

Los Angeles County
Asian American Employees Association

APA Heritage Day
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I'd like to thank the Los Angeles County Asian American Employees Association for its invitation, and it is an honor to be here with you today.

In 1952, Ralph Ellison published the novel, *Invisible Man* (Random House) that took up many themes, but among them, the social invisibility of African Americans in the United States.

Asian Americans are often "invisible" to the mainstream media and in other facets of American society and culture, but of course, we know that Asians have been in the United States since the late 1700s, when Filipinos settled in Louisiana.

We also know about the Chinese who came seeking gold as well as many other Asian groups who worked on sugar cane plantations in Hawaii and who helped build much of the infrastructure of California and the American West.

While all of the Asian groups faced hardships and unjust treatment, they struggled for their rights - winning cases in court to overturn discriminatory laws and also making their case in the media and lobbying for their causes in the government -- against heavy odds.

And so we are able to celebrate Asian Pacific American Heritage month today because of those who have come before us and who sacrificed much to make a way for us.

For many of us, who come from immigrant families, we understand this notion of sacrifice and hardship since they continue today.

It is encouraging to know that organizations like the Los Angeles County Asian American Employees Association exist.

In reading through the program, I did not realize how many Asian Americans work in various offices of the county.

In the same way, there are many community-based organizations represented here today who have their booths and who are doing amazing work in so many areas.

The UCLA Asian American Studies Center is one of those organizations, and one of the publications we help produce is the National Asian Pacific American Political Almanac. We are also a U.S. Census Information Center, and based upon both, there are some interesting figures:

- * Estimated 15.5 million persons of Asian ancestry in the United States
- * Approximately 5.1 million Asian Americans in California
- * Estimated 1.4 million Asian Americans (single or mixed race) in Los Angeles County - the largest single county in the United States in terms of population
- * Over 1 million Asian American owned businesses in the United States.
- * Over 2000 elected and major appointed officials at the federal, state, and local levels in over 30 states

Asian American individuals, families, and communities have throughout their history been active participants in improving their lives in the United States, even in the face of some very difficult circumstances.

The lesson that I would like to emphasize is the need to get involved, and to underscore the point that only by getting involved can we begin to make a difference in our own lives and those of our loved ones.

We must build coalitions with others as well and I would encourage all of us to get involved where we are - in our neighborhoods and with institutions that are linked to our communities like schools and other community-based organizations that are represented here today.

While Asian Pacific Americans still face structural barriers, we also bear responsibility for increasing our visibility, just as generations have done who have come before us.

Let us get involved and speak out for our issues for this will not only benefit our communities, but also the larger society of which we are a part.

Thank you.