

Denouncing Asian Hate while Celebrating Asian American Pacific Islander Heritage Month

May 2021

Incredible diversity has always shaped the United States, and Americans have increasingly recognized the invaluable contributions of the melting pot of cultures that make up our nation. This May, we celebrate Asian American and Pacific Islander Heritage Month and the contributions made by groundbreaking Asian American leaders such as retired U.S. Secretary of Transportation [Norman Yoshio Mineta](#). At the same time, as we look to celebrate Asian American contributions to our nation’s history and infrastructure, we must also pause to acknowledge the need for diversity and inclusion, especially amid the recent onslaught against this population—more commonly referred to as anti-Asian hate crimes.



Amid the harrowing trauma of the coronavirus pandemic, Asian American people have been facing another threat as evidenced by [data](#) released this month that reveals that over 6,000 incidents of assaults and crimes against this population were reported from March 19, 2020 to March 31, 2021. Hate incidents reported by women make up 65% of all reports. Clearly, these attacks, which can include verbal harassment as well as physical assaults, have been on the rise. Americans with Asian heritage have been insulted, threatened, and have endured terrible acts of violence.

The New York Times has called out a “[rising tide](#) of anti-Asian bias” across the nation and details the often blatant evidence of racially motivated hate in more than 100 incidents. President Biden recently [announced](#) new actions to anti-Asian violence, xenophobia, and bias.

Although these hate crimes have been on the rise, anti-Asian sentiment is unfortunately not new. The Chinese Exclusion Act in 1882 and the internment of Japanese Americans during World War II (WWII) are reminders that we must strive to do better. Many Americans have had to overcome such obstacles, and some have even used their experiences with them as catalysts for change. Despite having been a victim of anti-Asian sentiment, Secretary [Mineta](#) has demonstrated his commitment to a more united America time and time again.

A native of San Jose, California, Secretary Mineta embodies the American dream. Undeterred by his time spent in a WWII Japanese internment camp as a child, Mineta became the first non-white member promoted to San Jose City Council, the first Asian American mayor of a major U.S. city, and one of the first Japanese-Americans elected to Congress.

Among the many achievements in his lifetime, Secretary Mineta co-authored the Civil Liberties Act of 1988, passed and signed by President Reagan, to require redress to those affected by the mass incarceration of Japanese Americans during WWII. As a proponent of transportation, he also introduced ISTEA ([The Intermodal Surface Transportation Efficiency Act](#)), signed into law by President George H.W. Bush to create a national intermodal transportation system. Mineta was progressive and recognized that paving the way for equity and justice was sometimes controversial. He was an early [advocate](#) for same-sex marriage in the U.S., and he contributed to a variety of landmark legislation that advanced equity for many Americans. This included authoring the transportation section of the [Americans with Disabilities Act](#) (ADA), which guaranteed people with disabilities equal access to public transportation.

His trailblazing led him to the White House, where he became the first Asian-American Cabinet Member when President Bill Clinton selected him as Secretary of Commerce. He also became the first Asian-American to serve in two Presidential Cabinets when President George W. Bush chose him for Secretary of Transportation.

In this position and in a time of unprecedented national crisis, Mineta proved himself invaluable. On September 11th, 2001 he ordered 4,638 planes to be grounded within 2 hours and 20 minutes to ensure no other lives were lost to the terrorist attacks. And in response to anti-Muslim and Middle Eastern sentiments, President Bush echoed Secretary Mineta's [sentiments](#) by reminding his advisors that "We don't want to have happen today, what happened to Norm in 1942." A few years later, Mineta was recognized with the Presidential Medal of Freedom, and the San Jose International Airport was dedicated in his honor.

Norman Y. Mineta has served as a groundbreaking leader across the nation for Americans of all backgrounds. His visions of equity and diversity must be actualized every day. That is why the Mineta Transportation Institute (MTI) was founded in 1991 at [San José State University](#). MTI increases mobility for all by improving the safety, efficiency, accessibility, and convenience of our nation's transportation system. These pillars encapsulate the vision Secretary Mineta has for a welcoming, diverse, and equitable nation. He urges everyone to rise up amid adversity, make the world a better place, and inspire others to do the same.

Embracing diversity and acknowledging both positive and painful history brings us closer as Americans and world citizens. Let us recognize and celebrate the contributions and leadership of individuals with Asian and Pacific Islander heritage this month and forever.

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