Some notable heroes in Asian American History

The leading sports figure **Tiger Woods** describes himself as “Cabinasian”: a hybrid of Caucasian, Black, American Indian, and Asian.

**Dr. David Ho** was named Time magazine’s 1996 Man of the Year for his breakthroughs in AIDS research.

**I.M. Pei** is the Chinese-American architect who designed the glass pyramid of the Louvre.

**Norman Mineta** and **Daniel Inouye** were instrumental Asian-American leaders in establishing APA Heritage Month in 1977.

**Elaine Chao** became the first Asian-American woman appointed to a presidential cabinet.

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**Quiz: Asian American Entertainers**

1. Who played one of Charlie’s Angels in the 2000 remake?
2. Who is the Oscar-nominated director of Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon?
3. Who is the stand-up comic who starred in All-American Girl, the first Asian American sitcom?
4. Who is the performance artist and musician who married a famous rock icon?
5. Who is the martial arts superstar who made his American debut in Lethal Weapon 4?
6. Who is the Oscar-nominated director of The Sixth Sense?
7. Who is the legendary martial arts star of 1973’s Return of the Dragon?
8. Who played Mr. Sulu in the original Star Trek series?

(Answers on reverse)

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**Phrases you should Never Say To an Asian Pacific American**

1. Where are you from?
2. Are you oriental?
3. You are a perfect “model minority”
4. Do you know karate?

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**Stereotypes**

**Media**

Portrayals in movies and television have created persistent stereotypes of Asians as cunning and savage. They play roles such as “master criminal” in James Bond-type movies, “master detective” in Charlie Chan movies, or “supercops” in Jackie Chan movies. They are also portrayed as “wise,” "silent," "side kick," or “good at martial arts” in almost every American media source they are in.

**Model Minority**

Asian Pacific Americans (APAs) have been stereotyped as "model minorities" because many are college-educated with middle- or upper-income occupations. Yet it is incorrect because many APAs continue to remain employed in low-paying service jobs or sweatshops. This stereotype is dangerous because it homogenizes the Asian American population, perpetuates misconceptions that all Asian Americans are successful, places undue pressure on APAs, and results in several hate-crimes aimed at APAs (see the section on "Vincent Chin").

**Myths**

1. **Because they look alike, they are similar.**
   The fact is there is an incredible diversity among Asian groups, and some groups are wrongly classified.

2. **They have an intimate connection to their ancestral homeland.**
   The fact is that many have "overassimilated" and couldn’t care less about "back home".

3. **They tend to isolate and concentrate in their own communities.**
   Many have ventured individually into academics, politics, sports, criminal justice, entertainment, and other areas in the public spotlight on their own.

4. **Men are not masculine, and women are "exotic"**
   Stereotypes of both the emasculated Asian American male and the exotic Asian American female contribute to the pervasive and comprehensive, but nonetheless racist, dichotomy of Orient and Occident (a perception that attempts at a semblance of symmetry but nonetheless distorts the truth).

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Asian Pacific American Heritage Month

May 2009

In June 1977 Congress passed a resolution that called upon the President to proclaim the first ten days of May as Asian/Pacific Heritage Week. May was chosen to commemorate the immigration of the first Japanese to the United States in 1843.

On October 5, 1978, President Jimmy Carter signed a Joint Resolution designating the annual celebration.

In May 1990, the holiday was expanded further when President George H. W. Bush designated May to be Asian Pacific American Heritage Month.

"What is Asian American? Am I Asian American or am I American? All through school they taught us to learn Western history...don’t speak Chinese...You’re in America now boy. I always thought as...an Asian American I really had to write my own manual as to how to live in this country."

-Victor Wong

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Developed by Janette De La Rosa Ducut, Ed.D.
Asian American immigrant history is essentially labor history.

Dr. O’Connor, Faculty
North Carolina Wesleyan College

Asian American History

CHINESE immigration began in 1850-1880 to provide cheap labor on the nation's railway system and feed the American gold rush frenzy. During these turbulent times the "yellow peril" emerged, a 19th century belief that Asians constituted a threat to Western civilization. In the mid-1800s, many Chinese were prevented from working in mines or factories, or faced hostility from other workers fearing competition. In mining towns, many Chinese men were subjected to work as domestic servants in laundries, tailor shops, and restaurants.

During the first two decades of the 20th century, JAPANESE immigrants were able to move to the U.S. without any restrictions. However, in the 1923 case of Ozawa vs the United States, the Supreme Court ruled that Japanese were ineligible for naturalization. This ruling led to the Immigration Act of 1924 which virtually prohibited Japanese immigration, except women who were already married to Japanese men in the U.S. From 1941-1945 over 110,000 people were interned in American concentration camps during WWII. Many more were deported, left the country, or were pressed into military service. Anyone with as little as 1/8th of Japanese blood was rounded up and sent to one of ten camps in California, Arizona, Idaho, Wyoming, Colorado, Utah, and Arkansas.

SOUTH ASIAN immigrants include people from India, Pakistan, Sri Lanka, Bangladesh, Kashmir, Nepal, Bhutan, and Burma. Many in this category enter on visas as graduate students, scientists, software engineers; and later overstay or naturalize. They are usually well-educated, and many are upper-class. Their command of the English language is phenomenal, speaking the perfect Queen's English. Although many are a bit sensitive to it, British colonialism plays a vital role in their excellent educational system.

INDOCHINESE immigrants are mostly refugees and include the Vietnamese, Cambodians (Kampucheans), Laotian (Hmong), Thai’s, and ethnic Chinese. The Hmong are an ethnic Chinese group who moved to Laos in the 19th Century, and were recruited by the CIA as a counterguerrilla force during America’s longest war.

PILIPINO immigration has historically been tied to the need for cheap labor in the sugar plantations of Hawaii, agriculture in California, and fish canneries in Washington and Alaska. They are the most "Americanized" of Asian immigrants because in 1902, the U.S. installed a civil government in Manila to promote American culture and Protestant Christian values. Indeed, the Philippines endured American occupation when it was colonized from 1898-1946. The pensionado system, begun in 1903, brought Pilipinos to study in the U.S. After the Immigration Act of 1965 abolished country preferences and gave certain occupations priority, more Pilipinos with medical training began entering the United States.

Note: The word “Pilipino” is spelled here with a “P” as opposed to an “F”, because there is no “F” in the Tagalog alphabet (language of the Philippines). However, it is certainly acceptable to spell the word both ways.

Did You Know?

- The Chinese, Japanese, and Pilipinos were the first Asians to arrive in the United States in large numbers. The Korean and Vietnam Wars, the 1965 Immigration Act, and the desire for more highly skilled workers all prompted more immigration from other Asian countries.
- Today, Chinese are the largest Asian group in the United States, followed by Pilipinos, Japanese, Indians, Koreans, and Vietnamese.
- According to the 2000 census, there are 10 million Americans of Asian ancestry
- California has the largest Asian population (nearly 4 million people, or 11%) with an additional (114,000, or .3%) of Hawaiian or Pacific Islander heritage.
- Hawaii is the only state where and Pacific Islanders equal 50% of the population.
- Other states with large Asian populations are New York, Texas, New Jersey, Illinois, and Washington.

Answers to Quiz

1) Lucy Lui, 2) Ang Lee, 3) Margaret Cho, 4) Yoko Ono, 5) Jet Li, 6) M. Night Shymalan, 7) Bruce Lee, 8) George Takei

Things that can annoy Asian Pacific Americans

- Being told “You speak English well”
- Asked “Where are you from...originally?”
- Being addressed by (non-Asian) strangers with phrases in Asian languages
- Being addressed by (non-Asian) strangers with phrases in Asian languages...from the wrong country.
- Being subjected to offensive media portrayals of Asians.
- Mispronunciation of last names.
- Being asked the question, “Are you Chinese?”
- When Asians are viewed as a whole. It is annoying when people don’t know the cultural differences from one Asian country to another.

Who was Vincent Chin?

A murder in Detroit remains a turning point in the Asian Pacific American movement

Perhaps the most graphic and shocking incident in Asian Pacific American history was the murder of Vincent Chin in 1982. Vincent was beaten to death outside a Detroit bar by two White men who called him a "jap" and blamed him and Japanese automakers for the current recession and the fact that they just lost their jobs. While trying to run away for his life, he was cornered, and held down by one of the White men while the other repeatedly smashed his skull and bludgeoned him to death with a baseball bat.

The equally tragic part of this murder was the subsequent trials of the two White men. First, instead of being put on trial for murder, the prosecutor negotiated a plea bargain for reduced charges of manslaughter. Second, the judge in the case sentenced each man to only two years probation and a $3,700 fine -- absolutely no jail time at all.

Vincent Chin was a Chinese American.