

Editorial: A Glance at the Asian American Experience

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In a news piece published as recently as October 18, 2021, entitled “Inside the N.Y.C. Neighborhood with the Fastest Growing Asian Population,” Nicole Hong reports that “Long Island City, [...], is a microcosm of a sweeping demographic shift: a booming Asian population that has become the fastest growing racial group in the country and in New York. The nearly 11,000 Asians who live in the neighborhood make up about 34% of its population.” Accordingly, “the surge in Asian residents” is not only transforming neighborhoods but also reshaping the “housing market, small businesses and political representation” (Hong). With its positive overtones, which, after decades, if not centuries, of injustice and misrepresentation come as a surprise, the news piece seems to be attesting to the changing attitudes towards Asian Americans, though it is too little too late.

Starting in mid-19th century with the arrival of Chinese immigrants as contracted laborers, counteracted shortly thereafter by the Chinese Exclusion Act, the history of Asian immigrants in the United States is a story of exclusion, discrimination, wrongful treatment, and despair. Yet, at the same time, it is one of determination, unyielding hard work, discipline, and humility. From the dehumanized status of “yellow peril,” Asian Americans have risen to that of the “highest-income, best-educated and fastest-growing racial group in the United States,” according to a 2012 extensive survey by the Pew Research Center (“The Rise of Asian Americans”). The Report also states that “[t]hey are more satisfied than the general public with their lives, finances and the direction of the country, and they place more value than other Americans do on marriage, parenthood, hard work and career success” (“The Rise of Asian Americans”). Moreover, “[l]ooking forward, arrivals from Asia are projected to comprise a greater share of all immigrants, becoming the largest foreign-born group by 2055” (Hanna and Batalova).

Such a minuscule reminiscence of the Asian American experience is drastically deficient in reflecting either the diversity of the Asian American communities or their invaluable contributions to the making of the American culture and identity. So is this Issue! What we set out to endeavor and what we have come to achieve tell two different stories, running parallel with the experiences of the community it sheds a light on. Our humble hope is that, by presenting insight into the lives and literatures of Japanese, Vietnamese, German-Panamian-Chinese, Bengali, and Korean Americans, the Issue will lure readers, as well as scholars, into the exceptional experiences represented, and stimulate further research in the field, to be included in future issues of *JAST*.

In the meantime, and as much as ever, Emma Lazarus's verse, engraved at the base of Lady Liberty, holds true – for diverse communities in the United States, as well as for diverse scholars in American Studies, as *JAST* aims to remain the bearer of light:

Give me your tired, your poor,
Your huddled masses yearning to breathe free,
The wretched refuse of your teeming shore.
Send these, the homeless, tempest-tost to me,
I lift my lamp beside the golden door! (Lazarus, 184)

Works Cited

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