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Message from the Editors

## Closing the Research and Data Gap in Order to Serve Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders Better

Shirley Hune and Marjorie Kagawa-Singer

One of the greatest assets of the United States as a world leader is the diversity of the American people in their perspectives, cultures, knowledge, skills, and innovations. Significant segments of the nation's diverse population, however, remain marginalized in their everyday lives and civil rights, have less access to fundamentals (e.g., economic opportunities, education, and health care), and are underserved in a wide range of organizations and programs, including those publicly funded by federal, state, and local authorities. For a democratic society with enormous resources, this is far from an ideal situation for any individual or group. Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders (AAPIs) are among those who continue to be left out of full inclusion and participation in many sectors and levels of U.S. society. This special issue of *AAPI Nexus* provides research and policy briefs to address inequities in vital areas of AAPI community life through examples of innovative research methods, data collection, and policies and seeks to guide public and private entities, including federal agencies, toward increasing AAPI participation and access to opportunities to meet their needs.

AAPIs are comprised of diverse, complex, and growing populations. Not only are they part of the historical development of the United States, but also they are a growing and vibrant part of U.S. society. According to the U.S. Census, single-race Asian Americans grew faster than any other race group in the nation from 2000 to 2010—a 43.3 percent gain. In numerical terms, Asians alone increased from 10.2 million to more than 14.7 million during that period. Asians in combination with other racial/ethnic groups comprised another 2.6 million, for a total of 17.3 million single-race and multiple-race Asian Americans in 2010. Single-race Native Hawaiians and Other Pacific Islanders (NHPIs) grew 35.4 percent from 2000 to 2010, but more than half of them report being of multiple

racers. NHPIs totaled 1.2 million, or 540,018 NHPI alone and 685,182 of multiple races, in 2010.<sup>1</sup> By the year 2050, it is projected that Asian Americans (alone and in combination) will be 9 percent (40.6 million) of the total population, up from 5.6 percent in 2010. It is estimated that NHPIs (alone and in combination) will grow from 0.4 percent in 2010 to 0.6 percent (2.6 million) by 2050 (U.S. Census Bureau, 2011). These significant and continuing demographic changes create an urgent need to understand the everyday problems that face the growing AAPI population better.

On October 14, 2009, President Barack Obama signed Executive Order 13515: "Increasing the Participation of Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders in Federal Programs." The order reestablished the White House Initiative on Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders, housing it within the Department of Education, and created the President's Advisory Commission on Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders and the Federal Interagency Working Group (IWG). Working in conjunction, the commission and the IWG are comprised of individuals, executive branch departments, agencies, and offices representing a broad spectrum of fields and programs impacting AAPI communities. The initiative collaborates with the White House Office of Public Engagement, designated federal agencies, organizations, and community advocates to promote underutilized resources and opportunities in education, commerce, business, health, human services, housing, environment, arts, agriculture, labor and employment, transportation, justice, veterans affairs, and economic and community development.

The initiative has structured its efforts into five "pods," or areas of focus, that encompass a diverse range of community interests and issues, these include civil and immigrant rights, economic growth, educational opportunities, healthy communities, and sustainable neighborhoods. The pod structure allows the initiative to concentrate its efforts with an issue-based approach while acknowledging the importance of interagency cooperation in devising strategies for outreach and community-government partnerships.

The initiative hosted a Research and Data Convening on Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders in Washington, D.C., from December 10 to 11, 2010. Bringing together individual researchers, large "think-tank" research organizations, leading university Asian American studies programs, and representatives from federal agencies, this conference focused on addressing gaps in research and

data needs for AAPIs and providing input to federal agencies in order to improve the quality of life for AAPIs. The insights and practices shared during this event underscored the need for ongoing comprehensive, relevant, and actionable research on AAPIs. As a result, two proposed courses of action by *AAPI Nexus* journal founding senior editor and UCLA/CUNY Professor Paul M. Ong were to formalize working relationships among university-based AAPI research institutions—four institutions formed the Asian American and Pacific Islander Policy Research Consortium to support, promote, and conduct applied social science and policy research on AAPIs<sup>2</sup>—and to publish the proceedings of the convening and other issue-related briefs to inform federal policy making. (For more information on the initiative, please see the appendix.)

*AAPI Nexus* is proud to publish this special issue to coincide with the second anniversary of the initiative. Drawing upon the convening's theme, we sought out briefs that offered new research and data approaches to address AAPI everyday inequalities and policy gaps and that would provide findings and recommendations to improve AAPI access to services and programs. In February 2011, we invited presenters at the December conference and other experts of the five pods to submit briefs. The primary goals for this special issue are to (1) demonstrate how researchers and practitioners are innovatively overcoming the barriers to identify the needs and disparities in AAPI communities, (2) provide information to address AAPI issues, (3) support data-driven policy changes and advocacy on behalf of AAPIs, and (4) promote solution-oriented and replicable approaches.

In adopting the title *Forging the Future* for the issue, we envision the publication will play a significant role in fulfilling the initiative's goals as articulated in its "Winning the Future: President Obama's Agenda and the Asian American and Pacific Islander Community" paper of May 2011.<sup>3</sup> The dual goal is to provide the information and evidence-based strategies to identify and close AAPI inequity gaps. In the briefs that follow, a diverse group of scholars and community advocates explore important AAPI issues in detail, providing better research and data, along with their own analyses and recommendations for improving the lives of AAPIs. The volume is also designed to highlight opportunities for intervention and collaboration, initiate dialogue, and be a catalyst for the collective and coordinated efforts of academics, com-

munity organizations, and government agencies (local, state, and federal).

Overall the briefs identify the multiple ways in which AAPIs are made invisible, absent from and thus silenced, or inadequately represented or distorted in research, data, programming, and policies. Most importantly, they provide new methods, data, and recommendations for closing the research and data gap in order to serve AAPIs better. The briefs are organized into five sections presented in alphabetical order: civil rights, economic development (including sustainable neighborhoods), education, health, and NHPIs. The first four sections reflect the focus areas of the initiative's pods. The NHPI section ensures that due attention is given to this overlooked group. Each section is preceded by an overview in order to set the context for the topic and introduce the briefs, their findings, and recommendations. The volume concludes with an appendix describing key activities of the initiative to date.

This special issue is truly a collective effort and was completed on a strict timeline. *AAPI Nexus* stepped away from its usual practice of publishing research and policy articles to present new findings through shorter briefs. This alternative mode also enabled the journal to publish a larger and wider range of research and data findings. Nonetheless, journal space is limited and choices had to be made in regard to submissions. The editors wish to thank the contributors for their innovative work and timely responses, the reviewers (who remain anonymous) for their valuable input in the challenging process of peer review of the submissions, and the section editors for their expertise and help in contextualizing and shaping AAPI issues.

We are most grateful to the initiative, especially Kiran Ahuja, Executive Director, Christina Lagdameo, Deputy Director, Albert J. Lee and AAPI Nexus Managing Editors Melany De La Cruz-Viesca and Christina Aujean Lee for their leading roles in moving this issue forward, Associate Editor Don T. Nakanishi for his valuable insight, Publications Coordinator Mary Kao for her always amazing cover and overall design for this substantial double issue and Copyeditor Christine A.T. Dunn for turning drafts into polished publications. Finally, we especially thank the following organizational sponsors and individual donors: Asian and Pacific Islander American Scholarship Fund (APIASF), Association of Asian Pacific Community Health Organizations (AAPCHO), National Coalition for

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We hope that the readership is as excited as we are about the new research and data approaches in this special issue. The findings and recommendations in the briefs open up new opportunities to address unequal access by and participation of AAPIs in the larger U.S. society better. We encourage federal agencies and other public and private entities to use them and to work closely with AAPI scholars and community advocates in order to close the knowledge and service gaps for AAPI communities so that they might improve their lives and have full and equal opportunity to participate in all facets of American society and policy making.

## Notes

1. The *race-alone population* is defined as "individuals who responded to the question on race by indicating only one race or the group that reported only one race category." See Humes, Jones, and Ramirez, 2011 for more information.
2. The four founding institutions are the CUNY Asian American Asian Research Institute, the University of Massachusetts-Boston Institute for Asian American Studies, the University of California AAPI Policy Multi-Campus Research Program, and the UCLA Asian American Studies Center.
3. Available at [http://www.whitehouse.gov/sites/default/files/rss\\_viewer/aapi\\_winningthefuture\\_20110506.pdf](http://www.whitehouse.gov/sites/default/files/rss_viewer/aapi_winningthefuture_20110506.pdf).

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MARJORIE KAGAWA SINGER, PhD, MA, MN, RN, FAAN is a professor in the UCLA School of Public Health and Department of Asian American Studies. She is the senior editor of *AAPI Nexus* and is actively involved in research, teaching, and community engagement. She participates on numerous boards and committees at the local, state, and national level for cancer control and public health, such as the LA County Women's Health Policy Advisory Board, the Board of the National American Cancer Society, the Intercultural Cancer Council, and the Foundation for Psychocultural Research. Her research expands the traditional behavioral research paradigm to include cultural differences in the incidence and experience of cancer and other chronic diseases and to build the capacity of communities to reduce the unnecessary burden of disease in their communities through direct services and policy advocacy.