

A Year of Challenges and Progress, With More Work Ahead

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This year, National Asian American and Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander Heritage Month feels different. On the one hand, longstanding prejudice and discrimination towards Americans of Asian Pacific descent has been heightened as a result of the pandemic.

At the same time, we're celebrating unprecedented representation – including the first female, Black and Asian Vice President, Kamala Harris, the first Asian American U.S. Trade Representative, Katherine Chi Tai, and new members of Congress of East Asian, Southeast Asian, South Asian or Pacific Islander descent. Asian Pacific Americans are the [second fastest-growing population among major race and ethnic groups](#), and their stories are central threads in the fabric of our shared history.

Amid the global pandemic and the rise in acts of violence against AANHPI Americans, the public-facing nature of industries where Asian Americans figure prominently – as healthcare workers, small business owners and food service workers – pose very real risks to the health and well-being of Asian American workers and proprietors. Beyond the health impacts, the

economic impacts of the pandemic on Asian Americans have been substantial. According to the Census Bureau, a quarter of the nation's 578,000 businesses owned by this group [belonged to the Accommodation and Food Services sector](#), which was particularly hard hit by the pandemic.

The negative impact of the pandemic on the restaurant industry was deeply personal to me. Like many Asian immigrants, my parents built a loyal customer base with our family restaurant, a labor of love and commitment with a proud 18-year history in our community. Despite setbacks and challenges along the way, my parents will tell you that the American Dream is alive and well for Asian Pacific American communities and that theirs is still being written.

The growing numbers and greater visibility of AANHPI leaders, including women in positions of power, gives me hope for the future. Their stories of perseverance encourage all of us to keep moving forward even in the face of challenge and adversity. While the past year has witnessed an increase in acts of aggression and hatred towards members of the Asian Pacific American community across the nation, I am still heartened by what I see as clear evidence of renewed commitment to a set of shared values that demands fairness, equity and justice.

Let us take this moment to celebrate how far we've come, and also to recommit ourselves to the obligations of our shared humanity such that our fellow Asian Pacific American friends, family and neighbors never again have to endure a year like the past one.

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