TO BE ASIAN IN AMERICA

BY ANGELA JOHNSON MEADOWS
Still only 4.6 percent of the U.S. population, the Asian-American segment is experiencing astronomical growth. Between 2000 and 2050, the population is expected to surge 213 percent, according to the U.S. Census Bureau. The projected growth is not a 21st-century phenomenon. Historians have traced their presence in the land that evolved into the United States of America as far back as 1763, when Filipinos traveling aboard Spanish galleons jumped ship in New Orleans to escape imprisonment and fled into the Louisiana bayou to establish the first recorded Filipino settlement in America. Some argue their history in the United States dates back to the 1400s.

The Chinese were the first group of Asians to arrive in large numbers, appearing in the mid-1800s. The lure? The potential economic prosperity of the 1848 California Gold Rush and job opportunities associated with agriculture and the building of the transcontinental railroad.

Asian Americans were recruited as laborers—mostly men who were enticed by the opportunity to earn money to support their families or indentured servants who were sent to work off the debts of others back home.

"These people were often deceived," says Gary Okihiro, director of the Center for the Study of Ethnicity and Race and a professor of international and public affairs at Columbia University. "Although these [work and payment] conditions were spelled out to them, they were often times unfulfilled."

Many planned to return to their homelands when their contracted work period ended, but were prevented by U.S. immigration laws.

"They locked those that were here in the U.S.," says Okihiro. "Their remittances were crucial for the sustenance of their families back in Asia, so they were oftentimes trapped into remaining in the U.S."

Subsequent Asians came in waves, with the largest population arriving after the 1965 passage of the Immigration and Nationality Act. Immigrants and their offspring from China, the Philippines, India, Vietnam, Korea and Japan now account for the largest Asian populations in the country.
How They Score  Class of 2003 SATs

U.S. Asian Population

12.5
18.3
23.8%

10.9
10.5
7.8

10.9
Japanese
Korean
Vietnamese
Other

Asian Americans
Whites
Native Americans
Latinos
African Americans

Math
Verbal

Educational Attainment
People 25 years and older, 2004

Asian Americans
Whites
Blacks
Latinos

High school diploma
Bachelor's degree
Graduate or professional degree

Asian-American Buying Power
Projected rate of increase 1990-2005

Median Family Incomes
In U.S. Population 25+

Japanese
Asian-Indian
Filipino
Chinese
Asian-American
Other Asian
Pakistani
All U.S.
Korean
Vietnamese
Laotian
Cambodian
Among

670,849
665,189
60,059
59,324
59,733
50,199
50,045
48,635
47,624
47,103
43,542
39,021
102,884

370,708
365,189
215,165
56,324
56,733
48,199
48,045
46,635
45,624
45,103
41,542
36,021
98,884

Margaret Makihara Cerrudo, Senior Human Resources Director

On how being Asian Americans influenced her professional experience: A lot of what I am today and how I operate is a result of my upbringing and the values my parents instilled in me. An incredible work ethic, striving for excellence, the importance of family and respect for others are some of the values they taught me. It’s easy to see how those qualities translate into the corporate world. Working hard and being good at what you do help you earn credibility. Treating others with respect and caring about them helps build relationships, and it’s through those relationships that so much gets done, especially in a leadership role. Remembering how important family and friends are helps one keep perspective and achieve balance.

except for Filipinos (whose residence in a U.S. territory gave them the status of nationals), was halted in 1924 through the National Origins Act. It wasn’t until the Immigration and Nationality Act of 1965 that Asian Americans were accepted into the country in larger numbers. The gates to the United States were opened, particularly to those with expertise in the medical, science and technology fields, explaining in part the proliferation of Asian Americans in those disciplines today.

In the face of language barriers, cultural adjustments and government and societal oppression, Asian Americans as a whole appear to have done quite well in America. A look at demographic data shows that Asian Americans as a group surpass all other racial and ethnic groups in the country in median household income and education levels. And while many marketers are turned off by the small size and myriad languages of the population, the buying power of Asian Americans is projected to jump 347 percent between 1990 and 2009, compared with a modest 159-percent increase for the overall population.

For aspirational Asian Americans, social mobility is a priority and education often is viewed as the method of achievement. This focus contributes to the group’s economic success.

“Researchers suggest that one legacy of Confucianism in many Asian countries (notably China, Korea, Japan and Vietnam) is the notion that human beings are perfectible if they work to improve themselves,” write Yu Xie and Kimberly A. Goyette, authors of Demographic Portrait of Asian Americans. “Given this cultural heritage, some Asian Americans may be more likely than whites to believe that hard work in school will be rewarded.”

“In China, you have a kind of high-stakes testing,” adds Tchen, referring to the country’s civil-service system. “The emperor constantly recruits the best to come to the capital or to work. It’s not so odd for higher education to be seen as the modern variation of that practice.”

Mia Tuan’s mother and father encouraged higher learning.

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Corporate Vice President and Chief Scientific Officer
Bausch & Lomb
Age: 55
Ethnicity: Asian Indian
Country of Origin: India

On what it means to be Asian American in corporate America: It is a huge responsibility. In my experience, I believe that you need to learn and be disciplined about ensuring that you adopt and practice the behaviors respected in corporate America and not forget the learnings from your heritage.
"They lost a lot of status," says Tuan of her parents, whose migration to the United States eroded the prestige of their advanced degrees. "That put pressure on the next generation to make it worthwhile."

The belief that Asian Americans of all Asian Americans live in poverty. Twenty-three percent of Asians outside of the six largest groups are impoverished, rivaling the 24 percent of blacks of this economic status.

"With this spotlight on the talented tenth, there is neglect of others who may be in the lower tiers," says Ng.

Tuan recalls a meeting with faculty members and graduate students in her department. "At one point during the meeting, a graduate student said, "We take issue with the fact that the department isn’t hiring minorities,"" says Tuan, who was one of three recently hired Asian Americans in the department. "I was stunned when the student said that, and I said, 'So, do we not count?' And his answer was basically [that] we didn’t, that Asians were in the middle category ... In his mind a minority hire would have been Latino, African American and Native American.”

In addition to not being viewed as a traditional minority, Asian Americans also have an imposed identity as "eternal foreigners."

"Everybody cites the success of Asian Americans, yet if you compare the level of education and position with that of white people, they come below white people. Their investment in education does not pay off. There’s a glass ceiling for them.”

Gary Okibito, Columbia University

On what it means to be Asian American in corporate America: Within corporate America in senior executive positions, the representation of Asian Americans is still disproportionately low. I serve as an important mentor and role model for people willing to General Motors; the automotive industry a corporate America that Asian Americans achieve significant general-management positions in multinational corporations. There is no reason why this cannot occur. In fact when we look at the future global growth of the automotive industry and many other industries ... the direction is clearly Asia. Hence, we need more Asian managers to lead this growth.

Many American-born Asians have at least one story of being asked about their origins. A reply such as "Fresno..."
Norman Mineta, U.S. Secretary of Transportation, and Elaine Chao, U.S. Secretary of Labor, are two of the highest-ranking Asian Americans in the Bush administration. Andrea Jung, chairman of the board and CEO of Avon Products, and Indira Nooyi, president and chief financial officer at PepsiCo, are just a few people who have broken what career consultant Jane Hyun describes as the "bamboo ceiling" of corporate America. And the presence of Asian Americans in sports and entertainment continues to flourish.

"When I was growing up . . . there was not exactly a wide range," says Tiuan. "But if you were to ask—and I do ask these questions of the students—to name five prominent Asian-American public figures, they can come up with them now . . . I can only see that as being a good thing, because it shifts that notion of what's possible or who or what an Asian American is or what they're capable of. That's very powerful to me."

**THE SIX LARGEST ASIAN-AMERICAN GROUPS**

**Chinese Americans**

When Steven Fong set off for Rutgers University, he only had enough money for tuition, funds his widowed mother secured toiling long hours in a New York City restaurant. But Fong, a Chinese American whose strong-willed ancestors helped build the transcontinental railroad, didn't let that small detail deter his college dreams.

When he disembarked the train in New Brunswick, N.J., he canvassed the city in search of a Chinese laundry. Upon finding one, he approached the business, explaining that he was in need of a place to stay. He was offered room and board in exchange for ironing shirts. He soon learned that ironing was not his forte, but he kept the arrangement long enough to complete his first year of college.

After graduating from Rutgers, Fong accepted a teaching position in the Paterson, N.J., school district, a feat so notable that the local newspaper ran a story with the headline: "Chinese Man Hired as Teacher in Paterson School System." He stuck it out, raising his family in Paterson, eventually becoming superintendent of schools.

Fong's story illustrates the progress of Chinese in the United States, who first arrived in great numbers in the mid-1800s as peasants with little or no schooling in search of better educational and economic opportunities.

Many worked clearing land and laying tracks for the Central Pacific Railroad, yet they received little credit for their contributions. After the railroad was completed, nearly all the Chinese workers were laid off. They found subsequent work in restaurants, tailors and laundries.

The Chinese population in America remained relatively stable from 1860 to the 1960s. However, after the passage of the Immigration and Nationality Act in 1965, an increasing number of blue- and white-collar workers arrived. This highly educated group included Chinese immigrants who had fled to Hong Kong and Taiwan after the Communists defeated the Nationalists in China in 1949, as well as native Taiwanese.

Today, Chinese Americans represent the largest Asian population in the United States. There are significant numbers of Chinese Americans in California and New York; however, they have spread out to less traditional areas, such as Texas and Massachusetts.

Steven's daughter, Lora Fong, an attorney at Greenbaum, Rowe, Smith & Davis in Woodbridge, N.J., is among the many successful Chinese Americans in the U.S. work force.

**Chinese-American Population:** 2.7 million
**States With the Largest Chinese Populations:** California, New York, Hawaii, Texas and New Jersey
**Per Capita Income:** $22,519
**Median Household Income:** $51,119
**Educational Attainment:** Sixty-seven percent (73 percent native-born, 65 percent foreign-born) had a college degree or greater in 2000.
Subsequent leaders have been ill-equipped to manage the country's struggling economy, enormous foreign debt and pressure from communist and Muslim insurgents, prompting a continued flow of Filipino immigration. This growth has made Filipino Americans the second-largest Asian population in the United States.

Adjusting to the United States has been less of a challenge for Filipino immigrants, as most already are fluent in English. Recent arrivals tend to be highly educated, working as doctors, nurses, engineers, accountants or teachers.

Filipino-American Population: 2.4 million
States With the Largest Filipino-American Populations: California, Hawaii, New York, Illinois and New Jersey
Per Capita Income: $19,259
Median Household Income: $58,323
Educational Attainment: Forty-three percent (both native- and foreign-born) of those between 25 and 34 have a college degree or greater.

Notable Filipino Americans: Peter Aduja (first Filipino-American elected official), Lou Diamond Phillips (actor), Josie Cruz Natori (fashion designer), Bobby Saizena (first Filipino American in Major League Baseball), Tal Babilonia (Olympic figure skater)

Asian-Indian Americans
Sabeer Bhatia came to the United States from India in 1988 to pursue an education. He studied math at the California Institute of Technology and went on to earn a master's degree at Stanford University.

But it was opportunities in Silicon Valley that encouraged him to stay. Two of his Stanford colleagues had gone on to create Yahoo! Not to be outdone, Bhatia developed an Internet company of his own—Hotmail, which became one of the world's largest e-mail service providers.

Bhatia is just one of several Asian-Indian Americans who have found success with the increasing dominance of the Internet and related technology. However, prior to the Internet boom (and subsequent bust), Asian-Indian Americans already were leading professionals in the United States in medicine, technology and other occupations.

Asian Indians first came to the United States as laborers. In the early 1900s, some worked on plantations in Hawaii, while others found jobs in farming, mining or construction on the West Coast. The majority were Sikh men from the Indian state of Punjab.

Initially, Asian Indians were classified as Caucasian, providing them naturalization rights and the ability to marry white women. However, a 1923 Supreme Court decision ruled that Asian Indians were not "white." U.S. citizenship rights were stripped, and in 1924, Asian Indians, like their Asian counterparts, were barred from immigrating to the United States.

The Asian-Indian population in the United States remained relatively small until the passage of the 1965 Immigration and Nationality Act, which attracted a number of well-educated professionals, particularly doctors, nurses, engineers and scientists.

Asian Indians are among the most financially well-off foreign-born populations; the group has the highest median household income of all Asian-American groups.

Asian-Indian American Population: 1.9 million
States With the Largest Asian-Indian American Population: California, New York, New Jersey, Texas and Illinois
Per Capita Income: $32,415
Median Household Income: $61,322
Educational Attainment: Seventy-six percent (84 percent native-born, 76 percent foreign-born) of those between 25 and 34 have a college degree or greater.

Notable Asian-Indian Americans: Dalip Singh Sirdar (first Asian-Indian American elected to U.S. Congress), Deepak Chopra (author), Dinesh D'Souza (author/political commentator), Bobby Jindal (Congressman), Norah Jones (singer/songwriter), M. Night Shyamalan (filmmaker/writer), Indira Nooyi (president and CFO of PepsiCo)

Vietnamese Americans
The story of C.N. Le's family's evacuation from Vietnam provides a snapshot of the Vietnamese refugee experience. The collapse of the South Vietnamese government placed the lives of many in peril. To escape communist retribution, ex-military and government officials and U.S. military
Korean-American communities often included Korean Christian churches, which had a strong influence in their homeland, and Korean schools that taught the country's language and culture.

Like many Asian groups, Koreans who immigrated after 1965 were more likely to be middle-class and well-educated. Some have maintained the entrepreneurial spirit of the group by opening their own groceries, dry cleaners and other small businesses.

**Korean-American Population:** 1.2 million
**States with the Largest Korean-American Population:** California, New York, New Jersey, Illinois and Washington

**Per Capita Income:** $18,027
**Median Household Income:** $40,183
**Educational Attainment:** Fifty-nine percent (70 percent native-born; 58 percent foreign-born) of those between the ages of 25 and 64 have a college degree or greater.

**Notable Korean Americans:** Chang-Rae Lee (writer), Michelle Wie (golfer), Margaret Cho (comedian), Judge Herbert Choy (first Asian American appointed to the federal bench), Angela Oh (attorney/spokesperson during and after the 1992 Los Angeles riots), Harold Hongju Koh (Dean of Yale Law School, former assistant secretary of state)

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But as her children got older, she discovered she had a lot more free time, which she filled with volunteer work. Her involvement led to full-time work, which brought her to the United States and her current position as chief information security officer for Eastman Kodak.

Mayahara is a relatively recent immigrant; however, the Japanese have had a presence in the United States since the early 19th century. A significant number served as plantation workers in Hawaii. After Congress passed the Chinese Exclusion Act in 1882, Japanese replaced Chinese as cheap labor on the West Coast. Unlike the early Chinese who came to the United States with the plan of

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Japanese Americans

As a female raised in Japan, Kazuko Mayahara was expected to get married and have children. And she did exactly that.

"Having a career was not something that was expected," says Mayahara.

"Even the mentality we have is very different... For many Japanese women, it's very important to have their husbands to succeed or the children to do well... We put our own situation on the backburner."