

I WANT THE WIDE AMERICAN EARTH! AN ASIAN PACIFIC AMERICAN STORY

The Asian Pacific American story has roots that reach across borders and span oceans—but the tale is quintessentially American. Asian Pacific Americans were here before there was a nation. As the country grew, they worked to expand frontiers, forging the iron rails that linked sea to shining sea. They shed blood to defend the nation and stood up to preserve its cherished values, in classrooms and courtrooms, in statehouses and in the streets.

Before the brave, before the proud builders and workers,
I say I want the wide American earth
For all the free.

I want the wide American earth for my people.
I want my beautiful land.
I want it with my rippling strength and tenderness
Of love and light and truth
For all the free.

Carlos Bulosan (1913–1956), Filipino American laborer, activist, poet



Japanese Americans labor at the Tule Lake, California internment camp, 1944.

National Archives and Records Administration



I Want the Wide American Earth: An Asian Pacific American Story was created by the Smithsonian Asian Pacific American Center and the Smithsonian Institution Traveling Exhibition Service.

The exhibition is supported by a grant from the W.K. Kellogg Foundation.

Teacher resources courtesy of Teaching Tolerance. For additional resources, visit sites.si.edu/AsianPacificAmericanPosters

Building Railroads Cultivating the Land

Laura Kina, *Issei*, 2011. Portrait of the artist's great grandmother, who immigrated from Okinawa, Japan, to the Big Island of Hawai'i.



Laura Kina

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In the 1860s, Chinese immigrant workers built much of the treacherous Central Pacific stretch of the Transcontinental Railroad, making up over 80% of the workforce. They set records for track-laying speed while tunneling deep underground and setting explosives in high mountain peaks. Many lost their lives in these treacherous conditions, and there was harsh inequity in their wages. But through the workers' incredible diligence and industry, the line was completed in 1869, seven years ahead of schedule.

Asian immigrants also played a major role in the development of agriculture in America. In California, thousands of Asian tenant farmers cultivated fruit, vegetables, flowers, and poultry; in Washington, many were fishermen and worked in canneries. In Hawai'i, between 1850 and 1930, more than 200,000 Japanese, 112,000 Filipino, 7,000 Korean, and nearly 50,000 Chinese laborers worked the plantations and played a major role in the agricultural industry. When Hawai'i joined the U.S. in 1959, it was the first and only state with a predominantly Asian, Native Hawaiian, and Pacific Islander population.

Chinese immigrant workers building the Transcontinental Railroad.



California State Archives

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Filipino agricultural worker in California.

Library of Congress

Exclusion and Citizenship

For decades, “Asian in America” was not the same as “Asian American.” By the late 19th century, there was still no clear path to citizenship for the 110,000 Asian and Pacific Islander immigrants living in the United States. Only “free white persons and persons of African descent” could become naturalized citizens. New immigration was highly restricted. The Page Act of 1875 barred female Asians from entering the country, and in 1882, the Chinese Exclusion Act effectively halted all Chinese immigration. It was not repealed until the passage of the Magnuson Act in 1943.



013676. IN CHINATOWN, NEW YORK.

Chinatown, New York City, c.1900.

Library of Congress



Wong Kim Ark.

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The Puna Singh family. Early 20th century exclusion laws prevented male Punjabi immigrants from bringing brides from India, so many married Mexican women.

Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley

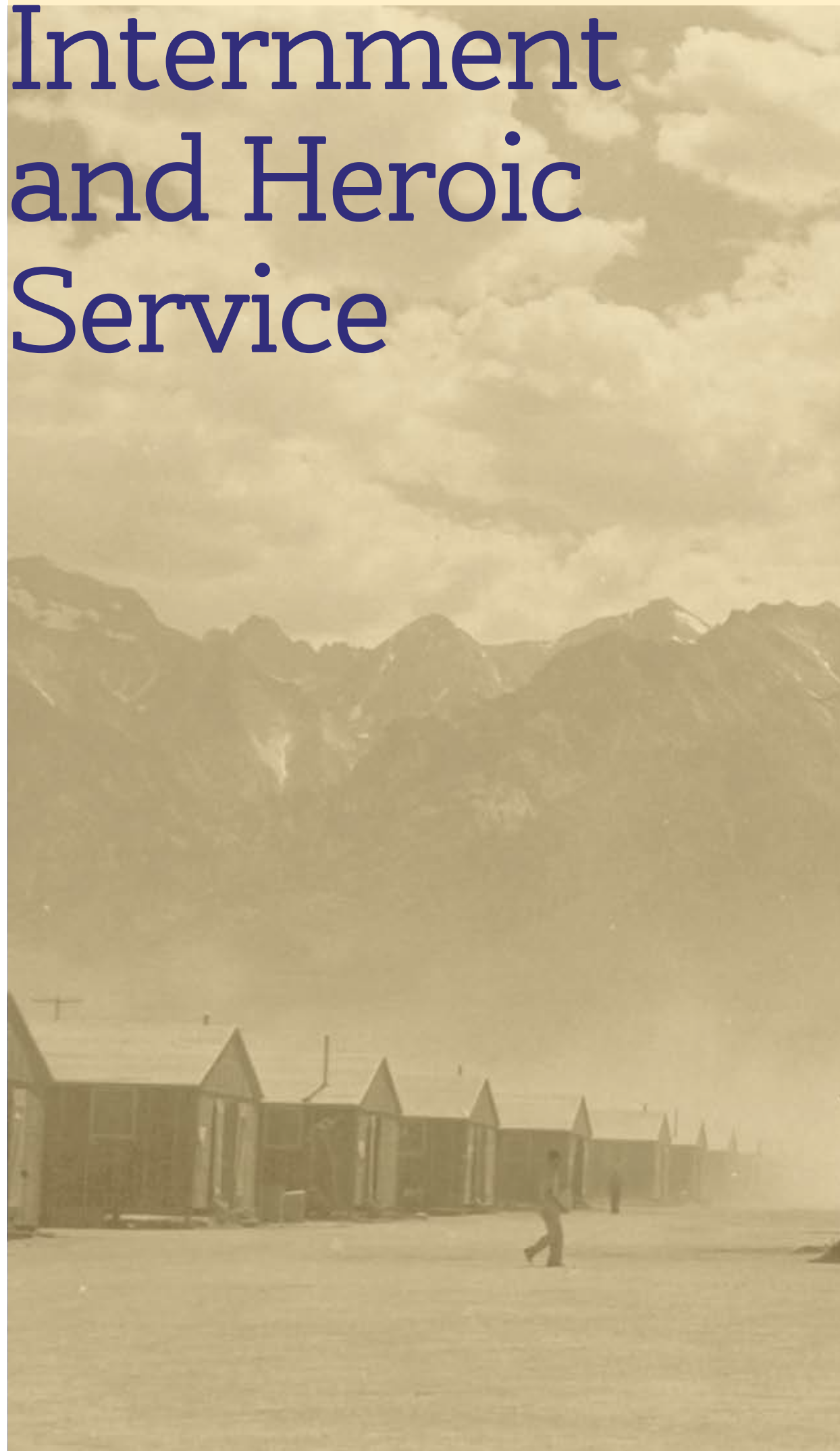
Even those born in the country could be denied citizenship rights. In 1894, on his way home from a brief visit to China, 21-year-old, California-born Wong Kim Ark was denied entry to the United States. As a native-born citizen, he claimed the right to return, and took his fight all the way to the Supreme Court. A landmark 1898 decision went in Wong's favor, ruling that the Constitution clearly states that anyone born in the U.S., even a child of undocumented parents, is a citizen of the United States. Over the decades, this decision has become one of the most critical in our nation's history in affirming an expansive definition of what it means to be a U.S. citizen.

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Japanese Internment and Heroic Service



Manzanar internment camp.

The harshest example of America's abiding perception of Asians as aliens came in 1942, with the country engulfed in World War II. Japan's attack on Hawai'i's Pearl Harbor triggered suspicion that Japanese Americans were a threat to the nation's security. President Roosevelt authorized removal of "any or all persons" judged to be a potential security threat, and built ten "internment camps" to imprison nearly 120,000 people of Japanese descent for the next three years. Ultimately, not a single Japanese American was ever found guilty of espionage.

Despite the incarceration of their families and friends, and despite classification as "enemy aliens," more than 14,000 Japanese Americans, along with Native Hawaiians and Korean Americans, chose to serve their country during World War II, joining the 100th Infantry Battalion, the 442nd Regimental Combat Team, and the Military Intelligence Service. The 442nd became the most decorated unit in the history of the U.S. military. Many soldiers, including Senator Daniel K. Inouye (1924–2012), who served in Congress for 53 years, would return home and dedicate themselves to public service.

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First Lieutenant Daniel K. Inouye of E Company, in the 2nd Battalion, 100th/442nd, in March 1945.



Military Intelligence Service interpreters in May 1944, the Pacific Theater, Burma.

National Archives and Records Administration

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National Japanese American Historical Society

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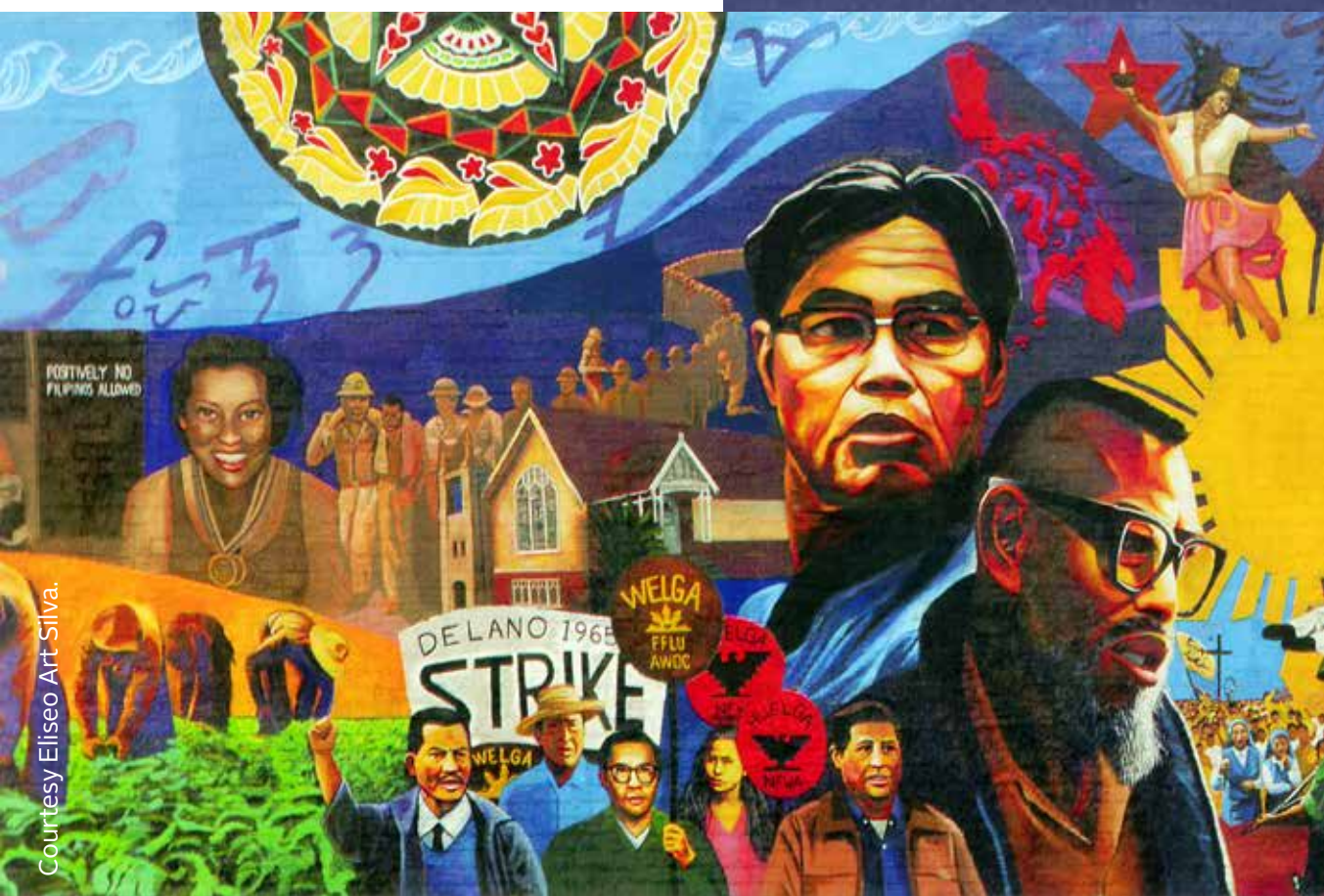


Asian American Activism



A 1983 protest in downtown Detroit after perpetrators are found guilty of manslaughter, not murder, in the Vincent Chin case.

Photograph by Corky Lee



Courtesy Eliseo Art Silva

The fight for fair labor practices and civil rights has long united Asian Pacific Americans with working-class African Americans, Latinos, and white Americans. For instance the Delano Grape Strike of 1965 brought together Filipino and Mexican American labor organizers, including Larry Itliong and César Chávez, and led to a successful nationwide grape boycott and the birth of the highly influential United Farm Workers.

A mural honoring Filipino American labor leaders Philip Vera Cruz and Larry Itliong in Filipino Town in Los Angeles.

The late 1960s also saw the birth of the “Asian American Movement.” Joining forces with African American civil rights leaders and other groups, the Movement rallied around issues ranging from worker’s rights to women’s rights, from civil rights to the Vietnam War, and from affordable housing to the fight to establish ethnic studies at major colleges.



Roz Payne Archives

Members of the Asian American Political Alliance at a Black Panther Party rally, 1968.

Asian Pacific American community organizing took another important step in the early 1980s, when 27-year old Chinese American Vincent Chin was beaten to death near Detroit, Michigan, by two local autoworkers angry about the rise of Japan’s auto industry. The perpetrators, who believed Chin to be Japanese, served no jail time. The case became a rallying point for Asian Pacific American communities across the country, and their efforts triggered a federal prosecution. Vincent Chin’s murder is considered the beginning of a widespread pan-ethnic Asian Pacific American movement.

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Post-1965 Immigration

In 1965, the Hart-Cellar Act opened up new waves of immigration, dramatically changing the demographic makeup of America and its cultural landscape. Asian Pacific America in particular was transformed, with over seven million new Asian immigrants arriving between 1971 and 2002 and settling all across the country. Today, the Asian and Pacific Islander population in the United States is the nation's fastest growing major race group. Between 2000 and 2010, the population increased by 46%, to an estimated 17.3 million, or 5.6% of the total population.

"Miss Vietnam DC" surrounded by well wishers at a pageant at the Eden Center, Falls Church, Virginia.



Courtesy Miss Vietnam, DC, Catherine Ho, photographed by Adam Optican



The Angkor Dance Troupe of Lowell, Massachusetts. Lowell has the second largest population of Cambodian Americans in the country.

Photo © James Higgins

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"If home is found on both sides of the globe,
home is of course here—and always a missed land."

"Land," from *Call Me Ishmael Tonight: A Book of Ghazals* by Kashmiri American poet Agha Shahid Ali. Copyright © 2003 by Agha Shahid Ali Literary Trust. Used by permission of W.W. Norton & Company, Inc.

Monks at a Thai American temple in Albuquerque, New Mexico.



Courtesy Adam Stoltman and the Asian & Pacific Islander American Health Forum.

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Transforming American Food

Asian immigrant cooking began transforming the American palate as early as the Gold Rush. Today, high-end Asian fusion restaurants permeate the gourmet dining scene. Chinese takeout, Japanese sushi and ramen counters, Indian buffets, Vietnamese pho houses, and Korean BBQs are staples throughout the U.S., vital as both family businesses and the public face of Asian Pacific America.



But these food cultures stretch beyond restaurants, from farmlands to home kitchens, from shrimp boats to places of worship. Stories of Asian Pacific American foodways are about preservation, adaptation, and ingenuity—stories of passing along and continually reinventing cultural identity.

Chinese-born American chef Martin Yan, host of "Yan Can Cook" on PBS, which first aired in 1978.



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Photograph by Doris Truong

Courtesy Adam Stolman and the Asian & Pacific Islander American Health Forum

Smithsonian National Museum of American History

Photo courtesy of Stephanie Jan, Yan Can Cook

Advances/ The Journey Continues



courtesy Random House

Maxine Hong Kingston, author

Part of the historical fabric of America, Asian Pacific Americans are also pointing us to its future, serving as pioneers in numerous fields—from literature to science; cutting edge technology to cutting edge fashion; and the big screen to the world stage.

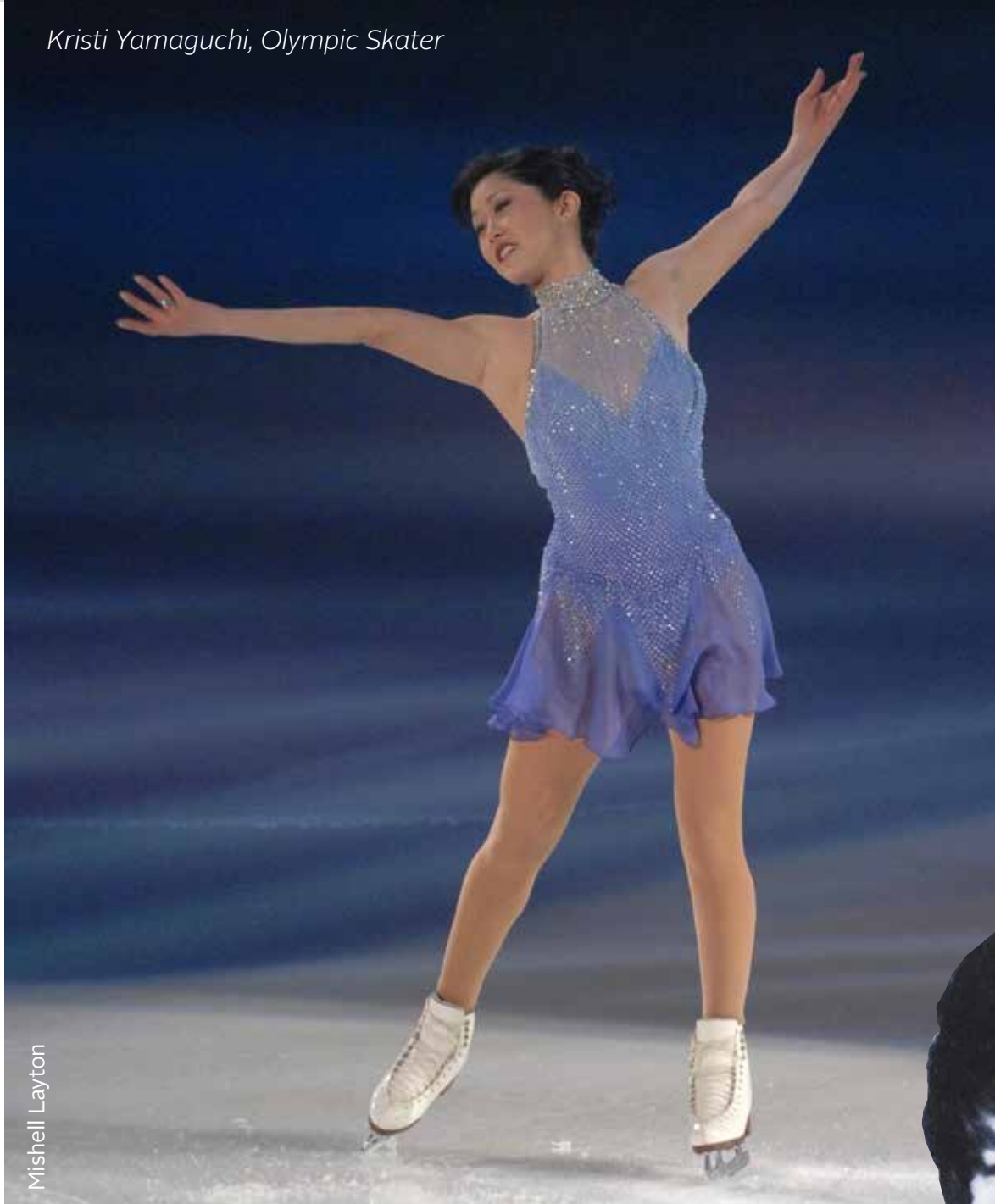
Despite these remarkable advances, challenges remain. The myth of Asian Pacific Americans as a “model minority” conceals the real educational, economic, and health disparities that these communities face today.



Anna Mae Wong, Actress

Library of Congress

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Kristi Yamaguchi, Olympic Skater

Mishell Layton

Asian Pacific Americans have been a part of every chapter in this country's great chronicle—building bridges, toppling barriers, imagining communities—shaping the arc of our nation's history and pointing the way to its future, ever seeking the Wide American Earth.



Vinod Dahiya, Father of Pentium Chip

Photograph by Preston Merchant



I.M. Pei, Architect

Photo By Victor Orlewicz
Courtesy Pei Cobb Freed & PARTNERS



Bruce Lee,
Martial Arts Superstar

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