



Asian American – Pacific Islander History Month

Many Americans are surprised to learn the rich history of Asian Americans. Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders have participated in American history from its early beginnings and conflicts. Though they were denied citizenship much the same as African-Americans, they were loyal to the United States. Among the first immigrants to the United States from Japan and China, there were harsh stories of exploitation. These immigrants suffered from discrimination and mistreatment not unlike African-Americans who were held as slaves. Asians and Pacific Islanders were often relegated to live in slum areas and the only jobs they often could get were as indentured servants in mines and other hard labor jobs. The treatment often was little better than slavery.

Szeming Sze

Szeming Sze was born in China. After his marriage to Bessie Li, a pianist, the couple moved to Shanghai, China but fled the Japanese invasion in 1941. The couple settled in London where Sze studied medicine. He was inspired by his residency at St. Thomas Hospital in a London slum to do public service.

His medical career took him from London to international circles. At the United Nations conference in 1945, Sze, Geraldo da Paula Souza of Brazil, and Karl Evang of Norway called for the creation of a single, international health organization. That group became the World Health Organization (WHO) which is credited with eradicating smallpox. He immigrated to the U.S. and later became a citizen. Dr. Sze retired as UN medical director in 1968. He died in 1998 at age 90. In a life of public service, Sze is credited with saving millions of children through vaccination programs.



Jun Choi

Jun Choi graduated from MIT with an undergraduate degree then earned a graduate degree in Public Policy from Columbia University. He is a Leadership New Jersey fellow and has taught economics and public policy as an adjunct professor.

In January 2006, Choi was sworn in as mayor of Edison, New Jersey, his hometown. He is one of the nation's youngest elected mayors. He was the first Asian American to lead the city and is one of the few Asian Americans to lead a U.S. city government. Choi breathed new life into the city by securing millions of dollars in grants to preserve open space, upgrade parks and restore the Edison Memorial Tower where Thomas Alva Edison perfected the incandescent light

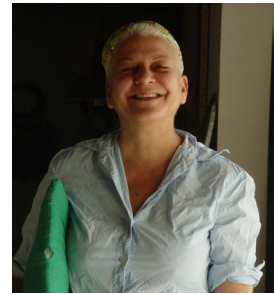
Prior to elected office, Mayor Choi served as Executive Director of a Student Achievement Task Force at the NJ Department of Education. He formerly worked at the White House Budget Office and as a management consultant for Ernst & Young LLP. (contains excerpts from the Edison, NJ, website and Jun Choi's website)

Michele Zalopany

Michele Zalopany grew up in the 1960s in Detroit which at the time was deeply divided on race issues. Her father was a dark-skinned Hawai'ian who was an international representative for the United Auto Workers. He endured racial taunts at work and otherwise. It was he who inspired her to give a voice to the poor and oppressed.

After high school graduation, she attended the Cleveland Institute of Art and the School of Visual Arts in New York City but left before graduation. Zalopany embarked on a career in the arts, having exhibitions across the U.S. and Europe from Italy and Germany. Being one of the few successful Pacific Islander artists, she credits her success as an artist to teachers in her young years including her stepmother who was an artist and teacher who believed in her and encouraged her to practice art.

Zalopany made a commitment early on to be an artist. In an interview, she explained, “at age fourteen, I looked at what I enjoyed the most in my life and decided to pursue an art education by changing from a Catholic high school to one of the best public high schools in the US, Cass Technical HS. The environment there was constructed like a university with various, concentrated departments. For the first time in my life, I was taken seriously by the practicing artist/teachers and bloomed under their tutelage. It's very true that even with all the talent in the world, without practicing, one will not develop.”



In 2001, Zalopany, despite having a successful arts career, decided to go back to school to complete her education and take her work full circle in later becoming a teacher. She graduated from Queens College with a graduate degree in fine arts in 2006 and went on to teach at the Cranbrook Academy of Art in Michigan then the Empire State College and later at the University of Hawai'i at Manoa. She currently is a visiting lecturer at Harvard.

Her paintings reflect her passion for social justice. At first, her messages of consciousness were subtly infused in her art but her latest work more overtly expressed her ideals. Though critically acclaimed, these latest pieces have had limited commercial success. Zalopany refuses to trade commercial success for her ideals. (based on an article by Michael J. Amy in *Art in America* and my email interview of Michele Zalopany)



Heather Fong

Heather Fong grew up in San Francisco under the mentoring of then-police chief, Fred Lau. Fong credits Lau with inspiring her to public service. She graduated from the University of San Francisco where she worked as a police cadet. After joining the police force at age 21, she earned a master's degree in social work from San Francisco State University. Being fluent in Cantonese she served as a liaison to Chinese community. In 1994 she was among the first three women to be named captain. In 2004 she became the chief of police for San Francisco after having served as acting police chief for several months. Fong is the first Asian American woman to become police chief for the city and the first for any major U.S. city. (based on the city of San Francisco website and a *San Francisco Chronicle* article by Suzanne Herel)

Kiran and Pallavi Patel, M.D.

Kiran and Pallavi Patel, (both M.D.) made history in May 2005 when they donated \$18.5 million to University of South Florida, the university's largest single donation. The money will go to build and sustain a center for global solutions. Dr. Kiran Patel is a cardiologist who was born in Zambia (west Africa) and he graduated from medical school at Gujarat University in India. Dr. Pallavi Patel was born in India. She attended Municipal Medical College of Gujarat University in India. She was in private practice in Kabwe, Zambia from 1974 to 1978. In 1978, the Patels immigrated to the U.S. and both started their residencies in New Jersey.



The Patels established a modern 50-bed charity hospital serving 100,000 villagers in India and have provided funds to a recurring annual scholarship fund that allows underprivileged children to obtain a college education. In addition, the Patels funded the construction of the USF Charter School for Underprivileged Children in Hillsborough County, Florida and have sponsored 25 orphans from India to visit and perform a cross cultural program in the United States. Dr. Kiran Patel built a billion-dollar company, providing service to more than 450,000 members, employing more than 1,200 employees and operating in Florida, New York and Connecticut. (based on the Tampa Bay Performing Arts Center website)

Hiram L. Fong

Hiram L. Fong (nee' Yau Leong Fong) was the son of Chinese immigrants. He grew up in Hawai'i under modest circumstances; his father worked as an indentured laborer for a sugar plantation and his mother was a maid. He went on to become a millionaire businessman and the first Asian-American elected to the United States Senate.



Fong began working at the age of 4, when he picked and sold algarroba beans for cattle feed. A few years later, he began selling newspapers and shining shoes on the streets of Honolulu. Fong graduated with honors from the University of Hawaii in 1930 and then worked a few years for the Honolulu suburban water system. He graduated from Harvard Law School in 1935.

Prior to statehood, he was a representative in the Hawaii Territory legislature. When Hawai'i achieved statehood, he ran and won the Senate seat. He was instrumental in crafting civil rights legislation. His amendment to a civil rights bill required auditors at polling places to assure minority voting rights, and he co-sponsored a 1965 bill assuring that Asians would be allowed to immigrate in similar numbers as people from other continents.

He died at 97 in 2004. (based on an Associated Press article)

Bobby Jindal

Bobby Jindal is the first Asian American of Indian descent to be governor of a U.S. state (Louisiana). Jindal is a native of Louisiana, born in June 1971. He graduated from high school at an early age (16) and went on to Brown University. After graduation he attended Oxford University as a Rhodes Scholar and graduated in 1994. Later he worked as a consultant then worked for the Louisiana Department of Health and Hospitals turning a \$400 million deficit into a \$220 million surplus in three years. A few years later he was appointed President of the University of Louisiana System. In 2004 he became the first Asian American of Indian descent to be elected to the U.S. Congress. He was sworn in as governor in January 2008.



Thurgood Marshall, Jr .

Thurgood Marshall, Jr. (son of the famed jurist Thurgood Marshall and Hawai'iian social activist Cissy Suyat Marshall) followed his late father into law. He obtained an undergraduate degree and a law degree from the University of Virginia. He began his legal career as a law clerk to District Judge Barri D. Parker then went on to work in various government positions including working for then Senator Al Gore and later again for then Vice President Gore as Director of Legislative Affairs and Deputy Counsel. He has volunteered with various environmental conservation programs including the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation. He also volunteers at a local food bank in the Washington, D.C. area with his younger son. In December 2006 he was appointed a Governor for the U.S.

Postal Service. He serves as a member of the Postal Service's board's Audit and Finance Committee and the Capital Projects Committee. In addition, Marshall is a partner at Bingham McCutchen and a principal with the Bingham Consulting Group. (based on www.sacbar.org and the U.S. Postal Service website)