



ELEVATING ASIAN-BLACK ALLYSHIP IN CORPORATE AMERICA

APRIL 2022

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Ascend maintains a long-standing objective of creating a space for courageous conversations for our members, partners and sponsors to build allyship and stronger relationships. Since the start of the COVID-19 global pandemic, as part of the #AscendTogether Series, we have accelerated exploration of how we can collectively drive more positive workplace and societal impacts. As one focus area of the Ascend Impact Fund, allyship aligns to our 5-Point Action Agenda core tenets of promoting inclusion and denouncing bias.

With the starting position that all humans are shaped by their experiences, upbringings, and biases, this paper factors in Ascend Foundation research as well as discussions and polling conducted at Ascend forums and gatherings to help highlight the issues and areas needing greater attention in the workplace to promote better relations between different multicultural groups, especially for AAPIs and Blacks. This paper focuses on and provides a perspective on the experiences of professional AAPIs and Blacks in the workplace, including their commonalities and historical plight in the United States (U.S.), reports on the reasons for the lack of stronger workplace partnerships and identifies actionable practices to consider.

The challenges faced by AAPIs and Blacks in the workplace do not exist in a vacuum but in a broader historical context. Both groups at different points have experienced hardship resulting from discriminatory laws. Their struggles to belong in America have at times pitted one group against the other when it came to the pursuit of success. Although both groups have a history of allyship underscored by moments of unity, in recent decades, there is an undercurrent of animosity drawn from a series of past and current triggering events, such as the perception that Blacks are perpetrators of recent anti-Asian hate, that have spurred societal biases that sometimes shows up in the workplace.

At the Ascend Chief DEI Officers (CDEIO) Forum in August 2021, diversity leaders of Fortune 500 companies affirmed that there is an undercurrent of tension between AAPI and Black communities, which has spilled over into the workplace. Specifically:

- Employees have a low to nonexistent understanding of the AAPI and Black historical journey in America.
- Each group carries perceptions of the other group drawn from harmful stereotypes.
- 95% of respondents agreed that there was room for improvement in Asian-Black professional relationships.

Each group experiences distinct challenges that inhibit them from fully succeeding and affects their sense of belonging in the workplace. The perpetuation of harmful stereotypes attributed to each group continues to adversely affect how they relate to one another as colleagues and minorities particularly as each group tries to prove their worth and compete for limited resources and opportunities. With this dynamic, true allyship is largely dependent on the commitment of companies to lead with empathy and to provide awareness raising programs that bring different segments of their workforce together.

The findings and extensive dialogue captured during the 2020 and 2021 Ascend National Conventions, national and local #AscendTogether Forums, and CDEIO Forums, on the topic of allyship with additional insights from DEI leaders form the basis for the best practices and approaches to cultivate better workplace allyship. Specifically, recommendations for strengthening partnerships in the workplace and addressing impediments to foster genuine allyship are summarized below.

To strengthen workplace partnerships, the top three areas needing attention include:

- Acknowledge the importance of recognizing the strengths of being Asian and Black and creating an environment in which belonging is the focus and that conformity is not essential to succeed and advance in the workplace
- Understand the different perceptions of privilege in the workplace and create a safe environment for honest conversations and for leaders to act with empathy
- Champion inter-group collaborations through targeted learning programs for all employees to learn more about AAPI and Black history and lived experiences

Actions to address impediments to fostering genuine allyship include:

- Challenge and change the zero sum mentality and eliminate any need for groups to compete for resources
- Reinforce DEI as a key component of company's goals, compensation and incentives programs
- Eliminate real or perceived threat to career advancement for raising DEI issues by building intentional relationships with minority leaders and groups to promote a diverse executive pipeline and create more collaborative opportunities

Creating a culture of belonging and an environment where one can strive to be who they are will yield benefits to the company as well as its employees. While fundamentally, some or all of the practices above may exist in organizations today, the progress made in nurturing interaction and allyship between AAPIs and Blacks as well as other racial and diverse groups is critical to make foundational change. The exploration and adoption by companies of practices focused on allyship will reflect their commitment to DEI and more importantly, be reflected in the measure of the long-term effectiveness and impacts of all their DEI programs.

INTRODUCTION

For the AAPI community, anti-Asian hate increased exponentially during the global pandemic, spawning national conversations about race and where AAPIs can actively engage in this discourse and fit into the American narrative.¹ The high-profile death of George Floyd was a tipping point for action and set in motion the urgency for the AAPI professional community to explore various avenues of allyship between AAPIs and Blacks, and in the process, seek answers to the larger questions around the complex history and relationship between these two communities.²

As a group that has also felt the dehumanizing effects of discrimination at various points in their lives, many AAPI professionals can highly empathize with the pain and anxiety felt by their Black colleagues.³ While the scale of oppression and mistreatment suffered by Blacks is incomparable, Asians have faced their own set of discriminatory laws that have barred them from entering the country as immigrants, owning land, being naturalized citizens, and testifying against Whites.⁴ Nevertheless, AAPI and Black experiences in the U.S. are unique and cannot be equated.⁵ As U.S. Senator Daniel Inouye pointed out, unlike African Americans, Asians in the U.S. have never endured slavery or been subjected to what he refers to as “systemic racist deprivation.”⁶ U.S. laws from the onset intentionally discriminated against Blacks who were forcibly brought to serve as property.⁷

At the start of their respective American journey, both groups were only seen as means to provide free or

cheap labor instead of as whole people and were met with extreme hate and discrimination. Through resilience and ingenuity, AAPIs and Blacks have overcome many legal and societal forms of discrimination to advocate not only for their own rights and place in the U.S., but also for other minoritized groups. But despite these advancements, societal prejudice has persisted; fueled by harmful stereotypes, it has seeped into the professional workplace and impacts workplace behavior and decision-making today.⁸

THE ISSUE

AAPIs and Blacks continue to be subjected to long-standing stereotypes that impact how they are perceived in both society and the workplace. These stereotypes touch on traits, such as competence and warmth, that govern social judgments of individuals and groups, and these judgments in turn shape people’s emotions and behaviors and ultimately influence their actions on both a conscious and unconscious level.⁹ These group characterizations have presented a barrier for racial minorities to succeed and fully contribute in the corporate workplace. In a number of employee surveys, for example, AAPIs and Blacks feel undervalued and disrespected at various points in their careers on account of race.¹⁰

Both groups continue to grapple with the issue of *belonging* in the corporate workplace. Belonging, defined as the experience of being wholly accepted and included by those around you, is especially a challenge for AAPIs and Blacks in positions of executive leadership and decision-making, where they are both notably

¹ In this paper, the term “Asians” is used interchangeably with the terms “Asian Americans” and “AAPIs,” and follows the US Census’ categorizations of what constitutes this group, regardless of immigration status. “Pan-Asians” and “APIs” refer to Asians in a more global context.

² The term “Blacks” is used interchangeably with “Black Americans” and “African Americans,” with the recognition that the African ancestry encompasses a diaspora of cultures (e.g., African American, Afro-Caribbean, Afro-Latinx, etc).

³ The White and Hispanic/LatinX communities play a notable role in affecting the Asian-Black dynamic however the scope of this paper is limited to an examination of Asian-Black experiences.

⁴ See Kim, *At Least You’re Not Black: Asian Americans in U.S. Race Relations*.

⁵ This also holds true for the plight of other racial groups (e.g. Native Americans, Hispanic/Latinx, etc).

⁶ See Wu, *The Color of Success: Asian Americans and the Origins of the Model Minority*, p.239.

⁷ Also noteworthy here is the plight of Native Americans and Hispanic Americans, but this is outside the scope of this paper.

⁸ See, for example, Vivinetto, “[Lisa Ling and Jada Pinkett Smith talk ‘animosity’ between Black and Asian Americans](#)”

⁹ See, for example, Cuddy et al., “[The dynamics of warmth and competence judgments, and their outcomes in organizations.](#)”

¹⁰ See, for example, [Together Forward @Work](#) initiative surveys.

underrepresented.¹¹ Those who have earned these ranks have had to work harder to prove that they belong in these senior roles, and for some, self-preservation then becomes the primary focus and driver of workplace behavior and dynamics.¹² Moreover, for leaders of color, particularly women, the “mistrust” and “constant discrediting” can adversely affect their ability to lead.¹³ With a heightened sense of the need to justify their advancement, racial minorities are also likely to feel like they have to compete with one another for limited opportunities, sometimes resulting in a competitive, zero-sum mindset. The reality is that while

companies understand the value of DEI, they often fall short of creating environments where employees of color feel a real sense of belonging.

At the Ascend 2021 CDEIO Forum, diversity leaders were asked to share one word that they thought generally characterized current relations between the AAPI and Black communities in American society. The most popular words used were “improving”, “complex”, “complicated”, followed by “fractured”, “misunderstood”, “competitive”, “distrustful”, “strained”, and so on (See Figure 1).¹⁴

Generally speaking, in ONE word, how would you characterize the relations today between the Asian and Black communities in American Society?



Figure 1

¹¹ See, for example, Dean et al., “[The Real Reason Diversity is Lacking at the Top](#)”; Dean et al. found that “33% of US employees who are from racially and ethnically diverse backgrounds see significant barriers to diversity when it comes to advancement. Only 19% of white heterosexual men aged 45 and older, a group that accounts for a large share of top leadership positions, had that same view.”

¹² Insights from a prominent Black corporate leader.

¹³ See Jackson, “[The difference between DEI and anti-racism at work, according to the diversity chief of a \\$37 billion company.](#)”

¹⁴ The words were captured in a word cloud, with more frequently submitted words appearing larger on the screen (Ascend CDEIO Forum: #AscendTogether Series, 8/26/21).

Poll: Current State of Relations

Generally speaking, how would you rate the current relations between your Asian and Black employees? (Scale 1–5)

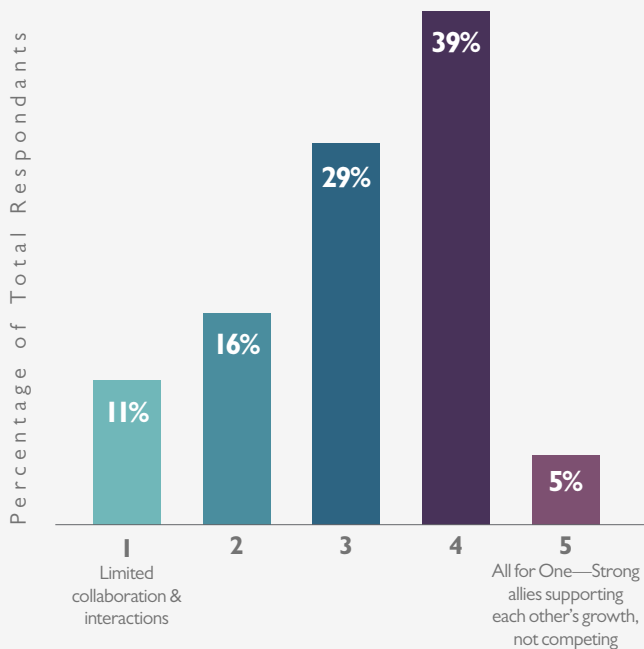


Figure 2

When asked to rate the current relations between AAPI and Black employees in their respective workplaces, 39% of respondents rated Asian-Black relations in the workplace a score of 4 on a scale of 1 to 5, with 5 being the highest (i.e., strongest allies). Tellingly, only 5% believed employees were “strong allies supporting each other’s growth, and not competing” (See Figure 2). Overall, 95% of respondents agreed that there was room for improvement in Asian-Black relations in the workplace. These polls affirm that more work is needed to advance the relationship.

The moderated panel discussion among AAPI and Black DEI leaders during this Ascend Forum also highlighted the fact that each group carries perceptions of the other group that are drawn from harmful stereotypes perpetuated at the societal level. For example, in many of the video-taped attacks against AAPIs since 2020, the perpetrators appeared to have been Black, and some media outlets have used such scenes to give more life to the Asian-Black conflict trope.¹⁵

While there is no solid fact-based evidence that Blacks have singled out AAPIs as targets of hostility relative to the rest of the population, there is still a perception that Blacks are the perpetrators of crimes against Asians that further deepens the misunderstanding between the two cohorts, absolves the history and systems of inequality that have led to current tensions, and requires more exploration to some of the root causes, such as homelessness and mental health.¹⁶

DESIRED OUTCOME & STRUCTURE

By sharing its findings, Ascend seeks to 1) Support the advancement of Asian-Black relations through continued workplace dialogue 2) Increase awareness and provide education about AAPIs and Blacks in U.S. history, and 3) Reinforce the organizational commitment to DEI and challenge the zero sum mentality.

This paper consists of three sections:

- Part I: *Understanding AAPI-Black History & Experiences* reports on Ascend’s work that shows a sizable segment of Fortune 500 employees have low knowledge of the AAPI and Black experience in American history and identifies this gap of information as an area that companies can focus

¹⁵ See, for example, Lee & Huang, “Why the trope of Black-Asian conflict in the face of anti-Asian violence dismisses solidarity”; Yam, “Viral images show people of color as anti-Asian perpetrators. That misses the big picture.” One study also found that the greatest threat to Asian lives was the racist and xenophobic views unleashed during the COVID-19 pandemic. The forces of white national populism drove these views and supported the usage of terms like the “China Virus.” See Perry et al., “Prejudice and pandemic in the promised land: how white Christian nationalism shapes Americans’ racist and xenophobic views of COVID-19.” Data shows that people of color have also committed anti-Asian hate crimes, but AAPI leaders note the importance of acknowledging the national effect white supremacists have had in fanning the flames of anti-Asian hate over the past few years. See Farivar, “Anti-Asian Hate Crime Crosses Racial and Ethnic Lines.” At Ascend, we share STOP AAPI Hate’s position, “All groups hold implicit biases and are capable of hurting each other,” and opt not to make broad generalizations and racially profile other groups. See Stop AAPI Hate, “Frequently Asked Questions.”

¹⁶ See, for example, Vivinetto, “[Lisa Ling and Jada Pinkett Smith talk ‘animosity’ between Black and Asian Americans](#)”; Sy, “[Can Black, Asian Americans move past historical animosity in the interest of solidarity?](#)” According to research by the [Coalition for the Homeless](#), Black people are disproportionately homeless in NYC. Studies also show that homeless single adults in NYC have higher rates of serious mental illness.

on to build more empathy between the two groups. To aid in bridging that gap, the **Appendix** broadly chronicles key legislation and pivotal events that have shaped the experiences of these two communities in America.

- Part II: *Asian-Black Relations – Workplace Perspective* highlights the experiences of both groups in the corporate workplace, including commonalities that they share.
- Part III: *The Road to Foster Better Workplace Allyship* reports the results of Ascend polls on some of the key reasons for the lack of stronger partnerships among workplace groups and networks, and impediments to building such partnerships, and then presents best practices for organizations to foster better relations between different multicultural groups, particularly AAPIs and Blacks.

Diversity of views, disagreements, and even deep chasms exist within each community on their positioning with other groups and within the greater racial justice discourse. The AAPI community is not monolithic. If the 20 plus sub-groups that make up the community were dissected by race, geography, socio-economic class, age, or immigration status, there will be different opinions about Blacks in America that are shaped by lived experiences and intersectional identities. This is also likely to hold true for the assortment of views and lived experiences in the Black community as they relate to their AAPI counterparts.¹⁷

PART I: UNDERSTANDING AAPI-BLACK HISTORY & EXPERIENCES

At Ascend’s August 2021 CDEIO Forum, diversity leaders were asked about the level of understanding their employees had of AAPI and Black history and lived experiences. 67% of diversity leaders believed their non-Asian employees had a low level of understanding of AAPI history and lived experiences, whereas 36%

Poll: Historical Understanding (AAPI)

In your opinion, what is the level of understanding of Asian American lived experiences and history by the majority of your employees that do not identify as Asian?

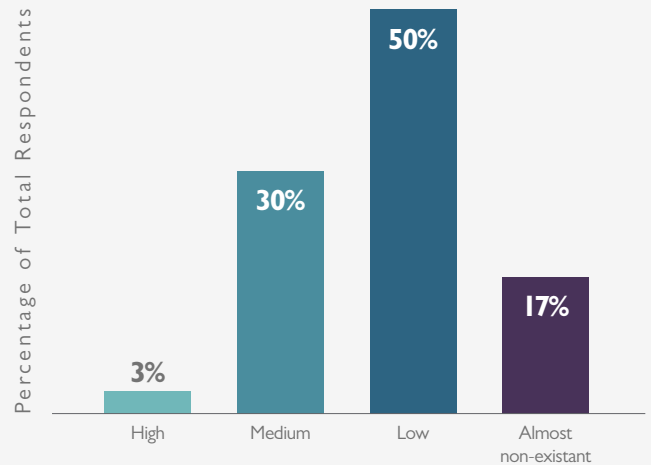


Figure 3

Poll: Historical Understanding (Black)

In your opinion, what is the level of understanding of Black American lived experiences and history by the majority of your employees that do not identify as Black?”

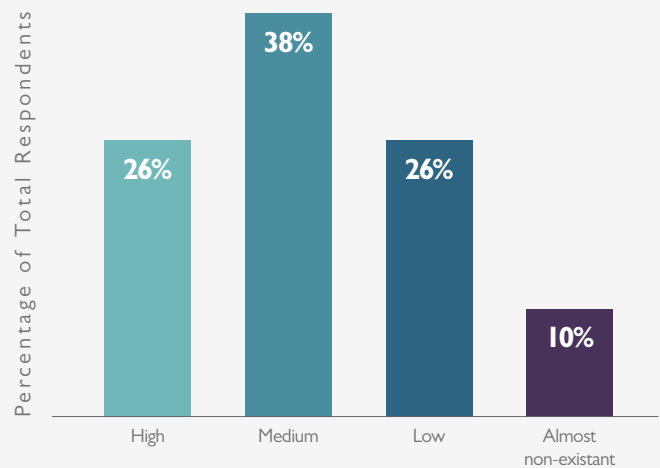


Figure 4

of the leaders believed their non-Black employees had a low to non-existent level of understanding of Black history and lived experiences (See Figures 3 and 4).

¹⁷ This position paper was primarily written from the perspective of Ascend Foundation, a Pan-Asian organization. Considering the scope, length, and complexity of this topic, this piece does not contain all possible perspectives and historical records, but attempts to provide a balanced analysis.

This key finding reveals employees' lack of understanding of the AAPI and Black historical journey in America, particularly less understanding of AAPI history and experiences.

A general lack of knowledge about the history and lived experiences of both groups, which can lead to the perpetuation of stereotypes and misperceptions, is one of the impediments to stronger allyship between AAPIs and Blacks.¹⁸ Recognizing that American history cannot be complete without fully incorporating the experiences of all Americans, including AAPIs and Blacks, a number of state legislators have pushed for greater integration of both Black and AAPI history into general American history curricula.¹⁹ This includes incorporating the nuances of the Black experience beyond the three conventional focus areas of instruction: enslavement, the Civil War and the civil rights movement.²⁰

For AAPIs, this move is particularly significant as the AAPI experience has been widely excluded from curricula across the U.S. and in formal education.²¹

Understanding AAPI history would help to dismantle the stereotypes of the model minority myth and perpetual foreigner, as well as other unfavorable stereotypes assigned to AAPIs that have altogether contributed to the bigotry and xenophobia targeted at Americans of Asian descent. Above all, it would solidify the fact that Asians are Americans and belong in the overall American narrative and the U.S.²²

In corporate settings, companies can help educate their workforces about the AAPI and Black histories with more educational programs year-round highlighting the rarely told histories and lived experiences that could help change stereotypical perceptions of both AAPIs and Blacks. Greater recognition of their multi-varied contributions to economics, law, literature, and the arts throughout U.S. history would in turn lead to greater understanding of AAPI and Black capabilities and positive impacts in the workplace.

“AAPIs and Blacks continue to be subjected to long-standing stereotypes that impact how they are perceived in both society and the workplace.”

¹⁸ See, for example, Sy, [“Can Black, Asian Americans move past historical animosity in the interest of solidarity?”](#)

¹⁹ See Reilly, [“How the Pandemic and Anti-Asian Violence Spurred 2 States to Change History Lessons”](#); See Mercer, [“Black History Instruction Gets New Emphasis in Many States.”](#)

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ History textbooks taught in American schools have largely overlooked the experiences of Asians in America. See, for example, Sy, [“Can Black, Asian Americans move past historical animosity in the interest of solidarity?”](#); Stevenson, *The Contested Murder of Latasha Harlins: Justice, Gender and the Origins of the L.A. Riots*. However, there is promise for future generations of American students because of new laws recently passed in Illinois and New Jersey that mandates the teaching of Asian American history. See Chavez, [“New Jersey becomes second state to require Asian American history to be taught in schools - CNN”](#); Reilly, [“How the Pandemic and Anti-Asian Violence Spurred 2 States to Change History Lessons.”](#)

²² Ibid. AAPI history is limited even though there are more than 22 million Asian Americans (about 6% of the U.S. population), representing nearly 50 ethnic groups; they are the fastest growing racial group of eligible U.S. voters.

PART II: ASIAN-BLACK RELATIONS—WORKPLACE PERSPECTIVE

Black and Asian professionals experience prejudice and bias in the workplace regardless of their educational achievements. The murder of George Floyd and rise of anti-Asian hate compelled companies to acknowledge the significance of these events on their employees and incorporate DEI mandates into the workplace culture. The increasing public call for accountability and stronger allyship in the workplace pushed many companies to examine where they stood in terms of racial diversity and equity, as well as inclusion and belonging, and to solemnly increase their focus and commitment to these efforts.

These acknowledgements proved what racially diverse employees had been feeling for years—that they were struggling with equity and inclusion in the workplace and that there was not enough being done to support their development, success, and advancement. People inevitably bring in biases and prejudice to the workplace, which can affect anything from everyday peer interactions to large-scale executive decisions.

This section identifies some specific challenges that AAPI and Black professionals face in the workplace and discusses how these challenges affect their overall experiences relating to advancement opportunities, a sense of belonging, and how they relate with other colleagues and each other.

UNIQUE CHALLENGES

Societal perceptions box AAPI and Black professionals into polarizing stereotypes that can impact workplace performance and relations. This can lead to feelings of tension and competition that ultimately harm and limit both groups involved.

AAPIs

AAPI professionals are commonly perceived as the “Model Minority,” largely successful and well-represented in the corporate space as a non-white racial group. While AAPIs may wish to embrace all the seemingly positive aspects that come with being a model minority, they must understand that these traits are a double-edged sword.²³ The label fails to protect AAPIs from constantly being perceived as foreigners and foreign competition, even for those who have lived in the U.S. for generations, and has proven to ultimately inhibit AAPI professionals from ascending in proportion to their workforce contributions to the management and executive pipeline.²⁴

As a model minority, AAPI professionals can be seen as hard workers who are good subordinates with high standards, but when considered for leadership roles, these traits can suddenly translate to lacking social skills and emotion, being risk averse, and lacking executive presence, leaving many AAPIs — especially AAPI women — in an advancement conundrum.

Nonetheless, the model minority label is often associated with success and has been used by populist groups to dismiss the role racism plays in the struggles of other racial groups, particularly Blacks. When “Asian success” is juxtaposed against “Black failure,” this inevitably creates divisiveness between these two groups.²⁵

Blacks

On what seems like the opposite side of the spectrum, Black professionals must fight against a host of deleterious societal stereotypes that carry over to the workplace. Black professionals frequently cite experiencing microaggressions in the workplace that stem from societal biases that portray Black people as having a poor work ethic, being angry, or being intellectually unqualified.²⁶ These societal biases routinely challenge Black professionals’ competence, professionalism, and behavior, regardless of their actual skills and

²³ See Nguyen et al., “[Model Minority Myth & The Double-Edged Sword](#)” (Ascend paper).

²⁴ See Kim et al., “[Race, Gender & the Double Glass Ceiling: An Analysis of EEOC National Workforce Data](#)” (Ascend paper); Barrett, “[Asian Representation of Fortune 1000 Boards](#)” (Ascend report).

²⁵ See Chow, “[‘Model Minority’ Myth Again Used As A Racial Wedge Between Asians And Blacks.](#)”

qualifications. While AAPI employees are penalized in performance reviews, Black professionals are penalized for being “too vocal” and “angry.” As such, Black professionals feel a constant pressure to limit their full expression of emotion and only present themselves as happy and non-threatening individuals, even in certain contexts when it can be perfectly reasonable for professionals to be more assertive, such as “litigators interacting with opposing counsel, or financial analysts responding to a stressful day on Wall Street.”²⁷

Perception of Workplace Performance: An Uncomfortable Comparison

Research reaffirms that stereotypes towards AAPIs and Blacks directly affect attitudes that are linked to perception of workplace performance, such as likeability, competence, and warmth. One study demonstrates that people did not particularly view Blacks overall as highly competent or warm, placing them in the middle of the scale. However, when breaking down Black groups by socioeconomic status, participants perceived “poor Blacks” as low in competence and warmth, but perceived “Black professionals” as having a level of high competence, similar to “Asians” overall. “Black professionals” were also perceived to be more sociable than “Asians” as a group.²⁸ Along with this finding, these researchers found that if the study participants were biased that “Asians” as a group were unsociable, the participants were more likely to feel negatively about the “Asian” individuals who were in the same room.²⁹

SHARED CHALLENGES

Low Executive Representation

AAPI and Black professionals continue to struggle to ascend the executive ranks. A 2020 Ascend report found that in 2018, individuals of Asian descent represented 13 percent of the U.S. professional workforce

but only 6 percent of executive posts, and Blacks accounted for 8 percent of the professional workforce and only 3 percent of executives. Meanwhile, Whites were the only group with a higher executive representation, representing 69 percent of the workforce but 85 percent of executives.³⁰ These disparities continue to exist today.

Furthermore, this report found that a gender glass ceiling exists for all women, but among all racial and gender groups, AAPI and Black women are the least likely to become executives. For both AAPI and Black men and women, the impact of race was found to be larger than the impact of gender. However, AAPI and Black men are twice as likely to become executives than their women counterparts.³¹ The 2021 Women CEOs in America Report, co-led by Ascend, found that women made up only 8.2% of Fortune 500 CEOs, but less than 1% were women of color, with 0.8% being AAPI and Black women. There were only 2 Black and 2 AAPI female CEOs out of 500.³²

Limitations to Bringing Their Authentic Selves to Work

AAPI and Black professionals both have to leave parts of themselves, most often their racial identities, at the door once they come into the workplace. For Black professionals, this phenomenon is described as “code-switching.” For AAPIs, this is described as assimilating or acculturating. Though labeled differently, they essentially imply that AAPI and Black professionals do not have the privilege of fitting in by simply existing and may need to make unnatural changes to their core identities to belong and advance in the workplace.

Higher Education Does Not Close the Gap

While higher education is often cited as a strong tool for overcoming adversity, research demonstrates that education unfortunately does not fully protect AAPI

²⁶ See, for example, Smithsonian National Museum of African American History & Culture, “[Popular and Pervasive Stereotypes of African Americans](#).”

²⁷ See Wingfield, “[Being Black- but Not Too Black-in the Workplace](#).”

²⁸ The “Asian” category is not broken down into subcategories for this study. See Fiske et al., “[A Model of \(Often Mixed\) Stereotype Content: Competence and Warmth Respectively Follow From Perceived Status and Competition](#).”

²⁹ See Lin et al., “[Stereotype Content Model Explains Prejudice for an Envied Outgroup: Scale of Anti-Asian American Stereotypes](#).”

³⁰ See Kim et al., “[Race, Gender & the Double Glass Ceiling: An Analysis of EEOC National Workforce Data](#).”

³¹ Ibid.

³² See Ascend Leadership Foundation, “[2021 Women CEOs in America: Changing the Face of Business Leadership](#).”

and Black employees from racial prejudice and bias. While there are significant differences in educational attainment among the various groups that make up the AAPI category, overall, nearly 60% of AAPIs earn a bachelor's degree or higher.³³ Even though there is a lower percentage of Blacks that have a bachelor's degree or higher (27.9%), the rate of Blacks earning a bachelor's degree is steadily increasing.³⁴ However, the employment rate for Black workers with a college or an associate's degree has been found to be similar to the rate of the total population of workers who only have a high-school diploma.³⁵

Highly educated Black and AAPI graduates who earn degrees from Ivy League Institutions continue to experience racial barriers in the workplace, despite the prestige of their education.³⁶ For AAPI and Black professionals alike, the factors that have been cited in holding them back from reaching the echelons of leadership include an unfair lack of trust from coworkers, as well as a dearth of role models, sponsors, mentors, and networks. It continues to be clear that the level of education does not make AAPI and Black professionals immune to unconscious bias.

PART III: THE ROAD TO FOSTER BETTER WORKPLACE ALLYSHIP

In recent years, increasing diversity, equity, and inclusion has become a key goal for companies, CEOs, and corporate boards to demonstrate accountability, uphold moral integrity, and answer the increasing demands of empathy and compassion from both employees and consumers. With DEI agendas now

elevated to a greater level of prominence across many corporate entities, company leaders must implement real incentives to truly foster a culture of belonging and maximize the efforts of their employees who are committed to DEI.

BEST PRACTICES DRAWN FROM DEI INSIGHTS

At the 2020 and 2021 Ascend National Conventions, #AscendTogether Forums held nationally, and CDEIO Forums, polling and extensive program discussions on the topic of allyship yielded data on the factors inhibiting employees and companies from strengthening relationships across racial minority groups.³⁷

“The reality is that while companies often understand the value of DEI, they often fall short of creating environments where employees of color feel a real sense of belonging.”

³³ There is a significant difference in educational attainment among the various groups (e.g. Chinese, Korean, Japanese, Indian, Vietnamese, Thai, etc.) that make up the API category, with only 15% Bhutanese Americans and 32% of Vietnamese Americans having a bachelor's degree or more. On the other spectrum, 75% of Indian Americans 57% of Korean, Pakistani, and Chinese Americans have a high level of education. For 2019 educational attainment rates for each ethnic group, see Budiman et al., “[Key facts about Asian origin groups in the U.S.](#)”

³⁴ Rate of Black Americans earning a bachelor's degree has increased from 19.8% in 2010 to 27.9% in 2020 according to US Census data. See 2020 educational attainment rates released by U.S. Census Bureau, “[Educational Attainment in the United States: 2020](#)”; U.S. Census Bureau, “[U.S. Census Bureau Releases New Educational Attainment Data.](#)”

³⁵ See Hancock et al., “[Race in the Workplace: The Black Experience in the U.S. Private Sector.](#)”

³⁶ See, for example, Roberts et al., “[Toward a Racially Just Workplace](#)”; Chin, *Stuck: Why Asian Americans Don't Reach the Top of the Corporate Ladder.*

³⁷ Allyship Forum: 2021 Ascend National Convention, 8/23/21; Allyship Forum: 2020 Ascend National Convention 9/29/21; and Ascend CDEIO Forum: 2020 Ascend National Convention, 9/16/20

Fostering Allyship – Polling Result 1:

What are the contributing factors for why there aren't stronger partnerships among workplace groups and networks? (Check all that apply)

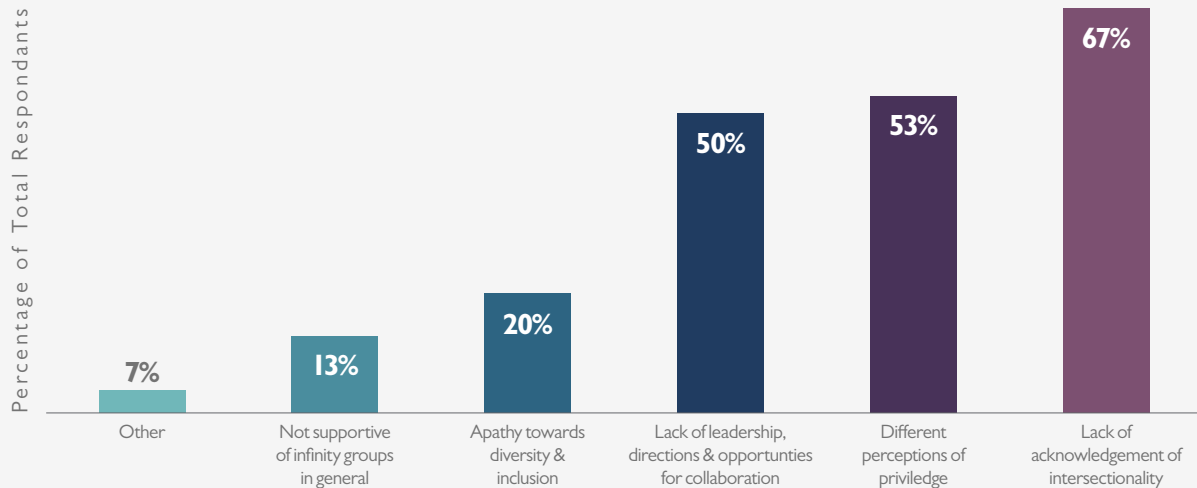


Figure 5

Polling 1:

At the 2020 Ascend National Convention, CDEIOs were asked: *Why Aren't There Stronger Partnerships Among Workplace Groups & Networks?*³⁸ Some of the factors identified included: “lack of acknowledgement of intersectionality”, “different perceptions of privilege”, and “lack of leadership, direction and opportunities for collaboration” (See Figure 5).

The following section includes best practices that foster stronger inter-group partnerships:

Acknowledge the Importance of Intersectionality

- **Recognize the strengths of being AAPI and Black.** In order for employees to bring their whole selves to work and feel like they belong, their identities should be celebrated and their strengths identified and incorporated into leadership development programs. Leaders should create an environment in which conformity is not essential to succeeding and advancing in the workplace.

- **Fully consider AAPI and Black experiences for all initiatives focused on empowering other marginalized identities (i.e. women, LGBTQ, and disability).** AAPIs and Blacks experience stereotypes and challenges based on their race, but AAPIs and Blacks who identify as a minority in other categories experience more challenges as a “double” or “triple” minority outside as well as within their own racial group. As such, it is essential for companies to make sure that their resources and initiatives take double minorities and their additional challenges into account.

Understand How Privilege Exists in the Workplace

- **Conduct an exercise on privilege and create a safe environment for minorities to have open and honest conversations.** Every individual is different, and every individual has privilege. Discussing privilege in a respectful manner can improve group dynamics and lead to building greater trust and empathy.

³⁸ Ascend CDEIO Forum: 2020 Ascend National Convention, 9/16/20.

When employees understand their own privileges relative to others, they become aware of teammates who might be struggling and held back from fully participating, and they become empathetic and better leaders. At the 2021 #AscendTogether Forum-Cultivating Allyship, Black and AAPI executives emphasized the need for companies to acknowledge and facilitate open conversations around significant events, such as George Floyd's murder and anti-Asian hate, which directly affect their employees' well-being.³⁹ One Black executive shared that the first time he felt he could openly talk about race in the workplace in his entire career was after George Floyd's murder. Another South Asian executive shared how much he valued his workplace relationships with colleagues who checked in on him during the rising anti-Muslim sentiments, racial profiling and surveillance after 9/11. Company leaders who immediately issue statements in support for employees at risk for emotional trauma and potential target of discrimination demonstrate the importance of acting with empathy and creating a culture that encourages open and honest exchanges.

Champion Inter-Group Collaboration Through Targeted Learning Programs

- **Make it mandatory for all employees, including top executives, to learn more about AAPI and Black history and lived experiences.** It is clear there is much more work needed to be done for all employees to understand American history through the lens of AAPI and Black journeys and lived experiences in the workplace and society at a deeper level. For example, companies can do more to highlight the unique and diverse experiences of sub-groups that make up the monolithic AAPI and Black communities. With a deeper understanding of these histories, all professionals, especially executives, can have a deeper understanding of where they stand and the privileges they have within these larger histories and dynamics.

“With DEI agendas now elevated to a greater level of prominence across many corporate entities, company leaders must implement real incentives to truly foster a culture of belonging and maximize the efforts of their employees who are committed to DEI.”

³⁹ Ascend Southeast Chapter and Home Depot executives discussed their stories of allyship and how to build and strengthen relationships across communities at the Ascend Forum - Cultivating Allyship: #AscendTogether Series on 10/27/21.

Fostering Allyship – Polling Result 2:

In your experience, what is the biggest impediment to fostering genuine allyship and a healthy work environment? (Check all that apply)

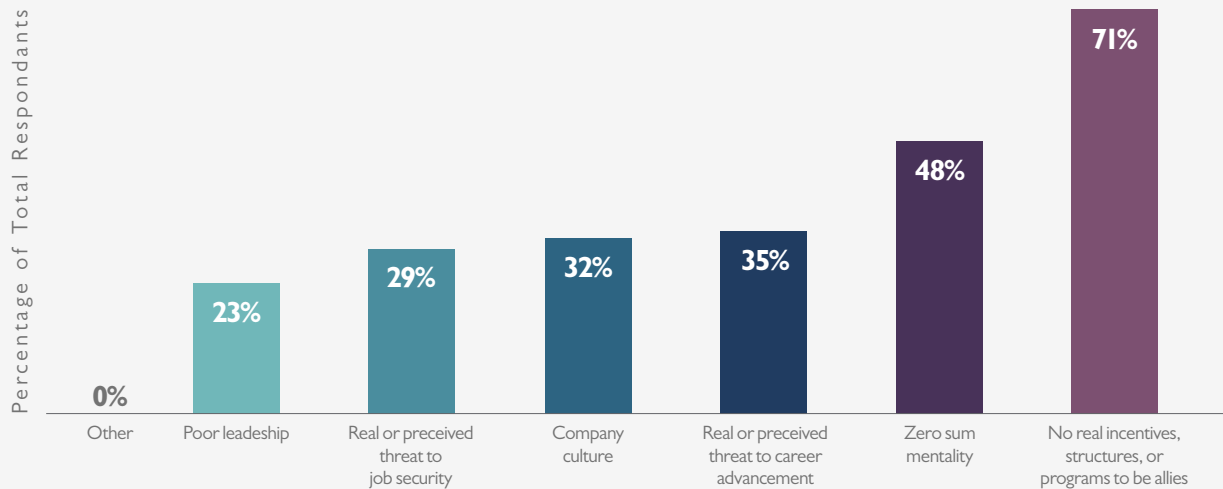


Figure 6

Polling 2:

At the 2020 Ascend National Convention, CDEIOs were asked: *What is the Biggest Impediment to Fostering Genuine Allyship?*⁴⁰ The most popular factors selected were “no real incentives, structures, or programs to be allies,” “zero sum mentality,” and “real or perceived threat to career advancement” (See Figure 6).

The following section include best practices that address these impediments to genuine allyship:

Create Incentives and Programs for Allyship

- **Make DEI a key component of the company’s long-term and near-term goals as well as the goals and compensation rewards for the Board, CEO and executives.** Implementing this workplace value will reaffirm that DEI is a key aspect of employees’ performance at all levels, and that a strong understanding and commitment to DEI is now a clear requirement for career advancement.⁴¹ When leaders tie DEI goals to executive compensation, this assures

diverse employees that they will work with leaders who are committed to creating a culture of belonging underscored by acceptance and inter-group cooperation, and more career advancement opportunities for diverse groups.

- **Provide tangible rewards and recognition to employees who are involved in DEI efforts.** Employees who identify as minorities spend disproportionately more unpaid time advocating for their groups. If AAPI and Black employees are tasked with improving relationships between groups, recognize them for their leadership and initiative. DEI should not be considered volunteer work and just for certain segments of the workforce, as it affects everyone and is a key determinant of a company’s success.

Challenge & Change the Zero Sum Mentality

- **Companies should not create a culture of scarcity and competition for leadership attention and resources.** Leaders must

⁴⁰ Ascend CDEIO Forum: 2020 Ascend National Convention, 9/16/20.

⁴¹ Salesforce is one organization who is now determining pay for executive VPs and above partially based on their ability to meet diversity and inclusion goals around hiring, retention and promotions. See Zaferi, “[Salesforce Will Tie Executive Pay to DEI and Sustainability Goals.](#)”

view DEI initiatives as a valuable investment in their employees with a high return.⁴² It is the company's responsibility to foster an inclusive and supportive environment for *all* employees to excel and perform to the best of their ability. When resources feel scarce, companies can unintentionally pit minority groups like AAPIs and Blacks against each other in the fight for budgets and generate resentment over the inequitable allocation of resources.

Eliminate Real or Perceived Threat to Career Advancement for Raising DEI Issues

- **Build intentional relationships with minority leaders and groups to promote a diverse executive pipeline and more collaboration.** Executives should build intentional individual relationships with minority leaders who demonstrate strong leadership and promote these leaders for future executive positions through mentorship and sponsorship programs. Executives can also actively encourage AAPI and Black ERGs to work together to tackle challenges, and organize networking events for employees to expand their networks outside of their racial group.

Fostering allyship is a complex task, requiring solutions that take into account specificities and nuances of different dynamics and concepts such as intersectionality and privilege. Recognizing privilege, for instance, can lead to more empathy, trust and ultimately better team dynamics that support open and honest workplace conversations. Fostering allyship does not solely fall on employees, but also directly on company leaders to help create the culture and infrastructure for employees to pursue allyship in the workplace without fear of repercussions. While there is no perfect solution, creating an inclusive culture of belonging will become a benchmark as companies and their employees more closely examine the long-term effectiveness of DEI initiatives and appreciate the critical role of allyship across all groups, including AAPIs and Blacks.

CONCLUSION

At the heart of this paper, we ask our readers to recognize that we each have the power to create a culture of belonging for groups who have been marginalized. This means taking action at both an individual and institutional level. Through national forums with participants representing a cross section of professionals from various levels in corporate America, we gained valuable insights into the current state of Asian-Black relations:

- There is a strong need to increase understanding of the AAPI and Black historical journey in America to advance allyship between these groups and amongst multicultural groups.
- The persistence of stereotypes fuel bias for AAPIs and Blacks that is detrimental to professional advancement and to workplace dynamics.

Discrimination and prejudice can only hinder company performance and progress. It is through fostering a culture of belonging in which allyship is the key ingredient that companies can measure the success of their DEI programs in both the short and long term. With insights from leading practitioners and experts in DEI, we suggest that corporate leaders must take the time, and more importantly, secure resources to build stronger partnerships and remove impediments to allyship. These actions will create an environment of empathy and acceptance in which people are not afraid to bring their whole and authentic selves to the workplace.

⁴² See, for example, Dixon-Fyle, Sundiatu, et al., "[Diversity Wins: How inclusion matters.](#)"

ASCEND OVERVIEW

The Ascend Foundation educates, conducts research and provides thought leadership that informs our programs, our members, and our partners to enable AAPIs and allies to become better leaders, innovators, role models and catalysts for workplace and societal change. Since inception, the Ascend Foundation has recognized stereotypes such as the model minority myth and its effects on advancement of AAPIs in the workplace. At the onset of COVID-19, the Ascend Foundation formed the 5-Point Action Agenda with leading organizations and companies championing for diverse communities, by redoubling our efforts to promote inclusion, raise awareness, denounce bias, support communities and give donations. The Ascend Foundation continues to shed light on the disproportionate adverse impacts of the pandemic on diverse communities and the ensuing anti-Asian hate sentiment on the AAPI workforce and at large. Collectively, our goal is to systematically tackle the issues that have surfaced through awareness, education, and forums to share and discuss approaches.

To further our efforts to bring about needed change, the Ascend Impact Fund allows the Ascend Foundation to take on the more complex and nuanced topic of race-based allyship by raising awareness, and creating a transformative tool for conversation and change in the workplace.

This paper is part of the Ascend Foundation's larger Allyship work. Ascend Foundation's Asian-Black allyship initiative aims to foster a greater understanding of the current relations between the Asian and Black workforce, facilitate greater professional relationships and dispel the public perception that Asians and Blacks have a uniquely negative relationship. We recognize that building authentic allyship also means having difficult conversations within and between communities and on a personal level, confronting our own biases as we support all colleagues on their journey of belonging in their work environment and in society.

The Ascend Foundation is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit Pan-Asian organization, related to Ascend Inc., the premier Pan-Asian business professional membership organization in North America. Ascend Inc. is a nonprofit organization. "Ascend" refers to Ascend Foundation, Inc. and Ascend Inc., collectively.

APPENDIX

Notable periods in this historical timeline show that at the start of American history, laws were enacted to keep Blacks as well as AAPIs from gaining access to citizenship, civil rights, and economic advancement. These codified acts of exclusion have shaped the historical experiences of AAPIs and Blacks and have brought them together in moments of unity and discord as each group struggled to belong in the U.S.

AMERICAN HISTORY: THE BLACK JOURNEY

Africans have a rich history and culture that goes back to the first traces of civilization. In 1619, African Angolans were violently and forcefully kidnapped, enslaved and transported in terribly inhumane conditions in the bottom of cattle ships to the British colony of Virginia to work on plantations. While free Africans were likely present in the Americas as early as the 1400s and the mid-1500s, it was this trade in human lives which eventually brought 6 to 7 million enslaved Africans from across Western Africa to the New World starting in the beginning of the 17th century.⁴³ The horrors of institutional slavery and the systemic mistreatment of Blacks in America thereafter are well documented.

America's southern states became the economic engine of territory that would later become the United States. This economic success would not have been possible without the labor of enslaved Africans and their descendants, who essentially built the economic foundation of this country and helped grow a global economy.⁴⁴

By the end of the 18th century, many northern states had abolished slavery, but the South's agrarian economy heavily relied on slavery for the production of cash crops. Threatened by the increase of slave rebellions and abolitionists, Congress passed the Fugitive Slave Act in 1793, which made it a federal crime to assist an

enslaved person trying to escape. This Act was the first of a series of legalized and discriminatory acts against enslaved Africans in the newly formed United States.

In 1807, Congress outlawed the import of enslaved people, however the existing Black slaves were barred from citizenship and could not sue for freedom, as Dred Scott tried to do but lost in the 1857 U.S. Supreme Court case. It was not until the Thirteenth Amendment, enacted in 1865 at the end of the Civil War, that officially abolished slavery and granted freedom to all Blacks in America. A few years later, through the Fourteenth and Fifteenth Amendments, Blacks were granted citizenship and the right to vote, respectively. However, despite these advancements, the Jim Crow laws, which emerged even before the passage of these later amendments, legalized racial segregation through state and local statutes and put in place institutional practices of discrimination that remained in effect until 1968 and have lasting effects that continue to impact society today.⁴⁵

AMERICAN HISTORY: THE ASIAN JOURNEY

The first Asians (Filipino) came to what is now the U.S. in 1765 as crew or indentured servants aboard Spanish galleons and settled in Louisiana's bayous, where they built one of the first outposts of riverine trade.⁴⁶ However, it was not until the mid-1800s that the first major wave of Asian immigrants arrived at American shores.

Drawn to the Gold Rush, the first Chinese arrived as miners in 1849 — almost 230 years after the arrival of the first enslaved Africans. By the time the Chinese came, millions of Blacks in America had already suffered immensely under an exploitative system. Throughout the mid-1800s, more Chinese men came as immigrant laborers. By the 1860s, over 35,000 Chinese laborers

⁴³ See Onion et al., "[Black History Milestones: Timeline.](#)"

⁴⁴ See, for example, "[How Slavery Helped Build a World Economy.](#)"

⁴⁵ The remaining Jim Crow laws were generally overruled by the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and the Voting Rights Act of 1965. But it was the Fair Housing Act of 1968, which ended discrimination in renting and selling homes, that marked the official end of these laws. See, Onion et al., "[Jim Crow Laws.](#)"

⁴⁶ See, for example, Waxman et al., "[11 Asian American History Moments to Know for AAPI Month.](#)"

worked in dangerous conditions for meager wages as they built the Transcontinental Railroad and the Central Pacific Railroad.⁴⁷ From the very start of their respective American journeys, Blacks and Asians, unwillingly and willingly, played a key role in building the economic and commercial infrastructure of this country.

In 1854, the California Supreme Court in *People v. Hall* ruled that Chinese people, who held the status of immigrants, could not testify against white defendants, equating them to “Negros, Blacks, Indians, and Mullatoes.”⁴⁸ This case marked the beginning of the normalization of institutional discrimination against Asians. At this time, Blacks in the South were still an enslaved people as the 1857 *Dred Scott* case reaffirmed.

The passage of the Fourteenth Amendment in 1868 which states that “all persons born or naturalized in the United States, and subject to the jurisdiction thereof, are citizens of the United States and of the State wherein they reside,” was a pivotal moment because it overturned the 1857 *Dred Scott* decision and allowed citizenship for Black Americans.⁴⁹ With its passage, Chinese immigrants saw hope in their struggle to find legal means to stay and build a future in the U.S. Despite this, with the Transcontinental Railroad completion in 1869, Congress approved the Naturalization Act and Page Act of 1875, effectively barring Chinese laborers from obtaining U.S. citizenship and preventing Chinese men from being reunited with partners or starting families in America.⁵⁰ This was followed by the Chinese Exclusion Act in 1882, which not only banned all Chinese workers from entering the country, but also excluded Chinese immigrants from American citizenship.

With the Exclusion Act in place, Asians were kept from citizenship, however they fought back to ensure birthright citizenship. In 1898, the U.S. Supreme Court upheld the Fourteenth Amendment birthright citizenship in the case of *United States vs. Wong Kim Ark*.⁵¹ This groundbreaking case affirmed that *anyone* born on U.S. soil, regardless of race, has automatic rights to citizenship and thus sealed the universality of American national identity. For both Blacks and Asians at the time, Ark’s victory showed that the U.S. courts were the only avenues to fight racial prejudice and that the U.S. ideals could be upheld despite the prevalence of racial prejudice.⁵²

Every ten years, Congress extended the provisions of the Chinese Exclusion Act from 1882 to 1943. In 1917, Congress passed the Immigration Act, which included an “Asiatic Barred Zone,” banning not only Chinese but also Asian Indians, Burmese, Thai, Malays and other groups of Asians from entering the U.S.⁵³ Despite these restrictive laws, from 1910 to 1940, Asian immigrants continued to make the perilous journey across the Pacific Ocean, where they landed at Angel Island, the west coast equivalent of Ellis Island, that was set up to process mainly Asian immigrants. Those coming from Asia, unlike the “huddled masses” that gathered at Ellis Island, were subjected to rigorous processing procedures and mistreatment.⁵⁴

Throughout the 19th and early 20th centuries, Asian immigrant laborers in the U.S. were villainized as the “Yellow Peril.” This overt prejudice left them vulnerable to horrendous racial violence that caught the attention of Black leaders, who understood firsthand the lasting damage of hate and discrimination. Frederick Douglass, for example, was one of the leaders who denounced the

⁴⁷ See, for example, “[Forgotten by society - how Chinese migrants built the transcontinental railroad.](#)”

⁴⁸ See Waxman et al., “[II Asian American History Moments to Know for AAPI Month.](#)”

⁴⁹ See Drexler, “[14th Amendment to the U.S. Constitution: Primary Documents in American History.](#)”

⁵⁰ See, for example, Rotondi, “[Before the Chinese Exclusion Act, This Anti-Immigrant Law Targeted Asian Women.](#)”

⁵¹ See, for example, Gray et al., “[U.S. Reports: United States v. Wong Kim Ark, 169 U.S. 649 \(1898\).](#)”

⁵² See Wu, “[Becoming American: The Chinese Experience.](#)”

⁵³ See, for example, “[Milestones in the History of U.S. Foreign Relations.](#)”

⁵⁴ The Chinese Exclusion Act allowed only merchants, clergy, diplomats, teachers, and students as “exempt” classes to come to the U.S. See Angel Island Immigration Station Foundation, “[History of Angel Island Immigration Station.](#)”

Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882 and the mistreatment of Chinese in the U.S.⁵⁵ He recognized the important role that Asians played in American economic life.

While all persons born in the U.S. were considered native-born citizens, Asian immigrants continued the fight to be considered naturalized citizens under the law. *Ozawa v. United States* (1922) held that because Japanese immigrants were not “free white persons” they were ineligible for naturalization citizenship.⁵⁶ As the government began to denaturalize South Asian immigrants based on this ruling, Bhagat Singh Thind, a South Asian who had served in WWI, sued for the right to become a naturalized citizen in the Supreme Court case, *United States v. Bhagat Singh Thind* (1923), basing his argument on the fact that U.S. citizenship centered on whiteness.⁵⁷ Thind lost, and the case stripped South Asian immigrants of their naturalization, forcing families to sell their homes and businesses as they were suddenly unable to own property.⁵⁸

THE WORLD WAR II ERA

Despite legal victories, even with citizenship, a person of color could still be discriminated against and rendered as second-class citizen or perpetual foreigner. When the U.S. went to war with Japan during World War II, Blacks were still living under the Jim Crow laws while mainland Japanese Americans were systematically deemed as disloyal to the U.S. and forced to relocate to internment camps through President Franklin D. Roosevelt’s Executive Order 9066.⁵⁹ It is important to note that German Americans did not receive the same treatment in spite of the U.S. war against Nazi Germany.



Still, many Blacks and Asians faithfully served in the U.S. Armed Forces. During World War II, more than 2.5 million Black Americans registered for service during the war, with some 500,000 seeing action overseas.⁶⁰ These Black servicemen, including the famous Tuskegee Airmen, and Asian American servicemen, including the 18,000 second-generation Japanese Americans who made up the 442nd Regimental Combat Team, were organized in separate units and were ironically forced to combat racism in their own country while serving and dying for it, as they fought for the freedoms of Europe and the Free World.⁶¹ It was not until after World War II, in 1948, that President Truman integrated the U.S. Armed Forces and mandated equality of treatment.

⁵⁵ Renee Tajima-Peña, the producer of *Who Killed Vincent Chin?* and PBS documentary series *Asian American*; See Lang, “[The Asian American Response to Black Lives Matter Is Part of a Long, Complicated History.](#)”

⁵⁶ Sutherland, G. & Supreme Court of United States, *U.S. Reports: Ozawa v. United States.*

⁵⁷ Sutherland, G. & Supreme Court of United States, *U.S. Reports: United States v. Thind.*

⁵⁸ In a famous case, Vaishno Das Bagai committed suicide as a result of hardships endured from this ruling. His widow, Kala Bagai, continued to raise their 3 sons in the U.S. In 2020, a street in Berkeley was named after her. See Sengar, “[US Street Named After Kala Bagai, An Indian Woman Pushed Out Of Her Home By Racist Neighbours.](#)”

⁵⁹ Military zones were created in California, Washington and Oregon, and the order affected about 120,000 people of Japanese ancestry—the majority of whom were American citizens. Because the U.S. was also at war with Germany and Italy, the idea of rounding-up Americans of European descent had been considered but was not as popular. The last camp closed in 1946, but it was not until 1976 that Executive Order 9066 was repealed. See Britannica, “[Japanese American internment.](#)”

⁶⁰ See, for example, Burger, “[Pictures of African Americans During World War II.](#)”

⁶¹ Many recruits of this regiment came from Hawaii, as those on the mainland were reluctant to volunteer while they and their families were forcibly interned in camps. See, for example, Gentry, “[Going for Broke: The 442nd Regimental Combat Team.](#)”

TARGETS OF HATE CRIME

At different points in history, both groups have been targets of massacres, lynchings, violent attacks, and other hate crimes due to racism and perceived economic, social and security threats. The following are just a few notable examples of criminal acts against these two communities, with Black Americans disproportionately experiencing more violence up to the present day:⁶²

- Nat Turner & slave rebellions, 1831 (Blacks)
- Rock Springs Massacre, 1885⁶³ (Chinese miners)
- Hells Canyon Massacre, 1887⁶⁴ (Chinese miners)
- Bellingham Riots, 1907 (Indians)
- Tulsa Greenwood Massacre (also called the Black Wall Street), 1921 (Blacks)
- Birmingham Church Bombed, 1963⁶⁵ (Blacks)
- Ku Klux Klan and Vietnamese American fishermen, 1979 (Vietnamese)
- Atlanta spa shootings, 2021 (Asian women)

These heinous acts and many others are underscored by the recurring themes of racism, xenophobia, and scapegoating that have led to countless deaths and damage.

THE CIVIL RIGHTS ERA

Despite the hardships suffered by these two communities throughout U.S. history, there is also a pattern of organized resistance that has led to monumental outcomes. Two cases that galvanized movements were the murders of Emmett Till, a black man, in 1955 and Vincent Chin, a Chinese man mistaken as Japanese in 1988. The perpetrators in Till's case were acquitted, while those in Chin's case were sentenced to three years' probation, a US\$3,000 fine and court costs even though they were charged with second degree murder.⁶⁶ Tellingly, these cases exposed the institutional bias of the criminal justice system and helped to ignite movements that called for greater racial and social justice.

During the 1950s and 60s, with support from notable Asian leaders and other allies, Black leaders largely

paved the way to secure major legal and political victories to protect minority communities. The Civil Rights Act of 1957 was the first federal civil rights legislation passed by the U.S. Congress since the Civil Rights Act of 1875. U.S. Representative Dalip Singh Saund, the first Sikh and first Indian American elected to Congress in 1955, was a leading supporter of this Act, noting in a speech that, "No amount of sophistry or legal argument can deny the fact that in 13 counties in one state in the United States of America in the year 1957, not one Negro is a registered voter....Let us remove those difficulties, my friends."⁶⁷

Martin Luther King Jr.'s leadership and activism were the driving forces behind the civil rights movement. The Civil Rights Act of 1964, which ended the legal separation of people by race in public places and gave the federal government more power to protect citizens

⁶² This list is incomplete and is not meant to compare the two groups.

⁶³ See Rea, "[The Rock Springs Massacre.](#)"

⁶⁴ See Nokes, *Massacred for Gold: The Chinese in Hells Canyon.*

⁶⁵ See Federal Bureau of Investigation, "[Baptist Street Church Bombing.](#)"

⁶⁶ See Hwang, "Killing Spawned Asian American Civil Rights Movement: 34th Milestone to Highlight Vincent Chin Case."

⁶⁷ See Blancaflor, "[5 Asian American political trailblazers who changed the United States.](#)"

against discrimination on the basis of race, religion, sex or national origin, was a historic win for this movement. One year later, the Voting Rights Act 1965 was passed and the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) was set up to ensure equal treatment of minorities in the workplace and heralded in affirmative action efforts.

In 1965, Patsy Mink was elected to Congress, becoming the first Asian American woman and the second woman from Hawaii to serve in Congress. By this time, there had been just four other Asian Americans in Congress, including U.S. Senators Hiram Fong and Daniel Inouye and U.S. Representatives Dalip Singh Saund and Spark Matsunaga. Asian representation in the U.S. Congress at the time was low and only increased when Hawaii achieved statehood in 1959.⁶⁸ Still, these leaders made noteworthy contributions to secure significant civil rights victories. For instance, Mink—a leading activist for the rights of women and girls—co-authored and sponsored the 1972 Title IX Amendment of the Higher Education Act, which prohibited gender discrimination in education programs in public schools, colleges and universities.

The late-60s also saw the proliferation of Black and Asian activists leading movements to establish race and ethnic studies in college and university curricula in California. During the founding of the Asian American Political Alliance, historian Yuji Ichioka coined the term “Asian American” as a way for Asians in the U.S., who were largely reticent in American politics, to assert power and a collective voice in identity politics, while they supported Black social justice movements. Asian activists at that time fought to repeal the Emergency Detention Act over concerns that Black activists could be subject to the same kind of treatment experienced by Japanese Americans during World War II. Larry Itliong,

a prominent Filipino-American organizer, led the first strike of the Delano grape strikes, which eventually led to the passage of the California Agricultural Labor Relations Act of 1975, empowering farmworkers to negotiate terms with contractors.⁶⁹ All in all, inspired by the Black Power Movements, many leading Asian activists used liberal, sometimes radical, frameworks to pursue their political gains.

COLD WAR ERA

Despite occasional instances of unity between the two communities during this time, Black and Asian relations were reinterpreted with the emergence of the Asian model minority myth during this period.⁷⁰ The Cold War propelled U.S. officials to reconsider their domestic racial order; coupled with Hawaii statehood, this shaped how AAPIs were more favorably viewed as legitimate citizens. By being the “good” minorities, however, the myth was used politically to undermine the movement for Black civil rights by questioning the existence of institutional racism in the U.S.⁷¹

America’s multicultural landscape became even more diverse with the 1965 Immigration and Nationality Act, driven largely by geopolitical factors stemming from World War II and Cold War concerns followed by the civil rights movement.⁷² This Act shifted U.S. immigration policy away from national-origin quotas and marked the first time Congress provided a permanent basis for the admission of refugees by prioritizing skills-based immigration, political refugees, and family reunification. It not only opened the doors to highly skilled labor from select Asian countries, but also to refugees escaping communist and other repressive regimes, starting from the 1940s with the Chinese and Koreans, and then in the 1970s with the Vietnamese, Cambodians, and other Southeast Asian and African groups.⁷³

⁶⁸ Apart from Singh, these elected officials came from Hawaii. For Asian Americans, the representation in Congress remains low. Since 1957, 38 have been elected as U.S. Representatives and 9 as U.S. Senators. Compared to Black Americans, from the first United States Congress in 1789 through the 116th Congress in 2020, 162 Blacks have served in Congress.

⁶⁹ See Guillermo, “Eclipsed by Cesar Chavez, Larry Itliong’s Story Now Emerges.”

⁷⁰ Although terminology was coined in 1966 in a New York Times Magazine article, the myth took shape over a period of time after WWII. See, for example, Ellen Wu in the *Color of Success: Asian Americans and the Origins of the Model Minority*.

⁷¹ See Wu, *The Color of Success: Asian Americans and the Origins of the Model Minority*.

⁷² President Lyndon B. Johnson “eventually recognized that existing immigration law, and in particular, national origins quotas created many decades before on racist grounds, as inconsistent with civil rights and racial justice.” See Tichenor, *Dividing Lines: The Politics of Immigration Control in America*.

⁷³ See, for example, U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services’ “[Refugee Timeline](#).”

The ethnic diversity of Asian Americans, along with the multiplicity of their political views and varying understanding of Black and Asian American history, became even more pronounced with the arrival of these newly arrived immigrants from Asia. Those who escaped socialist or authoritarian regimes during the Cold War and suffered hardship generally could not identify with and were less sympathetic to the left-leaning and more radical political agenda of the civil rights movement, even though they were among the targeted beneficiaries.⁷⁴ The intersection between the civil rights movement and the anti-war movement led to deepening misunderstandings.⁷⁵ During the Vietnam War, a number of prominent Black civil rights leaders, for instance, were vocal critics of the war and held a sympathetic view of Ho Chi Minh, the Communist-ruled Democratic Republic of Vietnam leader. For older generations of Vietnamese Americans who fought alongside their U.S. allies and fled as political refugees, or had been subjected to re-education camps, this was seen as a form of betrayal to them, their cause and call for freedom.⁷⁶ The divergence in political views among different groups of Asian Americans continues to affect current political dynamics.

However, it was Black civil rights leaders who played a pivotal role in advocating for Southeast Asian refugees to be resettled in the U.S. when the refugee crisis reached its peak in the late 1970s and early 1980s. Bayard Rustin, a prominent Black and gay civil rights leader, helped to change public opinion about these refugees and succeeded in galvanizing over 80 Black leaders, including Coretta Scott King, to publicly support the resettlement of Southeast Asian refugees through a 1978 ad in *The New York Times*. By comparing the

flight of refugees to poor and disempowered Black Americans, Rustin was successful in his advocacy efforts, which ultimately improved the lot of millions of Southeast Asian Americans.⁷⁷

CONTEMPORARY STATE OF ASIAN-BLACK RELATIONS

Over the last few decades, Asian-Black relations continued to be punctuated by moments of unity and discord. The added complexity of differing political views in the not-so monolithic AAPI community and rise of inter-racial clashes in urban enclaves did not deter prominent Black activists, such as Jesse Jackson, from joining forces with Asian community leaders in 1982 when Vincent Chin was murdered because of his race. These alliances, however, were sporadic and often short-lived due in part to the media's inflation of boycotts and clashes between Asian immigrant-owned small businesses and their Black customers.⁷⁸ There were several key events that soured relations between Asians and Blacks and continue to loom large in the mainstream narrative. The 1992 Los Angeles Riots that were triggered by the acquittal of four police officers in the Rodney King case brought to light underlying tensions that erupted during the riots, when Korean-American businesses appeared to be targets of looting and destruction. Commentators at the time connected these riots to the previous year's killing of a 15-year-old Black girl by a Korean immigrant store owner who was convicted of voluntary manslaughter. This pivotal event became a reference point for many future inter-racial conflicts between Black and Asian American communities and perpetuates the Black-Asian conflict trope.⁷⁹

⁷⁴ See, for example, Do et al., *Counterpart: A South Vietnamese Naval Officer's War*.

⁷⁵ Martin Luther King, Jr. was a staunch anti-war protester, and led his first anti-war march in Chicago on 25 March 1967. After his 'Beyond Vietnam' speech, the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People and Ralph Bunche criticized King of "linking two disparate issues, Vietnam and civil rights." See Martin Luther King, Jr. Research and Education Institute, "[Beyond Vietnam](#)."

⁷⁶ Political refugees fleeing communism struggled to understand why the forces behind the anti-war movement painted them as the villains when they were fighting a repressive system of government, similar to their South Korean counterparts decades earlier during the Korean conflict. To date, there are few published accounts of this topic from the perspective of S. VN actors. See Do, *Counterpart: A South Vietnamese Naval Officer's War*. As with many cases, a process of truth and reconciliation needs to happen for this community to provide inter-generational healing. See, for example, Nguyen, *Nothing Ever Dies: Vietnam and the Memory of War*.

⁷⁷ Southeast Asians included Vietnamese, Cambodian, Hmong, and Lao refugees. See Truong, "[What Southeast Asian Refugees Owe to Black Lives](#)."

⁷⁸ See Tso, "[Nail Salon Brawls & Boycotts: Unpacking The Black-Asian Conflict In America](#)."

⁷⁹ See Lang, "[The Asian American Response to Black Lives Matter Is Part of a Long, Complicated History](#)."

Tensions inevitably exist among small businesses who compete with each other in poor underserved neighborhoods.⁸⁰ What has added to the undercurrents of resentment is the institutional bias against Blacks when they attempt to get small business loans to start businesses in their own communities.⁸¹ Although the media has a tendency to exacerbate the acrimonious flashpoints between the two communities, especially in inner-city retail settings, relations on a day-to-day basis are generally underscored by cooperation. A prominent study shows that “social order, routine, and civility” more accurately describe the interactions between Blacks, Koreans and Jewish merchants and their Black customers.⁸² Indeed, there is more respect between members of these communities than is typically presented in mainstream media.⁸³

LOOKING AHEAD

Against the backdrop of COVID-19, both groups again are seeing the pandemic’s disproportionate social and economic impact on their respective communities. The murder of George Floyd and anti-Asian hate tied to the virus have brought the two communities together, as members of both communities started to show up for each other in demonstrations for Black lives and against anti-Asian violence. While some of the momentum has waned, there is still a growing desire in both communities to better understand each other’s history and present-day challenges.⁸⁴ This level of cooperation will become more important when controversial topics crop up, such as the Supreme Court’s review of a case known as *Students for Fair Admissions Inc. v. President*

and Fellows of Harvard College, in which the plaintiffs seek to bar and question the legality of race-conscious admissions programs at Harvard, thus raising serious doubts about the future of affirmative action in higher education.⁸⁵ Like the myth surrounding the Model Minority label for Asians, this polarizing case not only employs the strategy of pitting one minority group against another, but also risks further dividing groups within the non-monolithic AAPI community.

As awareness grows, a rising number of Asians, at an individual level and through Asian American organizations and their corporate workplaces, are starting to publicly talk about anti-Black racism and about Asian Americans confronting anti-Blackness.⁸⁶ Black leaders have also expressed public support for the Asian American community as Asian Americans grappled with a sudden rise in violence during the pandemic, lacking political representation and being constantly overlooked and generally invisible in the American narrative.⁸⁷

A deeper understanding of the institutionalized and entrenched racism that has historically disadvantaged America’s Blacks, and to a lesser extent Asians, can help each group come to terms with how they want to work together to achieve a shared vision of the future. It can start empathy and the recognition that although laws were used historically to exclude and discriminate against racial minorities and other groups in the U.S. they have also been used as effective vehicles to attain justice and equity, especially when allyship was effectively exercised.

⁸⁰ See Kang, *The Managed Hand: Race, gender, and the Body in Beauty Service Work*.

⁸¹ See Arora, “[Why Black-Owned Businesses Struggle To Get Small Business Loans](#).” In general, minority-owned businesses have a much harder time accessing small business loans than their white counterparts. AAPIs turn to informal networks for funding.

⁸² See Lee, *Civility in the City: Blacks, Jews, and Koreans in Urban America*.

⁸³ See Lee & Huang, “[Why the trope of Black-Asian conflict in the face of anti-Asian violence dismisses solidarity](#).”

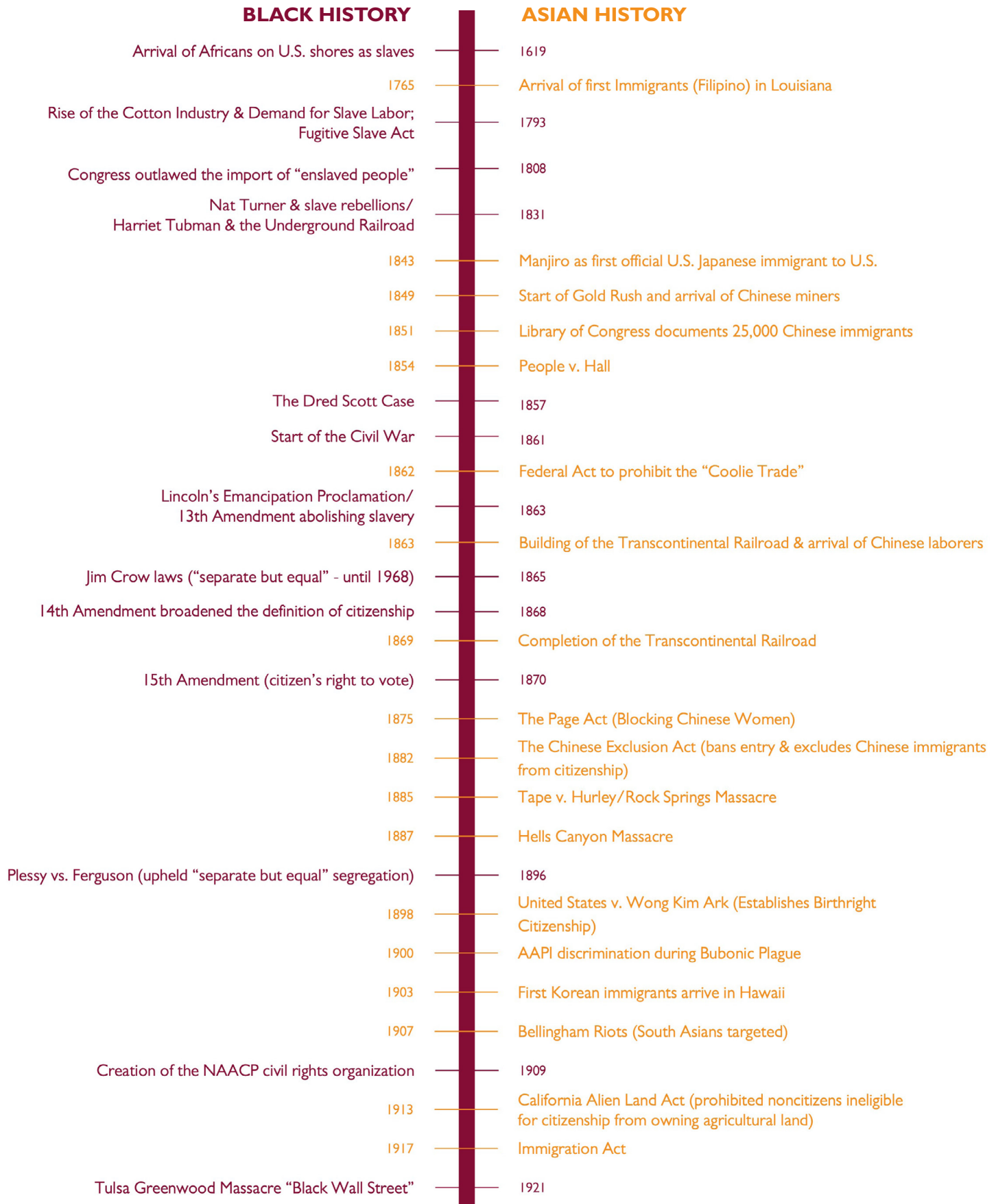
⁸⁴ For instance, a number of Black Chief DEI Officers appreciated learning about the socio-economic challenges AAPI communities face today which contradict the model minority label. (Ascend National Convention 8/25/21). For more information on the economic inequality within the AAPI community, see Budmian et al., “[Key facts about Asian Americans, a diverse and growing population](#)”; See, also for example, Meraji et al., “[A Letter From Young Asian-Americans To Their Families About Black Lives Matter](#)”; Moon, “[How Black-Asian Solidarity Is Taking on White Supremacy](#)”; Asian American Advocacy Fund, “[Asians for Black Lives - Asian American Advocacy Fund](#).”

⁸⁵ See Liptak et al., “[Supreme Court Will Hear Challenge to Affirmative Action at Harvard and UNC](#)”; Chang, “[Opinion: I’m an Asian American student who believes in affirmative action](#).”

⁸⁶ See Sy et al., “Can Black, Asian Americans move past historical animosity in the interest of solidarity?”

⁸⁷ See, for example, Song et al., “[Black and Asian Americans Stand Together Against Hate Crimes](#)”; Movement for Black Lives, “[M4BL Statement on Anti-Asian Violence](#)”; Shivaram, “[Amid wave of violence, Asian Americans, Black communities build coalitions](#)”; Harvey, “[Black Leaders, City Condemns Anti-Asian Violence](#).”

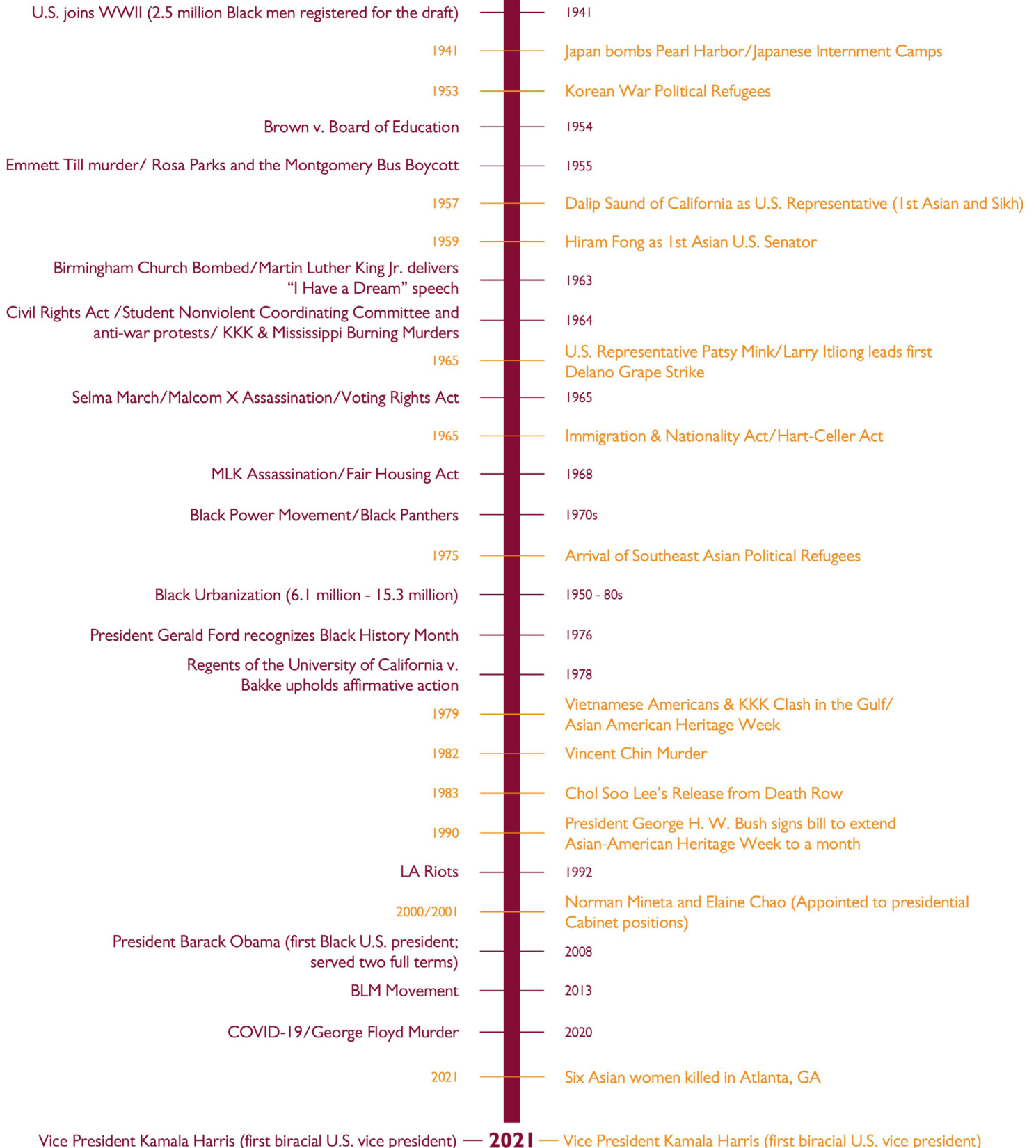
NOTABLE & CONSEQUENTIAL PERIODS IN AMERICAN HISTORY



NOTABLE & CONSEQUENTIAL PERIODS IN AMERICAN HISTORY

BLACK HISTORY

ASIAN HISTORY



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