

Message from the Editors

AAPIs 2040: Our Future

Elena Ong and S. Floyd Mori

Fifty years ago, Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders (AAPIs) were barely 1 percent of America's population, but today AAPIs are 6 percent. By the year 2040, there will be thirty-seven million AAPIs, nearly double the number of AAPIs today. In 2040, three years before America is projected to reach the "majority minority" tipping point, approximately one in ten Americans will be AAPI. As the total U.S. population increases by 18 percent, Asian Americans will increase 74 percent and Native Hawaiian and other Pacific Islanders will increase 52 percent.

What do these numbers mean for AAPIs and for America's future? To answer this question, we need to look at our past, present, and future.

AAPIs owe a debt of gratitude to the civil rights movement and activists such as Martin Luther King Jr., Cesar Chavez, and countless others for their profound impact on communities of color and the larger society. It is impossible to list the all of those who contributed to the historical transformation of race relations in the United States. AAPIs both benefited from, and participated in, the social movements of this and other monumental periods. AAPI pioneers took to the street and sought relief through the courts, demonstrating extraordinary acts of collective and individual courage, emblematically represented by people such as Yick Wo who challenged the discriminatory application of the "race-neutral" laws, Queen Lili'uokalani who fought for the sovereignty rights of Native Hawaiians, Gordon Hirabayashi and Fred Korematsu who challenged the racially motivated internment of Japanese Americans, Philip Vera Cruz who set the stage for organizing farm workers, and activists such as Grace Lee Boggs and Yuri Kochiyama who organized across the color line. Their actions and sacrifices remind us of the importance of making history by engaging history.

Changing history includes changing laws to be more just and inclusive. Had it not been for momentum created by the civil rights movement, President Lyndon B. Johnson may not have had the opportunity

to sign the Civil Rights Act of 1964, the Immigration and Naturalization Act of 1965, and the Voting Rights Act of 1965. Had it not been for the Immigration and Naturalization Act's anti-discrimination policies that changed the extremely low immigration quotas from Asia and the Pacific Islands, the AAPI population would not be the size that it is today. Had it not been for the Civil Rights and Voting Rights acts, AAPIs would not have the language rights protections that they have today. Had it not been for the Voting Rights Act, AAPIs would not have the same opportunities to vote for elected officials who represent their interests.

About a quarter of a century ago the UCLA Asian American Studies Center and Leadership Education for Asian Pacifics inaugurated the nation's first Asian Pacific American Public Policy Research Institute. They published "The State of Asian Pacific America: Policy Issues to the Year 2020" in 1993, the year President Bill Clinton took office. It was the first time that AAPIs took the initiative to project that far into the future and ponder what could happen with an AAPI policy agenda if the community increased from eight million Asian Pacific Americans in 1990 to twenty million Asian Pacific Americans by the year 2020.

Over the last quarter of a century, AAPIs have made great strides in America—with Secretary Norman Mineta becoming the first Asian American appointed to a presidential cabinet for two U.S. presidents; to the late U.S. Senator Daniel Inouye, who as president pro tem of the U.S. Senate was the highest-ranking Asian American politician in U.S. history; to U.S. Senator Mazie Hirono, the first Asian American woman to serve in the U.S. Senate. AAPIs were also given a voice in the White House, when President Bill Clinton established, and President George W. Bush and President Barack Obama reauthorized, the first White House Initiative on Asian American and Pacific Islanders. Now in 2016, we have the largest number of AAPIs in history to ever serve in U.S. Congress.

Today, Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders are two of the nation's fastest-growing racial populations and are already twenty million strong. History and current events have demonstrated that our presence in numbers matters.

Now the question is: "What do we envision a quarter century from today?"

To answer that question, the UCLA Center for Neighborhood Knowledge (previously the UCLA Center for the Study of Inequality), Asian Pacific American Institute for Congressional Studies (APAICS), and the UCLA *AAPI Nexus Journal* invited many of the organizations affiliated with the National Council on Asian Pacific Americans to an inaugural

meeting in early 2015, to give rise to this special 2040 edition of the *AAPI Nexus Journal*.¹ We challenged AAPI community leaders to look at where we've been, where we are, and where we want to be in 2040.

Our goal was to develop our own narrative through a collection of essays that would help shape the contours of a vision for the 2040 AAPI Dream. To understand our power in 2040, we studied projections² that revealed that by 2040:

- There will be thirty-seven million AAPIs.
- Nearly one in ten Americans will be of AAPI descent at a time when nearly one in two Americans will be persons of color.
- One in seven voters will be of Asian American descent.
- Asian American elderly will increase 178 percent and Pacific Islander elderly will increase 205 percent while the number of elderly overall will increase 72 percent.
- One out of six Asian Americans and more than half of Pacific Islanders will be multiracial, and
- About half of Asian Americans and one out of five of Pacific Islanders will be U.S.-born.

We asked a diverse range of AAPI spokespersons³ to speculate on what the implications of these numbers would mean for the AAPI community. We asked: "What should AAPIs do today to create and actualize a better AAPI and American future?"

Based on their written thoughts in this special issue's essays, most of the authors feel that "the fight for the future" is now. These authors feel that not enough is being done to address social inequities, and that there needs to be a combination of leadership, power, and accountability to change what is to what should be. Without intervention, some see a bleak future for Native Hawaiians and Pacific Islanders, Muslims and "other" yellow and brown peoples, and refugees. Without intervention, some see a long protracted struggle for AAPI aging, AAPI poor and near poor, AAPI women, and AAPIs who identify as LGBTQ. Some feel that AAPIs are viewed with undeserved suspicion. Many feel that AAPIs are one of the most poorly understood groups in America because aggregated data fails to dispel the myth of the successful minority. The authors share their vision for educational equity, health equity, economic justice, environmental justice, gender equity, LGBTQ equality, and political equality, but feel that there is a lack of capacity and institutional

infrastructure to address the dynamically changing demographics of AAPI issues and needs.

By contrast, some of the authors feel that AAPIs are finally coming of age and that “the future is now.” These authors feel that AAPIs are finally making progress, but only after significant efforts to increase participation and representation in all sectors, particularly in media, business, and philanthropy. They see a brighter future for AAPIs, provided AAPIs accept the responsibility and consequences of success by giving back to the community and lifting others up the ladder of success.

We are excited to share this collection of essays in two volumes. The first volume addresses leadership, power, equity, and justice, examining contemporary issues in the AAPI communities and what the future could look like with and without appropriate policy interventions. As nation of native-born, and a nation of immigrants, we present demographic projections of Native Hawaiian and Pacific Islander communities, and of the Asian American communities. We know that demographics are not destiny, so we begin the journal with an essay on AAPIs and the economy, and we look at our AAPI past, present and future, through a justice lens. Recognizing that the America’s health and socio-economic well-being depends on the multiple determinants of health, we include essays on the economy and economic justice, K-12 education, higher education, workforce participation, aging, health, environmental justice, and immigration. We conclude Volume I with an essay on the importance of a political trajectory for AAPIs by 2040. The second volume looks at the AAPI community through a population and a legacy lens. We begin Volume II with essays on Native Hawaiians and Pacific Islanders, the profiling of Asian Pacific Islander America, AAPI women, and the LGBTQ AAPI communities, to assess the progress that still needs to be made. We also look at the opportunity to create and sustain a legacy for the future, by looking the plight of AAPIs in business, in media, in philanthropy, in Asian American & Ethnic Studies, and in cultural and historic preservation.

AAPI 2040 provides a window to the future. It offers what AAPIs want to see for the AAPI Dream by examining it at the likely trajectory versus a desired trajectory. It also provides recommendations for how to achieve the AAPI Dream.

But what good is vision without the moral compass, people, resources, and action to turn the dream into reality?

To actualize to our 2040 vision, we need to develop the 2040 Blueprint that will chart our course for the future. To actualize our 2040 vi-

sion, we also need to invest in people and cultivate a 2040 AAPI leadership pipeline, for we will need people from the grass tops to the grass roots to navigate change from the inside out and the outside in. We also need to cultivate the resources that will shore up capacity and infrastructure.

A 2040 Blueprint for Policy and Community Action could consist of:

1. Making the collection and utilization of disaggregated data a consumer expectation, a business practice, and a governmental priority.
2. Building an AAPI leadership pipeline in business, philanthropy, government, and community that can navigate the journey to the vision in the short and long run.
3. Leveraging resources and strategic alliances for a movement that advances a pathway to equity.

You cannot change any society unless you take responsibility for it, unless you see yourself as belonging to it and responsible for changing it.

Grace Lee Boggs, 2012⁴

You are the future.

We are at the beginning of this journey. We need to take action to create a society that we want. We need to be visionary and create a trajectory that bends toward the arc of justice. We also need to recognize the challenges in the journey ahead. We need to create and advance the internal and external policy dialogue, the strategic leadership alliances, and the pipeline of policy makers and decision makers, who will strengthen our position now and for the future.

We invite you—the reader, the professional, the scholar, and the activist—to play an active role in advancing our AAPI future. This is a living document. We invite you to engage with the authors who reimagined America’s future with creativity, wisdom, and inspirational leadership. We thank them and the organizations they are affiliated with. We also thank the staff of the UCLA Center for Neighborhood Knowledge, the UCLA *AAPI Nexus Journal*, and APAICS. We are also indebted to our sponsors—the UCLA Center for Neighborhood Knowledge, APAICS, and Eli Lilly—for investing in the future of the AAPI American Dream. We also acknowledge the late UCLA Professor Don Nakanishi for his inspiring words for our future.

For today, with twenty million AAPIs, America’s marble ceiling is

still cold and hard—we still haven’t had an AAPI president of the United States or an AAPI U.S. Supreme Court Justice. In addition, the number of AAPI CEOs continues to be far and few between—far too few have shattered the glass and bamboo ceilings. Worse, without data disaggregation, many populations within the AAPI community who experience persistent health, educational, social, and income inequities will continue to be invisible, and their issues not heard, addressed, or resolved.

But by the year 2040, when roughly one in ten Americans is AAPI, the AAPI Dream will be within reach. By 2040, AAPIs will break the marble ceiling. By 2040, there will be significant AAPI presence and leadership in Congress, on commissions, and in the C-suite. By 2040, there will be resources and infrastructure to advance a pathway to equity. After all, the AAPI Dream is not just about attainment or buying power,⁵ success is about equity and justice. No AAPI forgotten, or left behind.

Let’s promise to continue the journey by investing time and resources in actualizing this vision over the next twenty-five years. Let’s promise to convene before 2040, on the seventy-fifth anniversary of the Civil Rights Act, before America reaches the “majority minority” tipping point, to assess how well we weathered the journey and see if we actualized our vision by sustaining the strategic alliances and collaborations to reach, if not exceed, our goals.

Notes

1. The idea for the 2040 project was developed by Paul Ong. Key influencers include J.D. Hokoyama, Melany De La Cruz-Viesca, S. Floyd Mori, Elena Ong, Amy Watanabe, and the National Council of Asian Pacific Americans.
2. These projections were based on the U.S. Census 2014 National Population Projections and customized for the AAPI community by Paul, Jonathan, and Elena Ong.
3. The authors were younger and older; U.S.-born, immigrant, and/or refugee; Pacific Islander and Asian American; mono-racial, multiracial, and/or in a multiracial relationship; and women, men, as well as persons identifying as LGBTQ.
4. Grace Lee Boggs was the author of *The Next American Revolution: Sustainable Activism for the Twenty-First Century* (Oakland: University of California Press, 2012.)
5. Some believe that the AAPI Dream can be measured in buying power. If it were, AAPI buying power is projected to exceed \$1.25 trillion by 2040. If AAPI America were its own separate nation, its spending power could rank among the world’s top twenty economies.

ELENA ONG is the Vice President of Ong and Associates, where she is a public policy and public affairs consultant to elected officials and nonprofits. Committed to advancing America's health and economic well-being, she served as the President/CEO of the Asian and Pacific Islander Caucus for Public Health prior to being elected to APHA's Executive Board. Committed to public service, Elena has served in a leadership capacity on several U.S. presidential and gubernatorial campaigns, as the governor's appointed First Vice Chair to the California Commission for Women, as Rob Reiner's appointee to the California Children and Families Commission's TA Advisory Board, and as President of the Los Angeles Women's Appointment Collaboration. A recent CORO Executive Fellow, Elena studied Asian American studies at UC Berkeley prior to earning her BSN/PHN from UC San Francisco, and her master's in health policy and management from the Harvard School of Public Health while cross-enrolled at the Kennedy School of Government.

S. FLOYD MORI is the President and CEO of the Asian Pacific American Institute for Congressional Studies (APAICS). Previously, Mori served as the National Executive Director/CEO of the Japanese American Citizens League (JACL). He was chair of the National Coalition of Asian Pacific Americans and has been on the Executive Council of the Leadership Conference on Civil and Human Rights. He served four years as National President and four years as a National Vice President of the JACL. Mori was elected in 1972 to the city council for Pleasanton, California, where he served as Mayor ProTem and later as Mayor. He was also elected to the California State Assembly and served for six years as an Assemblyman. He has received a number of awards including an Outstanding Citizen Achievement Award from OCA, the Community Leadership Award from APAICS, and the Order of the Rising Sun, Gold Rays with Rosette Award from the Government of Japan.