

ASIAN IMMIGRATION TO THE UNITED STATES

A UNIT OF STUDY FOR GRADES 8-12

PADMA RANGASWAMY
AND
DOROTHIE SHAH

PREVIEW COPY
INCLUDING THE COMPLETE FIRST LESSON

Prepared for:
America's History in the Making
Oregon Public Broadcasting

This lesson may not be resold or redistributed.

ORGANIZATION OF AMERICAN HISTORIANS
AND THE
NATIONAL CENTER FOR HISTORY IN THE SCHOOLS
UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA, LOS ANGELES

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Introduction

Approach and Rationale	1
Content and Organization	1

Teacher Background Materials

Unit Overview	3
Unit Context	3
Correlation to the National Standards for United States History	4
Unit Objectives	4
Historical Background of Asian Immigration	4
Lesson Plans	7

Lessons

Lesson One: The Asian American Immigrants	9
Lesson Two: Regulating Asian Immigration	26
Lesson Three: Global Forces and Asian Immigration.	41
Lesson Four: Why Do Asians Come to the United States?	56
Lesson Five: The Future of Immigration Policy	71

Annotated Bibliography	77
---	-----------

“Our beautiful America . . . flourished because it was fed from so many sources—
because it was nourished by so many cultures and traditions and peoples.”

—President Lyndon B. Johnson, Remarks upon Signing the 1965 Immigration Act

“The best way to contain Asian dynamism is to absorb it as the United States is doing.
Business people keep pointing out that it is far more cost-efficient to import the rest of
the world’s talent than to train citizens at home.”

—Robert D. Kaplan, “Travels Into America's Future,” *The Atlantic Monthly*, August, 1998, 37–61

INTRODUCTION

I. APPROACH AND RATIONALE

A *Asian Immigration to the United States* is one of several teaching units with primary sources produced by a joint effort of the National Center for History in the Schools and the Organization of American Historians. These units are the fruits of collaborations between history professors and experienced teachers of United States History. They represent specific issues and “dramatic episodes” in history from which you and your students can delve into the deeper meanings of these selected landmark events and explore their wider context in the great historical narrative. By studying crucial turning points in history the student becomes aware that choices had to be made by real human beings, that those decisions were the result of specific factors, and that they set in motion a series of historical consequences. We have selected issues and dramatic episodes that bring alive that decision-making process. We hope that through this approach, your students will realize that history is an ongoing, open-ended process, and that the decisions they make today create the conditions of tomorrow’s history.

These teaching units are based on primary sources, taken from government documents, artifacts, magazines, newspapers, films, private correspondence, literature, contemporary photographs, and paintings from the period under study. What we hope you achieve using primary source documents in these lessons is to have your students connect more intimately with the past. In this way we hope to recreate for your students a sense of “being there,” a sense of seeing history through the eyes of the very people who were making decisions. This will help your students develop historical empathy, to realize that history is not an impersonal process divorced from real people like themselves. At the same time, by analyzing primary sources, students will actually practice the historian’s craft, discovering for themselves how to analyze evidence, establish a valid interpretation and construct a coherent narrative in which all the relevant factors play a part.

II. CONTENT AND ORGANIZATION

Within this unit, you will find: Teacher Background Materials, including Unit Overview, Unit Context, Correlation to the National Standards for History, Unit Objectives, an Introduction to *Asian Immigration to the United States*; and Lesson Plans with Student Resources. This unit, as we have said above, focuses on certain key moments in time and should be used as a supplement to your customary course materials. Although these lessons are recommended for use by grades 8–12, they can be adapted for other grade levels.

Introduction

The Teacher Background section should provide you with a good overview of the entire unit and with the historical information and context necessary to teach this unit. You may consult it for your own use, and you may choose to share it with students if they are of a sufficient grade level to understand the materials.

The Lesson Plans include a variety of ideas and approaches for the teacher which can be elaborated upon or cut as you see the need. These lesson plans contain student resources which accompany each lesson. The resources consist of primary source documents, handouts and student background materials, and a bibliography.

In our series of teaching units, each collection can be taught in several ways. You can teach all of the lessons offered on any given topic, or you can select and adapt the ones that best support your particular course needs. We have not attempted to be comprehensive or prescriptive in our offerings, but rather to give you an array of enticing possibilities for in-depth study, at varying grade levels. We hope that you will find the lesson plans exciting and stimulating for your classes. We also hope that your students will never again see history as a boring sweep of facts and meaningless dates but rather as an endless treasure of real life stories and an exercise in analysis and reconstruction.

TEACHER BACKGROUND MATERIALS

I. UNIT OVERVIEW

Since 1965 the rapid growth of immigration from Asia has contributed to the tremendous diversity in the racial and ethnic composition of the United States population. In the 1990 census, Asian Americans represented the fastest growing group of immigrants, but the diversity among Asians is even more complex than indicated by census data. They represent a multitude of language groups and have many different countries of origin. For instance, Chinese-speaking immigrants may come from China, Taiwan, Hong Kong, Vietnam and other Southeast Asian countries. Asian Indians who speak any one of the 18 official languages of India may come from India, England, Fiji, South Africa, or the Caribbean. The reasons Asian Americans immigrate and their situations in the United States are no less diverse than their national origins. They could be well-heeled entrepreneurs seeking better economic opportunities or destitute boat persons fleeing political persecution.

How do different Asian Americans define themselves? How does the media define them? Why are Asian Americans in the United States in larger numbers than ever before? Should the nation welcome them as much-needed workers in the American economy or worry about the social welfare burden they might impose? Should Euro-Americans be concerned that they will somehow create a very different American culture or should they be glad that Asian Americans might enrich the fabric of our lives through new and exciting contributions? Answers to these questions can be attempted only after a study of the new Asian immigration in historical perspective, an analysis of the forces that have governed U.S. attitudes towards Asian immigration in the past, and an examination of the reasons why Asians immigrate to the United States. The material in this unit provides some of the resources that can be used to address these issues.

Students will examine advertisements and other popular media to determine how they reflect changes in American society. They will learn to interpret statistics presented in graphs and tables. They will read American legislative acts and survey relevant global events listed in chronologies. They will read statements made by a great variety of Asian immigrants to learn what prompted these people to leave their lands of origin to come to the United States.

Primary and secondary sources presented in this unit will complement U.S. history textbook content on late twentieth-century U. S. history, including Cold War competition with the USSR, the impact of U. S. military involvement in Indo-China, and the impact of technological innovation on Asian immigration to the United States.

II. UNIT CONTEXT

The history of Asian immigration to the United States has received scant attention in schools and colleges but is an integral part of American history. It raises issues about diversity and democracy, capitalism and economic opportunity, racism

Teacher Background Materials

and discrimination, property rights and citizenship rights, all of which are critical to a full and broad understanding of our common heritage as Americans.

This topic belongs to several eras from the mid-eighteenth century onwards. This unit will set the history of Asian American immigration in the wider context of American immigration legislation and global events and will examine motivations for Asian immigration. It is designed to augment other chapters in recent American history both by presenting information and by engaging students in activities that help them understand factors which affect migration, bring about social change, and influence United States policy.

III. CORRELATION WITH NATIONAL STANDARDS FOR UNITED STATES HISTORY

This unit is designed to accompany Standards 2A and 2B of Era 6, “The Development of the Industrial United States, 1870-1900;” Standards 2A and 3A of Era 7, “The Emergence of Modern America, 1890-1930;” and Standard 2B of Era 10, “Contemporary United States, 1968 to the Present,” in *the National Standards for United States History, Basic Edition* (Los Angeles: National Center for History in the Schools, 1996).

IV. UNIT LEARNING OBJECTIVES

1. To investigate legislation regulating immigration to the United States.
2. To assess policies regarding Asian immigration to the United States.
3. To research factors affecting decisions by Asians to immigrate to the United States.
4. To analyze interaction between global economic and social conditions and immigration to the United States.
5. To formulate positions and to propose policies to regulate future immigration in the best interests of the United States.
6. To examine statistical information regarding immigration from Asia to the United States.

V. HISTORICAL BACKGROUND OF ASIAN IMMIGRATION

Asians were among the very early immigrants to the United States, and like other immigrant groups they have contributed to the building of America. Yet millions of Asian Americans who have been in the United States for more than three generations are still mislabeled “foreigners,” and their history in America remains misunderstood. At the dawn of the twenty first century, more and more immigrants from Asia continue to arrive in the United States, answering the call for highly skilled labor in computer and information technology industries, shattering outdated images of immigrants as “huddled masses yearning to breathe free.” To understand these Asian immigrants it is necessary to examine the history of each of the major Asian groups, differentiating among people from China, India, Japan, Korea, the Philippines, and countries in Southeast Asia.

The first recorded arrival of people from Asia in the modern era occurred in 1790 when Filipino sailors escaped imprisonment aboard a Spanish galleon docked in New Orleans and fled into the bayous. The first large-scale Asian immigration to the United States took place when the **Chinese** came to work the gold fields of Northern California in 1848. American capitalists supported unfettered immigration in those years and welcomed the heavy Chinese immigration of unskilled workers; but organized labor opposed it, first on economic grounds, accusing the Chinese of lowering wages and increasing unemployment among natives, and later on racial and social grounds. For the first time in American history, racism was openly used as an argument for restricting immigration. The anti-Chinese movement led to the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882, which prohibited the admission of unskilled Chinese workers to the U.S.

The years 1890 to 1924 marked the initial period of **Japanese** immigration that was also punctuated by anti-Japanese movements. The Gentlemen’s Agreement of 1907 excluded Japanese and Koreans from immigration, the Alien Land Acts of California denied Asians property rights, and the Immigration Act of 1917 denied entry to all Asians from a “Barred Zone” in Asia. Immigration from Asia was effectively prohibited by the Immigration Act of 1924, which banned admission of persons ineligible for citizenship, a category that included all Chinese, Japanese, Koreans, and Asian Indians.

Filipinos were allowed unrestricted entry to the United States as “nationals” since the Philippines formally became an American colonial territory in 1902, but there was surprisingly limited immigration. Filipinos were defined as aliens under the Philippine Independence Act of 1934, and from 1935 to 1946, when the Philippines gained independence, they had an immigration quota of 50 persons per year. After 1946, the annual quota rose to 100 persons a year and immigrants were granted naturalization rights. By 1960, there were only 176,000 Filipino immigrants in the U.S., a low number given the close ties between the two countries.

The first significant wave of immigration of **Asian Indians** to the United States took place between 1900 and 1920, when nearly 7,000 agricultural workers, mostly Sikhs from

Teacher Background Materials

Punjab, came to the Pacific Coast. They also worked in the lumber and railroad industries, alongside the Japanese and the Chinese. Like other Asian immigrants, they became targets of the hostility and suspicion of white Americans, who campaigned vigorously against the “ragheads” and “the Hindoo menace.” Immigration from India to the United States virtually stopped when Congress passed exclusion laws in 1917 and 1924.

Immigration from Asia halted completely during World War II. During this time, anti-Japanese sentiment reached its zenith with the U.S. government-sanctioned incarceration of nearly 110,000 Japanese Americans in internment camps.

Small gains for Asians were made after World War II when racial bars to naturalization were removed in 1952 and token quotas of 105 immigrants per annum were granted to Asian nations. Small numbers of non-quota immigrants were allowed to enter, chiefly war brides and other relatives.

Whereas before World War II there were harsh restrictions on immigration from Asia and American policy was one of exclusion and overt racial subordination, there was a change in U.S. policy after the war. American global interests, both economic and political, expanded dramatically, and the United States saw itself as the champion of the new free world. Meanwhile, many Asian nations threw off the yoke of colonialism, becoming proud, independent states that America could no longer humiliate with its discriminatory immigration policies.

The 1965 Immigration and Naturalization Act reflected this new world order and marked a watershed in Asian American immigration history. It eliminated earlier discriminatory racial quotas and made possible the entry into the U.S. of millions of immigrants from Asia. Comparison of immigration statistics shows that Asian immigration, which was negligible during the period 1901–1930 (3.7%), rose slightly during mid-century, and increased dramatically from 1961 to 1989 (33.4%).¹

The conditions for Asian immigrants had changed dramatically over the course of the twentieth century. Whereas earlier they had been primarily single laborers, subject to exclusion, racially oppressed, and denied citizenship, since 1965 Asian immigrants have been mostly middle class, including professionals and entrepreneurs who have come with families to America. Asian immigrants no longer face overt and state-supported racism. Today Asian Americans are an increasingly significant minority in the United States.

¹Source: Douglas S. Massey, “The New Immigration and Ethnicity in the United States,” *Population and Development Review*, 21, No. 3 (September 1995), 634. See also Figure 2b.

VI. LESSON PLANS

1. The Asian Americans Immigrants
2. Regulating Asian Immigration
3. Global forces and Asian Immigration
4. Why Do Asians Come to the United States?
5. The Future of Immigration Policy



LESSON ONE

THE ASIAN AMERICANS IMMIGRANTS

A. ORGANIZING QUESTIONS

1. How many Asian immigrants have entered the United States?
2. When did they come?
3. Where did they come from?

B. LESSON OBJECTIVES

- ◆ To recognize changing immigration patterns in U. S. history.
- ◆ To examine the extent and variety of Asian immigration.

C. LESSON ACTIVITIES (two days)

Day One

1. Divide the class into small groups of three to five students. Ask students to select a recorder/reporter. Distribute copies of advertisements featuring photos of people from recent publications. Ask students to answer the following questions.
 - a. What do you notice about faces in these ads?
 - b. What is the significance of the diversity represented in these ads?
 - c. What do these ads indicate about the population of the United States?

Have the reporter from each group share their answers to these three questions.

2. View the video film: "Train # 7, Immigrant Journey" by Hye Jung Park and J. T. Takagi. Invite students to respond to this portrayal of the changing face of New York City and to comment on what this suggests about the United States. The film is available for rent or purchase from Third World Newsreel (see bibliography for additional information).
3. Review basic guidelines for reading graphs.

Lesson One

4. Homework:

Students should answer each of the following questions before class on **Day Two**.

- a. Carefully examine information in **Documents 1-A** and **1-B**.
- b. During what decade did the maximum number of immigrants enter the United States?
- c. How many immigrants arrived during that peak immigration decade?
- d. From what area of the world did immigrants come from 1820 to 1945?
- e. From which areas did an increasing number of immigrants come to the United States between 1965 and 1989?

Examine the statistics in **Document 1-C**.

5. List the five decades the largest number of people came from Asia to United States.
6. How many times greater was the number of Asian immigrants who came to the United States between 1971 and 1980 than the number who came one century earlier (1871-1880)?

Review the charts in **Documents 1-D** and the series of graphs in **Document 1-E**.

7. What is the main difference between “Immigration” statistics and “Population” statistics?
8. Name the six groups that had the highest rate of growth between 1980 and 1990.
9. Name the six largest Asian groups in the United States.
10. What information in these documents accounts for the fact that the Chinese-American and Filipino-American populations are significantly larger than other Asian-American groups in the U.S.
11. Which three Southeast Asian groups had a significant increase in immigration after 1975?

Day Two

1. Direct students to exchange papers and to correct answers to homework questions.

2. Ask students to calculate the number of their classmates who should represent each of the six major Asian population groups in order to represent their portion of the total Asian-American population. For example, in a class of 25 students

6 would represent Chinese
5 would represent Filipinos
3 would represent Japanese
3 would represent Indians
3 would represent Koreans
2 would represent Vietnamese
3 would represent other Asian immigrants

3. Divide the class into six groups representing six major Asian immigrant groups. Provide cardboard for placards (approximately 14 x 8 inches or 12 x 6 inches) and markers. Students in each group should make a placard with the name of the major Asian immigrant group in the United States they represent. On these placards students should write the year of the first major immigration from the land of origin. Illustrate placards with flags of the lands of origin of these immigrants. (Check an encyclopedia or the Internet for information.) In order to graphically represent their portion of the U.S. population, the designated number of students should stand with appropriate placards.

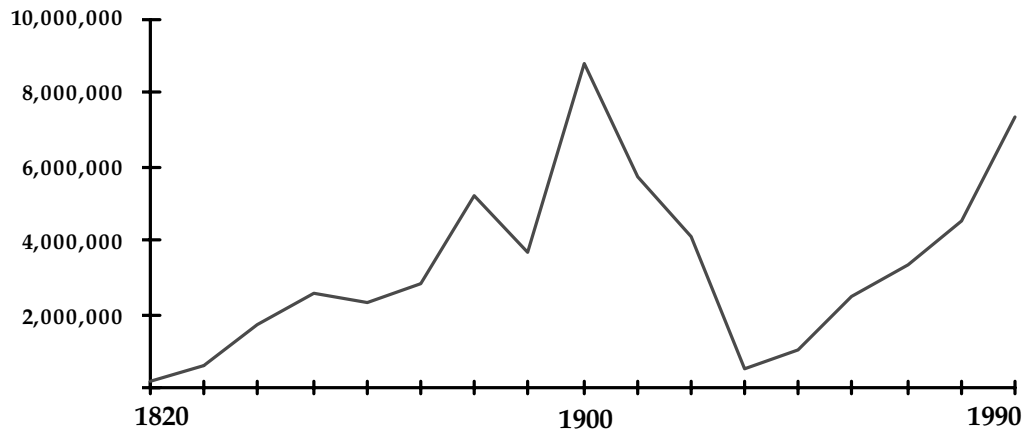
Note

The "Other Asian Immigrants" might hold smaller placards listing countries of origin of these immigrants. Immigrants whose rate of growth between 1980 and 1990 exceeds 200% should be written in a bright color contrasting with other placards.

4. Homework:

Students should read Background Information about Asian immigrants in the United States (**Student Handout 1**). Then they should write specific statements regarding what statistics reveal about Asian-American diversity, education, work, and income.

**IMMIGRATION TO THE UNITED STATES BY DECADE
FISCAL YEARS 1820–1990**

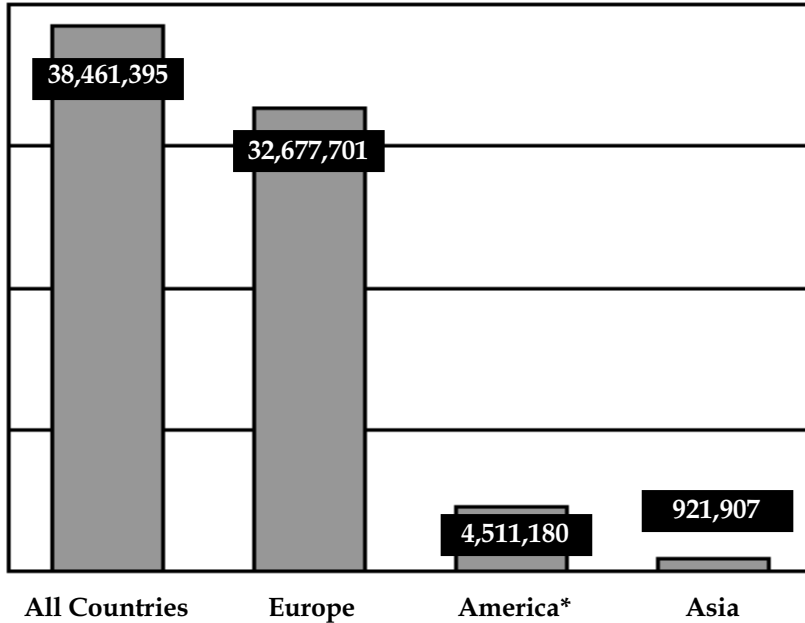


Decade	Number of Immigrants
1821–1830	141,439
1831–1840	599,125
1841–1850	1,713,251
1851–1860	2,598,214
1861–1870	2,314,824
1871–1880	2,812,191
1881–1890	5,246,613
1891–1900	3,687,564
1901–1910	8,795,386
1911–1920	5,735,811
1921–1930	4,107,209
1931–1940	528,431
1941–1950	1,035,039
1951–1960	2,515,479
1961–1970	3,321,677
1971–1980	4,493,314
1981–1990	7,338,062

Source: "Immigration by Region and Selected Country of Last Residence, Fiscal Years 1820–1989" In George Brown Tindall with David E. Shi, *America. A Narrative History*, Third ed. (New York: W. W. Norton, 1992), A40-41

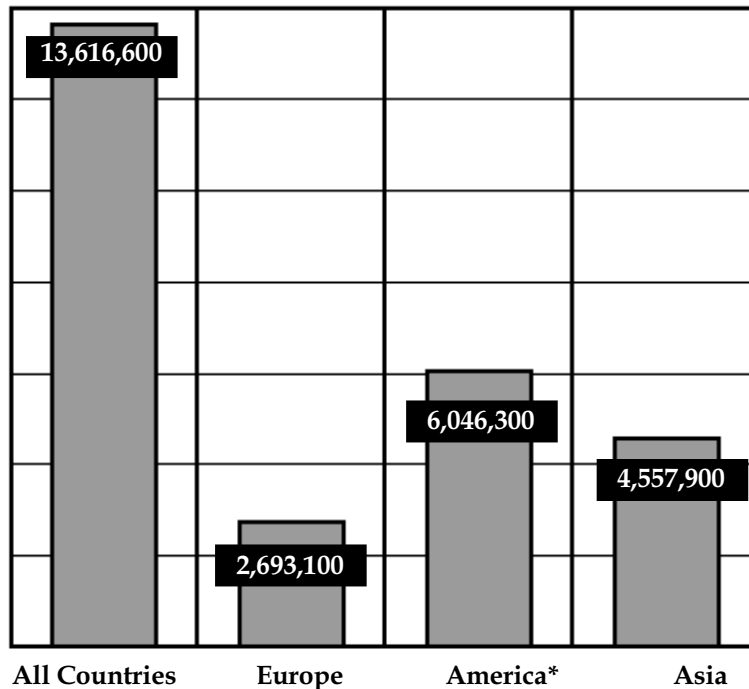
IMMIGRATION TO THE UNITED STATES

Figure 1: Immigration to the United States 1820–1945



Source: Table 4, *U. S. Immigration and Naturalization Service Annual Report for 1945*

Figure 2: Immigration to the United States 1961–1989

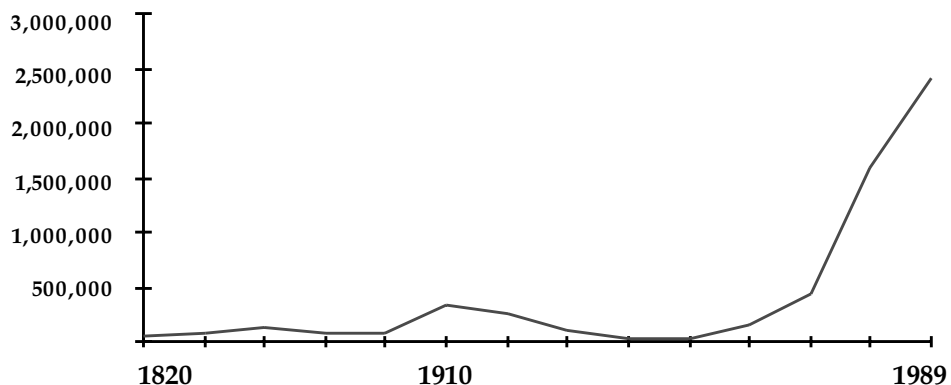


Source: Table 7, "Immigrants, by Country of Birth: 1961–1989," *Statistical Abstract of the United States 1994*

* America refers to North and South America outside the United States

IMMIGRATION TO THE UNITED STATES FROM ASIA

Immigration to the United States from Asia 1851–1989*



Decade	Number of Asian Immigrants
1851–1860	41,538
1861–1870	64,759
1871–1880	124,160
1881–1890	69,942
1891–1900	74,862
1901–1910	323,543
1911–1920	247,236
1921–1930	112,059
1931–1940	16,595
1941–1950	37,028
1951–1960	153,249
1961–1970	427,642
1971–1980	1,588,178
1981–1989	2,416,278

*Includes China, Hong Kong, India, Iran, Israel, Japan, Korea, Phillipines, Turkey, Vietnam, Other Asia.

Source: "Immigration by Region and Selected Country of Last Residence, Fiscal Years 1820–1989" In George Brown Tindall with David E. Shi, *America. A Narrative History*, Third ed. (New York: W. W. Norton, 1992), A42–48.

IMMIGRATION VS. POPULATION

Asian Population in the United States

Census Year	Total U.S. population	Total Asian and Pacific Islander population	Asian and Pacific Islanders as % of total U.S. population	Total Asian population	Asians as % of total U.S. population
1970	203,300,000	1,500,000	0.8%		
1980*	226,545,805	3,726,440	1.6%	3,466,874	1.5%
1990	248,709,873	7,273,662	2.9%	6,908,638	2.8%

* More than 20 Asian and Pacific Islander population groups were identified in the 1980 census, compared with only five in the 1970 census.

When new Asian and Pacific Islander groups were identified in the 1980 census, it became possible to compare the growth of many different population groups between 1980 and 1990.

It is important to distinguish between “Immigration” figures and “Population” figures.

“Immigration” figures for Asian countries show the number of people entering the United States from those countries.

“Population” figures for Asian countries show the number of people in the United States claiming ancestry from those countries. These figures include American-born descendants of immigrants. Many immigrants leave the United States and return to their land of origin or move on to other countries also, thereby reducing the Asian population in the United States.

Immigration was one major factor accounting for the doubling in the proportion of the Asian and Pacific Islander population from 0.8% in 1970 to 1.6% in 1980, and nearly doubling yet again in 1990 to 2.9%.

Large numbers of immigrants came from China, India, Korea, and the Philippines following the adoption of the Immigration Act of 1965, and more than 400,000 Southeast Asian Refugees came to America between 1975 and 1980 under the Refugee Resettlement Program.

In addition to immigration and natural increase, the growth in numbers was also due to changes in the census race definition to include more groups in the Asian and Pacific Islander categories.

Diversity of the Asian American Population

The Asian American population brings tremendous diversity to an already diverse United States, but the variety within this diversity is also enormous. No longer is it just the Chinese, Japanese, and Filipinos.

Several different groups are identified within the Asian American population, and 12 of these are named in the following table. They do not include the separate groups in the Pacific Islander population, namely the Hawaiians, Samoans, Tongans, Micronesians and Melanesians.

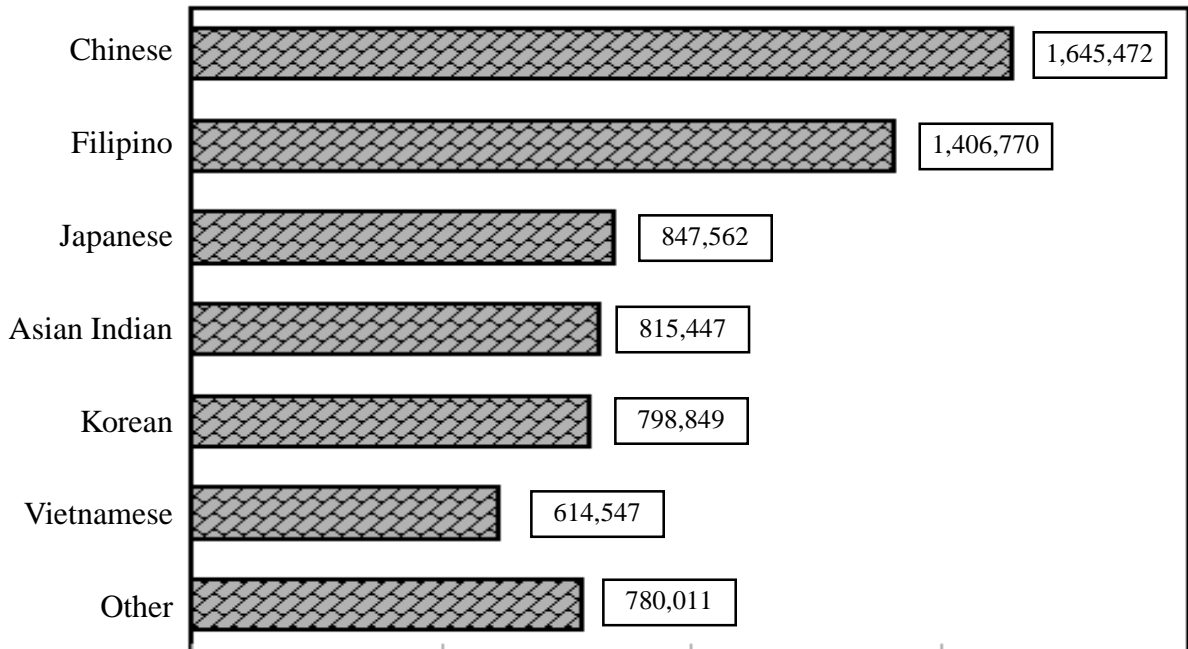
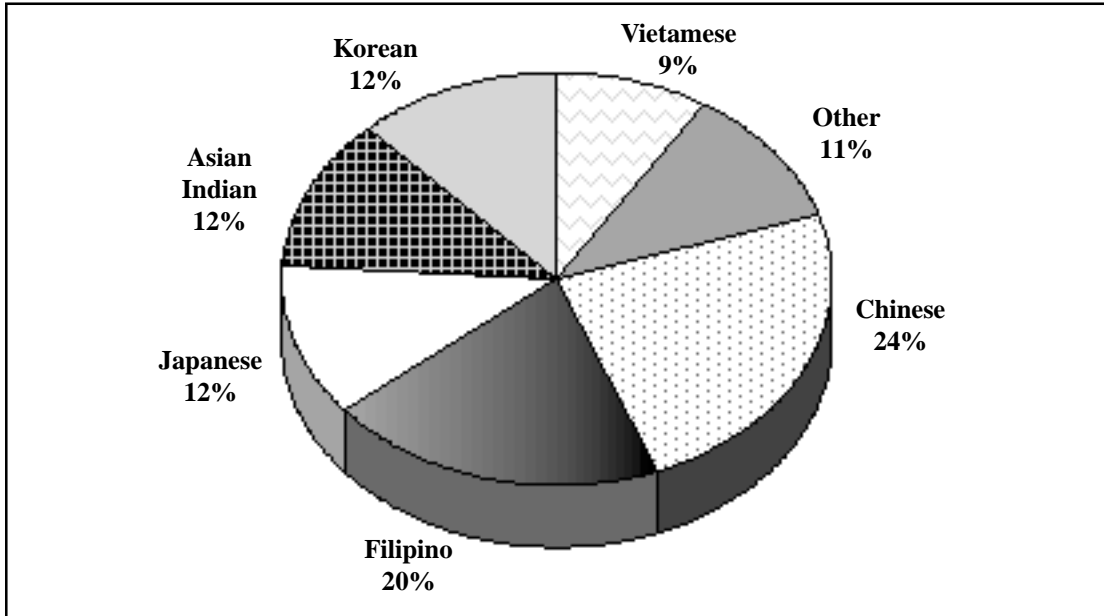
The following table shows the growth of the major Asian American groups identified in the U.S. Census of the population between 1980 and 1990.

Population Growth Among Major Asian Groups

Population	1980	1990	% Growth
<u>Total Asian</u>	<u>3,466,874</u>	<u>6,908,638</u>	<u>99%</u>
Chinese	812,178	1,645,472	103%
Filipino	781,894	1,406,770	80%
Japanese	716,331	847,562	18%
Asian Indian	387,223	815,447	111%
Korean	357,393	798,849	124%
Vietnamese	245,025	614,547	151%
Laotian	47,683	149,014	213%
Thai	45,279	91,275	102%
Cambodian	16,044	147,411	819%
Pakistani	15,792	82,903	413%
Indonesian	9,618	27,634	187%
Hmong	5,204	90,082	1,631%

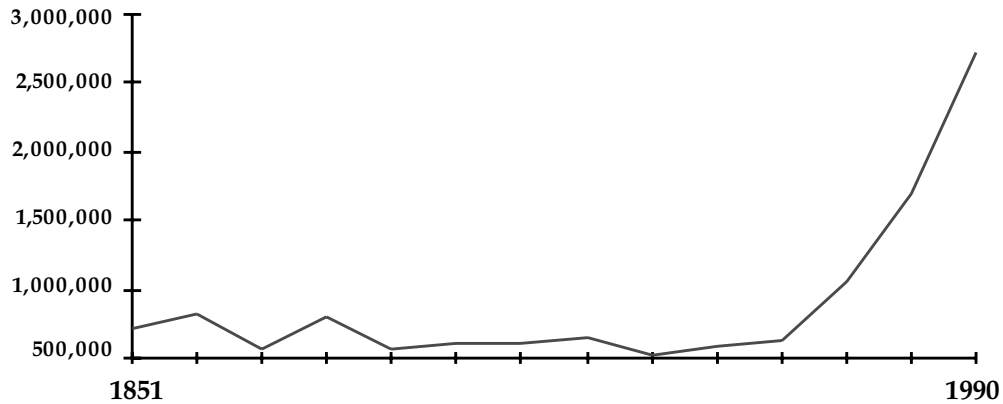
United States Population 1990

Total U.S. Population: 248,709,873
Asian and Pacific Islander Population: 7,273,662
Asian Population: 6,908,638



Source: "Table 3. Selected Social and Economic Characteristics for the Asian Population 1990," In *We the Americans: Asians* U.S. Department of Commerce: Economics and Statistics Administration, 1993.

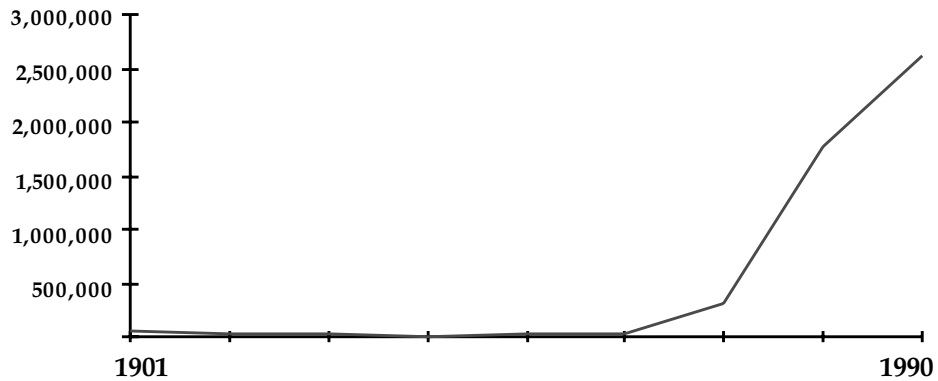
IMMIGRATION TO THE UNITED STATES FROM CHINA, 1851–1990



Decade	Number of Chinese Immigrants
1851–1860	41,397
1861–1870	64,301
1871–1880	123,201
1881–1890	61,711
1891–1900	14,799
1901–1910	20,605
1911–1920	21,278
1921–1930	29,907
1931–1940	4,928
1941–1950	16,709
1951–1960	25,198
1961–1970	109,771
1971–1980	237,793
1981–1990	444,962

Source: "Table 4.1 Chinese Immigrant Arrivals by Decade," In Pyong Gap Ming, ed. *Asian Americans* (Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications, 1995), 60.

IMMIGRATION TO THE UNITED STATES FROM INDIA, 1901–1990

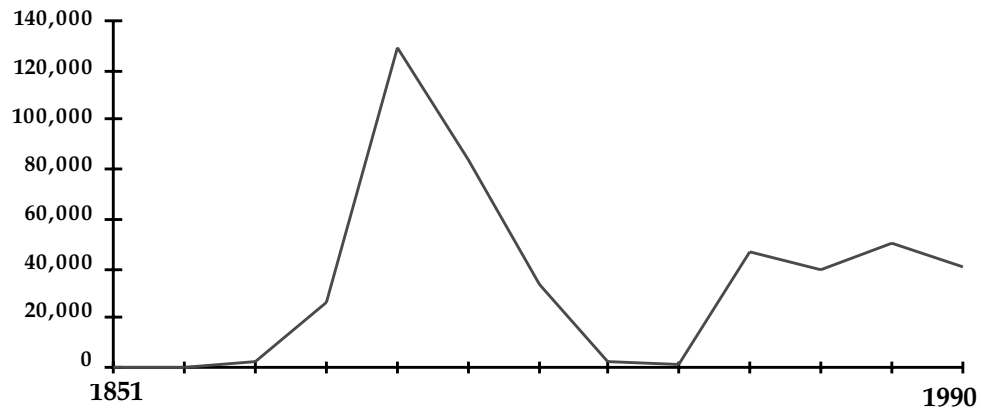


Decade	Number of Indian Immigrants
1901–1910	4,713
1911–1920	2,082
1921–1930	1,886
1931–1940	496
1941–1950	1,761
1951–1960	1,973
1961–1970	31,200
1971–1980	176,800
1981–1990	261,900

(Indian immigration to the United States between 1820–1900 totalled only 716.)

Source: Padma Rangaswamy, Table 2 and Table 4 In *Post-1965 Immigrants from India in Metropolitan Chicago: The Imperatives of Choice and Change* (Ph. D. Dissertation, University of Illinois at Chicago, 1996), 141, 145.

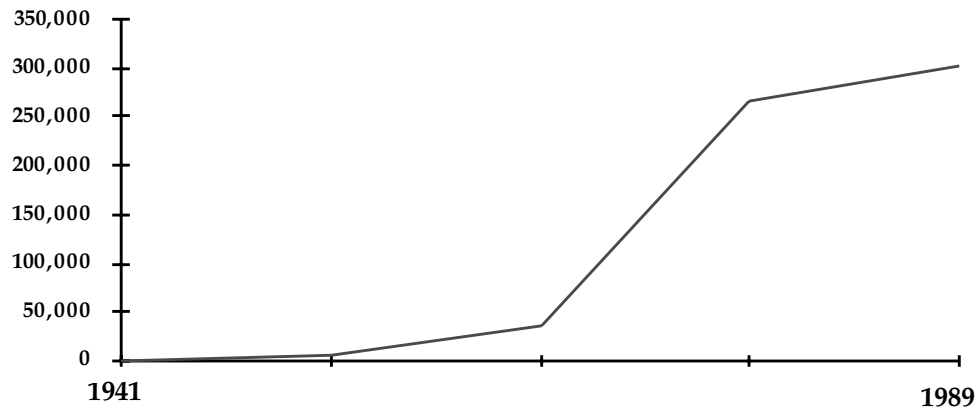
IMMIGRATION TO THE UNITED STATES FROM JAPAN, 1861–1989



Decade	Number of Japanese Immigrants
1861–1870	186
1871–1880	149
1881–1890	2,270
1891–1900	25,942
1901–1910	129,797
1911–1920	83,837
1921–1930	33,462
1931–1940	1,948
1941–1950	1,555
1951–1960	46,250
1961–1970	39,988
1971–1980	49,775
1981–1989	40,654

Source: "Immigration by Region and Selected Country of Last Residence, Fiscal Years 1820–1989" In George Brown Tindall with David E. Shi, *America. A Narrative History*, Third ed. (New York: W. W. Norton, 1992), A42- 48.

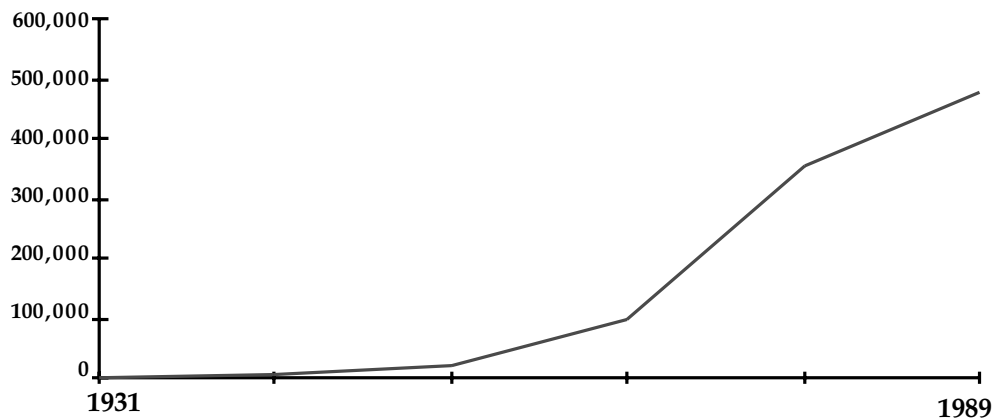
IMMIGRATION TO THE UNITED STATES FROM KOREA, 1941–1989



Decade	Number of Korean Immigrants
1941–1950	107
1951–1960	6,231
1961–1970	34,526
1971–1980	267,638
1981–1989	302,782

Source: "Immigration by Region and Selected Country of Last Residence, Fiscal Years 1820–1989" In George Brown Tindall with David E. Shi, *America. A Narrative History*, Third ed. (New York: W. W. Norton, 1992), A42- 48.

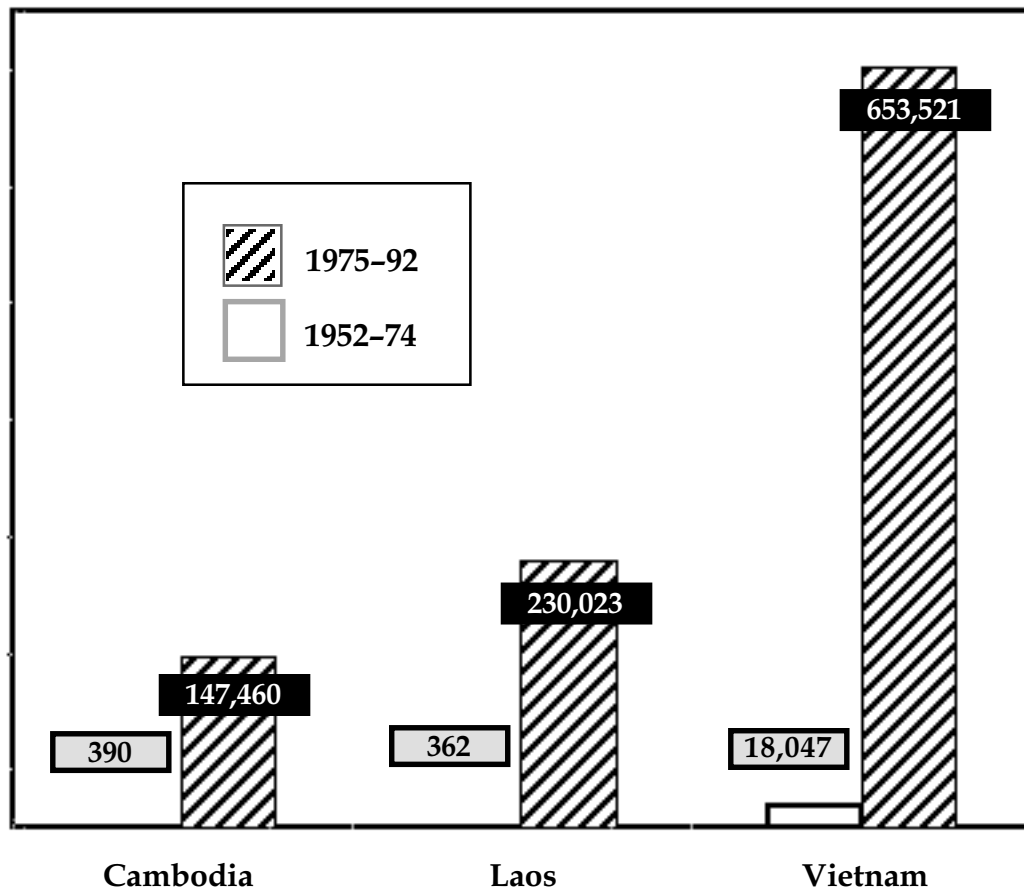
IMMIGRATION TO THE UNITED STATES FROM THE PHILIPPINES, 1931–1989



Decade	Number of Filipino Immigrants
1931–1940	528
1941–1950	4,691
1951–1960	19,307
1961–1970	98,376
1971–1980	354,987
1981–1989	477,485

Source: "Immigration by Region and Selected Country of Last Residence, Fiscal Years 1820–1989" In George Brown Tindall with David E. Shi, *America. A Narrative History*, Third ed. (New York: W. W. Norton, 1992), A42- 48.

IMMIGRATION TO THE UNITED STATES FROM CAMBODIA, LAOS, AND VIETNAM
Pre-1975 Immigrant Arrivals, 1952-1974
Post-1975 Refugee Arrivals, 1975-1992



Source: "Table 9.1 Arrivals in the United States from Cambodia, Laos, and Vietnam, 1952-1992" In Pyong Gap Ming, ed. *Asian Americans* (Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications, 1995), 241.

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

The graphs and tables in this section reveal patterns of immigration to the United States since 1820 when immigration records were first maintained, setting Asian immigration against the backdrop of total immigration to the United States. They show the periods of highest immigration in United States history, when waves of immigrants arrived on American shores, first from northern and western Europe, and later southern and eastern Europe. They also show periods of low immigration, when global events like world wars and the Great Depression adversely affected immigration to the United States. Lastly, they show how Asian immigration has risen and fallen over the years, increasing dramatically after 1965.

It was not until the 1980 census that many Asian groups were identified and counted as a separate group. Comparison between the 1980 and 1990 census data reveals some very significant patterns of growth in the Asian American population. A close look at the 1990 census figures reveals important socio-economic characteristics and the tremendous diversity among the Asian American groups.

According to the 1990 census, approximately 66% of Asians lived in just five states: California, New York, Hawaii, Texas, and Illinois.

Immigration contributed heavily to the growth of the Asian population. Although two-thirds of Asian Americans were foreign born, the vast majority of Japanese Americans were born in the United States. Most Vietnamese, Laotians, and Cambodians have arrived only recently and thus, most were born in Asia. The median age of Asians is 30 years, compared to the national median of 33 years.

Asians value education very highly. Although only 20% of Americans have a bachelor's degree, 38% of Asians have bachelors or higher degrees. Asian Indians have the highest educational attainment rates for both men (66%) and women (49%). Fewer than 9% of Cambodians, Laotians, and Hmong are college or university graduates.

Nearly two-thirds of Asian Americans speak an Asian language at home. Many like the Hmong and the Cambodians live in households where no one speaks English "very well."

Asian immigrants are industrious; 67% are employed while only 65% of all Americans are currently in the labor force. Sixty percent of Asian women work compared to 57% of all women in the United States.

Because of their education, Asian Americans tend to work in higher paying occupations. Almost one third of Asians are in managerial and professional specialty jobs compared to one in four Americans. Asian Americans also hold technical, sales, and administrative support jobs in higher proportion (33%) than all Americans (31%).

However, studies show that Asians do suffer from discrimination and are paid less than white Americans for the same type of work.

When looking at income levels, it is helpful to look at both median family income and per capita income. Asian American families have higher median family incomes (\$41,583) than all Americans (\$35,225), but that is due not only to their education, but because they have more family members in the work force. Only 13% of American households have three or more workers, while 20% of Asian families do. Consequently, the per capita income of Asian Americans is lower, at \$13,806, than the national per capita income of \$14,143.

Variations among the Asian American population are very broad. The Japanese had the highest per capita income of \$19,373, compared to the Hmong who had the lowest at \$2,692. The Hmong are also among the most recent Asian immigrant groups, and have not yet had the time needed to become financially stable in a new land.

Some Notable Asian Americans in Government Service



NASA, <http://www.jsc.nasa.gov/bios/htmlbios/lu.html>

Edward Tsang Lu (Ph.D.)
NASA Astronaut



AAP I Initiative,
<http://www.aapi.gov/singh.htm>

Shamina Singh, Executive Director of the first White House Initiative on Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders (AAPIs)



Heritage Foundation, <http://www.heritage.org/staff/chao.htm>

Elaine L. Chao
Secretary of Labor, 2001–
Former Chairman Asian Studies
Center Advisory Council



U.S. Army Public Information,
<http://www.dtic.mil/armylink/photos/Apr1999/newcsa.html>

Gen. Eric K. Shinseki
U.S. Army, 34th Chief of Staff