

Message from the Editors

Transforming Community After 2020: Collective Wills and Imaginations of Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders

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In 2020, three major events converged: the COVID-19 pandemic, the decennial census, and elections. This inflection point in history will reshape the social, economic, and political landscape of the United States and around the world for years to come. In response, the *AAPI Nexus Journal* issued a call for papers on these topics. Our objective was to develop a collection of papers presenting in-depth analysis of data, solutions, and policy recommendations that address the needs of vulnerable Asian Americans, Native Hawaiians, and other Pacific Islanders (AANHPIs), which is sorely lacking from policy discussions and media news stories. Moreover, the special issue provides critical information and insights for practitioners, researchers, and policy makers for taking action in the areas of advocacy, strategic planning, policy, program development, and service delivery in one of the most challenging times in American history.

This special issue includes fourteen stellar articles featuring more than fifty leading scholars, applied-researchers, students, and community leaders from all over the nation. *AAPI Nexus* received many extraordinary submissions that we decided to publish this special issue in two parts. The second part will be published in early 2021. Many articles compared across AANHPI subgroups, whereas others went into depth about the heterogeneity within specific communities (e.g., South Asians, Filipinos, Pacific Islanders).

Like many catastrophes, the COVID-19 pandemic magnifies pre-

existing structural inequities that disproportionately affect racial and ethnic minority communities. The article by Samoa and colleagues aptly illustrate how current conditions reflect historical processes among Pacific Islanders. As noted by Mar and Ong, the pandemic is not only a health issue, but an economic one as well. They document how COVID-19 has affected unemployment and business closures. Morey et al. discuss similar effects on the census and voter enfranchisement. Importantly, their analysis situates these effects in the broader context of structural racism. Similarly, Bacong et al. discuss the effects of racism on data collection and disaggregation. Nham and Huynh document the rise in anti-Asian hate crimes, and Cruz shows the reach of colonialization on the response to the pandemic. Aligned with insights of “health in all policy,” Yusof et al. discuss the implications of the Patriot Act while Nasol discusses the CARES act on COVID-19 disparities among South Asians and Filipino Americans, respectively.

However, there are silver linings amidst the crisis. Many members of the community have risen to combat the many challenges. Chin et al. document how the Asian & Pacific Islander American Health Forum has mobilized, both as an independent entity and in solidarity with other organizations to enact positive changes. Similarly, Kukahiko and colleagues discuss the efforts of the Office of Hawaiian Education to identify opportunities to improve learner outcomes.

The decennial census provides a further challenge to the year 2020. The original intent of the census was to inform congressional reapportionment because representation of each state is based on its population size. Today, the federal government relies on census data to inform public policy decisions and for the distribution of federal funding. Outside of government, census data plays a major role in advocacy efforts to highlight disparities found across different segments of the population and is the most often employed source of data to justify needs for a given community. Given its central importance, the kind of information collected by the census is critical. Unfortunately, there are two concerns related to data collection of AANHPIs. First, there has been historically an undercount of these groups, which means these groups are underrepresented in the data. Second, the data collected on these communities needs to allow analysts the ability to take into account the diversity that exists within these groups.

The essay by Soon et al. discusses the social and political consequences of having inadequate data specifically for Pacific Islander populations. Their essay reviews how an accurate count of these groups

is contingent on specific types of data availability offered by the Census Bureau. They highlight the particular need to be able to disaggregate census data into specific ethnic or tribal groups and discuss what gains can be made by having this type of data available to researchers and advocates.

The 2020 presidential election year revealed that AAPIs have a stake in the core principles and beliefs that form the bedrock of a free and democratic society. Given the stature of the role of the president, presidential elections typically draw significant national and global attention. But in a year when Americans were living through a global health pandemic that led to an unsteady national economy, the intensity over the outcome of this presidential election rose exponentially with each passing month of the election cycle. Three articles address elections and government. In this collection of articles, scholars offer perceptions into the impact of the Asian American vote and the role of Asian American legislators.

The election immediately began as a competitive race. The 2020 Democratic primary started with twenty candidates running for the nomination and represented one of the most racially diverse slates of candidates in a national election to date. Asian American voters are typically overlooked in national elections given their small share of the national population. In a competitive race to win state delegates, however, there were many localities where Asian American voters could swing the election outcome. Lee et al. offer analyses that provides insights into voter participation and candidate choice of Asian Americans during the Democratic primary election. Their study compares election results in eight states where Asian Americans represent a sizeable electorate along with a more detailed case study of voting in Los Angeles County. The findings in this study offer some evidence demonstrating growing Asian American political power because Asian American voters' preference for Senator Bernie Sanders was one source of support that helped to keep him competitive in the race. Park and Tom consider the political preferences of the evangelical Asian American vote. These authors challenge the conventional wisdom that Christian evangelical voters are overwhelmingly Republican and argue that these assumptions demonstrate attention to only white voters. This paper reviews the history and research on evangelical Asian Americans and offers a discussion on what we can expect from these voters in the 2020 general election.

Outside of elections, the COVID-19 pandemic raised a num-

ber of questions about the level of government intervention to contain and respond to the virus. Across the globe, governments sought to develop a national public health plan in response to COVID-19, but in the United States response to the virus was created as a partisan issue. This resulted in significant variation in how legislators and other political leaders responded to COVID. Feng and Lien highlight the leadership demonstrated by Asian American representatives in Congress during the spring of 2020. Their study tracks the bill sponsorship by each Asian American representative and finds that these representatives sponsored many bills specifically addressing the needs of their Asian American and Pacific Islander constituents.

We hope that this collection of articles invigorates a serious conversation about the various issues encountered by AANHPI communities as well as enlightens about opportunities that lead to a more equitable and just society. This special issue captures how the year 2020 marks a significant inflection point in America's history. The COVID-19 pandemic has sent the economy spiraling downward resulting in devastating and massive job losses, small business closures, the inability for vulnerable persons to make rent and mortgage payments, in addition to causing high death rates in communities of color. Moreover, the murder of George Floyd by police led to uprisings, calls for justice, and standing up for long-lasting transformative change. These moments of crisis present an opportunity for racial and social justice advocates to collaborate more and work collectively to bring about real change. How do we use the present moment as an opportunity to reset and think differently for how we serve vulnerable communities? Business as usual is not an option. The policies, practices, and research to resolve pressing systemic challenges will only be limited by our will and collective imaginations.

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