born in Canada, being the exception) and were primarily Japanese and Chinese Americans, by 2014, there were large numbers of immigrants and American-born Southeast Asians, South Asians, Filipinos, and Korean Americans being elected to office. There have been other notable AAPI political success stories. Gary Locke, after being elected as the first Chinese American Governor of Washington in 1996, later became the Secretary of Commerce in the first Obama Administration and then from 2011 to 2014, he served as the U.S. Ambassador to China in the Obama administration.

While AAPIs overwhelmingly live in electoral districts where they are the minority of the population, in a growing trend outside of Hawai‘i, AAPIs are becoming the majority or near majority in several local communities, and this fact has the potential to increase their representation in a fashion similar to the trajectory of other ethnic minority groups in the U.S. There are now an estimated 511,000 elected positions in the U.S.; AAPIs are still heavily underrepresented holding far less than 1 percent of all positions although they are perhaps 8 percent of the U.S. population. Electoral representation for many AAPIs is extremely challenging. Pacific Islanders have limited political representation on the mainland, yet their communities have educational, social, and economic challenges that necessitate

political solutions. Similarly, the entry of refugees from Southeast Asia to the U.S. since the late 1970s has been uneven as evidenced on the east coast of Texas, in New Orleans, in several communities in the Midwest, and in most West Coast states. Many Cambodians and Laotians have faced difficult transitions with limited political influence and challenging economic situations for the majority of first generation refugees and their children. Hmong Americans have organized and been successful in electing some of their members to political office even though their population numbers are small. Vietnamese Americans are the largest Asian refugee community, and in some places, their population numbers and organizing efforts have enabled them to become influential in local politics such as in Garden Grove, Westminster, and San Jose, California, where they have been successful in winning local and state races and serving not only their communities but the larger populations as well.

BUILDING AN ORGANIZATIONAL INFRASTRUCTURE FOR AAPIS

To sustain the growth of AAPIs winning electoral seats requires the building of organizational infrastructures that can help sustain and nurture efforts and bring more AAPIs into electoral politics. This effort is taking many forms; there are active AAPI caucuses of elected officials, such as the Asian Pacific American Municipal Officials (APAMO) caucus of the National League of Cities and similar caucuses for the various levels of elected officials at the county, state, and congressional levels, such as the Asian Pacific Islander Legislative Caucus in California which formed in 2001. These caucuses are an important opportunity for AAPI elected officials to network with



Union pioneers
Virgil Duyungan,
Tony Rodrigo,
CB Mislang,
Espiritu in 1933.
Photo courtesy
of the Filipino
American National
Historical Society.

others statewide and nationally, develop supportive infrastructures when individuals seek to run for a higher office, and reflect the growing political influence of Asian Americans.

At the federal level, the Congressional Asian Pacific American Caucus (CAPAC) formed in 1994; its purpose is to support legislation by the U.S. Congress that provides for the participation of AAPIs and reflects the concerns and needs of the communities. A corollary organization founded in 1995 is the Asian Pacific American Institute for Congressional Studies (APAICS), which was created to promote AAPI politics and conduct non-partisan education and informational activities, with programs designed to increase the participation of AAPI communities in the democratic process. APAICS continues to flourish as more AAPIs have been elected to Congress; it works closely with CAPAC.

Another piece of the growing infrastructure necessary to develop a sustainable presence of AAPI voters was the formation of APIAVote in the 1990s. APIAVote is a national nonpartisan organization, currently headed by Christine Chen, that works with local partners to mobilize AAPIs in electoral and civic engagement. It is focused on voter mobilization and the civic participation of the Asian American and Pacific Islander community. Their programs include education and outreach, field and infrastructure building, leadership training, research and communications, and work with youth.

In almost every election cycle, new barriers are broken. In 2012, the first Filipino American, Rob Bonta, was elected to the California State Assembly representing an important milestone in AAPI politics. Filipinos arrived in California as laborers beginning in the early 1900s and since the 1960s have migrated to the U.S. as part of family reunification efforts and to contribute their professional skills. Currently, they are the third largest AAPI group in the U.S., but they have lacked political representation beyond a few local community elected officials. The election of Bonta signals greater opportunities for other Filipino Americans in the future.

AAPI CIVIL RIGHTS AND LEGAL ORGANIZATIONS FLOURISH: 1970S TO THE PRESENT

As some Asian Americans became active in efforts to achieve electoral representation, others found different ways to contribute to the political landscape, and

these efforts and organizations are important to discuss. Established civil rights organizations in the Asian American community have been active in raising important issues for decades. The Japanese American Citizens League (JACL), founded in 1929, continues to focus on issues of civil rights, including becoming a strong voice in the efforts in the 1970s and 1980s to achieve redress and reparations for Japanese Americans who were held in internment camps during World War II. JACL has also built bridges to other AAPIs and other ethnic and religious groups to support their efforts for justice.

The Chinese American Citizens Alliance (CACA), which started as a local organization of Chinese born in America in 1895, evolved into the present organization in 1915 and continues today. Their mission is to empower Chinese Americans and defend American citizenship and its rights and responsibilities, observing patriotism, preserving historical and cultural traditions, and providing youth leadership and community education. The CACA has strived to implement this vision by opposing racial discrimination, defending the civil rights of Chinese Americans, and opposing anti-immigration policies and movements.

Another Chinese American civil rights organization is the Organization of Chinese Americans, now the OCA, which formed in 1973. OCA has local chapters in 100 cities. OCA works to advance the social, political, and economic needs of Asian Pacific Americans (APAs). It has evolved into a national advocacy organization that seeks to advance the civil rights of APAs and aspiring Americans. It remains a grassroots advocacy organization and is open to diverse ethnic identities.

In 1969, Chinese for Affirmative Action (CAA) was established by a small group of community activists. This San Francisco organization is based in the city's Chinatown. For 47 years, CAA has challenged social norms in order to advance equality and helped build coalitions that bridged traditional boundaries and prioritized the needs of the Chinese and the at-large AAPI community's most marginalized members. Some of CAA's early accomplishments include the fact that they assisted in 1970 in preparation of the landmark U.S. Supreme Court case *Lau v. Nichols*, which resulted in bilingual education provisions for Chinese-speaking and Spanish-speaking public school students in San Francisco. In 1972, CAA demanded bilingual election ballots in San Francisco to

comply with a new state election code that mandated bilingual assistance where a significant need is identified.

An important national organization for legal and civil rights for AAPIs is the Asian American Advancing Justice (AAAJ), which is a network of five affiliated organizations that provide legal services and advocacy for AAPI communities. The mission of Asian Americans Advancing Justice is to promote a fair and equitable society for all by working for civil and human rights and empowering AAPIs and other historically underserved communities. The AAAJ came together in 2013, although some of the local affiliates have been in existence for more than 30 years, providing grassroots legal services to those unable to afford and access legal services and advocacy. The Asian Law Caucus, for example, began as a storefront law group in San Francisco in 1972, set up to serve the low-income Chinese American and API communities. They have grown from a handful of young attorneys to a multi-purpose organization that provides legal assistance for low-income tenants, undocumented API students, wage theft of API workers, and many other issues. In New York City, the Asian American Legal Defense and Education Fund was organized in 1974. Similarly, the Asian American Legal Defense Center (AALDC) was formed in 1983 in Los Angeles to provide badly needed legal services to the rapidly growing API population. The AAAJ-LA has grown from one attorney to a staff of 80, including attorneys, advocates, researchers, leadership trainers, and other staff. The AALDC formed the year after the murder of Vincent Chin, a Chinese American, in Detroit, by two white autoworkers that took Mr. Chin as Japanese and scapegoated him for auto industry woes. The AALDC helped the family, serving as co-counsel to seek justice and has represented others who have been victims of racial violence.

A community organization that arose out of the murder of Vincent Chin, the Committee Against Anti-Asian Violence (CAAHV), was founded in 1986 in New York City to address issues of violence against Asians in the U.S. Today the organization reflects the growth in scope of work, utilizing a broad agenda of issues including police brutality, affordable housing, and other issues that impact Asian communities in New York. CAAHV has been organizing for social justice for more than 30 years. One of their programs was to organize the Southeast Asian Youth Leadership Project, which trained

refugee youth to become community organizers. Many Cambodian and Vietnamese refugees were inserted into the Northwest Bronx borough of New York City. These young people, many who were born in refugee camps, arrived in the U.S. and lived in extremely poor housing conditions, and their families had to survive on meager welfare benefits, which made civic participation extremely difficult.

CAAAV is one of hundreds of Asian ethnic specific and pan-Asian and Pacific Islander advocacy organizations, such as the Native Hawaiian Pacific Alliance, for health, youth and elderly services, along with ethnic specific and pan-Asian community based organizations that advocate for the rights of AAPIs at the local level. Some of these organizations were founded in the 1970s during the emergence of the Asian American Movement. They include the Chinese Progressive Association (CPA) in San Francisco (1973) and CPA Boston (1977), as well as the Filipino Advocates for Justice (FAJ), formerly Filipinos for Affirmative Action, which was established in 1973. Other organizations include the Asian Immigrant Women Advocates (AIWA), Asian Pacific Environmental Network (APEN), Filipino Worker Centers (FWC), Korean Immigrant Workers Alliance (KIWA), and other groups. These grassroots, locally-based, organizations are found primarily in the growing immigrant AAPI communities and provide an organizational voice for the concerns of young people, workers, LGBTQ members, and tenants.

In addition to the ongoing efforts of civil rights and legal organizations, Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders have developed an extensive network of social service organizations that provide a wide variety of services. At the national level, the formation of the Asian Pacific American Labor Alliance (APALA) in 1992 brought together AAPI workers in labor unions to advocate for economic and social justice including among non-unionized workers and professionals. An important coalitional effort is the National Council of Asian Pacific Americans (NCAPA), which formed in 1996 and has brought together 29 national organizations based in Washington, D.C. NCAPA has raised the national profile of AAPIs in Washington, D.C. and routinely speaks out on social concerns including immigration reform, labor rights, education, and health and human services. Also, the National Coalition for Asian

Pacific American Community Development (National CAPACD) is a national advocacy organization that is dedicated to addressing the housing, community, and economic development needs of AAPI communities. National CAPACD was founded in 1999. National CAPACD's member-based network has more than 100 community-based organizations, including community development corporations, community-based social service providers, preservation organizations, and advocacy groups in addition to national intermediaries and financial institutions in 17 states.

These national networks and other local coalitions highlight the broad organizational networking that exists in the AAPI community. These coalitional efforts are illustrative of the growing capacity of AAPIs to influence policy makers and public policy at the local level and increasingly at the national level. It is evident that when these efforts are combined with community grassroots initiatives to register and turnout AAPIs to vote and the efforts of AAPI elected and appointed officials, the diverse and growing AAPI community is developing the organizational sustainability and political voices to continue to grow in influence in the 21st century. With the AAPI community expected to nearly double in population by 2040 to 37 million persons, nearly one in 10 Americans will be AAPIs. AAPIs will have considerably more political influence than their humble beginnings in the U.S.

This essay highlights the fact that, in the face of racism and discrimination, AAPIs were able to find ways to challenge the denial of their political rights and advocate for causes they believed in during the first 100 years after their entry to the U.S. AAPIs have grown from small isolated groups of laborers in Hawai'i and the West Coast in the 19th and early 20th century into a very diverse majority immigrant/refugee community. While many challenges continue to confront the AAPI community, including the lack of full political representation, racial profiling, "model minority" stereotyping, and economic hardships, nevertheless, AAPIs have growing political clout in several states and at the national level and are building the organizational strength to be successful in the coming decades.

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