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A historical and contemporary overview of Asian American and Pacific Islander experiences: Immigration, racialization, and liminality ☆

Greg M. Kim-Ju [a,*], Wayne Maeda [b], Cara Maffini [a]

[a] Department of Psychology, California State University Sacramento, United States
[b] Department of Ethnic Studies, California State University Sacramento, United States

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ABSTRACT

When various contemporary issues of crime, violence, and gangs confronting Asian American and Pacific Islander (AAPI) communities are presented, they are often explained from an ahistorical perspective. This leads to a decontextualized understanding of the communities and the challenges they face. The first part of this article will provide a general historical overview of selected AAPI communities that examines salient aspects of immigration and racialization, resulting in generations living a circumscribed life on the margins of mainstream society. The balance of the article will draw on U.S. Census datasets from 1990 to 2000 to capture the size and growth of Asian American and Pacific Islander communities, and provide population, language, citizenship, education, income, and poverty data to contextualize emerging crime, violence, and gang issues that affect these communities. Data will show commonalities across AAPI communities, but will also reveal information specific to AAPI subgroups, shedding more light on the state of AAPI communities and their diversity.

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Asian American and Pacific Islanders (AAPI) are one of the most diverse and fastest growing populations in the United States. Risk factors for AAPI youth violence can be contextualized by the legacy of historical and contemporary experiences of being both a racial and an ethnic minority. It is hoped that this overview will give the reader a deeper understanding of selected AAPI experiences. It should be noted that this article is not intended to be a comprehensive account of each of the Asian American and Pacific Islander groups, but rather an exploration of general historical and contemporary experiences that have led to their liminal position in American society (Takaki, 1990, p. 18).

The histories of the various AAPI groups are in many ways substantively complex and varied from either "immigrant" or "racial minority" experiences in America.[1] In fact, AAPI groups have simultaneously experienced what ethnic and racial groups in America have experienced, with the added dimension of being constructed as perpetual foreigners in their own land. Historically, this unique

Abbreviation: AAPI, Asian American and Pacific Islander.

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* Corresponding author. Department of Psychology, 6000 J Street, Sacramento, CA, United States.
E-mail address: kimju@csus.edu (G.M. Kim-Ju).

[1] The term "Asian" refers to individuals having origins in any of the original peoples of the Far East, Southeast Asia, or the Indian subcontinent, and the term "Pacific Islanders" refers to individuals having origins in any of the original peoples from Hawai'i, Guam, Samoa, or other Pacific Islands. These are not without their contradictions and complexities.

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set of conditions has led to exclusion from immigration, denial of landownership and naturalization rights (a right given to all European immigrants), segregation in public schools, exclusion from certain areas of employment and housing, increases in physical violence (e.g., lynching, murder), and expulsion from settlements (Pfaelzer, 2007). In the United States, Japanese aliens and citizens alike faced forced removal from the West Coast and mass incarceration during World War II. In fact, one could argue that what historically binds these disparate AAPI groups together involves the ways in which they were exiled to the margins of American society, based on the construction of them as perpetual foreigners of color. At the same time, however, AAPIs have shown remarkable perseverance and resilience in claiming America as their home while being racialized and facing liminality.

1. Early immigration

Although it is not clear whether Chinese, Filipinos, or Japanese arrived "first" in what is now the United States, what is clear is that, almost from the beginning of their respective arrival periods, each of these groups was marginalized and prevented in a variety of ways from becoming part of mainstream America. The Chinese may have "discovered" America according to some sources (Fong, 2008, p. 36), but many scholars have noted that the Chinese began filtering into Hawai'i in 1789 and became ubiquitous, in the minds of many Whites, shortly after the discovery of gold in California in 1848 (Takaki, 1990, pp. 21–22).

Similarly, there is evidence that Filipinos landed in what is now Morro Bay, California, as early as 1587 and settled in current day New Orleans in the mid-1700s, after escaping Spanish colonizers following the long, tortuous trans-Pacific Galleon trade from Manila in the Philippines to Acapulco, Mexico (Cordova, 1983, pp. 1–7). However, large-scale migration of Filipinos to Hawai'i and the rest of the U.S. came after the Spanish-American and subsequent Philippine-American Wars ended "officially" in 1902, and the Philippines became a colony of the U.S.

Japanese were also known to have arrived in the 1600s either as accidental survivors of shipwrecks or as part of official contacts, for example, as diplomats visiting Mexico in 1610. Yet it was not until after the U.S. "opened" Japan with the encouragement of Commodore Matthew C. Perry's expedition in 1853 that the first shipment of Japanese as sources of "cheap labor" to Hawai'i began in 1868. And it was not until 1886 that the Japanese government sanctioned legal emigration. Following the Japanese, a much smaller number of other Asians arrived from Korea and India, in part as a result of colonization by Japan and Great Britain, respectively.

Another group consisting of a handful of Hawaiians, often referred to as "Kanakas," was enticed by people like John Augustus Sutter or the California Gold Rush itself, and introduced to the mainland as laborers of the Hudson Bay Company. When John Sutter established "New Helvetia" ("New Switzerland," later Sacramento, California) in the 1840s, his original group included eight male and two female "Kanakas" (McGowan & Willis, 1983, p. 9). Although the major groups of Asians arriving in the U.S. before 1965 differed in numbers as well as circumstances from those arriving after 1965, they all found common ground in the way the U.S. responded to these "strangers from a different shore" (Takaki, 1990, pp. 12–13).

Between 1850 and the 1930s, approximately 35 million European immigrants arrived in the U.S. During the same time period, roughly 400,000 Japanese, 370,000 Chinese, 180,000 Filipinos, 7000 Koreans, and 7000 Asian Indians entered the U.S. through Hawai'i and the West Coast (numbers do not include deaths, births, or re-entries; Chan, 1991, p. 3). Prior to the 1850s, the Chinese were brought in as contract laborers to Peru, Cuba, and other parts of the West. After the 1850s, the overwhelming majority of Chinese came on the credit-ticket system, attracted by the possibilities of actual gold in "them thar hills"; others dreamed of making their fortunes in Hawai'i and other parts of the mainland. For some groups, such as the Japanese, Koreans, and Filipinos, it was the Hawaiian sugar interests that enticed them as contract laborers to provide much-needed "cheap labor" on the plantations. The Asian Indians, however, were not part of this "Hawaiian experience," and made their way to Canada and the Pacific Coast by paying their own passage (Chan, 1991, pp. 3–4). Nevertheless, they encountered the same xenophobia and racialization as all other Asian groups. All of these AAPI groups shared a number of unenviable outcomes that served to marginalize them to the fringes of mainstream society for almost 100 years.

The Chinese American experience essentially became the template for each successive group of Asian Americans. The most critical step was the dubious Chinese distinction of being the first group to be excluded from immigration into the U.S. based solely on race and occupation. In addition, the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882 simultaneously excluded and officially denied Chinese the right to naturalized citizenship, a fundamental right granted to all European immigrants. The goal of excluding all Asians from immigration remained the same; lawmakers, however, faced a unique challenge with Asian Indians because of how "race" had been constructed.

The relatively small number of South Asians faced exclusion by the ingenious use of geographic ordinances. There was confusion among lawmakers about whether those from India and the Middle East were "White," even though they had been classified as belonging to the "Caucasian race" by anthropologists. To resolve this issue, the "Barred Zoned" provision was included in the 1917 Immigration Act using numerous geographic latitudes, longitudes, and meridian points to effectively exclude those from areas east of the Red Sea, including the Middle East, India, Pakistan, and Southeast Asia. It took a Supreme Court ruling in 1923 to officially determine that Indians, in fact, belonged to the "Caucasian" race, but were not "White" as understood by the ordinary person, thereby denying them naturalization rights. Thus, South Asians were also denied rights to immigration, naturalization, and landownership, particularly in California (Lopez, 2006, pp. 61–67).

The question of Japanese rights was easier, but at the same time difficult to decide. In 1922, the U.S. Supreme Court ruled that Japanese were not part of the Caucasian race and therefore not White, thus disallowing naturalization (a 1790 law passed by Congress confined naturalization to those who were "free and White"). Exclusion became more difficult because of Japan's growing military power and potential international entanglements. However, in 1924, at the height of the Eugenics movement, the Japanese were excluded from the U.S. without even being named. The Immigration Act of 1924 was an attempt to limit the "unfit" by assigning each country an immigration quota of 2%, based on the Census of 1890. This quota favored immigration from the "Nordic" countries and limited the number from Southeastern European countries, as well as excluding those "aliens ineligible to citizenship" (Daniels, 1962, p. 98). By using the exact euphemistic phrase California used to deny Japanese landownership a full decade earlier, the Act now prevented Japanese from entering the U.S.

Filipinos, despite being colonial subjects of the U.S., occupied an ambiguous legal status of "National/Wards" and suffered from the same xenophobia and racism faced by other Asian groups. Their ambiguous status ended when the Philippines was granted provisional independence under the Tydings–McDuffie Act of 1934 and Filipinos became "aliens ineligible to citizenship." The Philippines was given an annual quota of 50 persons allowed to enter the U.S., which essentially evaporated when 500 Filipino immigrants were permitted to enter in 1935. Furthermore, although the California courts determined that Filipinos were not Mongolian, making the anti-miscegenation law inapplicable to them, the legislature, in its infinite wisdom, merely added "Malay" to "negro, mulatto, Mongolian…" and thus prohibited them from marrying into the White race (Chan, 1991, p. 60).

It is no wonder that Carlos Bulosan (1973) stated in his semi-autobiographical account that "… in many ways it was a crime to be Filipino in California" (p. 121). Moreover, the dominant group's construction in popular culture of Chinese, Japanese, and Filipino at various periods from the 1850s through the 1930s, were as people who had no virtue but only vices—addicted to various depravities ranging from opium usage, gambling, prostitution, and bribery to crossing the color line, which necessitated anti-miscegenation laws. With these skewed perceptions by the dominant group in society, it is no wonder that Asian Americans faced legal and institutional barriers. Furthermore, they were the subjects of criminal studies to determine the origins of their "problems." In particular, racial paradigms prior to the 1960s led researchers to frame minorities in general, and Asian immigrants in particular, through the lens of dysfunctionality, deviance, and deficient models that created problems for mainstream America. A few salient studies on Asian Americans conducted in the past should provide a historical context for the racial research paradigms of the period.

2. Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders and delinquency

Hawai'i, having the largest concentration of Asians, was ripe for the study on delinquency and other forms of supposed deviance. Lind (1930) undertook a study in Honolulu and surrounding neighborhoods examining, among other categories, occurrence of juvenile court cases, suicide, and arrests for vice. One of his arguments was that the pattern of crime is often linked to a "cultural code." For example, suicide among the Japanese, extortion or graft in the Chinese community, and cock fighting among the Filipinos can all be linked to and explained by their respective cultures (Lind, 1930, p. 208). Other studies essentially came to the same conclusions, contrary to popular beliefs, that low rates of juvenile delinquency and of incarceration among Chinese and Japanese adults in Hawai'i can be understood within their respective cultural orientation and were not the result of genetic attributes.

During the 1930s, Walter Beach (1932) also conducted a comprehensive study that attempted to map out the crime rate among the Chinese and Japanese in California. His approach was to develop a pattern or clustering of crime based on police records from 1900 to 1927. His conclusions were similar to other studies, finding that the crime rate was relatively low for these groups compared to the size of their populations, and the crimes committed in larger percentages were classed as misdemeanors. Beach (1932) states that the "… percentage of offense committed by Orientals is found among the minor offenses and evidences a lack of acquaintance with the ways—the culture—of America" (p. 94). In the conclusion, Beach explains that although there are differences between Chinese and Japanese crime rates in California, "these differences are all social–historical; they concern culture contacts, and are evidently in no sense racial" (p. 95). This study once again undercut the popular depiction of the seriousness and frequencies of degeneracy among Asian Americans as innate deviancy.

H. Misaki's research is included in E.K. Strong's (1933) publication, *Vocational Aptitudes of Second-Generation Japanese in the United States*. Misaki examined records from the Probation and Juvenile Homes in Los Angeles, San Francisco, Alameda, and Fresno counties. He found 156 Japanese cases and 338 Chinese cases of delinquency over a ten-year period in all four counties. For the Japanese "delinquents," once the numbers are disaggregated, one is left with just 63 cases in ten years over four major population concentrations of Japanese in California. The top three categories ranged from a high of 17 cases for burglary to 11 for violation of any law and 7 for stealing. The Chinese had a total of 175 cases, with the top three categories ranging from a high of 41 cases for larceny to 25 for vagrancy and 21 for stealing (Strong, 1933, pp. 156–157). What is interesting about these studies on crime, violence, and general depravity is that even during this period of the most virulent anti-Asiatic racialization, there was very little evidence to support the historical construction of the innate criminality of Asian Americans.

3. Claiming America

Despite legal barriers that prevented AAPI groups from immigration, naturalization, landownership, miscegenation, and normal development of families and communities (with the exception of Japanese who were able to bring "picture brides"), they nevertheless found ways to claim America. The Chinese, along with the other groups, developed highly sophisticated governance structures to meet the needs of their communities as well as the legal and extra-legal challenges imposed by the dominant society (Salyer, 1995). For the major pre-1965 Asian American groups, however, World War II and the bourgeoning Civil Rights Movement were watershed moments in their collective histories.

For approximately 120,000 mainland Japanese Americans, the attack on Pearl Harbor, Hawai'i by Japan once again reminded an entire racial and ethnic group of their marginality in the phrase "aliens and non-aliens of Japanese ancestry." Despite over sixty percent of this population being American citizens, many along with their immigrant parents were forced off the West Coast and incarcerated for the duration of the War. However, for Chinese, the war years brought naturalization rights and a resumption of limited immigration (105 per year). The lives of Filipinos and Asian Indians also took a turn for the better with naturalization and immigration (100 per year) granted in 1946. Lastly, the Japanese were ultimately allowed naturalization rights in 1952. These changes in naturalization and immigration laws, the 15,000 Chinese and 7000 Filipinos who served in the armed forces during World War II, and the Korean War, along with other legislation during this period, laid the foundation for major shifts in Asian American communities (Chan, 1991, pp. 139–142). In many ways, however, it was the Civil Rights Movement, the Cold War era, and the U.S. involvement in Vietnam that ushered in the tectonic shifts seen in the demographic composition and racial construction of today's AAPIs.

The Civil Rights Movement brought national and international spotlights to the plight of African Americans and the "Jim Crow" system that still existed in America in the 1960s. Unintended consequences of this movement included an expansion of job market opportunities for Asian Americans and an increased public awareness of the historically racist immigration policies. America, the only major power to emerge unscathed from the ravages of World War II, was racked by civil rights marches and sit-ins. The resulting reactions of beatings, fire-bombings, and murders of civil rights demonstraters by Whites proved to be a public relations nightmare in the Cold War era. As part of the legacy of the Civil Rights Movement, Congress passed and President Lyndon Johnson signed the historic Immigration Act of 1965.

The changes in immigration policy ushered in an era of unprecedented growth for various Asian American communities by allowing 20,000 immigrants from each country, with a ceiling of 170,000 per year from the Eastern Hemisphere. The policy also included seven preference categories intended to reunify families, and allowed for specialized occupation and professional preferences. Fong (2008) argues that a larger percentage of Asians entered through established occupational and non-preference investment categories than in other categories early on. "In 1969, for example, 62 percent of Asian Indians, 43 percent of Filipinos and 34.8 percent of Koreans entered the United States…" under these categories. Fong (2008) further points out that while Asians comprised a mere 6.1% of all immigrants from 1951 to 1960, in the following decade Asians took full advantage of the new policies: as a percentage of all immigration, Asian immigration doubled to 12.9% between 1961 and 1970 and almost tripled to 35.3% between 1971 and 1980. Not only did the Civil Rights Movement contribute to this monumental demographic shift of more educated AAPI communities, the shift of more educated immigrants also

contributed to the way in which they were constructed. The marginalization of AAPIs took the form of constructing new ethnic heroes rather than the old racial villain images of decades past, essentially creating another kind of liminality.

The Civil Rights Movement laid bare the inherent contradictions of a "free America" locked in a Cold War struggle with the undemocratic totalitarian regimes of the Communist bloc. Asian Americans emerged in the 1960s (at the height of the Civil Rights Movement) as the perfect "poster child" of how to succeed in America. They met several important criteria of being a racial minority and one that, in the face of discrimination, had seemingly overcome all of the obstacles to become successful in America. In fact, one article entitled, "Success Story of One Minority Group in the U.S.," appearing in a 1966 issue of *U.S. News and World Report*, stated: "At a time when Americans are awash in worry over the plight of racial minorities—one such minority, the nation's 300,000 Chinese-Americans, is winning wealth and respect by dint of its hard work. Still being taught in Chinatown is… that people should depend on their own efforts—not a welfare check…" (pp. 73–78). The other major event to affect growth of Asian American communities was the U.S. involvement in America's longest war to date—the Vietnam War.

The U.S. involvement in Vietnam, Laos, and Cambodia began in the 1950s and came to an end by March 1973 with the withdrawal of American forces. Vietnam fell to Communist forces on April 30, 1975 (Cambodia and Laos would later fall). The collapse of the South Vietnamese army and government led to literally thousands of Vietnamese refugees fleeing for their lives. The U.S. responded by evacuating about 130,000 Vietnamese, many who had close ties to the U.S. or the Vietnamese army and government (Chan, 1991, pp. 154–157). With chaos reigning in Southeast Asia, the U.S. began receiving an entirely new group of Asian refugees. During the war, the U.S. Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) had conducted a "Secret War" in Laos, paying and training ethnic hill tribes groups such as Hmong and Iu Mien to fight against the Communists who used Laos' neutrality as a cover for operations. Many Hmong and Iu Mien eventually fled overland after becoming targets for extermination by Lao Communists, crossing the Mekong River into refugee camps in Thailand. These refugees, utilizing the various provisions of the Immigration Act of 1965 and subsequent legislation, accounted for an entirely new group of Asian Americans who were not part of the pre-1965 Asian groups (Chan, 1991, pp. 157–165). Moreover, being refugees, victims of decades of warfare, and adjusting to an entirely new country and culture presented its own set of issues not encountered by those involved in the orderly process of immigration.

The earlier construction of Asian Americans as the "model minority" in the 1960s today incorporates these newest groups from Southeast Asia into the mix of model minority, though their experiences in the U.S. vary to a certain extent. This model served two fundamental purposes: first, this construction served to confirm American exceptionalism that anyone can make it in America, even racial minorities; second, it demonstrated to the world that there are no structural barriers to economic equality and if inequalities exist they are the result of personal and/or cultural deficits (culture of excellence and culture of poverty). While being praised, Asian Americans are simultaneously marginalized as being perpetual foreigners, and are held in constant comparison to African Americans, Hispanics, and Native Americans, marginalizing them racially (Fong, 2008, p. 37).

The historical review shows us how larger structural forces in U.S. society influenced the experiences and perceptions of AAPI communities. Although these larger political, economic, and social forces shaped their status as racial and ethnic minority groups and identified common struggles and issues that bound them together, they also perpetuated certain images and stereotypes of AAPI groups such as the perpetual foreigner and model minority. As scholars have pointed out (Fong, 2008; Daseler, 2000), these images and stereotypes can pressure Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders to conform to ways of being that are culturally endorsed by those in power, or frustrate them when they cannot meet those expectations. The image of the perpetual foreigner suggests that Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders have difficulty adjusting to life in the U.S., while the model minority stereotype suggests they have overcome obstacles to "succeed" in the U.S. In effect, as the review suggests, both images position Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders at the margins of U.S. society.

Although recent studies of AAPIs and violence support earlier research that showed lower rates of crime and violence, we have witnessed a growth in studies that focus on organized crime and gangs (Song & Hurysz, 1995; Waters, 1999) as well as cultural factors such as collectivism, the family, and emphasis on education, to understand AAPI crime and violence. For example, the literature on AAPI violence shows us that the family can insulate Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders against violence, either as perpetrators or victims (Scanzoni, 2001). The literature also suggests that levels of violence may be related to the social organization of communities, especially the integration of Asian American communities and the acculturation of Asian Americans within the larger community (Harris, Firestone, & Vega, 2005; Paciotti, 2005). Others, such as Titterington and Damphousse (2003), have suggested that greater educational and economic levels of Asian Americans reduce their chances of being victims of violence.

Given the focus of the historical review and more recent studies on violence, the balance of this article accents the contemporary experiences of AAPI communities and examines population trends, educational and economic characteristics, and citizenship and language characteristics drawn from 1990 and 2000 U.S. Census data. Although we focus on the larger AAPI population, we also include data on specific AAPI subgroups to show the range of diversity where appropriate. This information will be useful in understanding the growth and diversity of the AAPI population in the U.S., and in framing some of the emerging issues related to violence and gang issues described in subsequent articles in this issue, by setting the cultural, social, educational, and economic contexts of AAPI experiences.

According to the U.S. Census, the AAPI population comprised only 3.8% of the total population in the U.S. in 2000. Although only a small percentage of the general population across the states, the number belies the overall growth of the AAPI population over the past few decades and the rapid growth of this population in specific cities and states. Nationally, the AAPI population is expected to grow to 37.6 million people by 2050, making up 9.3% of the total U.S. population (Fong, 2008). In areas such as Hawai'i, AAPIs comprised more than 41% of the total population. Not surprisingly, AAPI groups comprised more than 50% of the population in the two counties of Kalawao (65.3%) and Honolulu (54.9%) and about 40% for each of the remaining three counties of Kauai (45.2%), Maui (41.7%), and Hawai'i (38%). In California, AAPI groups comprised over 11% of the total population in 2000, and were considered among the fastest growing racial groups. They comprised at least 20% of the population in the counties of San Francisco (31.3%), Alameda (30%), Santa Clara (25.9%), and San Mateo (21.3%; Census, 2000a,b).

Although scholars and politicians have commented on the success of the AAPI population and focused on the model minority image, this population is made up of many different groups of people and varies substantially by educational status and affluence. Thus, it is important to recognize that the AAPI population is heterogeneous and differs by language, culture, ethnicity, ancestry, and generational status in the U.S. The following sections include data on population characteristics, education, income, and poverty in an effort to demonstrate similarities and differences among the AAPI groups and to contextualize some of the violence issues relevant to AAPI groups covered in subsequent articles in this issue.

Table 1
Population by race, ethnicity, and AAPI subgroup.

Race/ethnicity	1990	% of TP in 1990	2000 Alone	% of TP in 2000 Alone	2000 Alone or in combination	% change 1990 to 2000 Alone	% change 1990 to 2000 Alone or in combination
White Am.[a]	188,128,296	75.6	194,552,774	69.1	198,177,900	3.4	5.3
African Am.	29,986,060	12.1	34,658,190	12.3	36,419,434	15.6	21.5
Latino[b]	22,354,059	9.0	33,081,736	11.8	37,659,799	48.0	68.5
Asian Am.	6,908,638	2.8	10,242,998	3.6	11,898,828	48.3	72.2
Native Am.	1,878,285	0.8	2,475,956	0.9	4,119,301	31.8	119.3
Pacific Islander	365,024	0.1	398,835	0.1	874,414	9.3	139.5
Other race[c]	9,804,847	3.9	15,359,073	5.5	18,521,486	56.6	–
Total pop.	248,709,873	100.0	281,421,906	100.0	–	13.2	–
Asian American subgroup							
Chinese	1,645,472	23.8	2,432,585	23.7	2,865,232	47.8	74.1
Filipino	1,406,770	20.4	1,850,314	18.1	2,364,815	31.5	68.1
Asian Indian	815,447	11.8	1,678,765	16.4	1,899,599	105.9	133.0
Vietnamese	614,547	8.9	1,122,528	11.0	1,223,736	82.7	99.1
Korean	798,849	11.6	1,076,872	10.5	1,228,427	34.8	53.8
Japanese	847,562	12.3	796,700	7.8	1,148,932	− 6.0	35.6
Cambodian	147,411	2.1	171,937	1.7	206,052	16.6	39.8
Hmong	90,082	1.3	169,428	1.7	186,310	88.1	106.8
Laotian	149,014	2.2	168,707	1.6	198,203	13.2	33.0
Pakistani	–	–	153,533	1.5	204,309	–	–
Thai	91,275	1.3	112,989	1.1	150,283	23.8	64.6
Pacific Islander subgroup							
Nat. Hawaiian	211,014	57.8	140,652	35.3	401,162	− 33.3	90.1
Samoan	62,964	17.2	91,029	22.8	133,281	44.6	111.7
Guam/Chamorro	49,345	13.5	58,240	14.6	92,611	18.0	87.7
Tongan	17,606	4.8	27,713	6.9	36,840	57.4	109.2
Fijian	7195	2.0	9796	2.5	13,581	36.2	88.8

Data sets: Census 1990 Summary Tape File 1 (STF 1) 100-Percent Data, Census 2000 Summary File 1 (SF-1) 100-Percent Data, & Census 2000 Summary File 2 (SF-2) 100-Percent Data.
[a] White Americans refers to Whites who are not Latino.
[b] Latinos may be of any race.
[c] The change in the composition of the Other race category does not allow for comparison between 1990 and 2000 data.

Compared with the 1990 Census, in the 2000 Census the AAPI population grew by 46.3% for individuals identifying as one race and by 75.6% for those individuals identifying as more than one race.[2] A substantial portion of this population included Asian Americans, as they comprised 3.6% of the U.S. population and grew by 48.3% from 1990 to 2000 (see Table 1; Census, 1990, 2000a,b). When Asians of multiracial descent are included, the percentage of growth over the same period rises to 72.2%. The largest Asian American subgroups included Chinese (23.7%), Filipinos (18.1%), Asian Indians (16.4%), Vietnamese (11%), and Koreans (10.5%; see Table 1). Many of these groups were also the fastest growing Asian American subgroups since 1990, with Asian Indians leading the way at nearly 106%, followed by the Hmong group at 88.1% (Census, 1990, 2000a,b).

In 2000, the Pacific Islander population in the U.S. was small (398,835) compared to other major racial and ethnic groups, comprising only 0.1% of the total population. However, the Pacific Islander population more than doubles in size when multiracial individuals are included in this category. From 1990 to 2000, the Pacific Islander population grew by 9% for those identifying only as Pacific Islander and nearly 140% for Pacific Islanders of multiracial descent (Census, 1990, 2000a,b). Not surprisingly, Native Hawaiians comprised the largest Pacific Islander group, representing 35.3% of this population. However, the Tongan, Samoan, and Fijian groups were the fastest growing Pacific Islander subgroups from 1990 to 2000.

Although the AAPI population in 2000 was relatively small compared to the other major racial and ethnic groups, data suggest that the percentage of Asian Americans grew faster than any other racial group from 1990 to 2000; the percentage of Pacific Islanders was the fastest growing among multiracial groups over the same period (Census, 1990, 2000a,b). By comparison, Latinos grew by nearly 48% and 68.5% for "one race" and multiracial, respectively, over the same period. Pacific Islanders appear to be slightly younger than the rest of the U.S. population, with nearly 45.6% under the age of 25 (versus 35.1% for Asian Americans and 35.3% for the total U.S. population). Of note, nearly 24% of the Pacific Islander population was between the ages of 5 and 17 in 2000 (versus 17.5% for Asian Americans and 18.9% for the total U.S. population). These data suggest that AAPI communities are growing faster than the total U.S. population and that there is a large youth population among Pacific Islander groups.

4. Nativity, citizenship status, and English proficiency

One of the images strongly associated with AAPI communities is that of the perpetual foreigner who has difficulty adjusting socially and culturally to U.S. culture. Studies on Asian Americans and violence have shown that acculturation can reduce involvement in crime. Data presented here attempt to illustrate the diversity of Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders in relation to nativity (i.e., place of birth), citizenship status, and English proficiency, all of which may be seen as indicators of acculturation. Data show that a higher percentage of Asian Americans were born outside of the U.S. (31.1%) compared to other racial and ethnic groups, although roughly 80% of Pacific Islanders were U.S.-born (Census, 2000a,b). Within Asian American subgroups, the highest percentage of U.S.-born (60.5%) were Japanese, while Thai (22.2%), Korean (22.3%), and Vietnamese (23.9%) had the lowest rates; nearly 45% of Hmong were U.S.-born. Within Pacific

[2] It is important to note the changes made to the question on race in Census 2000a,b. There are at least two ways to present the growth in the total number and percentages of Asian Americans and Pacific Islander in Sacramento. They are: (1) the difference in the AAPI population between 1990 and 2000 using the "race alone" concept (self-identification with only one race) for 2000 and (2) the difference in the AAPI population between 1990 and 2000 using the "race alone or in combination" (self-identification with one or more races) concept. Because of these changes, the Census 2000a,b data on race are not directly comparable with data from the 1990 census or earlier years. Unless noted, we used "one race" data in examining various indicators.

Table 2
Educational attainment of persons 18 to 24 years by race, ethnicity, and AAPI subgroup.

Race/ethnicity	Less than 9th grade %	9th–12th grade, no diploma %	High school graduate %	Some college, no degree %	Associate degree %	Bachelor's degree %	Graduate or prof. degree %
Asian Am.	1.8	12.9	20.9	41.3	4.9	16.1	2.2
Pacific Islander	4.0	20.2	36.2	31.7	3.9	3.8	0.2
White Am.[a]	1.5	17.4	28.3	38.7	4.8	8.8	0.6
African Am.	2.6	29.1	32.5	29.1	2.6	3.8	0.3
Latino[b]	15.0	30.7	27.8	21.2	2.5	2.6	0.3
Native Am.	5.0	30.9	33.4	25.2	3.0	2.3	0.3
Asian American subgroup							
Hmong	4.8	27.0	33.8	28.4	3.0	2.7	0.3
Cambodian	3.5	30.9	30.1	29.8	2.3	3.2	0.2
Laotian	2.9	29.0	32.2	28.5	3.4	3.8	0.2
Vietnamese	3.4	18.6	23.4	39.0	5.3	9.5	0.7
Filipino	1.5	12.8	23.0	45.4	6.8	10.1	0.4
Pakistani	2.9	16.1	21.8	36.3	5.8	14.9	2.1
Korean	0.8	11.3	20.2	47.6	4.0	15.0	1.0
Japanese	0.5	6.6	21.2	47.9	7.8	15.1	0.9
Chinese	1.8	10.7	18.4	43.1	3.9	19.9	2.2
Thai	1.6	9.7	22.2	34.8	4.5	23.7	3.5
Asian Indian	1.5	9.7	16.4	34.5	3.9	27.4	6.6
Pacific Islander subgroup							
Tongan	3.7	24.8	36.4	29.8	3.6	1.6	0.1
Samoan	3.2	22.9	38.0	28.2	4.6	2.7	0.2
Fijian	0.6	26.7	29.7	35.1	3.8	4.1	0.0
Guam/Chamorro	9.4	21.1	29.0	32.2	3.4	4.4	0.5
Nat. Hawaiian	1.6	16.5	39.5	33.6	3.7	5.0	0.1
Total pop.	4.0	21.3	28.6	34.3	4.0	7.3	0.6

Data set: U.S. Census 2000 Summary File 4 (SF 4) Sample Data.
[a] White Americans refers to Whites who are not Latino.
[b] Latinos may be of any race.

Islander subgroups, less than a quarter of Fijians were born in the U.S. while a higher percentage of Samoans (79.1%) and Guamanians/Chamorros (87.6%) were born in the U.S. Even with a high percentage of Asian Americans born outside of the U.S., it is interesting to note that U.S. citizenship was held by at least half of this population.

Another indicator of nativity or citizenship status involves English proficiency, and lack of it would support the "perpetual foreigner" stereotype of AAPIs. In looking at English proficiency, we defined individuals as proficient if they self-reported their English ability as "Speak only English," "Speak English very well," or "Speak English well"; those who indicated either "Speak English not very well" or "Speak English not at all" were considered to be less than proficient in English. Eighty-three percent of Asian Americans and 94.8% of Pacific Islanders were proficient in English (Census, 2000a,b).[3] Across the major racial and ethnic groups, rates for AAPIs were between those of White Americans (99.2%) and Latinos (76.3%). Nearly 95% of Filipinos and 93% of Asian Indians were proficient in English, whereas 69% of Vietnamese and 73% of Cambodians were proficient in English; 90% of all Pacific Islander subgroups were proficient in English. In examining AAPI subgroups aged between 5 and 17 years, we found that only three subgroups were slightly below 90% in English proficiency: Hmong (85.1%), Vietnamese (88.8%), and Japanese (89.4%). By and large, most AAPIs are proficient in English, and those who are not tend to be the more recent Asian immigrant groups.

5. Education

Asian Americans have been hailed as the model minority, based primarily on their educational attainment and income. As some studies have suggested, higher levels of educational attainment may serve to reduce Asian American and Pacific Islander involvement in crime. Among the major racial and ethnic groups in 2000, Asian Americans were the highest achieving group, with slightly over 40% of those aged 18 years or older having received a bachelor's degree or higher, while this educational level was attained by 11.8% of Pacific Islanders, and 22.3% of the total U.S. population (Census, 2000a,b).[4] An examination of educational attainment for those individuals between the ages of 18 and 24 showed that a higher percentage of Asian Americans (18.3%) had received a bachelor's degree or higher compared to other racial and ethnic groups, more than double the rate of the general population (see Table 2). Four percent of Pacific Islanders in this age range had received a bachelor's degree. Given that many individuals in this age group can be at different points in their education, we focused on individuals who had some college experience but no college degree. Data showed that nearly 41.3% of Asian Americans and 31.7% of Pacific Islanders fit this category, compared to 34.3% of the total population. It is interesting to note that more Asian American females than males in this age group had completed their bachelor's degree (19.9% versus 16.6%, respectively), the widest gender gap for any racial or ethnic group. When those who had at least some college were included, Asian Indians, Japanese, Chinese, and Koreans ranked highest while Hmong, Cambodian, and Laotians ranked lowest.

Although the overall numbers do not show that Pacific Islanders are academically as strong as their Asian American counterparts, an examination of individuals aged 18 to 24 years and identifying as Pacific Islander paints a different picture. High school diplomas were received by 73.5% of Pacific Islander men and 78.5% of Pacific Islander women, a slightly higher proportion than the general population (71.4% of men, 78.3% of women) but lower than White American men and women (78.8% and 83.6%, respectively). In addition, 28.4% of

[3] It is important to note that South Asian and Filipinos immigrants generally come to the U.S with good working knowledge of English, as do Pacific Islanders whose instruction in school is in English.

[4] Data on educational attainment are not limited to education or degrees at U.S. institutions.

Pacific Islander men and 35.2% of Pacific Islander women reported having some college experience but no college degree.

A closer analysis of the educational attainment of AAPI groups showed variation by subgroup. Asian Indians (34%), Thai (27.2%), and Chinese (22.1%) had the highest percentages of individuals between the ages of 18 and 24 receiving a bachelor's degree while Hmong (3%), Cambodian (3.4%), and Laotians (4%) had the lowest percentages in the same age group (Census, 2000a,b). Pacific Islanders showed less variation for those individuals receiving a bachelor's degree with Native Hawaiians having the highest percent (5.1%) and Tongans the lowest (1.7%). Although it appears that Asian Americans are doing relatively well compared to other major racial and ethnic groups in educational attainment in this age group, a great deal of variation is found when data are disaggregated by subgroup.

6. Income

In addition to educational attainment, scholars have used median household income to demonstrate the success of Asian Americans. Similar to educational attainment, income level may serve to reduce involvement in crime for Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders. The 2000 U.S. Census data showed that both Asian Americans ($51,908) and Pacific Islanders ($42,717) had higher median household incomes compared to the total U.S. population (see Table 3). Asian Americans' median household income was roughly $6500 higher than the median household income of White Americans ($45,367), and about $10,000 higher than that of the total population ($41,994). However, great economic disparity exists among AAPI subgroups. Asian Indians had the highest median household income compared to other Asian American subgroups at $63,669, followed by Filipinos ($60,570), Japanese ($52,060), and Chinese ($51,444; see Table 3). In contrast, the median household incomes of Hmong and Cambodians were the lowest at $32,076 and $36,155, respectively. Pacific Islanders' median household income was slightly higher than that of the total population at $42,717. The median household incomes of all Pacific Islander subgroups were within a narrow range of $40,620 (Samoan) to $46,306 (Guamanian or Chamorro). These data on median household income by race and ethnicity show that, although AAPI communities appear collectively to be doing well compared to other racial and ethnic groups, there is disparity in this area. One important factor to consider in median household income is the average household size of AAPI groups (Asian Americans, 3.1; Pacific Islanders, 3.6; general population, 2.6), which may suggest that more workers contribute to the median household income compared to other groups.

Table 3
Median household income by race, ethnicity, and AAPI subgroup.

Race/ethnicity	$
African Am.	29,423
Native Am.	30,599
Latino[b]	33,676
Pacific Islander	42,717
White Am.[a]	45,367
Asian Am.	51,908
Asian American subgroup	
Hmong	32,076
Cambodian	36,155
Korean	40,037
Thai	40,329
Laotian	42,978
Vietnamese	45,085
Pakistani	47,241
Chinese	51,444
Japanese	52,060
Filipino	60,570
Asian Indian	63,669
Pacific Islander subgroup	
Samoan	40,620
Nat. Hawaiian	44,544
Fijian	45,420
Tongan	45,700
Guam/Chamorro	46,306
Total pop.	41,994

Data set: Census 2000 Summary File 4 (SF 4) Sample Data.
[a] White Americans refers to Whites who are not Latino.
[b] Latinos may be of any race.

Table 4
Poverty rate by race, ethnicity, and AAPI subgroup.

Race/ethnicity	%
White Am.[a]	8.1
Asian Am.	12.6
Pacific Islander	17.7
Latino[b]	22.6
African Am.	24.9
Native Am.	25.7
Asian American subgroup	
Filipino	6.3
Japanese	9.7
Asian Indian	9.8
Chinese	13.5
Thai	14.4
Korean	14.8
Vietnamese	16.0
Pakistani	16.5
Laotian	18.5
Cambodian	29.3
Hmong	37.8
Pacific Islander subgroup	
Fijian	10.5
Guam/Chamorro	13.7
Nat. Hawaiian	15.6
Tongan	19.5
Samoan	20.2
Total pop.	12.4

Data set: U.S. Census 2000 Summary File 4 (SF 4) Sample Data.
[a] White Americans refers to Whites who are not Latino.
[b] Latinos may be of any race.

7. Poverty rate

In 2000, the poverty rates for Asian Americans (12.6%) and Pacific Islanders (17.7%) were slightly higher than that of the total U.S. population (12.4%) and substantially higher than that of the White population (8.1%). When poverty data were disaggregated by Asian American subgroup, Hmong and Cambodians had the highest poverty rates (37.8% and 29.3%, respectively) while Filipinos and Japanese had the lowest poverty rates (6.3% and 9.7%, respectively; see Table 4). Similarly, Pacific Islander subgroups range in their poverty rates, with Fijians having the lowest (10.5%) and Samoans the highest (20.2%). These data on poverty rates for the AAPI population suggest that this population is not doing as well as the dominant images may imply (e.g., AAPIs are doing economically well), and that its poverty rate is not necessarily commensurate with its educational status and median household income. Furthermore, a closer analysis suggests that the more recent AAPI immigrant groups are not faring as well as those groups with a longer immigration history in the U.S.

Our analyses of census data that focus on population characteristics, education, income, and poverty issues show a few trends. Although the perception of AAPIs as perpetual foreigners is prevalent in the U.S., the census data including birth rates and English proficiency contradict this view. Data showed that a high percentage of AAPIs were born in the U.S. or have gained citizenship, and fluency is the highest among all minorities, falling a close second to White Americans. Clearly, the misconception of the foreigner is both

outdated and a reflection of past racialized constructions of AAPIs. Another recurring theme is that, although AAPIs are often grouped together and share similar histories of marginalization, racialization, and liminality, there are distinct differences among them. Within each of these groups (Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders), the subgroups are equally varied, a point well illustrated in the education and income data. On the whole, Asian Americans had higher education and income rates than any other race, and surpassed the general population. The AAPI groups with the longest history in the U.S. seem to be the most successful, whereas those that arrived in the past 40 years still seem to be struggling economically and educationally, though they are still faring better than other racial and ethnic minorities. Pacific Islanders do have lower rates of education than Asian Americans overall, but it is important to note that more than half of this population is under the age of 24.

The view of AAPI as the model minority has often overshadowed negative data in areas such as AAPI poverty rates. The high number of youth in combination with higher poverty rates, particularly among Pacific Islanders, must be examined in relation to the prevalence rates of crime, gang activity, and violence that afflict this group.

8. Conclusion

The term “Asian American” applies to 26 subgroups and “Pacific Islander” to six subgroups. As discussed earlier, what binds these disparate AAPI groups together are the ways in which they have been exiled to the margins of U.S. society based on the construction of two dominant images, the model minority and the perpetual foreigner. This unity, in part, has enabled them to persevere and be resilient in claiming and making the U.S. their home. However, it has also masked the tremendous amount of heterogeneity among Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders that has led to diverse experiences in social, political, economic, and educational settings. Variations in age, population, English proficiency, citizenship, education, and income in conjunction with the nuances in history and culture of each subgroup contribute to their unique experiences. These experiences should not be overshadowed by the greater AAPI experience, but rather considered within its context. It is important to understand that these variations, which contribute strongly to present day successes as well as challenges, provide for more specificity in addressing a number of emerging issues, including crime, violence, and gang involvement.

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