

Brilliant Boba in Context

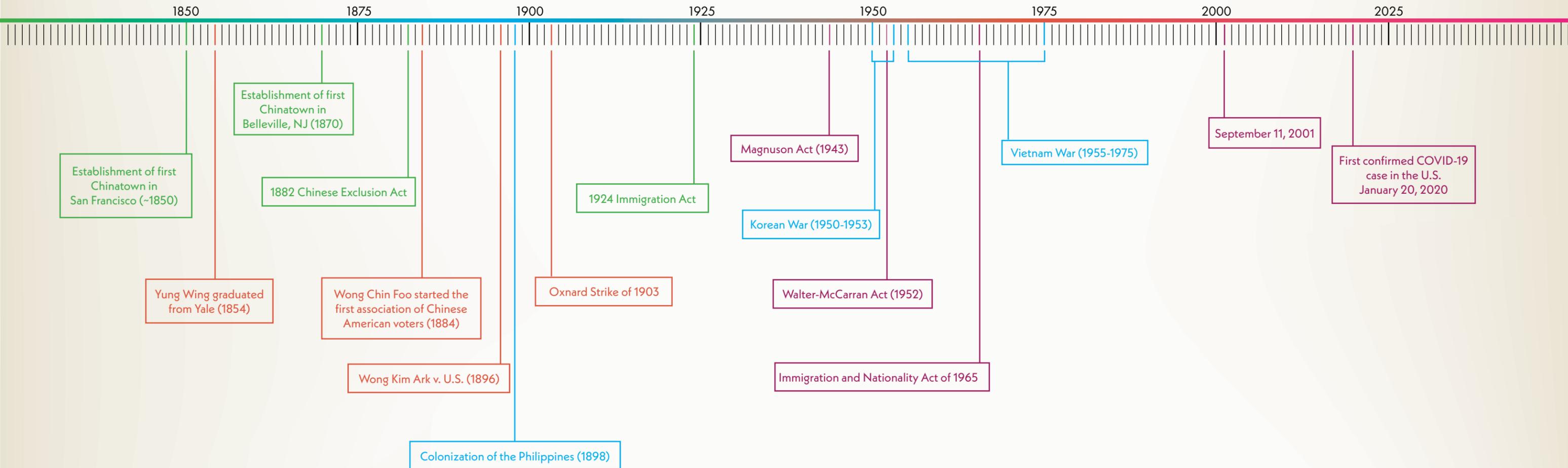
Asian American History

1850 to Present

The Brilliant Boba stories are from Asians and Asian Americans living in Connecticut and reflect the way Asian and Asian Americans are woven into the fabric of American society and history. This condensed history of Asian American history (compiled by [Immigrant History Initiative](#)) places the Brilliant Boba stories within the larger context of Asian American history.

This history starting in 1850 and spanning through 2020 presents important historical moments that have shaped how Asian and Asian Americans exist, experience, and interact with life in America. It is broken into four major themes. Each theme has its own detailed page

Brilliant Boba is a unique resource for educators to center Asian American voices in their classrooms through art and narrative. It gives students and educators new ways to reflect on how we can build community and empathy through experiencing others' perspectives.



1 1800s Asian Migration & Exclusion



2 Early Asian American Activism



3 U.S. Military Action in Asia



4 Modern Immigration from Asia & Today's AA Communities

1800s Asian Migration & Exclusion

When did the first Asians come to the Americas? Probably earlier than you think. The first recorded Asian sailors came to the Americas in the 1500s, not long after Christopher Columbus! However, the first significant wave of migration occurred in the 1800s. This big wave was driven by America's labor needs, as companies like railroad builders needed more workers to complete big projects like the Transcontinental Railroad. In this time period, mostly men came to work in the United States--partly because of the back-breaking nature of the work, but also because of U.S. policies against the immigration of Asian women. These policies created "bachelor societies" of mostly men, who faced serious discrimination and were often unable to form families and lay down permanent roots in the United States.

Essential Question:
Who were the first Asians in America, and how were they treated?

Establishment of first Chinatown in San Francisco (~1850) and in Belleville, New Jersey (1870)

Because many of the first Chinese migrants to the U.S. were hired to work on railroads on the West Coast, Chinese American communities grew significantly during the mid-1800s in states like California. However, the growth of Chinese (and later other Asian) communities led to backlash from the white majority, who passed laws that limited where Chinese residents could live and what they could do for work, limiting job opportunities to those that other men would not do, like laundry and restaurant work. Due to these restrictions, Chinese communities became confined in small neighborhoods that became known as "Chinatown." One of the first neighborhoods described as "Chinatown" was Portsmouth Square in San Francisco, a small area where Chinese opened laundries and restaurants to provide services to miners. In this neighborhood, Chinese residents made their home and celebrated their heritage, including establishing community associations and celebrating festivals. Some Chinese workers left the West Coast due to the discrimination and violence against Chinese people and established communities on the East Coast. One of the earliest Chinatowns on the East Coast was established in the 1870s in Belleville, New Jersey.

Brilliant Boba Connections:

[Your Identity Is In Your Palette](#) by Gloria Han

[A Natural Customer Service Representative in the Making](#)
by Yingying Zheng

[Okra](#) by Frances Yuko

Happy Birthday to You by Yingying Zheng ([story](#)) & Keith Leonhardt ([art](#))

1882 Chinese Exclusion Act

The 1882 Chinese Exclusion Act is the first major federal law on immigration in the history of the United States. It was the first building block of the large system of immigration restrictions that America has today. This law barred all immigration of Chinese laborers, targeting Chinese immigrants even though they made up a small percentage of all immigrants coming to America. Why were the Chinese targeted? During this time period, anti-Chinese movements spread across the country, with advertisements and cartoons portraying Asians as dirty, untrustworthy, and less than human. Western states passed laws that restricted where Asians could live, who they could marry, and charged them extra fees for working and living. Violent riots targeting Chinese immigrants erupted in many states, where white mobs killed individuals and drove entire communities out of town.

Brilliant Boba Connections:

[Enough](#) by Frances Yuko

1924 Immigration Act

After the passage of the 1882 Exclusion Act, anti-Asian sentiment only spread. Other communities of Asian immigrants also faced violence and discriminatory treatment, and anti-Japanese, anti-Korean, and anti-Filipino movements followed the anti-Chinese movement. South Asian immigrants faced particular hostility, and in 1907, a mob of 500 men in Bellingham, Washington beat Sikh residents and drove the entire South Asian community out of town. Responding to these societal trends, the U.S. passed a series of progressively more extreme anti-Asian immigration laws. In 1910, the U.S. government set up Angel Island Immigration Station to process incoming immigrants on the West Coast. Unlike its East Coast counterpart, Ellis Island, Angel Island was designed to enforce these anti-Asian immigration laws and used extensive interrogation and other tactics to keep out any Asian immigrants they thought might be evading these laws. The 1924 Immigration Act finally prohibited all immigration from Asia and set numerical quotas, or limits, on all immigration from places other than Western Europe. The goal of the law was to keep U.S. racial demographics the same. In other words, it tried to keep non-white immigrants from becoming a larger part of the U.S. population.

Brilliant Boba Connections:

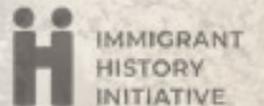
[Perpetual Foreigners](#) by Anonymous

Chinese Railroad Workers at Big Rock Cut, one mile above Cabinet, N.P.R.R., ca. 1880.

Credit: Photo from I.G. Davidson, ca. 1880, Scenery along the line of the Northern Pacific Railroad Company series, Baker Library Special Collections, Harvard Business School.



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Early Asian American Activism

At the same time that Asian immigrants faced overwhelming discrimination and outright violence, these communities also banded together to resist racism. Asian Americans reacted to mistreatment by fighting for their rights, and many of these fights led to the establishment of important principles and legal protections. From voting and citizenship, to education and labor, Asian American leaders made their mark on U.S. history even during the darkest of times. Today, we still benefit from the struggles of these early activists because of the rights and protections they won for us so many years ago.

Essential Question:

How did Asian Americans react to discrimination and mistreatment?

Yung Wing graduated from Yale (1854)

Although the majority of immigrants from Asia in the 1800s were laborers, there was a small number of scholars and officials who came. One of the first was Yung Wing. In 1854, he became the first Chinese student to graduate from a university in North America (Yale). Yung wanted to provide more Chinese students with educational opportunities and established the Chinese Educational Mission, which brought over 100 Chinese students to study in American schools across the East Coast of the U.S. Through this exchange, many Chinese students became scholars and diplomats in China and advocated for political reform during the Qing dynasty and worked on U.S.-China relations. Even though Yung was a wealthy, educated Chinese person, he still experienced discrimination as an Asian man. Although the Exclusion Act permitted a small number of Chinese merchants and government officials to come to the U.S., they did not have the same rights as white Americans. For example, Yung became an American citizen, but after the passage of the Exclusion Act, his citizenship was revoked, and he could not legally return to the U.S.

Brilliant Boba Connections:

A Musical Prodigy and Matriarch by Clara Shen ([story](#)) and Kaitlin Tan Fung ([art](#))

[Limitless Opportunities and Attainable Dreams](#) by Pauline Ho Bynum

Wong Chin Foo started the first association of Chinese American voters (1884)

Who coined the term “Chinese American?” Wong Chin Foo was a vocal advocate and trailblazer for the rights of Chinese immigrants in the United States. Truly straddling two worlds, Wong Chin Foo traveled back and forth between America and China and corresponded with Sun Yat-Sen (the first president of the Republic of China) on Chinese politics. He started a weekly newspaper in New York City called The Chinese American and established the first organization of Chinese American voters to fight against the Chinese Exclusion Act and later discriminatory immigration laws. Wong Chin Foo was far from the last Chinese American activist striving for voting rights. In 1912, Mabel Ping-Hua Lee helped lead a women’s suffrage parade in New York City at the age of 16. Despite knowing that women’s suffrage in the era of Chinese Exclusion would not benefit herself as she could not become a citizen, Mabel Ping-Hua Lee worked alongside other suffragists, both white and women of color, to advocate for women’s right to vote.

Brilliant Boba Connections:

[Limitless Opportunities and Attainable Dreams](#) by Pauline Ho Bynum

[Lunar New Year in New Haven](#) by Shirley Chock

Wong Kim Ark v. U.S. (1896)

Wong Kim Ark may be the most influential name you have never seen in your textbooks. Because of him, America follows the principle of birthright citizenship, which states that any person born in the United States is considered a U.S. citizen, no matter their race or skin color. Wong Kim Ark was born in America before the passage of the 1882 Exclusion Act. After he traveled to China to see his relatives, the U.S. government refused to let him back in, saying the Chinese Exclusion Act prohibited him from entering the country. Although only a teenager at the time, Wong Kim Ark sued the U.S. government under the 14th Amendment, saying all people born in the United States must be considered a U.S. citizen, regardless of their race. Today, America is a much more diverse and colorful country because of the birthright citizenship that Wong Kim Ark won for all of us. Are YOU a citizen because of Wong Kim Ark?

Brilliant Boba Connections:

[Where are you from?](#) by Quan Tran

[Culture Shock](#) by Anonymous

Oxnard Strike of 1903

Immigrants can face unfair labor practices, with employers often viewing them as a cheaper source of manpower. For example, Asian and Latinx workers were paid less than white workers and forced to work under worse conditions. During the Oxnard Strike of 1903, Japanese and Mexican workers united to fight back against these injustices. They accused California beet employers of working together to keep wages abnormally low, charge them unfair fees, and more. Despite being from different communities and speaking different languages, Japanese and Mexican workers collaborated to conduct a successful strike, and most of their demands were met! The 1903 strike is only one in a long line of cross-racial labor organizing, in which workers from different backgrounds found common ground and worked together to receive more equal treatment. Over sixty years later, Filipino and Latinx workers united under Cesar Chavez, Larry Itliong, and Philip Vera Cruz to lead a landmark strike and create a multi-racial union, the United Farm Workers.

Brilliant Boba Connections:

[Advocacy](#) by Christina Cho

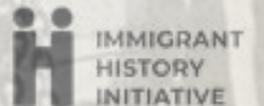
[Am I a Burden?](#) by Christina Cho

Workers Unloading Sugar Beets at an Oxnard, California Factory, ca. 1910

Credit: National Photo Company Collection, Library of Congress Prints and Photographs Division Washington, D.C.



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U.S. Military Action in Asia

Towards the end of the 19th century, America began extending its reach globally. In this process, it created military bases in Asian countries and began intervening in these countries' policies. Why did America intervene in places as far away as Asia? As one of the world's emerging superpowers, the U.S. fought to maintain its status against other global superpowers, including the Soviet Union. The U.S. feared the Soviet Union would grow more powerful by influencing Asian countries to follow its model of socialism or communism. To combat this, the U.S. began sending advisors, intelligence agents, and even military troops to Asia, fueling several military conflicts in the region. These conflicts led to immense destruction of land and property, as well as a steep toll of human lives. As a consequence, mass migration of refugees fleeing these war-ravaged countries transformed the demographics of Asian American communities in the U.S.

Essential Question:

What were the effects of U.S. military intervention in Asia on migration trends?

A Filipino Migrant Worker's Living Quarters in Belle Glade, Florida, February 1939.

Credit: Farm Security Administration - Office of War Information Photograph Collection, Library of Congress Prints and Photographs Division Washington, D.C.

Colonization of the Philippines (1898)

In 1898, the U.S. won the Spanish-American War and took over the Philippines, which had been a Spanish colony. Along with Puerto Rico and Guam, the Philippines became one of the first American colonies. The occupation of the Philippines began a century of U.S. military involvement in Asia and the emergence of the U.S. as a global military power. The U.S. justified the occupation of the Philippines by portraying the Filipinos as a backward race that needed American control to be "civilized." Filipinos were treated as inferior to white Americans. Even though the Philippines was part of the U.S., Filipinos were not given the same rights as American citizens. For example, they could not vote in presidential elections or have representatives in the U.S. Congress. During the early 1900s, many Filipinos migrated to Hawaii and then mainland U.S. to fill labor shortages that occurred following immigration restrictions against other Asian groups like the Chinese and Japanese. However, the presence of Filipino Americans was met with backlash, including violent riots against Filipino communities such as the 1930 Watsonville riot. Despite these challenges, Filipino communities formed, and workers organized to fight for better working conditions and wages.

Brilliant Boba Connections:

[You Are So Special](#) by Diane Phelan

Korean War (1950-1953)

The Korean War took place from 1950-1953, after Korea was divided into two governments following World War II: South Korea (supported by the U.S.) and North Korea (supported by the Soviet Union). The War took place in Korea but was supported by U.S. and Soviet Union forces, representing opposing political positions of democracy and communism. Often called the "forgotten war," the Korean War had one of the highest numbers of casualties in a 20th century conflict, leading to the death of approximately 3-4 million people. The effects of the War remain today: 20,000 American troops and many American military bases are still hosted in South Korea. During the war, almost 15,000 Koreans immigrated to the U.S. After the War, many more came to the United States, including Korean wives of American soldiers ("war brides"); orphans, many of who were "Amerasian" (someone whose father is an American soldier and whose mother is Asian); and students, businessmen, and scholars. During the mid-1900s, American immigration law did not allow Asian migration, but several laws were passed during the 1940s to 1950s to allow for the migration of Asian individuals affected by American military conflict in Asia. Examples include the 1946 War Brides Act and the 1952 Walter-McCarran Act.

Brilliant Boba Connections:

[Munjado](#) (art) by Jisun Kim

[#MyAsianAmericanStory](#) by Donna Yoo

[You Are So Special](#) by Diane Phelan

[A Family That Lives Apart](#) by Lily Engbith

Vietnam War (1955-1975)

Known as the "Resistance War against the Americans" among the Vietnamese, this conflict is one of the most devastating wars in human history, resulting in millions of civilian deaths and destroyed cities and critical infrastructure. Vietnam was split into two factions: the U.S. backed South Vietnam against a Communist North Vietnam. There was greater popular support among Vietnamese people for the North Vietnam regime. Desperate to keep Communism from spreading in Asia, the U.S. conducted numerous bombing campaigns of villages and cities and used chemical warfare to poison the area's water and land. The fighting spread out to surrounding countries, including Laos and Cambodia, who also suffered massive casualties. When U.S. troops finally withdrew in 1975, North Vietnam declared victory, and millions of refugees created by the war began flooding out of Southeast Asia. Although the U.S. admitted many Southeast Asian refugees, they often faced discrimination and mistreatment in the cities where they settled. Some U.S. politicians tried to prevent refugees from moving into their states, and a large part of the U.S. population opposed accepting Vietnamese refugees. But by the mid-1980s, refugees made up more than one out of every five Asian Americans in the U.S., radically transforming America's demographics.

Brilliant Boba Connections:

[Where are you from?](#) by Quan Tran

[The Things We Carried](#) by Quan Tran



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Modern Immigration from Asia & Today's AA Communities

In the 20th century, wars and new immigration laws dramatically changed the landscape of Asian American communities in the U.S. Asian immigrants came to the U.S. in greater numbers as a result of events like the Immigration and Nationality Act of 1965 and conflicts like World War II, the Korean War, and the Vietnam War. Why did the U.S. change its immigration policies toward Asians? What were the results of these changes in immigration policy? Because of these changes, there has been rapid growth of Asian American communities since the 1950s and 60s, and the majority of Asian Americans today are foreign born. Asian Americans have incredible diversity in terms of ethnicity, culture, and language, but also income, education, and immigration status. How do the different pathways to arriving in the U.S. shape the diversity of the Asian American community? Are you surprised by what you have learned?

Essential Question:

How have changing immigration patterns and global events shaped and/or changed Asian Americans as a community?

Credit: "I Still Believe in Our City" Poster by [Amanda Phingbodhipakkiya](#), 2021.

Magnuson Act (1943) and Walter-McCarran Act (1952)

In the early 20th century, military conflict in Asia and changing diplomatic relationships with countries like China and Korea shaped the change in immigrant policies toward Asians. In 1943, at the height of World War II, Congress passed the Magnuson Act repealing the 1882 Chinese Exclusion Act and ending a 60-year ban on Chinese immigration. However, Chinese immigration was still restricted by a quota. The United States' relationship with China during World War II shaped the passage of this law. The U.S. government was in alliance with the Chinese Nationalist government against the Japanese invasion of China. Chinese Exclusion was repealed a few months after Madame Chiang Kai-Shek (China's first lady during WWII) went on a speaking tour of the United States. During this time, U.S. war-time propaganda depicted the Chinese as allies and the Japanese as enemies, which led to the incarceration of more than 100,000 Japanese Americans during WWII. Following the end of WWII, criticism of the focus on race-based restrictions of immigration, especially its effect on international relations, led to the passage of the Walter-McCarran Act, which reintroduced immigration quotas for people from Africa and Asia (who had been completely banned before this law) and allowed non-white immigrants to naturalize and become U.S. citizens (which had been prohibited for Asian immigrants before this law).

Immigration and Nationality Act of 1965

In the 1960s, the Civil Rights Movement transformed how communities of color were treated in many different arenas, including segregation, voting, employment, and more. The immigration system was also deeply impacted. Civil rights activists, including African American, Latinx American, and Indigenous activists worked together to call for immigration reform, pointing out the racist roots of immigration laws. Their advocacy led to the passage of the 1965 Immigration and Nationality Act. This Act ended previous eras of exclusion based on racial categories including the quota system used since the 1920s (see [Immigration Act of 1924](#)) and instituted a new system based on employment, family reunification, and humanitarian claims. Because of the 1965 Act, U.S. racial demographics shifted radically, and new immigrant communities flourished.

Brilliant Boba connections:

[From Shanghai to Chicago](#) by Kaitlin Fung

[Advocacy](#) by Christina Cho

[Lunar New Year in New Haven](#) by Shirley Chock

September 11, 2001

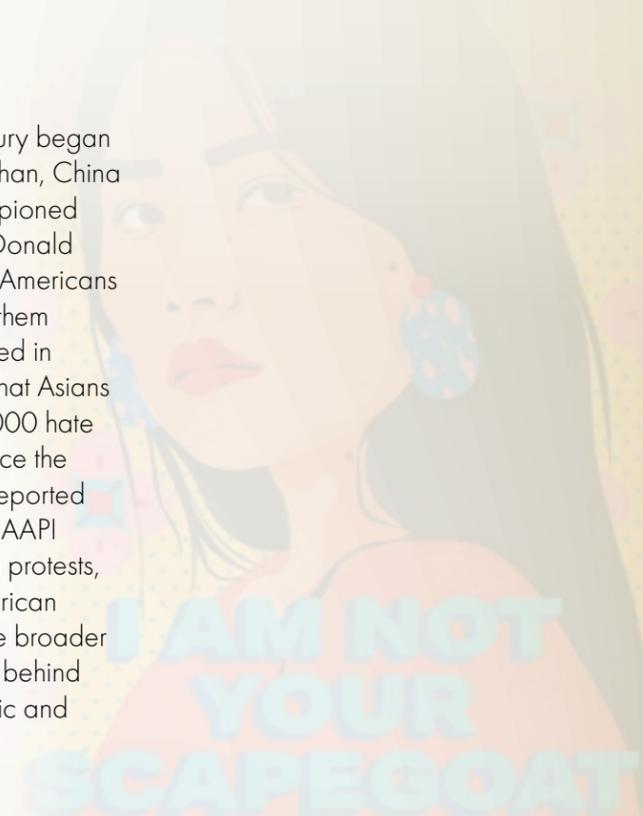
On September 11, 2001, four attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon coordinated by 19 militants associated with the extremist group Al-Qaeda led to the death of almost 3,000 people. The events of 9/11 spurred the "War on Terror," a global military campaign focused on military intervention in Afghanistan. In addition, surveillance programs were set up at the state and national levels to monitor Muslim communities. Examples include a post-9/11 database tracking people from Muslim-majority countries and the 2017 Executive Order known as the "Muslim Ban" that prohibited people from seven Muslim-majority countries from entering the country for 90 days and banned the entry of Syrian refugees indefinitely. Following the events of 9/11, Muslim and Brown communities (including South Asian American, Sikh Americans, and others who are not Muslim) in the United States (and elsewhere) experienced a significant increase in violence, hate crimes, and discriminatory treatment. Muslim Americans experienced a 500% spike in hate crimes, and there have been over 300 documented cases of violence and discrimination against Sikh Americans since 9/11.

Brilliant Boba connections:

[Perpetual Foreigners](#) by Anonymous

First confirmed COVID-19 case in the U.S. January 20, 2020

At the tail end of 2019, the most severe pandemic in a century began sweeping the globe. The COVID-19 virus originated in Wuhan, China and became nicknamed the "Chinese virus," a name championed by prominent leaders in America, including then-President Donald Trump. Due to the focus on the virus's Chinese origin, many Americans scapegoated the Asian American community and blamed them for causing or spreading the virus. Stereotypes deeply rooted in history came rushing back to the forefront, including ideas that Asians were dirty, untrustworthy, and not American. More than 6,000 hate incidents against AAPIs were recorded in the 18 months since the start of the pandemic, and 1 in 3 Asian American parents reported that their child faced a hate incident in school. In response, AAPI communities rallied together to [#StopAAPIHate](#) organizing protests, lobbying for laws, and spreading awareness of Asian American history. Brilliant Boba stems from these efforts to educate the broader public about Asian American narratives, unpack the history behind these dangerous stereotypes, and create a more empathetic and accepting America.



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