

# Who Are Asian Americans?

## *An Overview of History, Immigration, and Communities*

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*Gannen-mono*. Paper son. *Manong*. *Pau hana*. *Gum sahn*. Mountain of Gold. Tengoku. Illegals. Labor contract. *Kanyaku-imin*. Ticket dance. Runaway. Picture bride. Chinese Exclusion Act. Executive Order 9066. “I am Chinese.” Flips. *Juk Sing*. “. . . fight to prove our loyalty.” F.O.B. No-No Boy. Manzanar. The Golden Spike. “. . . your slanty-eyed, Korean ass. . .” Citizenship. Chinatown. Assimilation. Heritage. Homeland. Gooks. Boat People. “Success Story: Outwhiting the Whites.” Hmong quilt. The “Community.” Ancestors. Vincent Chin. Homeland. Hawaii Calls. HR 442. haiku. Panoum. *Cababayan*. Green-grocer. Cleaners. Dogeaters. Diploma. Diaspora. Asian American. Song, Encarnacion, Shahid Ali. *Ai. Aiieeee! The Woman Warrior*. Bruce Lee. Immigration attorney. Kearny Street. International Hotel. Berkeley quota. Wharton School. Chancellor. Tenure. One-and-a-half. Mainland. Homeland. . .

### Introduction

The passage above contains most of the word-cloud by Japanese American poet Garrett Hongo in his introduction to *The Open Boat: Poems from Asian America*, a collection of poems by Asian Americans. Hongo continues, “For the thirty writers here emerge out of more than a hundred years of immigration, sojourning, settlement, misconception, stereotyping, and soul-searching” (Hongo, 1993, pp. xviii–xix). Indeed, the history of Asian Americans in the United States is rich, varied, and often troubling. In this introductory chapter, we provide a brief overview of the history of Asian Americans from the first wave of Asian immigration until the “model minority” image of today. Who are Asian Americans? What does it mean to be Asian American? The focus of this chapter is on the first question, which is much more straightforward than the latter. For now, let us note that what it means to be Asian American varies from person to person, and that the experiences of Asian Americans living in the United States are incredibly diverse, influenced by a number of factors, such as the level of acculturation, country of origin, socioeconomic status, and geographic location.

## Background

When I was a kid back in the 1940s, I was always asked, “Are you Chinese or Japanese?” as if there could be no other options. There are over sixty different Asian groups in the United States today, from origins as diverse as Cambodia, China, India, Indonesia, Japan, Korea, Laos, Myanmar, Pakistan, the Philippines, Thailand, and Vietnam, as well as the islands of Polynesia—each with its own history, language, and culture. Some segments have been in the United States since the 1850s; others arrived only last week.

–Elaine H. Kim (2003)

Asian Americans are descendants of immigrants from any part of Asia, or are themselves immigrants from Asia to the United States. Countries of origin include East Asian countries (China, Japan, and Korea), Southeast Asian countries (e.g., Cambodia, the Philippines, Thailand, Vietnam, and Indonesia), and South Asian countries (India, Nepal, and Pakistan). Consisting of more than 17 million square miles, Asia is the largest continent on earth, and makes up approximately one-third of the earth’s land. More than 60% of the world’s population resides in Asia, while approximately 5% of the world’s population can be found in the United States.

Within the United States, Asian Americans are the fastest-growing minority group (U.S. Census Bureau, 2000). According to the 2000 Census, Asian Americans number 11,070,913 individuals (3.9% of the U.S. population). This is a sharp increase from the results of the 1990 Census, when Asian Americans numbered 6,908,638 (2.8% of the U.S. population). Chinese Americans make up the largest Asian group in the United States at 0.9% of the country’s population, followed by Filipino Americans (0.7%), Asian Indians (0.6%), Korean Americans (0.4%), and Japanese Americans (0.3%). Table 1.1 displays the populations of each Asian ethnic group in the United States. Interestingly, 3,916,204 Asian Americans (1.4% of the U.S. population) identified themselves as “other Asian,” which includes other Asian groups and/or mixed heritage. A relatively high percentage of Asian Americans marry outside of their ethnicity. Intermarriage rates among Asian Americans from the 2000 Census indicate that 12% of Asian men and 23% of Asian women are currently married to non-Asians. It has become increasingly common to see (and be a part of) an interracial couple. More and more often, Asian American men and women are marrying outside of their particular Asian group to other Asians (e.g., a Chinese American man marrying a Filipino American woman) and non-Asians (e.g., European Americans, African Americans, and Native Hawaiians).

Until the 2000 U.S. Census, Pacific Islanders were grouped together with Asian Americans. Pacific Islanders are immigrants or descendants of immigrants from one of the Pacific Islands to the United States, including Hawaii, Samoa, Fiji, Guam, and the islands of Micronesia. The term *Asian American* often assumes the inclusion of Pacific Islanders, although more recently the term *Asian American and Pacific Islanders* (AA/PI) has been adopted to explicitly acknowledge the grouping of American Pacific Islanders with Asian Americans. Approximately 0.1% of the American population self-identifies as Pacific Islanders (U.S. Census Bureau, 2000).

According to a census taken in March 2002, 12.5 million Americans identify themselves as AA/PI (4.4% of the population; Reeves & Bennett, 2003). In general, AA/PIs are younger than non-Hispanic Whites. Twenty-six percent of AA/PIs in March 2002 were under the age of 18, while it is estimated that the number of AA/PI youth will increase to 74% by 2015 (Snyder & Sickmund, 1999). Depending on where you grew up, these numbers may be surprising. In cities

**Table 1.1** Population of Asian Ethnic Groups

<b>Ethnic group</b>	<b>Asian alone</b>	<b>Two Asian ethnicities</b>	<b>Asian and at least one other race</b>	<b>Total population alone or in any combination</b>
Chinese	2,314,537	130,826	289,478	2,734,841
Filipino	1,850,314	57,811	456,690	2,364,815
Asian Indian	1,678,765	40,013	180,821	1,899,599
Korean	1,076,872	22,550	129,005	1,228,427
Vietnamese	1,122,528	47,144	54,064	1,223,736
Japanese	769,700	55,537	296,695	1,148,932
Native Hawaiian and other Pacific Islanders				874,414
Cambodian	171,937	11,832	22,283	206,052
Pakistani	153,533	11,095	39,681	204,309
Laotian	168,707	10,396	19,100	198,203
Hmong	169,428	5,284	11,598	186,310
Thai	112,989	7,929	29,365	150,293
Taiwanese	118,048	14,096	12,651	144,795
Indonesian	39,757	4,429	18,887	63,073
Bangladeshi	41,280	5,625	10,507	57,412

Source: U.S. Census Bureau. (2000). *Census 2000*. Washington, DC.

such as Honolulu, Asian Americans made up 61.8% of the population in 2000. According to the census taken in March 2002, over half of the AA/PI population resides in the West (51%), 19% in the South, and 12% in the Midwest, while the remaining 19% lives in the Northeast. Ninety-five percent of AA/PIs reside in metropolitan areas, compared to 78% of the non-Hispanic Caucasian population.

Whereas a large percentage of AA/PIs were born in the United States, approximately 69% of Asian Americans (not including Pacific Islanders) are foreign born (U.S. Census Bureau, 2000). As with many other characteristics (e.g., average years of education and income levels), this percentage varies dramatically depending on what particular Asian group is being considered. For example, 40% of Japanese Americans versus approximately 75% of Korean Americans are foreign born. About one-quarter of the foreign-born population in the United States was born in Asia. Of these 7.2 million people, the majority immigrated after 1980, following previous generations of Asian immigrants and adding to the diverse cultural landscape of a growing country.

### History and Immigration

The study of Asian Americans often begins with a study of their immigration history. Alongside Europeans, hundreds of thousands of Chinese, Japanese, South Asians, Koreans, Filipinos, Southeast Asians, and Pacific Islanders arrived in the United States in the 19th and 20th centuries. The reasons behind the immigration for each Asian group across the generations differed based on the political and economic landscapes of the United States and of the Asian country from which they came. Alongside the laws created to affect their immigration (see Table 1.2),

**Table 1.2** Major Congressional Acts and Judicial Rulings on Asian American Immigration and Naturalization

1882	Chinese Exclusion Law suspends immigration of Chinese American laborers for 10 years
1898	<i>Wong Kim Ark v. U.S.</i> decides that Chinese born in the U.S. cannot be stripped of their citizenship
1917	Asiatic Barred Zone Act defines a geographic “barred zone” (including India); immigration from Asia ceases
1922	<i>Takao Ozawa v. U.S.</i> declares Japanese ineligible for naturalized citizenship
1923	<i>U.S. v. Bhagat Singh Thind</i> declares Asian Indians ineligible for naturalized citizenship, after ruling Indians as being Asian and non-White
1943	Magnuson Act repeals all Chinese exclusion laws, grants right of naturalization and a small immigration quota to Chinese
1946	Luce–Celler Bill grants right of naturalization and small immigration quotas to Asian Indians and Filipinos, allowing a quota of 100 Indians and 100 Filipinos to immigrate to the United States
1965	Immigration and Nationality Services (INS) Act of 1965 abolishes “national origins” as a basis for allocating immigration quotas to various countries—Asian countries now on equal footing

Source: Chan, S. (1991). *Asian Americans: An interpretive history*. CT: Twayne Publishers.

the reactions of the European American majority played a role in the reception of Asian immigrants. These circumstances colored the immigrants’ prospects of being American and their experiences in American culture.

#### *Chinese Americans*

The Chinese were among the earliest wave of East Asian immigrants to arrive. By the mid-1800s, high taxes, peasant rebellions, and family feuds led to poverty and starvation in China, which prompted thousands of Chinese to flee to countries around the world (Loo, 1998; Hoobler & Hoobler, 1994). This period of strife coincided with the onset of the California gold rush. Dreams of wealth led to the immigration of young Chinese men to the American West, encouraged by stories they heard about America. One young man wrote about America to his brother:

Oh! Very rich country. . . . They find gold very quickly so I hear. . . . I feel as if I should like to go there very much. I think I shall go to California next summer. (Takaki, 1998, p. 34)

As **sojourners**, these men planned to return to China after earning enough money to support their families (Kitano & Daniels, 1995). These early Chinese Americans emigrated to escape the suffering endured in China, only to encounter it again in America. The hardships, however, were of a different quality. Although the government and public in California initially welcomed the Chinese, White American miners began to feel threatened by their presence (Hing, 1993; Takaki, 1998). Within 6 months of the initial welcome, the California government claimed that the customs, language, and education of the Asiatic races “threatened the well-being of the mining districts” (Takaki, 1998, p. 81). The government then imposed the foreign miners’ license tax, the first of many taxes to discourage Chinese immigration (Hing, 1993).

Chinese Americans in the late 1800s often filled the void of low-paying jobs in the growing industries of America. They used their knowledge of agriculture to cultivate farms in the West, and they labored in mining and land development. Approximately 15,000 Chinese Americans played a notable, yet often uncelebrated, role as railroad workers who created the first transcontinental railroad in America (e.g., Loo, 1998; Takaki, 1998; Hoobler & Hoobler, 1994).

During the 1870s, working-class European Americans, incited by an Irish immigrant, Denis Kearney, rallied against the Chinese Americans. Their anti-Chinese movement exploited the Chinese Americans as scapegoats for the economic hardship at that time, and demanded “The Chinese Must GO” (Hoobler & Hoobler, 1994). Not everyone shared the anti-Chinese sentiment, but the movement still grew, and ultimately led to the Chinese Exclusion Act in 1882, which remained in effect until 1943. This law legally barred Chinese without family already in the United States from entering the country. To enforce this law, Angel Island Immigration Station, billed as the “Ellis Island of the West,” was built in 1910 near the city of San Francisco. Immigrants arriving at Angel Island did not receive the same open reception as the Europeans who arrived at Ellis Island. Whereas Ellis Island processed and released immigrants within hours, Angel Island served as a long-term detention center that controlled Asian immigration. As such, Angel Island was often referred to as the “Guardian of the Western Gate” (Chang, 2003). U.S. immigration officials at Angel Island interrogated, received, or refused Asian immigrants. Many were detained in Angel Island for up to three years (Hoobler & Hoobler, 1994). The frustration and sadness of those detained prompted poetic expression. To this day, the barrack walls display their words:

Imprisoned in the wooden building day after day,  
My freedom withheld, how can I bear to talk about it?  
. . . My sad mood, even so, is not dispelled. (Hom, 1992, p. 74)

The San Francisco earthquake and fires of 1906 were an inadvertent but auspicious turning point for Chinese who desired to immigrate to the United States. According to the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882, the United States only allowed family members of Chinese Americans already residing in the United States to immigrate. With immigration documentation and birth records destroyed in these disasters, many Chinese entered the United States as **paper sons**. Pretending to be relatives of Chinese Americans, thousands of paper sons immigrated into the United States. Doing so was not without complication; entrance into the United States required processing at Angel Island so that the U.S. government could confirm their legitimacy. A paper son was often required to provide detailed information regarding the individual whose identity he had taken on (Chang, 2003; Hoobler & Hoobler, 1994).

A dramatic change in American sentiment regarding the Chinese in America occurred shortly before and during World War II. America began to see the Chinese Americans as hard-working and respectful—an idealized image that literature and films of the time helped to promote. Moreover, the Japanese bombing of Pearl Harbor, and the U.S. alliance with the Chinese leader, Chiang Kai-shek, prompted Americans to question the standard idea of what it meant to be American (Kitano & Daniels, 1995). In 1943, the United States repealed the Chinese Exclusion Act (Loo, 1998). However, the repeal was primarily a foreign policy matter, aimed at reflecting benevolence toward China as an ally. Despite the repeal, the United States operated on a quota system for the next two decades, which allowed only 105 Chinese immigrants to enter the United States each year (“This Month in Immigration History,” 2006). What appeared as an overall attitude change toward the Chinese during World War II did not erase racism toward Chinese Americans nor welcome Chinese immigrants to the United States (Kitano & Daniels, 1995).

The Immigration Act of 1965 served as a crucial turning point in immigration for Asian Americans. In fact, your family or other people you know may have immigrated to the United States under this act. Rather than adhering to a quota system, individuals allowed to immigrate included those with close kin in America and those with specialized entrepreneurial and technical skills (Hing, 1993). The Chinese Americans who initially came during this wave were

primarily professionals such as engineers and doctors (Takaki, 1995). Immigration changes in the 1990s that expanded the immigration of educated professionals have led to Chinese Americans pursuing MBAs and law degrees (Kwong & Miscevic, 2005).

Since the 1960s, Asian Americans have been dubbed model minorities, a term that alludes to Asian American achievements (Kitano & Daniels, 1995). Coined during the height of the civil rights movement by mainstream America, the term *model minority* pitted minorities against one another by suggesting that, unlike other minorities, Asian Americans had a work ethic that led to their success as Americans (Zia, 2000). Although seemingly flattering, the term overlooks the adverse experiences among the different Chinese American subgroups, in addition to the persistent discrimination faced by Chinese Americans as a whole. Newly arrived Chinese immigrants, and Chinese Americans who have lived in the United States for generations, continue to struggle with the experience of immigration and negotiation between the perception of mainstream America and their personal development as Americans.

### *Japanese Americans*

The Japanese entered the United States during the 1800s. Alert to the wealth in a booming American economy, these farmers embraced the opportunity to leave for America as contracted farm laborers in Hawaii (Hing, 1993). As one Japanese immigrant expressed it:

Huge dreams of fortune,  
Go with me to foreign lands, across the ocean. (Hom, 1992, p. 146)

Following the annexation of Hawaii by the United States, the Japanese began to immigrate to the U.S. mainland. The mainland was attractive to the Japanese, with American wages over and beyond those earned in Japan. In the 1890s, young Japanese American men labored as migrant farm workers and railroad workers (Hoobler & Hoobler, 1995). Although they received



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Sadaki Nishimoto emigrated from Kumamoto on the island of Kyushu, Japan to Hawaii in 1911 at the age of 19 to meet his parents, who had been working in the coffee plantations of Hawaii since he was an infant. He worked on the railroad and in construction as a powder man.

low pay, these men were not as destitute as the Chinese Americans who had arrived earlier; the Japanese government selected and monitored Japanese American migrants, who arrived to the United States with money, to ensure that the men were good representatives of Japan (Kitano & Daniels, 1995).

However, like the Chinese Americans, the Japanese Americans faced racism early on. In 1906, the San Francisco School Board forced Japanese American children along with Korean American children to attend a segregated school for Chinese (Takaki, 1998). The incident escalated such that President Theodore Roosevelt agreed to reverse the school board decision, and established the Gentlemen's Agreement of 1908, which halted further immigration of the Japanese to the United States (Takaki, 1998). Specifically, this required that the Japanese government restrict emigration from Japan by stopping the issuing of passports for Japanese to immigrate as "laborers" (Kitano & Daniels, 1995). This did not preclude Japanese Americans from bringing over their family members. What was once a male-dominated Japanese American population transformed into a community with a proportionate number of males and females (Hing, 1993). However, additional immigration laws, such as the Immigration Law in 1924, sought to block Japanese from entering the United States (Hoobler & Hoobler, 1995). As well, the 1922 *Takao Ozawa v. United States* case rejected the citizenship application of a Japanese immigrant who classified himself as Caucasian. The Supreme Court ruled that Ozawa was not White but Mongoloid ("The House We Live In," 2003).

The Japanese American population grew even with the restrictions on Japanese immigration. With the arrival of **picture brides**, or shashin kekkon (literally, "photo marriage"), Japanese women married Japanese American men, whom they would not see until they arrived to the United States. As Riyo Orite, a picture bride, described it: "All agreed to our marriage, but



Akira Kawakami's passport, dated June 28, 1923.



Sadaki Nishimoto, age 31, and Akira Kawakami, age 20, were wed on June 28, 1923—the same day that Akira Kawakami arrived on the shores of Hawaii and met Sadaki Nishimoto for the first time.

I didn't get married immediately. I was engaged at the age of 16 and didn't meet Orite until I was almost 18. I had seen him only in a picture, first" (Takaki, 1998, p. 47).

The increased number of American-born children of Japanese ancestry during that time reflected the impact of the picture brides. According to Hing (1993), there were approximately 4,500 of these children in 1910, 30,000 in 1920, and 68,000 by 1930.



Akira and Sadaki Nishimoto pose for a family portrait with their first daughter, Kashiko Nishimoto.



A second family portrait taken years later. Sadaki (middle) and Akira Nishimoto (far right) pose for a family portrait. Years earlier, Akira arrived in Hawaii from Kumamoto, Kyushu, Japan as a picture bride at the age of 20 in search of a better life. She met and married Sadaki Nishimoto, age 31, on the day that she arrived on the shores of Hawaii. Their five daughters are (from left to right) Kashiko, Namiko, Evelyn Shizuko, Mildred Shizuyo, and Grace Akiko. Both Kashiko and Namiko adopted the American names of Dorothy and Marilyn, respectively, for themselves while growing up. Both Sadaki and Akira Nishimoto lived into their 90s and remained together.

The 1930s saw a Japanese American community with two generations, the Issei, who were the immigrant generation, and their American-born children, the Nisei (Takaki, 1998).

Table 1.3 shows the generational group names of Japanese Americans. The Issei established Japanese American organizations that allowed the Japanese government to exert control in issuing documents the Japanese needed in order to bring their family members into the United States. At the same time, these organizations encouraged Japanese Americans to acculturate and to obtain a good education in the United States (Kitano & Daniels, 1995). The Nisei formed organizations modeled after mainstream American social clubs and church groups (Kitano & Daniels, 1995). Unlike the Chinese Americans whose population had dwindled because of the Chinese Exclusion Act, the Japanese American community acculturated faster to mainstream American culture by creating organizations to promote patriotic values that distanced themselves from the Issei. Even with the attempt to become “more American,” these younger Japanese Americans did not integrate with the mainstream American community (Hoobler & Hoobler, 1995). European Americans during this time still had difficulty accepting any Asians as equals to their race (Takaki, 1998).

**Table 1.3** Generations of Japanese Americans in the United States

Group	Generation	Nativity
Issei	First	Immigrants from Japan
Nisei	Second	Born in U.S., parents born in Japan
Sansei	Third	Born in U.S., grandparents born in Japan
Yonsei	Fourth	Born in U.S., great grandparents born in Japan
Gosei	Fifth	Born in U.S., great great grandparents born in Japan

The treatment of Japanese Americans during World War II marks an experience that sets apart the Japanese Americans from any other Asian American group. Following the Japanese bombing of Pearl Harbor, the U.S. government froze the bank accounts and other assets of Japanese Americans, financially immobilizing the Japanese American community (Kitano & Daniels, 1995). In 1942, the U.S. government then, under military auspices, rounded up Japanese Americans from their homes, regardless of their age, sex, and even citizenship, placing them in “assembly centers” and then to “relocation centers,” places of **internment**. Confined to these internment camps without trial, and only because of ancestry, thousands of Japanese Americans lived and worked in the camps (Hoobler & Hoobler, 1995). You may know of Japanese Americans whose family members experienced the effects of World War II in this way. Only 10,000 Japanese Americans on the mainland who lived east of the prescribed area and 150,000 Japanese Americans who lived in Hawaii did not enter the internment camps. For the Japanese Americans in Hawaii, their labor for the United States was a “military necessity” (Kitano & Daniels, 1995). The federal government began clearing individuals to leave the internment camps in 1944, and all internees left by 1945.

A striking irony of the internment camp experience is that in 1943 the federal government began recruiting Japanese American men from these internment camps for service in the U.S. military.

Author of this chapter Gordon Nagayama Hall’s uncle, David Ogawa, was part of the all-Japanese American 442nd Regimental Combat Team that valiantly fought in Europe. The 442nd was one of the most highly decorated military units in U.S. history. Meanwhile, Hall’s mother Olive, who had been a college student, her parents, and younger siblings were somehow considered a threat to national security and were placed in an internment camp in Poston, Arizona.

Approximately half of those who were in the internment camps moved east beyond the Rocky Mountains for school, work, or military service following the war (Hing, 1993; Hoobler & Hoobler, 1995). Many continued to experience discrimination at work and school (Kitano & Daniels, 1995). Loo (1993) considers the repeated exposure to racism through internment and by daily encounters within U.S. society to be a form of **race-related trauma**. This type



Isamu Miyata grew up in Hawaii and was drafted into the army in 1945 at the age of 20. Meanwhile, mainland Japanese Americans were still being confined to internment camps. Isamu Miyata is pictured above at an army training camp in Alabama.

of trauma has been associated with silence and shame within the family, as it pertains to internment (Nagata & Cheng, 2003). Meg, a Japanese American woman, reveals how this silence affected her family:

My parents were both interned, and I was born in the camp. However, I didn't really find out anything about my parents' experience until I was seventeen. They just did not talk about it. . . . My parents and others like them were experiencing a kind of amnesia about the facts of war, life in the camps. (Chow, 1998, p. 194)

Over time, the American public began to recognize the hardships of internment and to appreciate the Nisei U.S. military service in the war. Formal government acknowledgment of wrongs came only in the 1980s when the tireless efforts of a group of Sansei and other Asian American attorneys helped overturn the World War II convictions of Gordon Hirabayashi and Minoru Yasui, who refused to comply with curfew laws that applied to Japanese Americans but not to other U.S. citizens, and of Fred Korematsu, who refused to comply with the internment camp evacuation order. As a result of these legal victories, the federal government apologized and compensated each Japanese American individual who had been interned. By then, however, almost half of those placed in internment were dead (Kitano & Daniels, 1995).

Since the 1970s, generations of Japanese Americans have integrated into mainstream America. Even so, Japanese Americans continue to participate in ethnic organizations and adhere to values such as hard work and community solidarity passed down by previous generations (Hoobler & Hoobler, 1995). Despite their success at acculturation, discrimination remains. Japanese Americans continue to be stereotyped based on their Asian physical features, reflecting the hesitancy of mainstream America to accept that an American with an Asian background is also American.

### *South Asian Americans*

The British colonial rule in India and unresolved racial classification by Americans during the 20th century characterize the experiences of South Asian immigrants. South Asian Americans are identified as those whose ancestry can be traced to the Indian subcontinent, which includes a number of countries: Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan, and Sri Lanka (South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation, n.d.).

The first major wave of South Asian immigration to the United States took place after 1900 (Hing, 1993). These early South Asian immigrants originated from Punjab, an agrarian region of India. Because the overpopulated Punjab could not offer everyone a share of land, South Asian Americans sought to acquire their own land in the United States. Although some became tenants and proprietors, most of the immigrants became laborers on sawmills, farms, and railroads in the Pacific Northwest. Frustrated that the South Asian Americans were willing to work for lower wages, hate crimes were committed against these immigrants. In one incident, 500 European Americans attacked the "Hindus," forcing several hundred South Asian Americans to flee into Canada (Kitano & Daniels, 1995).

Most of the Punjabis were Sikhs, who characteristically wore turbans and unshaven beards (Takaki, 1998). This difference in dress may have been another contributor to the prejudice toward South Asian Americans, prompting some Americans to regard them as "the least desirable race of immigrants" (Kitano & Daniels, 1995, p. 97). By 1917, South Asian Americans, along with other Asian groups, were not allowed to immigrate to the United States if they could not pass a literacy test. Racially motivated hostilities and the strategic attempt to exclude South Asian Americans decreased South Asian immigration to the United States.

Racial classification for South Asian Americans over the first half of the 20th century proved inconsistent and generally discriminatory (Takaki, 1995). From 1910 to 1920, the government deemed South Asian Americans as Caucasian, which granted them naturalization. Although this did not allow them to sell or lease land, some South Asian Americans married Mexican American citizens to circumvent the restriction (Hing, 1993).

The 1917 Asiatic Barred Zone Act expanded exclusions of Asian immigration, paralleling the exclusion of immigrants from China. This act prevented South Asians and several other Asian nationals from coming to the United States (Campi, 2005). The 1923 Supreme Court case *U.S. v. Bhagat Singh Thind* was a major setback for South Asian Americans in their quest to obtain U.S. citizenship (Hing, 1993; Takaki, 1998). The Supreme Court ruling classified South Asian Americans as non-White, annulling the status of naturalized South Asian Americans. In a protest against this nullification of citizenship, Vaisho Das Bagai took his own life, leaving the message:

I am no longer an American citizen. . . . What have I made of myself and my children? We cannot exercise our rights, we cannot leave this country. Humility and insults, who are responsible for all this? I do not choose to live a life of an interned person. . . . Is life worth living in a gilded cage? (Takaki, 1998, p. 300)

South Asian Americans began to lobby again for U.S. citizenship during World War II as America looked to India to establish alliances against the Germans and Japanese (Kitano & Daniels, 1995). The right for naturalization was obtained following Congressional approval in 1946. The act allowed wives and children to immigrate to the United States (Hing, 1993). Later, the Immigration Act of 1965 dramatically changed the immigration pattern for South Asian Americans, as an influx of South Asians entered the United States (Takaki, 1995).

Compared to other Asian immigrant groups, South Asian immigrants distributed themselves across the country somewhat more evenly. South Asian Americans currently primarily reside in the Midwest and Northeast, in addition to the West (Kitano & Daniels, 1995). Highly educated South Asian–American men and women occupy positions in medicine and engineering (Takaki, 1995), with many living and working within Silicon Valley. Dubbed part of the **brain drain**, many Indians initially came to the United States after receiving training in India because of the difficulty in obtaining profitable positions in their native country (Zia, 2000). Although Indian American workers in technological positions are paid significantly more than their Indian counterparts, Indian nationals are more able to obtain technological positions because many U.S. companies are now outsourcing technological positions to India (Pink, 2004). Attracted by the modernization and economic growth in India, many Indian Americans have returned to their native country (Waldman, 2004). Recent economic opportunities within South Asia have rapidly changed the motivations to immigrate to the United States.

Although many South Asians are able to obtain well-paying positions in the United States, South Asian–American men and women continue to face a **glass ceiling** when it comes to income and attainment of management positions (Fernandez, 1998). There is just a handful of South Asians in upper management, such as Amar Bose (founder of Bose Corporation), Kim Singh (CEO of PortaEnterprise and former executive of IBM, Ernst & Young, and Unisys), and Indra Nooyi (CEO of PepsiCo). As it currently stands, however, there are 4.4 percent of Asian Americans in the workforce, and only less than 1 percent in senior management. Only 1 percent holds board seats on a Fortune 500 company (Curry, 2006).

Not all South Asian Americans in the United States are educated and skilled technically. During the 1980s, an influx of South Asian Americans started businesses in the United States. South Asian Americans currently occupy the newsstand industry of New York, work as taxicab



Silicon Valley, an area within the San Francisco Bay area, is home to several high-tech industries. Many South Asian Americans, immigrants from the South Asian brain drain, work alongside Chinese American engineers.

drivers, and operate successful motel and hotel chains across the United States (Kitano & Daniels, 1995; Zia, 2000). Working-class South Asian Americans have borne the resentment of other ethnic groups due to their success in attaining these jobs. For instance, during the 1980s, members of the Puerto Rican community harassed South Asian–American business owners (Takaki, 1995). The Jersey City gang, “Dotbusters,” in reference to the dot or bindi that Indian women often wear, have targeted and violently attacked South Asian Americans. After the September 11, 2001, terrorist attacks on the World Trade Center in New York City, South Asian Americans from all socioeconomic and educational backgrounds have been the target of hate crimes and racial profiling. South Asian Americans are commonly mistaken as illegal immigrants or terrorists (Novas, Cao, & Silva, 2004).

First- and second-generation South Asian Americans, like earlier generations, may continue to grapple with their identification as Americans. Due in part to the successful lobbying of the Association of Indians in America, the U.S. government counts South Asian Americans as Asian American (Novas, Cao, & Silva, 2004). Nowadays, South Asian Americans are the third largest Asian American group in the United States (U.S. Census Bureau, 2000). Even so, South Asian Americans often feel like outsiders to Asian Americans, especially since East Asian groups are not inclined to recognize South Asia as Asia. The debate as to whether South Asian Americans should consider themselves as Asian American remains, even among second-generation South Asian Americans. The decision to identify with being American is an issue even within the family. From one perspective, the task of second-generation South Asian Americans is to assimilate and succeed by attaining a good education and a well-paying job, but to also retain traditional values, such as marrying someone within their own group (Zia, 2000). As of now, a better understanding of the psychological adjustment among South Asian Americans, as it relates to issues of discrimination and identity in America, is still necessary.

#### *Korean Americans*

Korean Americans came to the United States in waves at the end of the 19th century. The Sino-Japanese War, which took place in Korea, propagated Korea’s earliest wave of immigration to the United States (Kitano & Daniels, 1995). The poor living conditions in Korea, coupled with the

need for laborers on the island of Hawaii, motivated approximately 7,000 Koreans to immigrate to Hawaii from 1903 to 1905 (Hing, 1993). Facilitated by Christian missionaries, sugar plantations recruited lower-class Koreans to work in the fields. Like the other ethnic minority laborers, these early Korean Americans faced poverty and hardship.

Japanese annexation in Korea prevented further migration of Koreans to the United States, consequently affecting the identity of Koreans in Hawaii (Zia, 2000). As a marginalized group in Hawaii without a homeland to return to, these Korean American “exiles” bonded together based on Korean nationalism, establishing Korean churches and schools that retained their home culture. During that period, one Korean writer from the *Sinhan Minbo* newspaper wrote: “If we want to start afresh our Korean community, we should give serious thought to our children’s education and have schools that would give them Korean education” (Takaki, 1998, p. 279).

Korean women arrived as picture brides during this time, which helped to form Korean American families. Korean Americans also formed interethnic marriages in Hawaii, as they began to assimilate into mainstream culture (Novas, Cao, & Silva, 2004). In the early 20th century, Korean immigrants, like Chinese and Japanese laborers, left for the mainland and worked on farms and on the railroads.

After the Korean War in 1953, another wave of Korean immigrants arrived to the United States. These immigrants were predominantly the wives of servicemen and war orphans, with a small number of them students and professionals. Korean “war brides,” accompanying their military husbands back to the United States, largely subsumed into American society (Kitano & Daniels, 1995). These women were not immune to the hardship of immigration according to the few studies conducted on this group (Yuh, 2002; Kim, 1972; Ratliff, Moon, & Bonacci, 1972; Jeong & Schumm, 1990). Attempted suicide and psychological maladjustments from abuse or “culture shock” characterized the experience of some wives (Yuh, 2002).

Approximately 150,000 of the immigrants from this wave were comprised of war orphans adopted by middle-class European Americans (Ministry of Health and Welfare, 1999). Korean adoptees faced a unique condition unlike other Asian American immigrants, appearing racially different from their European American families and from the communities they were raised in. As you might imagine, this often raised issues regarding their identity. Young Hee, a Korean adoptee describes: “Theoretically I was white, my family is white, the community I grew up in was white, and I could not point out Korea on a map, nor did I care about such a place. . . . I denied that I was Korean to everyone, most painfully, I denied it to myself” (Bishoff & Rankin, 1997).

Currently, Korean adoptees, their adoptive families, and others have raised issues specific to this experience, and have organized themselves, either in person or online, as a community, evidenced by the number of Web sites committed to support their unique experience.

The experiences of the most recent wave of Korean immigrants, arriving after the Immigration Act of 1965, are reminiscent of the second-generation Chinese and Japanese immigrants. With the exception of some Korean immigrants, such as doctors who successfully found work in New York (Takaki, 1995), language barriers and discrimination prevented many immigrants from obtaining professional positions even though many were professionally skilled in medicine or engineering. Instead, these Korean Americans chose to open small businesses, such as groceries, dry cleaners, and restaurants. The effect of the shift toward downward mobility included long working hours and the constant struggle to maintain an income. Due to the family-oriented nature of Korean Americans, all family members often contributed to the operation of the business (e.g., Min, 1984). Unlike traditional Korean gender roles, where women remain at home, many Korean American women found themselves working out of economic necessity (Kim & Kim, 1998; Lim, 1997). The lack of adherence to gender roles and occupational difficulties are sources of immigration stress for Korean American families. Immigration stress

and psychological maladjustment may contribute to the high rate of domestic violence within Korean American families (Rhee, 1997).

Korean American-owned businesses are often located in large urban centers such as New York City or Los Angeles. Located within African American neighborhoods, Korean business owners faced a downside to their operations, as it became the center of racial tension between Korean Americans and other ethnic groups living in those areas. The impetus for the major conflict between the Korean Americans and African Americans involved the 1992 rioting following the verdict that found police officers not guilty of violating the civil rights of Rodney King, an African American beating victim (Novas, Cao, & Silva, 2004). The racial and economic conflict among minority groups manifested in massive looting and armed conflict, and took place at Korean American-operated stores, lasting three days (e.g., Min, 1996; Kim, 1999). **Sa-I-gu**, which literally means “April 29,” denotes the riot that left financially and psychologically lasting effects on Korean Americans. One study found that the majority of riot victims experienced severe distress and symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder (Kim-Goh, Suh, Blake, & Hiley-Young, 1995).

Currently, over 1 million Americans are of Korean descent (U.S. Census Bureau, 2000). Like other ethnic groups, Korean Americans predominantly reside in California and New York. A considerable number have also moved to areas such as Illinois, Washington, and Georgia. As middle-class entrepreneurs, many Korean immigrants have encouraged their American-born children toward upward mobility by attaining a better education and well-paying professions (Novas, Cao, & Silva, 2004). Given the relatively shorter immigration history of Korean Americans compared to other ethnic groups, greater research on immigration stress, discrimination, and psychological adjustment is needed for Korean American families.

### *Filipino Americans*

The United States colonized the Philippines shortly after the conclusion of the Spanish-American War in 1898. As an official American colony, the Filipino people were considered “nationals” of the United States. As U.S. nationals, the Filipino people were not subjected to the same



A Korean American family from Maryland welcomes home their son and brother after his service in the Iraq War. AA/PIs continue to serve in the U.S. military, like previous generations. In 2005, 4.5% of all personnel on active duty and 3.4% of those in the National Guards and Reserves were AA/PIs. These numbers closely reflect the representation of military service age-eligible AAPs (Williams, 2005).

exclusionary laws as other Asian ethnic groups. Until the Tydings–McDuffie Act in 1934, there was a high rate of immigration from the Philippines. Immediately after the establishment of the Philippine Independence Act in 1934, however, they were legally considered “aliens” (Sobredo, 1997). The Tydings–McDuffie Act restricted Philippine immigration to 50 people per year.

Having endured 377 years of Spanish colonization (1521 to 1898) and 50 years as a formal U.S. colony (1898 to 1946), Filipino culture is a mosaic of eastern and western influence, despite their geographical connection with Asia. Although colonization by the United States has facilitated their adaptation into mainstream culture, the unique relationship between the Philippines and the United States has been marred by ambivalence. The Philippines has tolerated over a century of extreme shifts from U.S. immigration and legal policy makers (Sobredo, 1997).

The migration history of the Filipino people reflects the heterogeneity of the culture. Filipinos entered the United States in three waves (San Juan, 1994). The first wave, which lasted from 1906 to 1946, was composed of a mix of agricultural workers, who settled throughout Hawaii and California, and college students sponsored by the United States. Following the success of hiring Japanese Americans to work on the plantations of Hawaii, sugarcane and pineapple plantation owners recruited Filipinos to work on their land. Not restricted to exclusionary laws that barred other Asian groups from entering the United States, over a hundred thousand Filipinos arrived in Hawaii between 1909 and 1934 in hopes of finding livelihood as field workers (Alcantara, 1981). The laborers, comprised mostly of men, served 3-year renewable contracts. These Filipino workers returned to the Philippines, stayed in Hawaii, or, like other Asian groups, moved toward the mainland for agricultural work (Espiritu, 1995).

Additionally, the U.S. government invited and funded **pensionados** to study in America. Over the course of 1903 to 1910, hundreds of Filipino students studied at universities across America, including prestigious Ivy League schools, such as Harvard and Yale. Several of those who succeeded in obtaining their degrees returned to the Philippines to work in government. However, not all pensionados were so fortunate. Many of those who did not complete their education ended up finding work in low-paid labor positions in the United States (Castillo-Tsuchida, 1979).

The second wave, from 1930 to 1964, was composed of the families of war veterans who fought alongside U.S. servicemen during World War II. Along with the Chinese Americans and Korean Americans, Filipino Americans shared the benefits of wartime prosperity and idealized Asian stereotypes created by the United States to separate Asian American groups from Japanese Americans. Despite their wartime allegiance to the United States, however, they entered the United States without American citizenship (Espiritu, 1995).

The third wave, from 1965 to 1984, included people from both the professional and working class. These Filipino Americans arrived to the United States under the Immigration Act of 1965, which gave Filipinos the opportunity to escape the hardships of their own country and seek out a better life. Motivated by political instability from the Philippines, Filipino immigrants sought better economic opportunities within the United States. Educated and professional, these Filipino immigrants shared similar characteristics with other Asian groups arriving at this time (Kitano & Daniels, 1995).

Filipino culture is often ignored when discussing Asian American issues, despite their status as the fastest-growing Asian American group (Flores, 1994). As the second largest Asian group (U.S. Census Bureau, 2000), their status as the “invisible Asian group” is ironic. The Filipino people’s ease in adapting to American culture may contribute to their obscurity when discussing Asian American issues (Flores, 1994). Within the Asian groups, Filipino Americans demonstrate the greatest level of multiculturalism because of their history as a Spanish and U.S. colony. As such, they are often not thought of as Asian Americans. Today’s Filipino Americans



A Filipino American grandmother and grandson visit San Francisco from their hometown of Los Angeles. When arriving to America, Filipino Americans resided largely in metropolitan cities on the West and East coasts. In the 1930s, many of them lived in “Little Manilas,” small ethnic communities similar to Chinatown. Nowadays, Filipino Americans reside in both the cities and the suburbs across the United States.

include professionals, with many women specially trained in the medical field. However, these Filipino immigrants seem to lack cohesion compared to the East Asian groups that have organized themselves, and settle dispersedly the country.

#### *Southeast Asians*

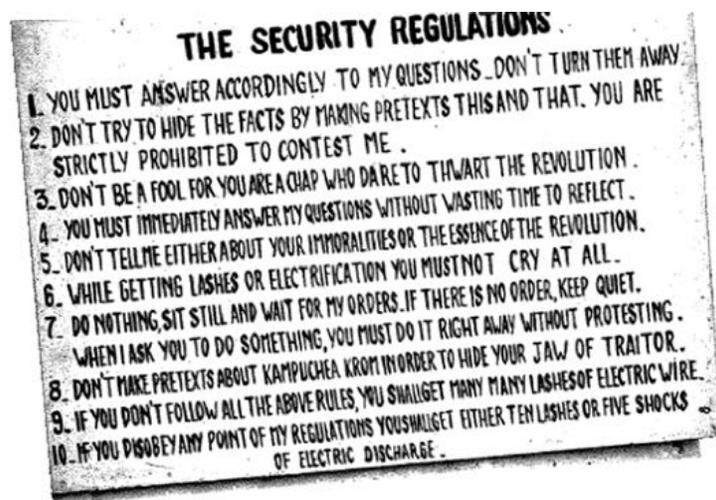
There is incredible diversity among Southeast Asians, but they are often studied and discussed as one cultural group. Southeast Asians differ in their premigration histories, religious and philosophical ideology, worldviews, and language. Colonization created more cultural distance among the Southeast Asian groups than would be expected based on their geographic proximity. Laos itself is home to four different ethnic groups.

Broadly grouped, Southeast Asians can be understood in terms of their migration status. Ogbu (2002) distinguishes between refugees, or involuntary minorities, and immigrants, or voluntary minorities. Southeast Asian refugees include Cambodians, Vietnamese, and Laotians, which also include among them Mien, Hmong, and Meo ethnic groups. Other Southeast Asian groups have entered the United States under less coercive conditions. While some Southeast Asians, such as the Burmese, have entered the United States with refugee status, the majority have been voluntary immigrants. In the United States, their experiences reflect their cultural distinctness. Table 1.1 includes a breakdown of the different Southeast Asian groups currently living in the United States. This discussion will include a history of Southeast Asian refugees (Vietnamese, Cambodians, Hmong) and other Southeast Asians (Thais, Indonesians, Malays, Singaporeans).

*Southeast Asian Refugees* The political turmoil that ensued shortly after the Vietnam War spread to the surrounding countries of Cambodia and Laos, forcing many of the inhabitants to flee their war-ravaged homelands. Although the Geneva Conference established Laos as a neutral country in 1954, North Vietnam relied on the **Ho Chi Minh Trail** in Laos to fight against South Vietnam (Conboy, 1995). To aid in the war without direct military involvement, the CIA covertly trained thousands of Hmong to fight against the North Vietnamese. Like the Vietnamese, the Hmong fled their war-torn country after the war. Fearing the Communist regime, over a hundred thousand Hmong people have entered the United States since 1975 (Office of Immigration Statistics, 2004). The United States also entered into Cambodia, bombing villages, and areas that housed the Vietnamese Communist camps and supply routes. Khmer Rouge, the Communist organization within Cambodia, overtook Cambodia during the 1970s, and shut down the country by confiscating property, closing institutions, and evacuating the cities (Chan, 2004). Khmer Rouge killed almost 2 million Cambodians through torture, execution, and starvation. Chanrithy Him, author of *When Broken Glass Floats* (2000), writes of her experiences during the Khmer Rouge:

Throughout a childhood dominated by war, I learned to survive. In a country faced with drastic changes, the core of my soul was determined to never let the horrific situations take away the better part of me. I mentally resisted forces I could only recognize as evil by being a human recorder, quietly observing my surroundings, making mental notes of the things around me. There would come a day to share them, giving my voice to children who can't speak for themselves. Giving voice, as well, to my deceased parents, sisters, brothers, and extended family members, and to those whose remains are unmarked mass graves scattered throughout Cambodia, the once-gentle land. (p. 21)

Approximately 150,000 Cambodians have been admitted to the United States from 1974 to 1998, with the most recent wave of refugees escaping Cambodia after the mass defection of the Khmer Rouge in 1996 (Office of Immigration Statistics, 2004).



Pol Pot was responsible for the deaths of 2 million Cambodians. He frequently imprisoned those he considered enemies to Cambodia; this included educated Cambodians and anyone affiliated with the former monarchy. A sign hanging in Pol Pot's infamous prison, Tuol Sleng, reflects the years of intimidation and bloodshed that the Cambodian people experienced under his dictatorship. Many Cambodians fled to France, Canada, and the United States as a result of this experience.

Southeast Asian refugees entered the United States in three waves, each defined by a distinguishing set of circumstances and struggles. The first wave came immediately after the end of the Vietnam War from 1975 to 1978. During this time, President Gerald Ford authorized the entrance of 130,000 Southeast Asian refugees into the United States. This wave was composed mostly of Vietnamese and Cambodian individuals with social clout, such as political leaders, educated professionals, and the wealthy.

Approximately 700,000 Southeast Asians comprised the second wave of refugees arriving to the United States in 1978 (Office of Immigration Statistics, 2004). The fall of Saigon, which ended the Vietnam War, prompted hundreds of thousands of surviving Vietnamese, fearing reprisal from the Communists that had taken control of the country, to leave for countries such as China, France, and Canada. After the Vietnamese moved from their homes to asylum camps, U.S. military cargo ships transferred the Vietnamese to refugee-processing centers in the United States.

Additionally, the invasion of Cambodia by Vietnam marked the end of the “killing fields” and its associated trauma propagated by the Communist regime, the Khmer Rouge. Unlike their predecessors, this second wave included individuals from a variety of socioeconomic backgrounds, including less-educated farmers, and fisherman. The second wave brought with them a more traumatic history of war atrocities. Their adaptation to American culture was made difficult by their limited English proficiency and education (Takaki, 1995; Kitano & Daniels, 1995).

The third wave entered the United States after 1982, amidst changes in refugee policies. In collaboration with the Vietnamese government, individuals left Vietnam as part of the Orderly



Coauthor Sopagna Eap's family in a Thailand refugee camp. Eap's parents, Hwai and Heang Eap, and uncle, Harrison Pech, were part of the second wave of Cambodian refugees that entered the United States after the Cambodian civil war. Forbidden to leave the country, they narrowly dodged active minefields and Vietnamese soldiers as they rode bicycles to the Cambodian-Thai border.

Departure Program (ODP) and were granted immigrant status rather than refugee status. This group included released prisoners from reeducation camps and Amerasian children fathered by U.S. servicemen during the war (Kitano & Daniels, 1995).

Since the flight from war and political turmoil, Southeast Asians have had to reconcile their desire to go back to their homeland with living in and acculturating to American society. Cultural differences among the Southeast Asian groups have made this process particularly difficult. In particular, the Hmong have faced drastic cultural challenges, including a disruption in their agrarian lifestyle and ostracism toward their custom of marrying child brides (Kitano & Daniels, 1995). Among immigrant groups, the Hmong are among the poorest and most unemployed (Swartz, Lee, & Mortimer, 2003). Limited occupational skills and language competencies have prevented Southeast Asians from easily adapting to American culture (Ying & Akutsu, 1997).

*Thais, Malays, Indonesians, Singaporeans, and Bruneian* Unlike their neighboring countries, the Thais were fortunate to not experience the political turmoil that characterized most of Southeast Asia. Instead, immigration to the United States by the Thai people was motivated more by military and trade connections than by political necessity (Novas, Cao, & Silva, 2004).

Other Southeast Asian groups from Indonesia, Malaysia, Burma, Brunei, and Singapore make up a small percentage of the Asian population in the United States (Novas, Cao, & Silva, 2004). The people of Indonesia, Malaysia, and Burma are no strangers to poverty and political instability in their own homelands, but poverty has prevented many of them from immigrating to the United States. The majority enter the United States through family preference provisions, and education. For this reason, only a little over 100,000 residents in the United States are from these three countries combined (U.S. Census Bureau, 2000).

In contrast, Singaporeans and Bruneian individuals enjoy some of the highest standards of living of any groups in the world. As a result, few come to the United States. These groups constitute a very small percentage of the U.S. population.

#### *Pacific Islanders*

Pacific Islanders have roots in Oceania, which includes islands in the Central and South Pacific Ocean. Oceania is composed of Polynesia (many islands), Micronesia (small islands), and Melanesia (black islands). Polynesia includes the Hawaiian Islands and American Samoa. Micronesia includes Guam, a U.S. territory, and the Marshall Islands, while Melanesia includes Fiji and Papua New Guinea. Among the Asian and Pacific Islander American population, Pacific Islanders have a particularly high risk for mental health problems and disabilities (Andrade et al., 2006; Cho & Hummer, 2001). However, Pacific Islanders are vastly understudied, and little is known about the protective and risk factors for mental illness and the most appropriate preventative measures and treatments for this heterogeneous group.

In the 2000 U.S. Census, 874,414 individuals identified themselves as Pacific Islanders, the majority of whom live in Hawaii and California. Pacific Islanders make up 0.3 percent of the U.S. population and are often of mixed heritage. Two-thirds of Pacific Islanders self-identify as biracial or multiracial. The four largest Pacific Islander subgroups in the United States (alone or in combination with one or more other races) are Native Hawaiians, Samoans, Guamanians, Chamarros, and Tongans (U.S. Census Bureau, 2000).

*Native Hawaiians* Polynesians first settled on Hawaii approximately 1,500 years ago. It was not until January 18, 1878, that James Cook, an English explorer, first stumbled onto the shores of Hawaii. Initially, Captain Cook was showered with gifts from the Hawaiian people. However, in a later trip to the islands, he was stabbed to death over an incident involving a stolen boat



Brothers Justin, Jeris, and Jordan Orian are  $\frac{3}{4}$  Japanese,  $\frac{1}{8}$  Filipino, and  $\frac{1}{8}$  Hawaiian. Like many children living in Hawaii, they are multiracial. This picture was taken in the mid-1980s. Justin is currently residing in Beaverton, Oregon, Jeris in Pearl City, Hawaii, and Jordan in Las Vegas, Nevada.

from one of his ships. Captain Cook was the first of several American and European explorers to exert a profound influence on the inhabitants of the previously isolated islands. At the time of his arrival, there were approximately 300,000 Hawaiians inhabiting the islands. By 1858, after numerous contacts with explorers and missionaries, the Hawaiian population had dramatically decreased in numbers to an estimated 60,000 due to the introduction of foreign, infectious diseases, such as syphilis (Novas, Cao, & Silva, 2004). Also by this time, the Hawaiians had largely abandoned their religion and their kapu (taboo) system, and adopted the Christian religion and many Western ideas. This was largely facilitated by King Kamehameha II, who had abolished the Hawaiian religion during his rule.

In 1848, King Kamehameha III signed an act called the **Great Mahele**, which divided the millions of acres of Hawaiian land between mostly the government and the Hawaiian chiefs. Before western influence, Hawaiians had no concept of land ownership and did not believe that the land belonged to anyone. Many Hawaiians sold their property for meager sums to foreigners, believing that this would not affect their use of the land. Foreigners soon seized the land for growing crops, hiring Hawaiians as cheap labor. Soon thereafter, wealthy plantation owners began recruiting workers from Asian countries to supplement Hawaii's dwindling native population, in effect creating one of the world's first "melting pots" (Novas, Cao, & Silva, 2004). On January 17, 1893, fearing the threat of taxation of their crops into the United States under the leadership of Queen Liliuokalani, plantation owners rallied for the dethroning of the queen by the U.S. government and staged a rebellion. The success of the rebellion led to the annexation of Hawaii to the United States, under President William McKinley in 1898. However, it was not until March 12, 1959, that Hawaii became the 50th state of the Union (Novas, Cao, & Silva, 2004).

Originally a healthy people, Native Hawaiians now face a multitude of physical and mental health problems (Cook, Withy, Tarallo-Jensen, & Berry, 2005). One study found that Native Hawaiian adolescents have significantly higher rates of psychiatric disorders than

non-Hawaiians, particularly for anxiety disorders (Andrade et al., 2006). Interestingly, a strong ethnic identity in this population has been shown to be a protective factor for symptoms of depression and anxiety (Mccubbin, 2004), as well as a decreased risk of becoming a victim or perpetrator of violence (Austin, 2004).

*Samoans, Guamanians, and Tongans* Similar to the Hawaiian Islands, the Samoan Islands were first inhabited by Polynesians and remained isolated until 1722 when Jacob Roggeveen, a Dutchman, first landed on its shores. Missionaries soon followed. In 1899, Germany and the United States essentially split the islands of Samoa between them. American (Eastern) Samoa went to the United States and was annexed on April 17, 1900 (Novas, Cao, & Silva, 2004). Around the same time, the Spanish-American War of 1898 concluded with the Treaty of Paris, in which Spain ceded Guam to the United States. The Spanish had ruled Guam since 1695 and much of the native population (the Chamorros) had been wiped out (Novas, Cao, & Silva, 2004). The Kingdom of Tonga, unlike Hawaii, Samoa, and Guam, is not owned by the United States. Rather, Tongans began immigrating to the United States in the 1960s with the backing and encouragement of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, which had become a strong presence in Tonga (Novas, Cao, & Silva, 2004).

While very little research has been done on Pacific Islanders as a population, even less research has been conducted on Samoans, Guamanians, and Tongans. However, based on their histories, one would speculate that there exist differences in the psychological landscapes of these populations. Researchers should be careful not to overgeneralize their findings within one specific Pacific Islander group to the entire Pacific Islander population.

### Socioeconomic Status

Asian Americans are often perceived as a group that has successfully utilized education for upward mobility. According to the 2000 U.S. Census Bureau, Asian Americans have the highest median household income of all ethnic groups. This figure, however, can be misleading. For instance, Asian American households are larger than European American households. The Asian American household includes more children and elderly people than the average European American household. When household income per capita is examined, Asian Americans are behind European Americans despite their higher rates of educational attainment. Even with a median income that is higher than the national average, Asian Americans still have a high rate of poverty. The Census shows that 13.5% of all Asian Americans live in poverty. This percentage is similar to the national average of 14% (U.S. Census Bureau, 2000). These dichotomous findings reflect the heterogeneity within ethnic minority populations. Table 1.4 shows data from the 2000 U.S. Census Bureau indicating median family income and percentage of those living in poverty in different Asian American groups. Southeast Asians and Pacific Islanders are over-represented in the lowest economic strata.

### The “Model Minority”?

In sixth grade Mrs. Walker  
Slapped the back of my head  
And made me stand in the corner  
For not knowing the difference  
Between persimmon and precision.  
How to choose  
Persimmons. This is precision . . .

—Li Young Lee, “Persimmons” (1986, p. 17)

**Table 1.4** Income Levels for Each Asian Ethnic Group

	Chinese	Japanese	Filipinos	Asian Indians	Cambodian/ Hmong/ Laotian	Koreans	Pacific Islanders	Vietnamese
Median family income	\$58,300	\$61,630	\$65,400	\$69,470	\$43,850	\$48,500	\$50,000	\$51,500
Median personal income	\$20,000	\$26,000	\$23,000	\$26,000	\$16,000	\$16,300	\$19,100	\$16,000
Percentage living in poverty	13.1	8.6	6.9	8.2	22.5	15.5	16.7	13.8

Source: U.S. Census Bureau. (2000). *Census 2000*. Washington, DC.

The popularity of the model minority myth largely stems from the educational success of Asian American students. Indeed, at first glance, evidence suggests that Asian Americans surpass all other ethnic groups in educational attainment. Eighty-five percent of all Asian American adults have attended college. Thirty-one percent of all Asian Americans 25 years of age or older hold a college degree, which is higher than the national average of 21% (Chang & Le, 2005). Asian Americans are also more likely to attain graduate degrees in higher education.

It is important to remember that figures suggesting the relative success of Asian Americans do not accurately reflect the academic experiences of all Asian Americans. Achievement discrepancies exist among various Asian American groups. Barriers experienced by refugee groups are obscured by evidence suggesting that Asian Americans are academically successful. Thus, social services and scholarships that are available to ethnic minorities often exclude Asian Americans from being eligible, despite the low achievement rates of Cambodians, Hmong, Laotians, and Pacific Islanders.

Among Asian Americans, Southeast Asians and Asian Pacific Islanders do not experience the same level of academic success as their South Asian and East Asian counterparts, although Vietnamese American children are quickly bridging the academic gap (Zhou & Bankston, 1998). Southeast Asian Americans have lower college graduation rates than that of the national average. For example, only 6% of Cambodians, 7% of Laotian or Mien, and 17% of Vietnamese complete a college degree (Niedzwiecki & Duong, 2004). Twenty-six percent of Cambodians and 22.7% of Laotians have experienced no formal education. One reason for this discrepancy may be the conditions surrounding their immigration. Many Southeast Asian Americans have experienced various traumatic events and have had a more difficult time adapting to the host culture.

Explanations to account for the academic success of Asian Americans include both cultural and structural theories (Kim, 2002). Cultural theorists posit that the inculcation of the Confucian values of hard work, education, and social solidarity among Asian American children are responsible for their high rate of academic achievement. Structural explanations include the idea of relative functionalism (Sue & Okazaki, 1990). This explanation suggests that hardships experienced by immigrant groups result in an emphasis on education as a means of upward social mobility.

The idea that education may be the pathway for social leverage may perpetuate behaviors conducive to academic achievement among Asian American children. Indeed, Asian American

youth are more likely to be involved in achievement-oriented peer groups (Steinberg, Dornbusch, & Brown, 1992). Clearly Asian Americans place a high value on education. However, this high value comes at a cost to Asian Americans.

Even when Asian Americans do well, they must overcome obstacles not endured by European Americans. Despite higher levels of educational attainment, evidence suggests that the economic payoff for the amount of education received by Asian Americans is lower than that of all other ethnic groups. For instance, found that Chinese Americans made less money than European Americans and African Americans when education, occupation prestige, and number of hours worked were equal, suggesting a glass ceiling effect that isn't revealed by descriptions of mean salary (Leong, 1998). Asian Americans are also less likely to be included in the ranks of management positions. Studies suggest that Asian values emphasizing social conformity and interpersonal harmony may work against Asian Americans when decisions regarding positions of authority are made (Leong, 1985). As Asian Americans acculturate and adapt more western values, stereotypes perpetuating Asian Americans as introverted and submissive may limit their ability to enter into more socially interactive fields such as law and psychology.

### Summary

Who are Asian Americans? What does it mean to be Asian American? Answering these questions may have proven to be even more difficult than you first imagined. *Asian American* is an umbrella term for many ethnic groups and does not readily demonstrate the heterogeneous cultures, histories, and lifestyles for the members of these groups. Although many perceive Asian Americans to be well off economically, the socioeconomic status of Asian Americans must be couched in an understanding of the heterogeneous circumstances and cultural beliefs of each group. Generalized perceptions of the group as a whole have created the “model minority” myth, which has been found to affect psychological functioning. The question of how these perceptions might change remains, as the histories and experiences of Asian Americans continue to evolve.

### Discussion Questions

1. Why is it important to study Asian Americans?
2. What is your cultural background? How has your background shaped who you are? How has your background influenced your personal habits?
3. How might the historical experiences of different ethnic groups impact their psychological experiences?
4. When was the last time you observed or experienced discrimination? How did you come to determine it to be discrimination?
5. How might the “model minority” myth have a positive impact for Asian Americans? How might it have a negative impact? How might it positively or negatively impact other ethnic groups?
6. What will each of the different Asian American communities look like 50 years from now? How might individuals' ethnic identities change over time?
7. Imagine you are a refugee from another country coming to the United States. How similar or different would this experience be from that of a “voluntary immigrant”? What challenges or advantages might you face that “voluntary immigrants” may not experience?

- The U.S. government dispersed many Southeast Asian refugees all over the country and settled them in small towns in the Midwest rather than big cities on the West Coast where there is a larger Asian American population. Can you think of the advantages and disadvantages of the U.S. government's approach to resettling Southeast Asian refugees? What emotional, psychological, and social issues might you face as a refugee living in California versus as a refugee living in Arkansas?

### Key Terms

**Brain drain:** The loss of professionally trained labor from one environment to another environment considered more geographically or economically favorable. In the present day, many skilled South Asian Americans come to the United States to seek better opportunities.

**Glass ceiling:** Covert barriers experienced by minority groups in the workforce that precludes them from advancing in rank.

**Great Mahele:** An act signed by King Kamehameha III in 1848 dividing Hawaiian land between the royal family, chiefs, and the government. A small percentage of land went to commoners.

**Ho Chi Minh Trail:** A network of paths and roads used by the Viet Cong, a militant Communist group, to supply soldiers and supplies into South Vietnam during the Vietnamese War.

**Internment:** The imprisonment or confinement of individuals, in camps, without legal due process. For Japanese Americans, it refers to their experience of being forced to relocate by the U.S. government during World War II.

**Paper sons:** Young men, often in their teens, who came to the United States from China. These men posed as sons of an American-born or naturalized Chinese American in order to gain entry into the United States.

**Pensionados:** Filipino students sponsored by the U.S. government to receive a university education in the United States.

**Picture brides:** Women from primarily Japan and Korea chosen as brides by a matchmaker and paired with a groom living in the United States. Thousands of women during the 20th century married men whom they only “met” through photographs and family recommendations.

**Race-related trauma:** Experienced by stigmatized groups, such as Japanese Americans in internment, and it involves the repeated exposure to overt or covert racial discrimination, which can lead to interpersonal and psychological difficulties.

**Sa-I-gu:** A Korean term that refers to April 29, 1992, the day in which racially motivated riots targeted Korean American businesses in Los Angeles. Due to the acquittal of four members of the LAPD in the case of an African American man, Rodney King, riots involving fire and looting destroyed over 2,000 Korean American–operated stores. The riots prompted a city-wide curfew and over 30,000 law enforcement officers to maintain the area.

**Sojourners:** Immigrants who do not intend to stay in the new country permanently.

### For Further Learning and Suggested Readings

- Interview an Asian immigrant about his or her experiences entering the United States, preferably someone who is in your family or close to you in some way. You will be surprised at how much more you learn about them by focusing on such a vivid and often evocative experience. Here are some questions to consider asking: What were the most challenging aspects of immigrating to this country? Is there a story that sticks out in your memory that characterizes your experience as an immigrant? Who (if anyone) did you turn to for social support? What emotions did you personally

- experience when you first entered this country? After a year living in this country? After 10 years?
2. Construct a family tree. Try to go back at least 4 generations. List where each family member was born and, if applicable, the year they immigrated to the United States.
  3. Create a realistic dialogue between a man and a woman meeting for the first time on the shores of Hawaii. The Japanese man is an immigrant who emigrated to Hawaii to work in the sugar cane fields. The woman is a picture bride in search of a better life. This is their first meeting and they will be married later on that day.
  4. What would it take to make you leave your country for good? Write down a list of possibilities and throw them into a hat. Draw one of the possibilities from the hat and identify the emotions associated with the situation you have created. Where would you go and why?
  5. It is common to experience the symptoms of depression (i.e., sadness, fatigue, irritability, sleeplessness) when you move to a new place, especially if that place is very different from the place where you came from. Research treatments for depression in an Asian country and compare it to the treatments here (e.g., antidepressants and psychotherapy). Which treatments seem more appealing to you? If a recent Asian immigrant asks you to recommend help for his symptoms of depression, what would you tell him?

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