

# Asian Pacific American Heritage Month

*leadership,  
diversity,  
harmony*



*gateway to success*

**A word from our illustrator Pete Hemmer:**

I found this artist quote while researching modern Asian-American art and it became the catalyst for my poster design.

“The circle evokes a sense of an expanding embrace of inclusion. It is the shape that is formed when a pebble is dropped into a pond of water. The concentric rings that radiate from the point of the pebble’s entry move outward toward the edges of the pond. This is the nature of the living self. In the pond of life, innumerable pebbles punctuate the surface of the water. It is through many years of studying and working with the circle that I see how it embraces the nature of interrelationships. There is no limit to how large it can expand, yet its center is never comprised. The concentric rings created by the pebbles of all individual lives expand into one immense ring that reaches to the edge of the pond. In the end, we are all one.”

Lucy Arai  
Japanese American Artist

## **Preface**

Chief Librarian, Karen Olender, at the Defense Equal Opportunity Management Institute (DEOMI), created this document to provide background and reference material information for Asian Pacific American Heritage Month, 2008. This document is posted on the Internet at: <https://www.deomi.org>. Additionally, there are various materials on the Web site that support other national observances.

The opinions expressed in this report are those of the author and should not be construed to represent the official position of DEOMI, the U.S. military Services, or the Department of Defense.

Cover design by Mr. Pete Hemmer, Ki Corporation, contractor with the DEOMI.

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**ASIAN PACIFIC AMERICAN HERITAGE MONTH**  
“Leadership, Diversity, Harmony—Gateway to Success”  
*1 May–31 May 2008*

In 1978, a joint resolution signed by President Carter on October 5, 1978 proclaimed May 4, 1979 as the first Asian Pacific Heritage week. One week in May was proclaimed Asian Pacific Heritage Week until 1992 when Congress passed legislation extending the period of the Asian Pacific American Heritage celebration to the entire month. May was chosen because of some significant milestones in Asian American history during that month such as the arrival of the first Japanese immigrants and the completion of the transcontinental railroad.

Asian immigration to the United States started after the California Gold Rush in 1848 when labor for mining and transcontinental railroad construction was needed. Over 200,000 Chinese came to the West Coast to work on the railroad which was completed on May 10, 1869. In the following decades, more than 450,000 Japanese (the first arrived on May 7, 1843) and Filipinos came as immigrants.

By the year 2007, the Asian American population increased to over 14 million with even more diversity among Asian American ethnic groups with many immigrants arriving from Korea, India, Vietnam, Cambodia, Thailand, and Pakistan. There are 3.6 million Asians of Chinese descent, 2.9 million are of Filipino descent, 2.7 million are Asia-Indians, 1.6 million are Vietnamese, 1.5 million are Koreans, and 1.2 million are of Japanese descent.

Source: *2006 American Community Survey* <http://factfinder.census.gov>

The projected number of U.S. residents in 2050 who will identify themselves as single-race Asians will be 33.4 million. That number will be eight percent of the total population in 2050.

Source: *Population projections* <http://www.census.gov/Press-Release/www/releases/archives/population/001720.html>

Hawaii had a population of 275,000 people in 2006 categorized as Native Hawaiian and Other Pacific Islanders, followed by California with 260,000, and the state of Washington with 49,000.

Source: *Population estimates* <http://www.census.gov/Press-Release/www/releases/archives/population/010048.html>

The number of people ages five or older who speak Chinese at home is 2.5 million. After Spanish, Chinese is the most widely spoken non-English language in the country. Tagalog, Vietnamese, and Korean are each spoken at home by more than 1 million people.

Source: *2006 American Community Survey* <http://factfinder.census.gov>

After browsing through the DEOMI library's Asian Pacific American Heritage book collection, the following books were selected for review. Each book chosen explores an aspect of this year's theme.

## **Leadership**

*National Asian Pacific American Political Almanac 2007–08*, 13<sup>th</sup> edition (Asian American Studies Center, 2007), co-edited by Don T. Nakanishi and James S. Lai lists over 2,000 names of elected or appointed Asian Pacific American officials and their contact information. A joint endeavor of the UCLA Asian American Studies Center and the Asian Pacific Institute for Congressional Studies, the book features several commentaries/perspectives by activists and political scientists, as well as, a research section which includes up-to-date census information, policy research reports, and voter exit poll data. See the link to <http://www.sscnet.ucla.edu/aasc> to view the Web site of the UCLA Asian American Studies Center. Full text of their *CrossCurrents* newsletter features announcements of newly published books.

## **Diversity**

*Atlas of Asian American History* (Facts on File, 2002), by Monique Avakian, is illustrated with many maps, photos, and graphs tracing the history of Chinese, Koreans, Japanese, Filipinos, and other Asian groups' immigration to the United States. The chapter on the arrival of the Chinese in the 19<sup>th</sup> century includes some interesting details on mining methods used by Chinese miners. Another chapter provides information on plantation life in Hawaii for the Chinese workers, Filipino, and Korean immigrants to Hawaii, as well as, information on native Pacific Islanders. The conflict in Southeast Asia in the 60's and 70's produced a new wave of immigrants from Vietnam, Cambodia, and Laos, a chapter in this book was dedicated to relay their immigration experiences. The last chapter of this book has a section that celebrates Asian American culture. It addresses the fact that each national group carries its individual history of immigration, acculturation, customs, and contributions to American society. Some examples are as followed:

### *Asian-Indian Americans*

Arranged marriage still common

50% of U.S. Asian-Indian households include one nonnuclear relative

### *Korean Americans*

75% of Korean-Americans are of Christian faith

66% of Korean-American women work outside the home

### *Chinese Americans*

First Chinese woman elected to become mayor of a U.S. city: Lily Lee Chen

Chinese cuisine is one of the most popular ethnic foods

### *Filipino Americans*

Benjamin Cayetano Jr. elected Governor of Hawaii in 1996

U.S. 1st and 2nd Filipino Infantry fought at Bataan in WWII

### *Japanese Americans*

Japanese forms of martial arts such as karate and judo very popular in U.S.  
100<sup>th</sup> 442 Battalion Regimental Combat Team fought in Europe in WWII

### *Southeast Asian Americans*

1,342,532 Southeast refugees entered the U.S. between 1975 and 1998  
As of 2001, Long Beach, CA had the largest Cambodian community in the U.S.

## **Harmony**

*Buddhism: World Religions* (Facts on File, 1993) by Madhu Bazaz Wangu introduces the reader to the fourth largest religion in the world with over 300 million people practicing Buddhism. In short, Wangu writes that Buddhism teaches how to avoid extremes of behavior, such as severe self-denial or the other extreme, selfish attachment to pleasure. Zen Buddhism expands on the Dharma, truth or law of Buddhism, and teaches that people should find fulfillment in life by self discipline, meditation, and instruction. In eight chapters of this book, Wangu explores the life of the Buddha, the spread of Buddhism throughout the world, the three major schools of Buddhism, its literature, and the state of Buddhism today. In Japan, Taiwan, Thailand, Cambodia, and Vietnam, Buddhism is the majority religion.

The early Chinese immigrants built Buddhist temples in California when they came to work in the mines and on the railroad. The Japanese first built Buddhist temples in Hawaii when they came to work on the plantations. Zen Buddhism became popular in the U.S. after Dr. Suzuki, a student of the Japanese Zen master Soyen Shaki, translated Buddhist literature into English and later taught at Columbia University where he lectured to enthusiastic audiences.

## **Gateway to Success**

*Extraordinary Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders*, Revised edition (Children's Press, 2003) by Susan Sinott features 72 people and nine groups arranged chronologically with short biographies. An excellent book for browsing, the people selected reflect a broad range of both well-known figures such as Tiger Woods and Michelle Kwan, as well as, successful Asian/Pacific-American scientists, writers, and politicians. There are also group entries for the Chinese railroad workers, Hawaiian sugar cane workers, Hmong refugees and others. Many of the new biographies of men and women profiled in this revised edition are second generation Asian/Pacific Americans whose parents fled from turmoil in their native countries, yet their children have fulfilled the American dream and become successful in their chosen careers.