

**CULTURAL  
AWARENESS**

**OBSERVANCE**



**Asian American & Pacific Islander Heritage Month  
Resource Base**

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## Table of Contents

Did You Know? .....	4
People.....	15
Events & Initiatives.....	33
Quotes .....	44

## **Instructions**

Choose the items you'd like to include on your document from the Resource Base. Copy and paste desired items into the blank templates located on DEOMI's Special Observances tab, under Observance Products. You can also paste facts into emails and other social media.

## Asian American & Pacific Islander Heritage Month

Did You Know?



*A Japanese Lantern placed in the Tidal Basin, where Japanese cherry blossom trees are planted, Washington, DC, 1954.  
Photo credit: Carol Highsmith, Library of Congress. <https://www.loc.gov/item/2011633233/>*

### Origins of AAPI Heritage Month

The first organized effort to formally recognize the contributions of Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders, including Native Hawaiians, in the United States formally began in the 1970s. New York Representative Frank Horton proposed legislation to mark the first 10 days of May as “Asian/Pacific American Heritage Week.” Hawaii Senator Daniel Inouye brought forth another similar piece of legislation the same year, but neither passed. Horton persisted and again introduced a resolution to request the President to proclaim a week in early May to commemorate Asian/Pacific American Heritage Week. After the legislation became law in 1978, each President from 1980 to 1990 proclaimed annual commemorations for Asian/Pacific American Heritage Week.

In 1990, the annual observance was expanded to an entire month, being designated as the entire month of May under President George H. W. Bush in 1992. In 2009, the month was renamed to “Asian American and Pacific Islander (AAPI) Heritage Month.”

<https://www.history.com/topics/holidays/asian-american-pacific-islander-heritage-month>



*“East and West Shaking Hands at Laying Last Rail” portrait of the completion of the Transcontinental Railroad from which Chinese workers were excluded, 1869. Photo credit: Andrew J. Russell, Yale University Libraries, Wikimedia Commons. [https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/5/5d/East\\_and\\_West\\_Shaking\\_hands\\_at\\_the\\_laying\\_of\\_last\\_rail\\_Union\\_Pacific\\_Railroad\\_-\\_Restoration.jpg](https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/5/5d/East_and_West_Shaking_hands_at_the_laying_of_last_rail_Union_Pacific_Railroad_-_Restoration.jpg)*

### **Transcontinental Railroad was Built Thanks to Chinese Immigrants**

Many Chinese immigrants came to the United States in the 1850s during the California Gold Rush, during which many believed they could make a fortune finding gold in the Western United States. However, many people still needed to find other work to support themselves.

Despite prejudice and resistance, railroad companies hired many Chinese workers to construct the Transcontinental Railroad, which would connect the Eastern United States to the western frontier. About 15,000 to 20,000 Chinese immigrants suffered intense labor, explosions, landslides, and terrible conditions to construct this feat of engineering. It wasn't uncommon for Chinese workers to die during the construction. About 90% of Central Pacific's railroad construction force in the west was comprised of Chinese laborers by 1867.

Working 6 days a week, many workers were paid \$26 a month before a strike in 1867. Working conditions improved, but little else did. They were paid less than their White counterparts and lived in tents. When the railroad was complete in 1869, many of the Chinese workers' contributions were minimized. Despite their lack of recognition, their contributions and sacrifices connected the United States like never before.

<https://www.history.com/news/transcontinental-railroad-chinese-immigrants>

<https://www.theguardian.com/artanddesign/2019/jul/18/forgotten-by-society-how-chinese-migrants-built-the-transcontinental-railroad>



*“Chinese Emigration to America” sketch aboard Pacific Mail Steamship “Alaska,” 1876. Photo credit: Arthur Hopkins, Harper’s Weekly, UC Berkeley, Bancroft Library.*

<https://oac.cdlib.org/ark:/13030/hb3j49n5z4/?layout=metadata&brand=oac4>

### **The Chinese Exclusion Act Halted Immigration to the United States**

Racism against Asians and Asian Americans was high during the 19th century, particularly against those of Chinese descent. An increased number of Chinese immigrants were coming to the United States in the mid-1800s. Until the 1880s, citizens of China and the United States had unrestricted access to immigration and travel. Turmoil in China and better opportunities in the United States caused immigrants, mostly men, to come to America for work. The growing labor movement caused large companies to seek Chinese labor when trying to cut costs or replace striking workers. This fueled racist anti-Chinese sentiments—then legislation—that often led to widespread discrimination and violence.

In 1882, U.S. Congress passed the Chinese Exclusion Act. This was the first piece of legislation in U.S. history to significantly restrict the free immigration of people into the United States; it was the first law to forbid immigration based solely on race. It threatened immigrants with imprisonment and deportation if they entered the country. The law also forbade Chinese immigrants from obtaining U.S. citizenship.

The Geary Act, which went into effect in 1892, extended the ban and required all Chinese residents to carry documentation and proof of residence from the Internal Revenue Service or risk labor or deportation. These restrictions grew to include those from many other Asian countries, including those in the Middle East, India, and Japan, after the 1924 Immigration Act. Many Asian Americans challenged these laws in court, but many were upheld and remained in place. The outright ban on Chinese immigration only ended in 1943 after China became an important U.S. ally during World War II.

<https://blogs.loc.gov/law/2022/05/the-chinese-exclusion-act-part-1-the-history/>

<https://www.history.com/topics/19th-century/chinese-exclusion-act-1882>



ID Photo of Wong Kim Ark filed with San Francisco's immigration services, 1904. Photo credit: National Archives.  
<https://catalog.archives.gov/id/296479>

### **U.S. Citizenship as We Know it Established in *United States v. Wong Kim Ark***

Wong Kim Ark was a cook living in San Francisco, where he was born in 1873 and spent most of his life. His parents were Chinese immigrants who came to the United States to build railroads and supply prospectors.

Economic downturn due to the Panic of 1873 and xenophobia against Chinese immigrants greatly increased in the second half of the 19th century. In 1882, President Chester A. Arthur signed the Chinese Exclusion Act, which forbade Chinese laborers from coming to the United States and becoming citizens. This marked the first time the United States excluded a group from immigrating based on race or nationality. Wong's family felt the effects of the law and returned to China; he stayed in the United States.

Wong went to visit his family in China in 1894, taking the precaution to procure identification documents proving he is a citizen of the United States. Despite his document being stamped by an inspector when departing, he was denied reentry when he returned based on his race. He stayed in detention, being moved from ship to ship in San Francisco Bay for months. This resulted in a heated lawsuit that would reaffirm the guarantees of citizenship stated in the 14th Amendment.

The amendment, which stated that "all persons born or naturalized in the United States, and subject to the jurisdiction thereof, are citizens of the United States," was interpreted to give citizenship to Wong, even though his parents were Chinese citizens. The case came before the Supreme Court in 1897 in *United States v. Wong Kim Ark*. The justices sided with Wong, 6-2. The case tested the 14th Amendment, which was originally created to grant citizenship to formerly enslaved people and established the right to citizenship to children born to immigrants in the United States. Despite attempts to forbid Asians from becoming citizens, it was their fight that helped define that very citizenship accepted in the United States today.

<https://www.history.com/news/born-in-the-usa-the-immigrant-son-who-fought-for-birthright-citizenship>



Women hula dancing with wreaths of flowers in Honolulu, Hawaii, 1923. Photo credit: Library of Congress.  
<https://www.loc.gov/pictures/item/2018647440/>

### Hawaii has a Rich, Ancient Culture

Hawaii was originally populated by Polynesians from the Marquesas Islands over 1,600 years ago. These incredible sailors navigated by the position of the sun and stars, winds and currents, and flights of seabirds to travel 2,400 miles of open ocean. The future Hawaiians brought animals, including pigs, dogs, and chickens, fruits and seeds, and medicinal plants.

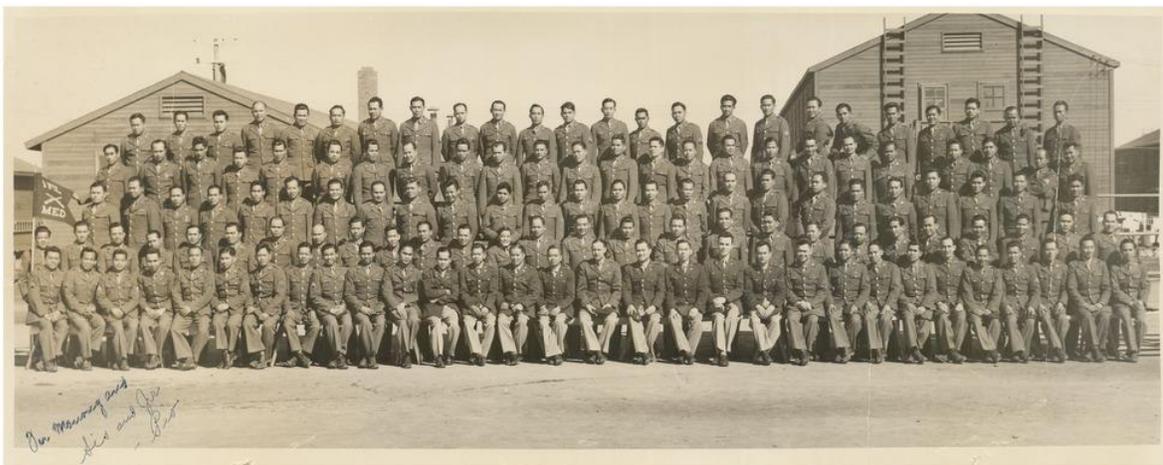
About 800 years ago, a different group of Polynesians from the Society Islands arrived on the island and took control of the islands. After traveling from Polynesia ceased, a unique Hawaiian culture developed in isolation from the rest of the world for hundreds of years.

Ancient Hawaiians worshipped many deities, including *Akua*, which represented natural forces, and *'aumakua*, which represented ancestral protectors. Music, chanting, and dance were connected to Hawaiian religion and provided entertainment, playing an important part in Native Hawaiian culture today. Hawaiian society maintained a hierarchical caste system, with professionals at the top, commoners who farmed and fished, and a caste of outcasts and slaves. Eventually, Hawaii became a united kingdom under King Kamehameha I.

In 1778, Europeans began landing on the islands, and Hawaii was eventually colonized to grow crops, becoming populated by Americans, Europeans, and workers from different parts of Asia. The royal dynasty lasted until 1893 when European and American citizens and some Native Hawaiians overthrew the government, instating the Republic of Hawaii, which was annexed into the United States in 1898. Hawaii became the 50th, and most recently admitted, State in the United States in 1959.

<https://www.nps.gov/locations/hawaii/heritage.htm>

<https://www.history.com/topics/us-states/hawaii>



Golden Gate NRA, Park Archives, Lazaro Fabian Filipino Infantry Regiment Photographs, GOGA-34990

*The 1st Filipino Infantry Regiment. Photo credit: Golden Gate National Recreation Area, Park Archives, Lazaro Fabian Filipino Infantry Regiment Photographs. <https://npgallery.nps.gov/SearchResults/albumid/ac2cbb3c-267e-425c-a063-62adac18d9df#>*

### **Filipino Regiments in Fought for the United States in WWII**

During World War II, the Philippines was still a U.S. territory. After the United States entered the war, Japan quickly conquered the islands of the Philippines. Thousands of American and Filipino soldiers surrendered, escaped, were killed or wounded, or even continued fighting as guerillas. Many people of Filipino ancestry in the United States, particularly in California, wanted to help fight to liberate the islands.

In 1942, the U.S. Army activated the 1st Filipino Infantry Battalion at Camp San Luis Obispo near Monterey, California. The unit was comprised of escaped Filipino soldiers and many Filipino American volunteers. The popular battalion was elevated to regiment status; months later, the 2nd Filipino Infantry Regiment organized at Fort Ord in Salinas, California.

The Filipino regiment underwent training in Tagalog (Filipino language). Later, as many members were reassigned to reconnaissance units because of these skills the 2nd Regiment was again reduced to battalion status. The 1st Regiment fought in New Guinea in 1944 before moving to the Philippines in 1945. Some of the companies provided security for important airstrips and headquarters. They provided security and support operations in the battered islands. In 1946, the war had been won and the regiment was deactivated and celebrated for their efforts. Many Filipino veterans became naturalized citizens of United States.

[https://www.army.mil/article/257944/from\\_the\\_historian\\_californias\\_army\\_filipino\\_regiments\\_played\\_important\\_role\\_in\\_wwii\\_beyond](https://www.army.mil/article/257944/from_the_historian_californias_army_filipino_regiments_played_important_role_in_wwii_beyond)

[https://history.army.mil/html/topics/apam/filipino\\_regt/filipino\\_regt.html](https://history.army.mil/html/topics/apam/filipino_regt/filipino_regt.html)



Representative Saund (left) and others present an open letter to President Kennedy, 1962. Photo credit: Robert Knudsen, White House Photographs, National Archives. <https://jfk.blogs.archives.gov/2020/05/15/dalip-singh-saund/>

### **Dalip Saund was the First Asian Person to Join U.S. Congress**

Dalip Singh Saund was the first Asian, first Indian American, and first Sikh to be elected to U.S. Congress. Born in 1899, and raised in Punjab, India while it was still under British control, Saund was an active member of the Indian independence movement led by Mohandas Ghandhi. He attended the University of Punjab before moving to the United States to earn his Ph.D. in mathematics at the University of California, Berkeley, in 1920. There, he married and moved to a ranch he purchased, but he had to get a friend sign the deed for him because California had laws preventing Asians from owning land.

As a farmer, Saund witnessed firsthand the devastation of Great Depression and he became a supporter of President Franklin D. Roosevelt’s New Deal policies. In 1946, Congress finally passed legislation for Indians to become naturalized citizens, which Saund did just 3 years later. The following year, he successfully ran for judge but faced constant racism, winning by only 13 votes.

In 1956, Saund ran for a seat in the U.S. Congress. He dealt with some racist arguments, including ones that called into question his citizenship, but ultimately won the nomination and general election. He served for three terms, championing immigrants’ and farmers’ rights, as well as civil rights legislation. He helped create greater relations to India and Mexico. He passed away in 1973.

<https://www.history.com/this-day-in-history/dalip-singh-saund-elected-to-congress>

<https://www.pbs.org/newshour/show/how-dalip-singh-saund-became-the-first-asian-american-elected-to-congress>



*Japanese relocation center at Manzanar, California, during Memorial Day services, 1942. Photo credit: Dorothea Lange, U.S. Office of War Information, Library of Congress. <https://www.loc.gov/pictures/item/2017699973/>*

## Japanese Internment During WWII

Before the United States formally entered World War II following the attack on Pearl Harbor, the Federal Bureau of Investigation identified possible enemy agents of Japanese, Italian, and German descent. After the declaration of war, not only were some of these suspects targeted as “enemy aliens,” but all people of Japanese ancestry were, whether foreign or U.S. born. President Franklin D. Roosevelt announced Executive Order No. 9,066, which authorized military commanders to exclude civilians from military areas. Under authority deeming the entire West Coast as a military area, Japanese immigrants and Japanese Americans were placed under curfew.

Lieutenant General John L. DeWitt led the effort to force the evacuation and detention of these people of Japanese ancestry. In 1942, with just 48 hours of notice, Japanese people either had to leave the West Coast or be forced into internment camps. Supported by Congress, which authorized Public Law 503, the Government made any violation of the order a misdemeanor punishable by up to 1 year in prison and a fine up to \$5,000.

Soon, about 112,000 people were moved to assembly centers, where they waited to be transported to long-term “relocation centers,” leaving behind their homes, belongings, and businesses. Of these relocated people, 70,000 were American citizens, and none were actually charged with disloyalty.

Those in the relocation centers had few belongings, shared army-style barracks, and stayed there for about 3 years until the war’s end. Four or five families were often grouped together, and all shared common facilities, which were monitored by armed guards. These internment camps were slowly evacuated once the war began to draw to a close.

In 1988, the Civil Liberties Act acknowledged the injustice of the internment of Japanese immigrants and Japanese Americans, issuing an apology and providing \$20,000 to each person who was incarcerated.

<https://www.archives.gov/education/lessons/japanese-relocation>



*Ellison Onizuka aboard an aircraft. Photo credit: National Aeronautics and Space Administration.  
<https://www.nasa.gov/image-article/ellison-onizuka-first-asian-american-space/>*

### **Ellison Onizuka becomes the First Asian American in Space**

Part of NASA's Astronaut Class of 1978, Ellison Onizuka became the first Asian American to fly in space. Onizuka was born in 1946 in Hawaii, eventually entering the Air Force in 1970. For years, he served as a flight test engineer and a test pilot. At the Sacramento Air Logistics Center at McClellan Air Force Base, he developed test flight programs and systems security for a variety of important aircraft, including the F-84, F-100, F-105, and A-1. While attending the U.S. Air Force Test Pilot School, he registered more than 1,700 flight hours. His first space mission took place in 1985 aboard the Space Shuttle Discovery. Tragically, the following year, Onizuka died aboard the Space Shuttle Challenger after it exploded shortly after launch.

After his death, Congress posthumously promoted him to the rank of colonel. The Sunnyvale Air Force Station in California was renamed after Onizuka in 1994. However, it closed in 2011.

<https://www.af.mil/News/Commentaries/Display/Article/587450/may-is-asian-american-pacific-islander-heritage-month/>

<https://www.nasa.gov/image-article/ellison-onizuka-first-asian-american-space/>



*Ajay Bhatt at Intel International Science and Engineering Fair, 2010. Photo credit: Wikimedia Commons.  
[https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Ajay\\_Bhatt\\_at\\_Intel\\_ISEF.jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Ajay_Bhatt_at_Intel_ISEF.jpg)*

### **Asian American Contributions to Modern Technology**

Asian American and Pacific Islander populations have made incredible technological advancements that have benefitted many people across the globe. These innovations have changed how we communicate with each other, use and enjoy the internet, or interact with the world around us. Many of the people listed below were born in other countries but came to the United States for opportunities in business, education, and innovation.

- Indian American Ajay Bhatt and his team are responsible for creating Universal Serial Bus (USB) technology in 1994. This allowed people to easily connect components to computers or electronic devices. Prior to this, devices like keyboards or mice had to be meticulously installed.
- Taiwanese American Steven Chen cofounded YouTube, a popular website to upload and watch videos, in 2005 and served as the website's chief technology officer. In 2006, he and his two partners sold the site to Google for \$1.65 billion in stock.
- Born in Hong Kong, Ching Wan Tang was inducted into the National Inventors Hall of Fame in 2018 after he and others invented the organic light-emitting diode (OLED) in 1987. This innovation has greatly improved screen technology for phones, computers, and tablets.
- Born in Japan, Yoky Matsuoka moved to the United States where she became a robotics and computer expert who has built an anatomically correct robotic hand, which has led to further innovations in prosthetics. Her research has been impactful for people with brain injuries and physical disabilities.
- Chinese American Eric Yuan founded Zoom, a video communication tool used by schools, governments, and businesses. The program was essential during the COVID-19 pandemic when people were discouraged from meeting in person.
- China-born American scientist Fei-Fei Li has led innovations in artificial intelligence technology, particularly in organizing the datasets for deep learning. She has advocated for diversity in STEM and artificial intelligence fields.

<https://www.fullstackacademy.com/blog/asian-american-pacific-islander-innovators-in-technology>

<https://ideas.ted.com/8-asian-americans-and-pacific-islanders-whose-innovations-have-changed-your-life-really/>

<https://www.forbes.com/profile/eric-yuan/?sh=7806913961bf>



*Pledge of Allegiance at Raphael Weill Public School in San Francisco, California, with children of Japanese ancestry soon to be relocated with their families, 1942. Photo credit: Dorothea Lange, National Archives.*  
<https://www.archives.gov/education/lessons/japanese-relocation>

### **Asian American Statistics Have Changed Dramatically Throughout U.S. History**

The Asian continent is the largest in the world, by population and landmass. This enormous size also makes Asian populations very diverse, which is also true of the population of Asian Americans in the United States. The 22.4 million Asian Americans in the United States trace their ancestry to more than 20 countries with their own histories, languages, and cultures.

In the 1870 census, about 63,000 people were classified as Asian by the U.S. Census Bureau; by 1960, 980,000 people self-identified as Asian; by 2000, there were 11.9 million people identifying as Asian or Asian American; and in 2019, that number increased to 22.4 million. People of Asian descent make up 7% of the Nation’s total population.

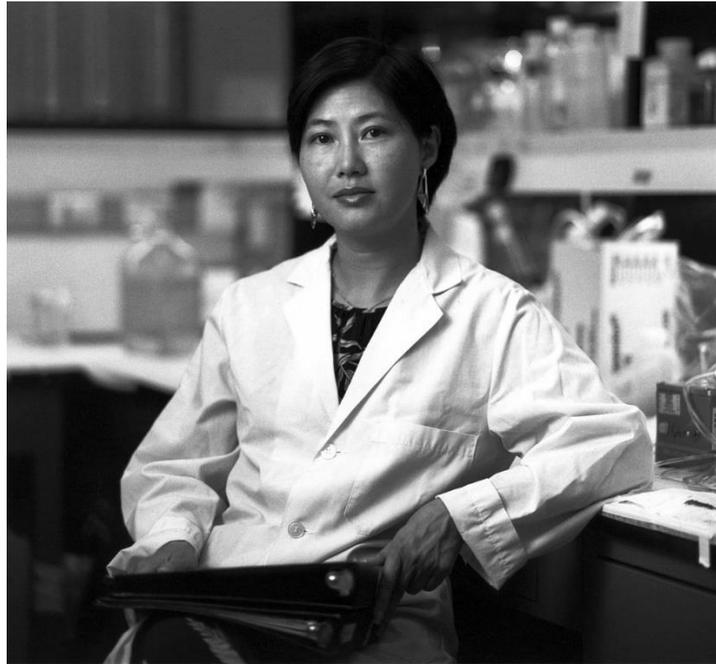
Chinese Americans are the largest group within this population at 5.4 million—or 24% of the total. The second largest group is Indian Americans, accounting for 21% of the total—or 4.6 million people. This is followed by people of Filipino descent at about 4.2 million people—or 19%. The next three largest groups include Vietnamese, Korean, and Japanese, in that order.

About 45% of all Asian Americans live in the Western United States, with about 30% in California alone. About 57% of all Asian Americans were born in another country, and they are projected to be the Nation’s largest immigrant group by the middle of the century. Today, Asian Americans and Pacific Islands are the fastest growing racial group in the United States.

<https://www.pewresearch.org/short-reads/2021/04/29/key-facts-about-asian-americans/>

## Asian American & Pacific Islander Heritage Month

### People



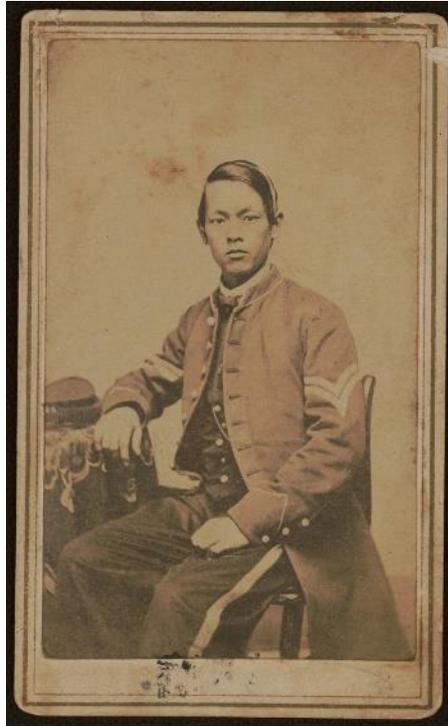
*Flossie Wong-Staal. Photo credit: National Cancer Institute, National Institutes of Health, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. <https://visualsonline.cancer.gov/retrieve.cfm?imageid=8247&dpi=300&fileformat=jpg>*

#### **Dr. Flossie Wong-Staal Played a Crucial Role in HIV Research**

Dr. Flossie Wong-Staal was a Chinese-born American who pioneered research about HIV. After graduating from the University of California, Los Angeles, she began working at the National Institutes of Health, where she worked in a lab with Robert Gallo, with whom she'd write over 100 journal articles. Wong-Staal's research provided evidence for cancer-causing viruses, innovating the scientific community's understanding of retroviruses.

After becoming a senior scientist and section chief in 1982, she began researching human immunodeficiency viruses (HIV). Wong-Staal was the first person to clone HIV and determine the function of its genes, drawing the connection between HIV and acquired immunodeficiency syndrome (AIDS), which was causing a public health crisis. She led the way for treatments for the illness as well, becoming the most-cited female scientist of the 1980s. She'd go on to study and find treatments for other illnesses until her death in 2020.

<https://ccr.cancer.gov/news/article/in-memoriam-flossie-wong-staal-phd>



*Joseph Pierce of Company F, 14th Connecticut Infantry Regiment. Photo credit: William Hunt, Library of Congress.  
<https://www.loc.gov/resource/ppmsca.72054/>*

### **Joseph Pierce Bravely Fought During the Civil War**

Joseph L. Pierce participated in one of the bloodiest battles of the Civil War. The 21-year-old fighter was a Chinese immigrant when he enlisted in the 14th Connecticut Infantry. While details about his arrival in the United States aren't well documented, it seems likely he was brought to the Nation by his adoptive father, ship captain Amos Peck.

Pierce fought at the Battle of Antietam, Maryland, in 1862. Afterwards, he became sick and had to stay in a Washington, DC, hospital, where he was assigned to the Quartermaster Department for a short time. He rejoined his regiment in time for the Battle of Chancellorsville, Virginia, in 1863. As part of the 14th Connecticut Infantry, he fought on Cemetery Ridge at the Battle of Gettysburg, Pennsylvania, helping to repel Pickett's Charge. His unit played a crucial role in fighting back rebel forces. He stayed with the Union Army until the end of the war and was promoted to the rank of corporal.

Afterwards, he settled in Meriden, Connecticut. Pierce married an American woman and had four children, passing away in 1916 at the age of 73. His picture currently hangs in the Gettysburg Museum.

<https://www.army.mil/asianpacificamericans/timeline.html>

<https://news.va.gov/50843/civil-war-veteran-joseph-pierce/>



*Fred Korematsu with his family at the Stonehurst Flower Nursery, which his family owned and operated, 1939. Photo credit: National Portrait Gallery, Smithsonian Institution. <https://www.nps.gov/people/fred-t-korematsu.htm>*



*The internment camp located in Topaz, Utah, where Fred Korematsu and his family were transferred to in 1942. Photo credit: National Archives and Records Administration. <https://www.nps.gov/people/fred-t-korematsu.htm>*

## Fred Korematsu Fought Back Against Japanese Internment

Fred T. Korematsu was an important activist and civil rights leader who fought against Japanese American internment during World War II and brought his case before the Supreme Court. Born in 1919 in Oakland, California, Korematsu helped his parents in their flower nursery.

After the attack on Pearl Harbor in 1941, paranoia and discrimination against Japanese immigrants and Japanese Americans increased dramatically. Executive Order No. 9,066 was declared to remove Japanese American from their homes and force them into internment camps.

Korematsu decided to disobey the order, forged a fake ID, and planned to move away from the West Coast. However, he was arrested on the street and put in jail. While in detention, he met American Civil Liberties Union attorney Ernest Besig, who would convince him to challenge the internment. Because of his resistance, he was charged for violating the order, fined \$2,500, and, after paying bail, was immediately detained again.

Korematsu successfully applied to leave the camp, settling in Detroit in 1944, but his lawsuit with Besig continued. After a number of appeals, the case was brought to the Supreme Court. In *Korematsu v. The United States*, it was argued whether the internment of Japanese Americans was constitutional. The justices sided against Korematsu, upheld his conviction and the removal orders, and did not address the racism involved in the case.

Eventually, he returned to Oakland to repair and resume his family's destroyed nursery business. It wasn't until 1983 that Korematsu had his conviction overturned in district court after a lawyer contacted him, revealing that the Government falsified information they shared with the Supreme Court. Still, Korematsu continued to fight for civil rights, lobbying Congress to pass the Civil Liberties Act of 1988, which would issue a public apology and compensate Japanese Americans who were unjustly incarcerated.

In 1998, he was awarded the Presidential Medal of Freedom. January 30<sup>th</sup> is Fred Korematsu Day in California. He passed away in 2005.

<https://www.nps.gov/people/fred-t-korematsu.htm>



Portrait of Jose B. Nisperos. Photo credit: Congressional Medal of Honor Society. <https://www.cmohs.org/recipients/jose-b-nisperos>

### **Jose B. Nisperos Earned the Medal of Honor**

Private Jose B. Nisperos was the first person of Filipino heritage to be awarded the Medal of Honor. Born in 1887 in Luzon, an island of the Philippines, Nisperos was just a child when his homeland revolted against Spanish rule, which had existed for about 300 years until that point. After 2 years, the United States gained control of the Philippines with the treaty that ended the Spanish-American War in 1898.

Many in the Philippines were displeased with being under control of another foreign power, and unrest continued. It wasn't until 1907 that Jose Nisperos joined the U.S. Philippine Scouts. At just 20 years old, his duty was to help restore order in the Philippines. His first enlistment ended in 1911, but he soon rejoined the military as a soldier.

That year, he went on an expedition to search for insurgents on Basilan Island. The eight-man team came under fire, their guide was killed, and the commander was badly wounded. Nisperos, speared through his body and shot in the elbow, shielded his wounded commander with his body while fighting back his attackers. Despite his own wounds, Nisperos insisted his commander get aid first once medical help arrived. Both survived.

On behest of the commander and the other Service members there that day, Nisperos was nominated for the Medal of Honor, which he was awarded in 1913. He was honorably discharged for his disability, and he received a pension. Later, he was appointed as a deputy sheriff in Basilan. Nisperos died in 1922.

<https://www.cmohs.org/news-events/medal-of-honor-recipient-profile/asian-pacific-heritage-month-jose-nisperos-the-first-filipino-medal-of-honor-recipient/>

<https://www.army.mil/asianpacificamericans/timeline.html>



*Dr. Chien-Shiung Wu at Columbia University, 1958. Photo credit: Smithsonian Institute, National Park Service.  
<https://www.nps.gov/people/dr-chien-shiung-wu-the-first-lady-of-physics.htm>*

### **Chien-Shiung Wu Innovated Understanding of Nuclear Science**

Chien-Shiung Wu was a crucial figure in the history of physics. Born in 1912 in a fishing town north of Shanghai, China, Wu attended school in a time when many girls did not. By 1934, she graduated from the National Central University at the top of her class with a degree in physics. She immigrated to the United States to continue her education, enrolling at the University of California, Berkeley.

Working closely with advisor Ernest Lawrence, who received the Nobel Prize in Physics, Wu graduated with her Ph.D. in 1940. A few years later, she would become the first woman hired as faculty in the Physics Department at Princeton University. In 1944, she began working at Columbia University before joining the secret Manhattan Project to create the atomic bomb. She was responsible for improving Geiger counters to detect radiation and conducting essential research to enrich uranium.

After the war, she continued her work at Columbia University. However, she wouldn't receive equal pay to her male counterparts until 1975. Her contributions to science include confirming the theory of beta decay, advancing atomic science, and designing an experiment to test the conservation of parity in nuclear particles. The latter experiment—named the “Wu Experiment”—earned fellow Columbia University physicists Tsung-Dao Lee and Chen Ning Yang a Nobel Prize in Physics; Wu's essential contributions were unacknowledged.

Throughout her career, Wu made important contributions to biology and medicine as well. She was elected to the National Academy of Sciences—just the seventh woman to earn the position. In 1975, she became the first woman to be president of the American Physical Society and the first person to receive the Wolf Prize in Physics 3 years later. Wu also became the first woman to be awarded an honorary doctorate from Princeton University.

<https://www.nps.gov/people/dr-chien-shiung-wu-the-first-lady-of-physics.htm>

## Larry Itliong Led the Filipino Labor Movement in the United States and Abroad

Born Modesto “Larry” Dulay Itliong in 1913, Itliong was a Filipino American labor organizer and civil rights activist. Itliong came to the continental United States in 1929 after growing up in the Philippines, which was then a U.S. territory. He hoped to continue his education but got caught in the midst of the Great Depression, xenophobia, and racial violence. Many Filipinos were discriminated against at the time; they were unable to marry White women, faced police and mob raids, and received only low-paying jobs. Racism and economic injustice caused Itliong to pursue activism.

To earn a living Itliong worked up and down the West Coast, mostly in canneries and on farms. In 1930, he was working on a lettuce field near Monroe, Washington, when he joined 1,500 farmworkers on a walk out. Three years later, he was organizing farmworkers in the Salinas Valley of California. Soon, he helped found the Alaska Cannery Workers Union, fighting for a contract to give workers an 8-hour workday with overtime. Itliong became an established leader in the growing Filipino American workers’ rights movement.

His organizing picked up further after WWII, during which he served as a steward on a U.S. Army ship. He organized farmworkers with the United Cannery, Agricultural and Packinghouse Workers of America and the International Longshore and Warehouse Union. He even participated in Filipino organizations like the Legionarios del Trabajo and the Filipino Voters League. He helped to develop diverse coalitions to organize better treatment, pay, and working conditions throughout the 1940s and 1950s.

One of Itliong’s greatest achievements was organizing the massive 1965–1966 grape strike and boycott. He joined forces with César Chávez and Dolores Huerta in the effort, which succeeded in giving farmworkers safer working conditions, higher pay, and recognition for their respective unions. Eventually, their union and his joined forces to create the United Farm Workers union.

Before his death in 1977, he traveled and defended farmworkers internationally, was elected delegate of the 1972 Democratic National Convention, and established a retirement village for aging Filipino farmworkers.

<https://www.nps.gov/people/larry-itliong.htm>



*Kurt Chew-Een Lee as a first lieutenant in the Marine Corps in the Korean War. Photo credit: Marine Corps, Department of Defense. <https://www.defense.gov/Multimedia/Photos/igphoto/2002626959/>*

### **Maj. Kurt Chew-Een Lee Bravely Served in Several American Wars**

Kurt Chew-Een Lee was born in 1926 in San Francisco, California, to a large family. His parents were immigrants and vegetable peddlers for local businesses, providing for their children while Lee excelled in school. He was given a scholarship to study engineering at the University of California, Berkeley, but believed he needed to serve his country. He joined the Marine Corps in June 1944 to fight in World War II.

Lee obtained the rank of private first class after completing his basic training in San Diego, California. He was training to become an intelligence officer in the Pacific, learning the Japanese language instead of deploying into combat. Before his finished his training, the war ended, but Lee stayed in the Marine Corps, being commissioned as second lieutenant. He was the first Asian American Marine Corps officer.

During the Korean War, he commanded a machine gun platoon. Some unfairly doubted his loyalty and qualifications because of his Chinese descent. In 1950, Lee and his unit were outnumbered by a surprised attack. Trapped with his unit, Lee ventured out alone so his men could see where the enemy forces were hiding. He even tricked the enemy by shouting, “Don’t shoot! I’m Chinese.” His valiant fighting and strategy against the Chinese forces in Korea earned him a number of awards, including the Navy Cross. He also earned a Silver Star for leading a rescue mission while injured, guiding his marines through freezing, rocky hills in the battle of the Chosin Reservoir. After the Korean War, he would go on to serve in Vietnam, receiving a Purple Heart. Lee retired from the Marine Corps in 1968 and passed away in 2014.

[https://usmcmuseum.com/uploads/6/0/3/6/60364049/major\\_kurt\\_chew-eeen\\_lee.pdf](https://usmcmuseum.com/uploads/6/0/3/6/60364049/major_kurt_chew-eeen_lee.pdf)

<https://www.cnn.com/2014/03/06/us/major-lee-marines/index.html>

### **Tom Kobayashi Innovated the Filmmaking Process**

As the child of Japanese immigrants, Tom Kobayashi was targeted by Executive Order No. 9,066, which ultimately led to the internment of Japanese immigrants and Japanese Americans in camps during World War II. Kobayashi was sent to relocation camps in Utah and Arkansas; however, he would go on to serve in the U.S. Army from 1946–1951. After his time in the military, he went to business school and became an accounting clerk at a film laboratory.

For more than 20 years, he worked his way through the Glen Glenn Sound audio production company in Hollywood, going from vice president, to president, and finally Chief Operating Officer of audio postproduction. In 1985, he was recruited by George Lucas, the creator of *Star Wars* films, to head his “Skywalker Sound” division at his production company. He organized the building of a 700,000-square-foot production facility near San Francisco and a second similar studio several years later. Dozens of films were worked on there, including *Indiana Jones and the Last Crusade*, *Backdraft*, and *Terminator 2: Judgement Day*. Kobayashi and his engineers develop new production strategies using digital phone technology and audio compression devices.

Based on this technology, Kobayashi collaborated with producers to launch the Entertainment Digital Network in 1992. This production company uses fiber-optic networks to transport video and audio to link filmmakers’ production processes together. He retired in 2000; however, he still worked on the board of directors at Azusa Pacific University and refined surround sound recordings with the company Pentec. He passed away in 2020 at age 91.

<https://www.hollywoodreporter.com/news/general-news/tom-kobayashi-dead-george-lucas-general-manager-at-skywalker-sound-was-91-1283767/>



*Photo of Anthony Kaho'ohanohano. Photo credit: U.S. Army.*  
[https://www.army.mil/article/55395/medal\\_of\\_honor\\_pfc\\_anthony\\_t\\_kahoohanohano](https://www.army.mil/article/55395/medal_of_honor_pfc_anthony_t_kahoohanohano)

### **Anthony Kaho'ohanohano's Sacrifice Earned the Medal of Honor**

Army Pfc. Anthony Kaho'ohanohano made a valiant stand against an overwhelming enemy force in the Korean War that led to his death, earning him a posthumous Medal of Honor.

Born in Maui, Hawaii, in 1930 before it was integrated as a State, Kaho'ohanohano came from a dedicated family of service. His father served in the military and on the police force, and his five brothers also joined the military. Kaho'ohanohano enlisted in the Hawaiian National Guard and, in 1951, joined the U.S. Army.

Deployed to the front lines during the Korean War, he participated in the Battle of Chup'a-ri. He led a machine gun squad that supported a defensive position when an enemy onslaught began. American forces retreated, and Kaho'ohanohano provided them cover. He was hit in the shoulder, but stayed behind so his men could move to safety. Facing North Korean forces alone, he fought with his machine gun, grenades, and—out of all ammunition—with a shovel in close combat. The enemy was too numerous, and Kaho'ohanohano was tragically killed defending his fellow Service members' retreat.

For his selflessness, he was posthumously awarded the Distinguished Service Cross. His family and community thought he deserved more, and, with petitioning from U.S. Senators Danny Akaka and Dan Inouye, his honor was upgraded to the Medal of Honor in 2011. President Barak Obama presented the award to his siblings, Elaine and Eugene. A National Guard armory was named after him in Maui.

<https://www.defense.gov/News/Feature-Stories/Story/Article/2218232/medal-of-honor-monday-army-pfc-anthony-kahoohanohano/>



*Wat Misaka in 1948 as a University of Utah basketball player. Photo credit: University of Utah "Utonian" yearbook, Wikimedia Commons. [https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/1/19/Wat\\_Misaka.jpg](https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/1/19/Wat_Misaka.jpg)*

### **Wat Misaka Broke the "Color Barrier" in the National Basketball Association**

Wat Misaka was the son of Japanese immigrants who broke the racial barrier in the National Basketball Association when he joined the Knicks in 1947. Born in 1923 in Ogden, Utah, Misaka and his family avoided the internment of Japanese Americans during World War II, living outside the area of forced relocation. He played two seasons of basketball at Weber State College before transferring to the University of Utah. There, he led a team of young players to victory in the 1944 NCAA tournament over Dartmouth.

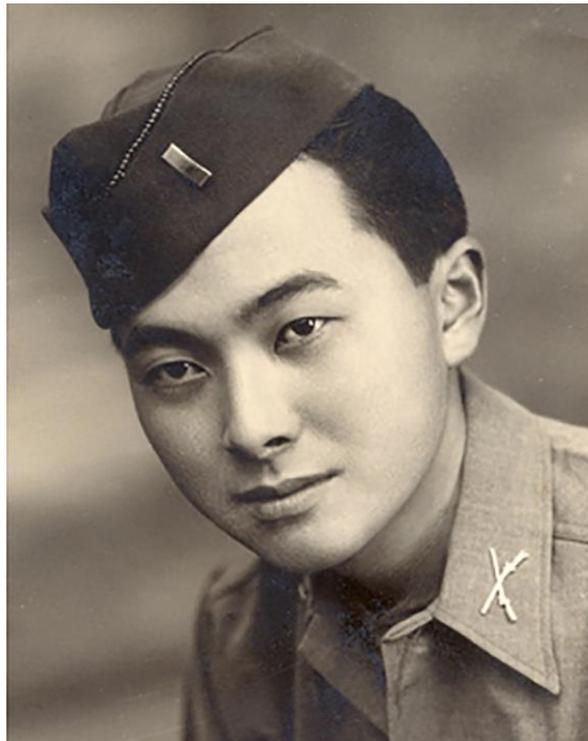
Afterwards, he served in an Army intelligence unit that was sent to Japan after the atomic bombs fell. He conducted interviews about the bombing raids amongst the civilians affected by them. Misaka returned to Utah basketball in 1946. In 1947, he signed on to play for the New York Knicks; however, he only played three games before he was cut, scoring only seven points. He was the first non-White player in the National Basketball Association.

After his time with the Knicks, he returned to the University of Utah to earn his degree in electrical engineering. He was recognized in 2000 as a sports pioneer at the Japanese-American National Museum in Los Angeles, California. In 2009, he was invited by President Obama to a ceremony to reestablish a presidential advisory commission on Asian American issues. He passed away in 2019.

<https://www.nytimes.com/2019/11/21/sports/basketball/wat-misaka-dead.html>



*President Bill Clinton awards Sen. Daniel Inouye the Medal of Honor in 2000. Photo credit: U.S. Government.*  
<https://www.nationalww2museum.org/war/articles/medal-of-honor-recipient-daniel-inouye>



*Daniel Inouye as a lieutenant in the U.S. Army. Photo Credit: U.S. Army.*  
<https://www.nationalww2museum.org/war/articles/medal-of-honor-recipient-daniel-inouye>

### **Daniel Inouye Served his Country in the Army and in Congress**

Born in 1924 in Honolulu, Hawaii, Daniel Ken Inouye had a lifelong career of selfless service in the military and in the U.S. Government. At the time of his birth, Hawaii was just a territory of the United States. Inouye's parents were Japanese immigrants who emphasized helping others. He was volunteering for the Red Cross when Pearl Harbor was attacked in 1941. He was at church with his family when it began but rushed to the aid station to help wounded civilians and sailors.

After he graduated high school, he tried to enlist in the Army but was denied because Japanese Americans were declared "enemy aliens." In 1942, the Federal Government imprisoned 112,000 Japanese Americans and Japanese immigrants in detention centers; Inouye's family was safe because Japanese Americans made up such a large percentage of Hawaii's population. Still, Inouye and many other Japanese Americans petitioned to serve their country. Eventually, the Government created segregated units of Japanese American soldiers, and Inouye joined the 2nd Battalion of the 442nd Regimental Combat Team.

This unit was sent to fight in France, where they rescued another battalion surrounded by German forces. Inouye and his company were fortunate, but many segregated Japanese American forces died in Europe. For his courage and leadership in battle, Inouye was promoted to second lieutenant and earned a Bronze Star Medal. In 1945, under fire in Italy, Inouye was shot in the torso but continued fighting and successfully saved his platoon from machine gunners. He was again wounded in the leg, briefly lost consciousness, then led his troops to secure their objective. Nine hours later, he underwent surgery without sedation and received 17 blood transfusions. His right arm was amputated, and he spent 2 years recovering from his injuries. He earned the Distinguished Service Cross.

After returning to Honolulu, he went to the University of Hawaii and eventually George Washington University Law School in 1952. When Hawaii became a state in 1959, he was elected to the U.S. House of Representatives before joining the Senate in 1962. As the first Japanese American in Congress, he served a total of 53 years in Federal Government. During his time in office, he was known for Hawaiian advocacy, bipartisanship, and fighting against discrimination. In 2000, he was awarded the Medal of Honor by President Bill Clinton and the Presidential Medal of Freedom after his death in 2012.

<https://www.nationalww2museum.org/war/articles/medal-of-honor-recipient-daniel-inouye>



*Portrait of Major General John Liu Fugh. Photo credit: U.S. Army.  
<https://www.army.mil/asianpacificamericans/profiles.html>*

### **John L. Fugh was the First U.S. Army Major General of Asian Descent**

Born in Beijing, China, in 1934, John L. Fugh grew up in a high-status Christian family. However, the Chinese civil war between communist and nationalist factions made life difficult. John’s father was an assistant to the U.S. ambassador who sought to bring a peaceful resolution to the conflict, Dr. John Stuart. The war ended with the establishment of the communist People’s Republic of China, and the Fugh family came to the United States in 1949.

As a teenager, Fugh’s life was upheaved, but his parents were determined to provide a good life for him. They stayed in San Francisco, California, then Washington, DC, while Fugh went to boarding school in New Rochelle, New York. After a few years, Fugh graduated from Georgetown University with a degree in international relations. In 1957, he became a naturalized citizen of the United States with help from Ambassador Stuart and Congress.

Fugh went to law school and was drafted into the Army. In 1960, he became a first lieutenant in the Army’s Judge Advocate General’s Corps, feeling a sense of giving back to the Nation that gave him a new home. He eventually did a tour of duty with U.S. Army Europe, reviewed administrative laws, and tried cases, becoming an expert in fiscal and contract law. He began working with NATO, solving legal issues between member nations. He deployed to Vietnam, solving more legal issues, including currency controls, personnel claims, labor contracts, and advising on the Geneva Conventions. He soon got his dream assignment, a position with the Military Assistance Advisory Group to the Republic of China, working directly with Taiwanese officials.

Over the course of his 32-year-old career, he served many positions across the globe. In 1984, he made history as the first American of Chinese descent to reach the rank of major general. He retired in 1993 as the top lawyer in the Army.

<https://armyhistory.org/from-a-teenager-in-china-to-an-army-lawyer-in-america-the-remarkable-career-of-judge-advocate-general-john-l-fugh/>

<https://www.army.mil/asianpacificamericans/timeline.html>



*Official portrait of Tammy Duckworth for Congress, 2017.*

[https://www.duckworth.senate.gov/imo/media/image/Official\\_Portrait\\_2017.jpg](https://www.duckworth.senate.gov/imo/media/image/Official_Portrait_2017.jpg)

### **Tammy Duckworth has Trailblazed During Military and Political Career**

Tammy Duckworth was born in Thailand in 1968 to her mother, a Thai shopkeeper with roots in China, and father, an American marine. She spent her early childhood in Indonesia but moved around other parts of Asia looking for job opportunities. She moved to Honolulu, Hawaii, but her family struggled with poverty.

She attended the University of Hawaii and then graduate school at George Washington University for a degree in international affairs. During this time, she enrolled in the Reserve Officers Training Corps. She pursued becoming a helicopter pilot, which, in 1991, was one of the few positions that could allow women to get close to combat. Through her hard work and persistence, she achieved this goal.

Duckworth was one of the first Army women to fly combat missions during Operation Iraqi Freedom. In 2004, while piloting a Blackhawk helicopter, she was tragically hit with a rocket and lost her legs and partial use of her right arm. She spent the next year recovering at Walter Reed Army Medical Center, becoming an advocate for soldiers. She became director of the Illinois Department of Veterans Affairs, where she established a tax credit for employers, a crisis hotline, and better access to housing and health care. In 2009, she was appointed as Assistant Secretary of Veterans Affairs by President Obama; there, she improved accessibility and equity for veterans across the Nation. In 2012, she was elected to the U.S. House of Representatives, serving two terms.

Despite her disability, she continued to serve for the Army Reserve, retiring after 23 years at the rank of lieutenant colonel in 2014. Two years later, she was elected to the U.S. Senate. As of 2024, she is still representing Illinois in this role. Duckworth is best known for her legislation to increase health resources and job protection for veterans, rebuild infrastructure, and environmental justice. She is the first Thai American to serve in Congress, the first disabled woman in Congress, and the second Asian American woman in the Senate.

<https://www.duckworth.senate.gov/about-tammy/biography>

<https://www.nytimes.com/2021/03/30/books/review/every-day-is-a-gift-tammy-duckworth.html>

### **Danielle Ngo Fled to the United States and Decided to Give Back**

Col. Danielle Ngo escaped war in Vietnam as a 3-year-old girl with her mother and infant sister. They suffered the effects of a rocket attack as they waited to escape to the United States via a relative who worked at the embassy. As the airport was further attacked by rockets, they boarded a military aircraft in the nick of time on one of the last U.S. military planes to leave the nation.

As refugees, they landed at a camp on Wake Island, a remote U.S. territory. They spent 3 months there before obtaining sanctuary at camps in Hawaii and then Arkansas. With very few possessions, they were finally sponsored to stay in the United States, moving into government housing in Melrose, Massachusetts. Their new lives weren't easy; many Americans still harbored anti-Vietnamese sentiments. The Ngo family stayed in subsidized housing for about 8 years, dealing with poverty and taking care of one another.

The image of U.S. soldiers welcoming the family to Wake Island stayed with Ngo, and she decided at age 17 to join the Army, repaying the debt she felt she owed. With hopes of getting an education to become a doctor, she enlisted as an operating room technician in 1989. However, after 2 years in the Army, she attended the University of Massachusetts in Boston to study finance. With a scholarship, she joined the school's ROTC program and Veterans Affairs office. In 1994, she graduated and earned her commission as a combat engineer officer. As a company executive officer, she traveled to Bosnia in 1998; then she deployed to Iraq after the attacks on the World Trade Center.

Her younger sister, Lan-Dinh, followed her example and attended the U.S. Military Academy at West Point. The sisters lived together for several years at Fort Hood, Texas, where Lan-Dinh saw her compassion, leadership, and respect for fellow soldiers. Lan-Dinh served for 7 years in the military, then later became a vice president at Bank of America, then taught English in Thailand.

Colonel Ngo became the first female company commander in a combat engineer battalion directly assigned to a combat brigade. Ngo's unit was credited with helping to capture Saddam Hussein. She would go on to deploy in Afghanistan, command a battalion at Fort Carson, Colorado, work as a military assistant to the chairman of the NATO Military Committee, and command the 130th Engineer Brigade at Fort Shafter, Hawaii. As of 2021, Ngo is the highest-ranking active-duty woman of Vietnamese descent in the Army.

[https://www.army.mil/article/244704/once\\_a\\_war\\_refugee\\_soldier\\_rises\\_through\\_armys\\_ranks](https://www.army.mil/article/244704/once_a_war_refugee_soldier_rises_through_armys_ranks)



*Danielle Ngo with her mother and sister within Vietnam, their native country, 1973. Photo credit: Ngo family, U.S. Army.  
[https://www.army.mil/article/244704/once\\_a\\_war\\_refugee\\_soldier\\_rises\\_through\\_armys\\_ranks](https://www.army.mil/article/244704/once_a_war_refugee_soldier_rises_through_armys_ranks)*



*Col. Danielle Ngo training at Marine Corps Base Hawaii in 2018. Photo credit: Sgt. 1st Class Michael Behlin, U.S. Army.  
[https://www.army.mil/article/244704/once\\_a\\_war\\_refugee\\_soldier\\_rises\\_through\\_armys\\_ranks](https://www.army.mil/article/244704/once_a_war_refugee_soldier_rises_through_armys_ranks)*



*Tulsi Gabbard's portrait as a member of U.S. Congress. Photo credit: Biographical Directory of the U.S. Congress. <https://bioguide.congress.gov/search/bio/G000571>*

### **Tulsi Gabbard was the First American Samoan Woman to Congress**

Tulsi Gabbard was born in Leloaloa, American Samoa, in 1981. Her father was a Hawaii state senator, and her mother was a Hawaii Board of Education member. When she was just a teenager, she cofounded the Healthy Hawaii Coalition, an environmental nonprofit organization. At just 21 years old, she became the youngest woman ever elected to the Hawaiian state legislature. She represented West Oahu in the Hawaii State House, and, between sessions, she attended basic training with the Hawaii Army National Guard.

From 2004 to 2005, Gabbard voluntarily deployed to serve in Iraq as part of a field medical unit. After her tour, she became a legislative aide to Senator Daniel Akaka of Hawaii for 3 years. During this time, she went to the Accelerated Officer Candidate School at the Alabama Military Academy, where she became the first woman to achieve the title of distinguished honor graduate. After another deployment, this time to Kuwait, she was elected to the Honolulu City Council.

In 2012, she successfully ran to represent the 2nd District of Hawaii in the House of Representatives to become the first female American Samoan elected to Congress and the first practicing Hindu member of Congress. She soon became the vice chair of the Democratic National Committee and was promoted from captain to major by the Hawaiian Army National Guard. She is known for working to tackle domestic and international issues, including fighting against terrorism. Gabbard unsuccessfully ran for president in 2020, did not run for reelection to Congress, and left the Democratic Party to become an Independent. As of 2020, she is a lieutenant colonel in the U.S. Army Reserve.

<https://www.cnn.com/2019/01/30/us/tulsi-gabbard-fast-facts/index.html>

# Asian American & Pacific Islander Heritage Month

## Events & Initiatives



*Street art in San Francisco's Chinatown neighborhood, 2013. Photo credit: Carol M. Highsmith.  
<https://www.loc.gov/resource/highsm.25489/?r=-0.8,-0.094,2.6,1.034,0>*

### **Theme for the 2024 Asian American and Pacific Islander Heritage Month**

On January 5th, 2024, the Federal Asian Pacific American Council announced the theme for the 2024 Asian American and Pacific Islander Heritage Month: “Advancing Leaders Through Innovation.” As part of the “advancing leaders” series introduced in 2021, the theme honors AAPI visionaries who shaped the past and lead into the future. Leaders in the AAPI community have made tremendous contributions to the U.S. economy, technology, and social change despite numerous cultural barriers.

Since its founding in 1985, the Federal Asian Pacific American Council has aided in the participation and advancement of AAPI people and Native Hawaiians, promoting equal opportunity and cultural diversity in public service.

<https://fapac.org/pressreleases/13297339>



*Marine Corps Master Gunnery Sgt. Milton Donatus at the ceremony of his promotion, 2023. Photo credit: Garrett Gillespie, U.S. Marine Corps. <https://www.dvidshub.net/news/444710/palauan-marine-camp-blaz-becomes-first-achieve-rank-master-gunnery-sergeant>*

### **Palauan Marine Achieves Master Gunnery Sergeant**

In 2023, Milton Donatus became the first Palauan to achieve the rank of master gunnery sergeant. MSG Donatus was born in Ngkekklau in the state of Ngaraad in the Republic of Palau, an island nation in the western Pacific. Inspired by his grandmother’s stories of U.S. marines fighting Japanese forces off the island, an 18-year-old Donatus traveled to Guam to join the Marines. However, the Guam recruiting station was closed down for an extended period of time; Donatus worked odd jobs while living with his aunt and uncle until the station reopened in 2000.

Over the course of his 23 years in the Marines, he deployed to Fallujah, Iraq, and twice to Afghanistan. At Camp Blaz in Guam, Donatus has served as the operations chief, organizing and managing the force layout. With his promotion to master gunnery sergeant, he was assigned to serve as operations chief for 3rd Battalion, 7th Marines, in Twentynine Palms, California.

<https://www.dvidshub.net/news/444710/palauan-marine-camp-blaz-becomes-first-achieve-rank-master-gunnery-sergeant>



*Marines of the 1st Marine Division Band perform "Promise of the World," 2023. Photo credit: Kayla Halloran, U.S. Marine Corps. <https://www.defense.gov/News/Feature-Stories/Story/Article/3400027/honoring-heritage-through-song/>*

### **Marine Band Perform Japanese Songs for AAPI Heritage Month**

On May 13, 2023, the 1st Marine Division Band performed music to celebrate Asian American and Pacific Islander Heritage Month. The marines played at the Marine Corps Base Camp Pendleton, California. The band played "Promise of the World" by Chieko Baisho in Japanese.

<https://www.defense.gov/News/Feature-Stories/Story/Article/3400027/honoring-heritage-through-song/>



Portrait of Anna May Wong, 1940. Photo credit: Carl Van Vechten, Library of Congress.  
<https://loc.gov/pictures/resource/cph.3c16605/>

### **Hollywood Star Anna May Wong Appeared on U.S. Quarter**

Born in 1905 as the daughter of Chinese immigrants, Anna May Wong is considered the first Asian American film star in Hollywood. She rose to prominence during a time of anti-immigration, “yellow face”—or the stereotypical portrayal of Asians by White actors—and racism. She would occasionally skip school to watch film crews shooting on her street in Los Angeles’s Chinatown, where she grew up, and eventually discovered her love of acting.

However, as she got started in her career, there were very few parts for Asian American actors. She played background parts until her leading role in *The Toll of the Sea* at age 17. Her roles were usually limited to stereotypes. Many saw her as attractive, but she could not play romantic leads because she was forbidden by law from kissing somebody of another race onscreen. On one occasion in the 1930s, she was strongly considered for a part in a movie about Chinese farmers, *The Good Earth*. When a White actor was selected to play who would be Wong’s husband, she lost the part to a White woman. Both played their parts in yellow face, with the actress winning an Academy Award for her performance.

She had greater opportunities after moving to Europe to star in films. Still, she maintained a prominent American career and earned a spot on the Hollywood Walk of Fame in 1960, 1 year before her death.

In 2022, she was featured on the U.S. quarter as part of the American Women Quarters Program, which seeks to represent and honor trailblazing, overlooked American women. Wong is the first Asian American woman to be depicted on U.S. currency.

<https://www.nytimes.com/2022/10/18/us/anna-may-wong-quarter.html>

### **Sunisa Lee Maintains the U.S. Legacy of Excellence in Olympic Gymnastics**

In 2021, Sunisa “Suni” Lee became the fifth straight American woman to win an Olympic gold medal in all-around gymnastics. The then-18-year-old woman and the U.S. team earned the silver medal. She performed an incredible uneven bars routine to earn the victory, overcoming a history of injuries, including a broken foot.

Born in St. Paul, Minnesota, Lee is the first Hmong American to compete in the Olympics. Her family supported her passion for gymnastics at an early age, helping her perform tricks around the house and even building a balance beam in their backyard for Lee to practice on.

In 2023, she suffered some kidney-related health issues. However, she still participated in the U.S. Championships for gymnastics, despite months of being in and out of the hospital. She is positioning herself to join the 2024 Paris Olympics.

<https://apnews.com/article/reigning-olympic-champion-sunisa-lee-070b3d40b336e6ae1e9bccf3a81d2e86>

<https://www.cbsnews.com/news/olympic-gymnastics-all-around-women-gold-suni-lee/>

<https://www.cnn.com/2021/07/29/sport/gymnast-suni-lee-profile/index.html>

### **Roseli Ocampo-Friedmann Discovered Life in a Seemingly Lifeless Place**

Born in 1937, Filipino American Dr. Roseli Ocampo-Friedmann was an influential microbiologist and scientist whose research focused on organisms who live in extreme environments. In the 1970s, she and her husband discovered microorganisms living inside rocks in Antarctica. These organisms freeze, thaw, and rehydrate, proving life in an otherwise lifeless place. Her research has been cited when discussing possible life discovery on other planets, including Mars. In 1981, she was awarded the U.S. Congressional Antarctic Service Medal for her work. By the turn of the millennium, her research had expanded to catalog over 1,000 extremophiles—organisms living in extreme environments—and directly search for extraterrestrial life. She passed away in 2005. The Antarctic mountain peak where she made her discovery was renamed in her honor.

<https://ideas.ted.com/8-asian-americans-and-pacific-islanders-whose-innovations-have-changed-your-life-really/>

<https://www.asiaresearchnews.com/content/microbiologist-who-studied-life-extreme-conditions>

## Asian and Asian American Achievements in Entertainment

Asian and Pacific Islander representation in media has had a long, complex history. In U.S. culture, Hollywood often portrayed people of Asian and Pacific Islander descent as racist caricatures, employing White actors in “yellow face,” or makeup to appear “Asian.” Today, there are still examples of acting roles being “whitewashed,” meaning roles that are intended for Asian people being filled instead by White actors. However, particularly in recent years, many people of AAPI descent have ascended to successful positions, won many accolades, and created outstanding art. Below are just a few recent examples:

- In 1998, Disney’s *Mulan* became the first animated film with leads predominantly performed by Asian American actors.
- In 2005, filmmaker Ang Lee won an Oscar for Best Director for his film, *Brokeback Mountain*. He won in that category again for *Life of Pi* in 2012. His 2000 film *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon* is the highest grossing foreign-language film in North America.
- In 2016, actor Dwayne “The Rock” Johnson became the highest paid actor in the world. Beginning as a professional wrestler, John would go on to star in many blockbuster films, including Disney’s *Moana*, which allowed him to proudly display his Polynesian heritage.
- In 2018, the film *Crazy Rich Asians* became the highest earning romantic comedy of the decade, featuring roles played predominantly by Asian Americans.
- In 2020, South Korean director Bong Joon-Ho won in several Oscar categories for his film *Parasite*, including in the category for Best Picture. It is the first foreign language film to ever win the category.
- In 2022, Chloé Zhao won an Academy Award for directing the film *Nomadland*, becoming the first woman of Asian descent to win an Oscar in the Best Director category.
- In 2023, the film *Everything Everywhere All at Once* won seven Oscars, including one for lead actress Michelle Yeoh, the first Asian woman to win for best actress. The absurdist film depicts the lives of a family who immigrated to the United States.
- In 2023, the Indian film *RRR* won in the Oscar category for original song with “Naatu Naatu.” The film is the first Indian feature to win an Oscar.

<https://www.chicagotribune.com/entertainment/movies/ct-asian-americans-movies-history-20180812-story.html>

<https://www.cnn.com/style/article/oscars-asian-representation-rrr-michelle-yeoh-intl-hnk/index.html>

<https://time.com/5779940/parasite-best-picture-oscars/>

<https://www.npr.org/sections/live-updates-oscars-2021/2021/04/25/988816124/chloe-zhao-is-the-first-woman-of-color-to-win-oscar-for-best-director>



*President Joe Biden presents the Medal of Honor to Dennis Fujii, 2022. Photo credit: Adam Schultz, The White House. <https://www.flickr.com/photos/whitehouse/52307495482/in/photostream/>*

### **Dennis M. Fujii Recently Earned a Medal of Honor**

In 2022, Army Spc. 5 Dennis M. Fujii was awarded a Medal of Honor by President Joe Biden for putting his life on the line during the Vietnam War. In 1971, for 5 straight days, Fujii defended his crashed medevac helicopter from enemy fighters, took care of wounded South Vietnamese soldiers, and was successfully extracted by U.S. air support.

Born in 1949 on the Hawaiian island of Kauai, Fujii enlisted in the Army while he was still in high school, taking after his father who served in the National Guard. In 1968, he deployed to Vietnam as an assistant gunner with the 4th Infantry Division. He returned home, but Fujii redeployed in 1970 with the 237th Medical Detachment, 61st Medical Battalion of the 67th Medical Group.

The following year, Fujii was the crew chief on a medevac helicopter and sent to rescue wounded South Vietnamese soldiers in Laos. Heavy fire followed Fujii's landing, and a mortar exploded part of the aircraft, causing a crash. Fujii and two other medics retreated to a bunker, but he was injured by shrapnel in the shoulder and then in the eye when another helicopter attempted to rescue him. He waved off the craft when heavy fire resumed to prevent any further loss of life. Now trapped in a hot zone, Fujii ignored his own injuries and took care of South Vietnamese troops. He called in airstrikes through a radio to clear the area, constantly risking his life to view enemy locations, fighting them off all the while. After this ordeal, he was rescued but suffered another crash landing under heavy fire near an allied encampment. Two days later, he was finally taken to safety.

After returning home, Fujii feared a court-martial for fighting in Laos, but he received a hero's welcome, earning a Silver Star (later upgraded to the Distinguished Service Cross), two Purple Hearts, and the title of Army Aviation Soldier of the Year.

<https://www.defense.gov/News/Feature-Stories/Story/Article/3122476/medal-of-honor-monday-army-spc-5-dennis-m-fujii/>



*Retired General Erik K. Shinseki speaks to soldiers and Army civilians at Army Futures Command headquarters, 2023.*

*Photo credit: Patrick Hunter, U.S. Army.*

*[https://www.army.mil/article/267099/retired\\_gen\\_shinseki\\_speaks\\_to\\_soldiers\\_civilians\\_during\\_aapi\\_heritage\\_month](https://www.army.mil/article/267099/retired_gen_shinseki_speaks_to_soldiers_civilians_during_aapi_heritage_month)*

### **General Eric Shinseki Speaks to Soldiers During AAPI Celebration**

For Asian American and Pacific Islander Heritage Month in May 2023, retired General Eric K. Shinseki visited Army Futures Command headquarters in Austin, Texas, to discuss important contributions and members of the AAPI community in the military. Shinseki’s speech highlighted contributions dating back to the War of 1812, including the participation of military men and women with Chinese, Japanese, Filipino, Korean, and other AAPI ancestry.

Graduating from the U.S. Military Academy in 1965, Shinseki would go on to study English Literature at Duke University before being commissioned in a variety of roles. He completed two combat tours in Vietnam as an artillery forward observer and then as a commander. He served for over 10 years in Europe in several commanding roles. In 1996, he was promoted to U.S. Army lieutenant general and then to commanding general, U.S. Army Europe just 1 year later. He was also commander of the Allied Land Forces Central Europe and NATO Stabilization Force in Bosnia-Herzegovina. Shinseki also served as the 34th Chief of Staff of the Army from 1999 to 2003 and the U.S. Secretary of Veterans Affairs from 2009 to 2014.

<https://armyhistory.org/general-eric-k-shinseki/>

[https://www.army.mil/article/267099/retired\\_gen\\_shinseki\\_speaks\\_to\\_soldiers\\_civilians\\_during\\_aapi\\_heritage\\_month](https://www.army.mil/article/267099/retired_gen_shinseki_speaks_to_soldiers_civilians_during_aapi_heritage_month)

### **Amanda Nguyen has Sought to Provide Greater Protections for Victims**

Born in 1991, Amanda Nguyen is an entrepreneur and activist who was instrumental in crafting the Sexual Assault Survivors’ Rights Act, which was unanimously passed by both the House of Representatives and Senate. The law reforms the handling of sexual assault evidence-collection kits on the Federal level. She and her nonprofit civil rights organization, Rise, continued to help establish similar laws in 40 States as of 2022.

While attending Harvard University in Massachusetts, Nguyen was raped. She did not immediately press charges because she worried about the resources it would take for her to participate in a long trial. Nguyen’s fight with the legal process began over rape kits that are used to bring a rapist to justice by preserving physical evidence. In some states, thousands of kits are stuck in backlogs, never tested, and most are eventually destroyed. In Massachusetts, kits are destroyed after 6 months, and her kit was going to be destroyed before she challenged it.

Nguyen and her organization helped craft the legislation that standardizes the process to hold onto evidence, provides kits to survivors, and notifies survivors if their evidence is going to be destroyed. Her reform efforts have gone international as she has taken her movement to the United Nations to protect sexual assault survivors across the globe. For her work, she was nominated for a Nobel Peace Prize.

<https://time.com/collection/women-of-the-year/6150543/amanda-nguyen-interview/>

<https://time.com/6181019/amanda-nguyen-davos/>

<https://time.com/collection/american-voices-2017/4478049/amanda-nguyen-american-voices/>

### **Filipino Space Force Master Sergeant is Planning for the Future**

Space Force Master Sergeant Ana Afonso spent most of her childhood in Galveston, Texas, after her family moved there from the Philippines in 1991, after the eruption of Mount Pinatubo. Growing up, Afonso spent years visiting her mother’s home in her home country, but she always yearned to see the rest of the world. Afonso’s father served as a ship serviceman in the Navy.

Afonso joined the military in 2011 as a space operator in the Air Force. She was one of the first members of the Air Force to join the Space Force in 2020. By 2023, she began serving as the superintendent for an operating location in Space Delta 2. She is responsible for integrating space capabilities, planning future systems for warfighting, and activating new squadrons.

<https://www.spaceforce.mil/News/Article/3392061/down-to-earth-with-del-2/>

<https://www.spoc.spaceforce.mil/News/Article-Display/Article/2435635>



*Myles Miyamasu speaks to employee for an AAPI Heritage Month event, 2023. Photo credit: Alyssa Crockett, U.S. Army. [https://www.army.mil/article/267154/the\\_miyamasu\\_family\\_generations\\_of\\_service\\_to\\_their\\_country](https://www.army.mil/article/267154/the_miyamasu_family_generations_of_service_to_their_country)*

### **Myles Miyamasu Shares his Family Story at Redstone Arsenal**

On May 22, 2023, the Redstone Arsenal, an Army base near Huntsville, Alabama, hosted an event to celebrate Asian American and Pacific Islander Heritage Month. The event celebrated diversity, family, and loyalty. Cambodian food was served for attendees.

The key speaker for the event was Myles Miyamasu, who shared stories of his service and heritage. Born in Hawaii, Miyamasu's father was an infantryman in the U.S. Army, but he didn't initially want to follow in his footsteps. However, while attending Shippensburg University in Pennsylvania, he joined the ROTC as a back-up plan. Miyamasu started on his military track with great appreciation for leading others and helping others in need. He was inspired by the selfless service and reflected on the heroics of his father and grandfather, who helped immigrants in Hawaii after the attack on Pearl Harbor and provided aid to a church destroyed in Hiroshima.

Miyamasu's children have continued his follow the familial legacy of service. One of his daughters is scheduled to become the first woman to take command of headquarters of the 1-68 Armor Battalion at Fort Carson, Colorado; another is a lieutenant commander in the Navy; and his son is in the Army. After retiring in 2010, Miyamasu worked in civilian service, eventually joining the Army Materiel Command.

[https://www.army.mil/article/267154/the\\_miyamasu\\_family\\_generations\\_of\\_service\\_to\\_their\\_country](https://www.army.mil/article/267154/the_miyamasu_family_generations_of_service_to_their_country)



*Photo of Telesforo Trinidad. Photo credit: National Medal of Honor Museum, Trinidad family.  
<https://mohmuseum.org/ship-shipmate-before-self-the-story-of-telesforo-trinidad-moh-1915/>*

### **Telesforo Trinidad Will Have a Destroyer Named in his Honor**

In May 2022, Secretary of the Navy Carlos Del Toro announced that a Arleigh Burke-class guided-missile destroyer will be named after Medal of Honor recipient Fireman 2nd Class Telesforo Trinidad, the only Filipino in the Navy to ever achieve the honor. He is also the first and only Asian American in the Navy to get the Medal of Honor.

Telesforo De La Cruz Trinidad was born in 1890 in Aklan Province, Panay, the Philippines. He enlisted in the Navy as part of the Insular Force in the Philippines. In 1915, then-Petty Officer Trinidad was serving on the USS San Diego. His captain conducted an endurance trial, but one of the ship's boilers failed and caused a series of explosions. Trinidad was forced out of one of the firerooms by a blast but reentered the closed space to save Fireman 2nd Class R. W. Daly, carrying him through the ship. Trinidad was hit with an explosion from one of the boilers, burning his face. Despite this, he continued to help rescue other injured shipmates. This selfless bravery earned him the Medal of Honor.

Trinidad served in World War I and World War II, retiring in 1945. He lived in Imus, Cavite, Philippines until his death in 1968.

<https://mohmuseum.org/ship-shipmate-before-self-the-story-of-telesforo-trinidad-moh-1915/>

<https://www.navy.mil/Press-Office/News-Stories/Article/3036923/secnav-names-future-arleigh-burke-class-destroyer-telesforo-trinidad/fbclid/secnav-names-future-arleigh-burke-class-destroyer-telesforo-trinidad/>

## Asian American & Pacific Islander Heritage Month

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### Quotes

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“I didn't think that the government would go as far as to include American citizens to be interned without a hearing. And then later on, they changed my draft card to 4-C, which is enemy alien. In those days, if you're an Asian, people automatically think you don't belong in this country. You're not an American, and I thought that was wrong.”

“I decided to leave... [a]way from the family because there was so much sadness [...] to be pushed into evacuation, threatened with punishment, because you look like the enemy is wrong... I felt that I was an American citizen and I had as much rights as anyone else. I don't even have ties with Japan, nor have I ever been there. To be accused like this, I just thought it wasn't fair. It was wrong.”

“I don't want a pardon. If anything, I should be pardoning the government.”

“Having this conviction cleared, I am very happy. But...I would like to have it completely cleared from the record and that this will never happen again to any American citizen.”

**Fred Korematsu**

<https://www.npr.org/2012/01/31/146149345/the-legacy-of-civil-rights-leader-fred-korematsu>

<https://www.nps.gov/people/fred-t-korematsu.htm>

“I feel we are just as good as any of them. I feel we have the same rights as any of them because, in that Constitution, it said that everybody has equal rights and justice.”

“May I let you know that it was our [Filipino] people who started the strike. Then our Mexican brothers followed suit. Since then, the cooperation between these two groups has been good. It looks to me that this is the real beginning of a closer relationship between our people”

**Larry Itliong**

<https://www.history.com/topics/asian-history/larry-itliong>

“Life isn’t fair, and it isn’t government’s job to make life fair. But if you’re not willing to give up on yourself, then we shouldn’t give up on you, either.”

“The American Dream I believe in is one that provides anyone willing to work hard enough with the opportunity to succeed.”

“Sometimes it takes dealing with a disability—the trauma, the relearning, the months of rehabilitation therapy—to uncover our true abilities and how we can put them to work for us in ways we may have never imagined.”

**Tammy Duckworth**

<https://www.brainyquote.com/authors/tammy-duckworth-quotes>

“There is only one thing worse than coming home from the lab to a sink full of dirty dishes, and that is not going to the lab at all.”

“... it is shameful that there are so few women in science... In China there are many, many women in physics. There is a misconception in America that women scientists are all dowdy spinsters. This is the fault of men. In Chinese society, a woman is valued for what she is, and men encourage her to accomplishments, yet she remains eternally feminine.”

**Chien-Shiung Wu**

<https://diversity.lbl.gov/2015/05/19/chien-shiung-wu-physicist-who-helped-change-the-world/>

[https://www.goodreads.com/author/quotes/7856156.Chien\\_Shiung\\_Wu](https://www.goodreads.com/author/quotes/7856156.Chien_Shiung_Wu)

“I was aware of the considerable prejudice against the people of Asia in California and knew that few opportunities existed for me or people of my nationality in the state at that time. I was not a citizen and could not become one. The only way Indians in California could make a living at that time was to join with others who had settled in various parts of the state as farmers.”

“Even though life for me did not seem very easy, it had become impossible to think of life separated from the United States... The only way Indians in California could make a living at that time was to join with others who had settled in various parts of the state as farmers.”

**Dalip Singh Saund**

<https://jfk.blogs.archives.gov/2020/05/15/dalip-singh-saund/>

<https://www-tc.pbs.org/rootsinthesand/dalip.pdf>

“I’m used to racism. I was in an all-Japanese unit fighting with an all-Black unit, Puerto Rican unit, Filipino unit. This is in the war. To go to a combat zone and see signs, ‘White Officers Only,’ you want to shoot that sign off. What war are we fighting here?”

“I hope that the mistakes made, and suffering imposed upon Japanese-Americans nearly 60 years ago will not be repeated against Arab-Americans whose loyalties are now being called into question. History is an excellent teacher, provided we heed its lessons, otherwise, we are likely to repeat them.”

“On this [Pearl Harbor Remembrance Day], let us remember all those who have had the courage to put on the uniform and sacrifice for our great nation. Our way of life has always been, and will always be, protected and preserved by volunteers willing to give their lives for what we believe in.”

“Over the years, many have asked us—Why? Why were you willing and ready to give up your life? I told my son it was a matter of honor. I told him about my father’s farewell message when I left home to put on the uniform of my country. My father was not a man of eloquence, but he said, ‘Whatever you do, do not dishonor the family, and do not dishonor the country.’ To have done any less than we did in battle would have dishonored our families and our country.”

**Daniel Inouye**

<https://dkii.org/quotes/>