

Preface

The State of Asian America Trajectory of Civic and Political Engagement

Fifteen years ago, Leadership Education for Asian Pacifics, Inc. (LEAP) and the UCLA Asian American Studies Center published their first joint public policy effort, *The State of Asian Pacific America: Policy Issues to the Year 2020*. With the inauguration of President Bill Clinton and the shift from a Republican to Democratic administration, 1993 marked a dramatic change in U.S. politics. Asian Americans were then an emerging yet underrepresented and near “invisible” minority. The report’s timely release provided significant data and policy perspectives on major issues and concerns affecting the Asian American population. It highlighted the increasing significance of this community, and the need for appropriate knowledge and understanding of its unique needs.

The year 2008 marks yet another remarkable moment in American politics. Following an exciting and unprecedented primary season, the nation is poised on the brink of history, with the expected nomination of the first African American (defeating the first viable female candidate) for President of the United States.

Given this dramatic backdrop, LEAP’s fifth major publication, *The State of Asian America: Trajectory of Civic and Political Engagement*, published in conjunction with the University of California AAPI Policy Multi-Campus Research Program (MRP), is particularly salient. The upcoming election has renewed public interest in political participation, galvanizing women, young people and entire communities of color. Regardless of who wins the White House, change is sure to come. The issues that will define November’s election—the economy, energy, education, healthcare, immigration, globalization, foreign policy, the environment, race, gender and ethnicity—are issues pertinent to all Americans, including Asians.

Is it safe to say that we are now part of the dialogue?

Since 1993, the Asian American community has grown and matured tremendously. Due in large part to higher levels of civic engagement, Asian American visibility has increased on all levels and in all sectors of society.

This report discusses the extent and variety of ways in which Asian Americans are civically engaged—as individuals working towards any collective, common good—from volunteers in religious, professional, political and community-based organizations to citizens exercising their right to vote. Linked by a constructed racial category, many have come to embrace the umbrella term “Asian American” as a means to establish a unified identity, and therefore a more powerful voice in the political arena. Still, institutional barriers continue to limit full Asian American participation, and creative solutions are necessary to overcome these challenges.

As college students, grassroots activists, educators, journalists, entrepreneurs, politicians, artists, corporate executives, foreign and native born, transnational citizens, young and old, Asian Americans must continue to be involved and assert influence throughout the American landscape. Asian Americans must strive to shape policy and to inform politicians and the public alike about matters relevant to Asians. We hope this publication illustrates the nature and impact of Asian American civic engagement and offers meaningful and insightful suggestions towards future empowerment. (Due to limited funding, this report focuses only on Asian American civic engagement. In the future, every effort will be made to include Pacific Islander communities.)

The realization of this ambitious project is due to the vision of Professor Paul Ong of the UCLA School of Public Affairs and the UC AAPI Policy Multi-Campus Research Program. The catalyst and driving force behind this report, Professor Ong is the nation’s leading expert on public policy issues facing the Asian and Pacific Islander population. We are extremely grateful for the leadership and commitment that he provided to ensure the success of this endeavor.

Finally, we would like to acknowledge the notable team of writers who contributed their expertise to this report. We also express

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