

## **A BRIEF HISTORY OF ASIAN AND PACIFIC ISLANDER MONTH**

*May 1 through May 31*

Former congressional staffer during the 1970s, Jeanie Jew, had the idea of designating a month recognizing Asian and Pacific Islander peoples. Two members of the U.S. House of Representatives, Congressman Frank Horton (Republican 1/3/1963-1/3/1993) and Representative Norman Mineta (Democrat 1/3/1975-10/10/1995) introduced to the House a resolution proclaiming the first ten days of May as Asian-Pacific Heritage Week. A similar bill was introduced to the Senate a month later by Daniel Inouye and Spark Matsunaga of Hawaii. This decision to pursue this initiative was made for two reasons: (1) the first Japanese arrived in the United States in 1843, and (2) more than two decades later, on May 10, 1869, the golden spike was driven into the First Continental Railroad, completed by Chinese laborers.

President Jimmy Carter signed the Joint Resolution on October 5, 1978 and it became public law 95-419. George H. W. Bush signed the bill passed by Congress to extend the dates for Asian-American Heritage week from May 1 to May 31 in 1995. Later it was designated as Asian/Pacific American Heritage Month, signed into law on May 1, 2009 by Barack Obama.

Asians (mostly Japanese and Chinese) primarily settled in Hawaii and California and were skilled laborers. Between 1850 and 1905 many of the new arrivals were refugees from Viet Nam, Cambodia, Hmong, after the Viet Nam War.

As migration patterns shifted, more proportions of highly educated Asians immigrated to the United States. Their success is often referred to as the “model minority” myth.

There has been some significant hate projected towards certain groups of AAPI in the United States, drawing some parallels between the anti-Asian sentiment during Jeanie Jew’s great-grandfather’s time and the recent “China Virus,” where hate crimes have become more chillingly violent. Typical discriminatory practices have not escaped the Asian and Pacific Islander populations in the U.S.; they suffer in similar ways to the rest of the minorities in this country. They have and are still undergoing racism, discrimination, being called all sorts of derogatory names; Asian Americans are stereotyped and are subjected to exclusion from leadership positions, what has come to be referred to as the “bamboo ceiling.”

Asian and Pacific Islander Month is to bring aware to these things and teach the public about them.