

Preface

The State of Asian America Trajectory of Civic and Political Engagement

Fifteen years ago, Leadership Education for Asian Pacifics, Inc. (LEAP) and the UCLA Asian American Studies Center published their first joint public policy effort, *The State of Asian Pacific America: Policy Issues to the Year 2020*. With the inauguration of President Bill Clinton and the shift from a Republican to Democratic administration, 1993 marked a dramatic change in U.S. politics. Asian Americans were then an emerging yet underrepresented and near “invisible” minority. The report’s timely release provided significant data and policy perspectives on major issues and concerns affecting the Asian American population. It highlighted the increasing significance of this community, and the need for appropriate knowledge and understanding of its unique needs.

The year 2008 marks yet another remarkable moment in American politics. Following an exciting and unprecedented primary season, the nation is poised on the brink of history, with the expected nomination of the first African American (defeating the first viable female candidate) for President of the United States.

Given this dramatic backdrop, LEAP’s fifth major publication, *The State of Asian America: Trajectory of Civic and Political Engagement*, published in conjunction with the University of California AAPI Policy Multi-Campus Research Program (MRP), is particularly salient. The upcoming election has renewed public interest in political participation, galvanizing women, young people and entire communities of color. Regardless of who wins the White House, change is sure to come. The issues that will define November’s election—the economy, energy, education, healthcare, immigration, globalization, foreign policy, the environment, race, gender and ethnicity—are issues pertinent to all Americans, including Asians.

Is it safe to say that we are now part of the dialogue?

Since 1993, the Asian American community has grown and matured tremendously. Due in large part to higher levels of civic engagement, Asian American visibility has increased on all levels and in all sectors of society.

This report discusses the extent and variety of ways in which Asian Americans are civically engaged—as individuals working towards any collective, common good—from volunteers in religious, professional, political and community-based organizations to citizens exercising their right to vote. Linked by a constructed racial category, many have come to embrace the umbrella term “Asian American” as a means to establish a unified identity, and therefore a more powerful voice in the political arena. Still, institutional barriers continue to limit full Asian American participation, and creative solutions are necessary to overcome these challenges.

As college students, grassroots activists, educators, journalists, entrepreneurs, politicians, artists, corporate executives, foreign and native born, transnational citizens, young and old, Asian Americans must continue to be involved and assert influence throughout the American landscape. Asian Americans must strive to shape policy and to inform politicians and the public alike about matters relevant to Asians. We hope this publication illustrates the nature and impact of Asian American civic engagement and offers meaningful and insightful suggestions towards future empowerment. (Due to limited funding, this report focuses only on Asian American civic engagement. In the future, every effort will be made to include Pacific Islander communities.)

The realization of this ambitious project is due to the vision of Professor Paul Ong of the UCLA School of Public Affairs and the UC AAPI Policy Multi-Campus Research Program. The catalyst and driving force behind this report, Professor Ong is the nation’s leading expert on public policy issues facing the Asian and Pacific Islander population. We are extremely grateful for the leadership and commitment that he provided to ensure the success of this endeavor.

Finally, we would like to acknowledge the notable team of writers who contributed their expertise to this report. We also express

our utmost gratitude to the faculty and staff of the UC AAPI Policy MRP and to the Board of Directors of LEAP for their unwavering support of our collaboration.

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State of Asian America: Trajectory of Civic and Political Engagement Acknowledgements

We wish to thank the following institutions that have provided their generous support to the LEAP Asian Pacific American Public Policy Institute in making this publication possible:

The Carnegie Corporation of New York has been a major funder of the Public Policy Institute since 1994 and is the principal supporter of this policy report. We wish to also acknowledge the support of the following funders: The James Irvine Foundation, Washington Mutual and Nielsen Media. We'd particularly like to acknowledge the individuals who believed in the importance of this project and supported LEAP to carry it out: Geri Mannion, Carnegie Corporation of America, LaTonya Slack, The James Irvine Foundation, Monica Hill, Nielsen Media Research and Antonio Manning, Washington Mutual.

Any successfully completed project is the result of the cumulative efforts of many people. Our sincere thanks extend to the following individuals for sharing their talent and providing invaluable support: Gena Lew Gong, copy edited the report and wrote the accompanying executive summary. Grace Toy, proofread the final manuscript and with the help of Fatima Capinpin ensured consistency and accuracy of references. Megan Emiko Scott, Naomi Tacuyan, Lucy Tran and Theresa Firestine worked with Professor Paul Ong as Research Assistants. Mark Hirai of Elite Graphics and Michelle Sun of Unic Graphic typeset and printed the publication, Wesley Encina designed the cover. Brad Rodney, Tom Schuyler, Joyce Yaeger, Martha Cid and Chiara Coletti of M Booth & Associates provided media and PR support and guidance. LEAP Board members Brad Cooper, Susan Jin Davis, Bill Imada, Lawrence Joe, Bill Kaneko, Deanna Lee, Karen Park, Mona Lisa Yuchengco and Nita Song of the IW Group and

Michael Murashige contributed corporate, community and media counsel. Linda Akutagawa provided project guidance and direction and was assisted by Scott Chan and Farzana Nayani.

We are grateful to the members of our Advisory Group, Karen Narasaki and Vincent Eng of the Asian American Justice Center, and William H. (Mo) Marumoto of the Asian Pacific American Institute for Congressional Studies.

We would also like to express our gratitude to the Board of Directors of LEAP and the members of the University of California AAPI Policy Multi-Campus Research Program for their guidance and support of this project.

