The history of Asian Pacific Islander Desi Americans (APIDAs) is an important part of the American experience. Works dedicated to APIDAs contribute to a fuller understanding of the history of the United States. Their stories encompass a rich legacy of achievement, along with hardships and sacrifices, that deserve to be explored.

APIDAs are often overlooked in Virginia’s history. Books, articles, and other secondary sources specifically dedicated to APIDAs in the commonwealth are rare. In addition, very few publications address how APIDAs were viewed in the South during the era of “Jim Crow” racial segregation laws. To understand how APIDAs may have navigated life in Virginia, researchers may need to focus on national, regional, and local historiographies and secondary sources, in addition to archival and primary sources. The publications listed here explore the history of these populations in the United States, not in other nations.

A guide for Asian Pacific Islander Desi American archival sources at the Library of Virginia can be found under “Using the Collections” and “Guides and Indexes” on the Library website or by using this link: https://www.lva.virginia.gov/public/using_collections.asp#_guides-AsianPacificIslanderDesiAmericanAPIDAResearch

A curated list of APIDA digital content resources not included in this guide can be found at: https://edu.lva.virginia.gov/apidaresources

The works listed in this guide are organized in the following categories: APIDAs Studies in Virginia, Virginia and Southern History, Race Studies, APIDA Studies in the South, and Books on APIDAs, with subcategories on some specific ethnic groups. Some works may be listed in more than one category. For example, Leslie Bow’s book Partly Colored: Asian Americans and Racial Anomaly in the Segregated South is helpful for studying APIDA populations in the South as a whole, but also for studying Chinese American history.

Although a number of ethnic groups and populations are not yet represented here, this guide is a work in progress. The list contains no publications that specifically address the Asian American experience of immigrants and refugees native to Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, Brunei, Burma, Cambodia, East Timor, India, Indonesia, Laos, Malaysia, Maldives, Mongolia, Myanmar, Nepal, Pakistan, Papua New Guinea, Singapore, Sri Lanka Taiwan, and Thailand. More publications will be added to future updates. Some of these ethnic groups are addressed within general APIDA publications, but specific books are lacking in the field.

Special thanks to Erica McCollum for helping to develop this guide. We are happy to take suggestions for publications not included. Please email questions or suggestions to Emma Ito at emma.ito@lva.virginia.gov.

Emma Ito
May 2020

Asian Pacific Islander Desi American (APIDA) Studies in Virginia

New Virginians: 1619–2019 & Beyond, an exhibition produced jointly by the Library of Virginia and Virginia Humanities, highlights the changing demographics of the commonwealth through a series of interviews with first-generation immigrants and refugees who arrived in Virginia after 1976. This exhibition explores the historical and continuous journey toward the ideals of America and seeks to foster an honest discussion about the immigrant and refugee experience and Virginia’s increasing diversity. The interviews reveal the complexity of the experience for people representing a wide range of personal backgrounds, experiences, ages, and countries of origin—Africa, Asia, Europe, Latin America, and the Middle East. New Virginians is a Legacy Project of the American Evolution, 2019 Commemoration.

APIDA interviewees in New Virginians include:
- Chandra Chhetri, native of Bhutan
- Mohammad Hassanzada, native of Afghanistan
- Xang Mimi Ho, native of Laos
Virginia Women in History, a Library of Virginia program that celebrates Women’s History Month, has honored three APIDA Virginia Changemakers (https://edu.lva.virginia.gov/changemakers/) who have made a difference in their community, state, and nation.

- Corazon Foley, native of the Philippines
- Pearl Fu, native of China
- Marii Hasegawa, native of Japan

The following works focus specifically on APIDA Virginians.


Virginia & Southern History

While the following books on the history of Virginia and the South do not specifically address APIDAs, they can provide context for the experiences of Asian Pacific Islander Desi American (APIDA) populations in the state, particularly in regard to race relations and laws, which differ from those on the West Coast.
During the Jim Crow period in Virginia (between 1877 and the mid-1960s), authorities enforced racial segregation throughout the state. In 1924, the Virginia General Assembly, with much persuasion from Virginia's registrar of statistics, Dr. Walter Ashby Plecker, passed the Racial Integrity Act, which required that all Virginia birth certificates and marriage certificates list the person's race as either "white" or "colored," and classified all nonwhites, including Native Americans, as "colored." Like Native Americans, Asians and Asian Americans were individuals who did not fit easily into this legal and cultural system predicated on a binary distinction. The 1924 statute specifically limited the rights of anyone who was not categorized as "white" in Virginia, including "prohibition against whites marrying anyone save another white," and the definition of a white person as one "who has no trace whatsoever of any blood other than Caucasian." The small population of APIDAs in Virginia during this period had to live and work within these racial laws and constraints.


Race Studies

When studying Asian Pacific Islander Desi American (APIDA) history in Virginia, it is helpful to consider the idea of race. *Partly Colored: Asian Americans and Racial Anomaly in the Segregated South* by Leslie Bow addresses some aspects of the idea of whiteness, but *Barbarian Virtues* by Matthew Frye Jacobson and *Making Whiteness* by Grace Elizabeth Hale provide further context to the theme. Bow also argues that *The Mississippi Chinese: Between Black and White* by James W. Loewen is an “unacknowledged precursor to Critical White Studies; in positing Asians under segregation as ersatz white people, it recognized whiteness as a detachable, transferable social status.” These studies provide crucial insight into how Asians and Asian Americans were treated in the South, particularly in Virginia.


Asian Pacific Islander Desi American (APIDAs) Studies in the South

While works dedicated to the history of Asian Pacific Islander Desi American (APIDA) populations in the South as a whole are scarce, some publications may help to interpret what life may have been like for APIDAs in Virginia. These can offer useful case comparisons between attitudes in Virginia and other southern states. *Asian Americans in Dixie: Race and Migration in the South* includes informative essays that shed light on the nature of race, community, and Asian American identity and experience in the South.

Many of these publications offer insight on how Chinese and Chinese Americans were treated in Jim Crow-era Mississippi and elucidate on the Supreme Court ruling *Gong Lum v. Rice*, which formally established the “colored” status of the Chinese in Mississippi in 1927. Leslie Bow’s book *Partly Colored: Asian Americans and Racial Anomaly in the Segregated South* underlines “what racial identity segregation demanded of those who seemed to stand outside—or rather, between—its structural logics,” with the use of government documents, sociology, anthropology, history, autobiography, visual culture, and fiction. Bow highlights Asians and Asian Americans within the Jim Crow South, with specific attention to those of Chinese descent. She writes that the shift in status of the Chinese in Mississippi represents “racial interstitiality, the space between normative structures of power.”


**Books on Asian Pacific Islander Desi Americans (APIDAs)**

The larger historiographies of Asian Pacific Islander Desi American (APIDA) history and selected sociology works are fundamental to understanding APIDA life in Virginia. Many of these publications look solely at the West Coast, however, and tend to generalize national attitudes with little attention to a southern context, particularly in regard to race.

A number of national policies and rulings likely affected APIDAs in Virginia. For example, the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882 prevented Chinese laborers from immigrating to the United States, and the “Gentlemen’s Agreement of 1907–1908” was intended to exclude the Japanese from coming to the country. Additionally, 1924’s Immigration Act, often referred to as the National Origins Act, introduced a permanent national origins quota system, and set an annual immigration quota from each foreign country. While the quota set for European countries was quite large, Asian countries were only allowed 100 people per year to immigrate to the United States. Supreme Court rulings such as 1922’s *Ozawa v. United States* prohibited Japanese from becoming naturalized citizens because they were “not Caucasian.” In this case, the Supreme Court’s decision was made against Takao Ozawa, a Japanese man who contended that race was a matter of color and culture. He claimed that his skin was “whiter than that of ‘the average Italian, Spaniard or Portuguese,’ and that he was thoroughly assimilated and a fervently patriotic American.” The court rejected his arguments and relied on “the scientific opinion that denied skin color as a criterion of racial classification and held that white as synonymous with Caucasian.”

Directly below are works on the history of APIDAs in the United States, followed by suggestions for works on specific ethnic groups that may aid in research of APIDAs in Virginia. As mentioned above, this guide is a work in progress and not a comprehensive list. As of this writing, publications that specifically address the Asian American experience of immigrants and refugees and their families native to Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, Brunei, Burma, Cambodia, East Timor, India, Indonesia, Laos, Malaysia, Maldives, Mongolia, Myanmar, Nepal, Pakistan, Papua New Guinea, Singapore, Sri Lanka, Taiwan, and Thailand are completely missing from this list. More publications will be added to future updates. Some of these ethnic groups are addressed within general APIDA publications, but specific books are currently lacking in the field.


Japanese American History

President Franklin Delano Roosevelt signed Executive Order 9066 on February 19, 1942, which required that Japanese and Japanese Americans, regardless of age, loyalty, or citizenship, move into designated camps surrounded by barbed wire and military police. There are numerous publications dedicated to the topic, and the vast historiography of Japanese incarceration (often referred to as internment) offers a window into the experience of Japanese Americans in the United States. A number of these works also examine the redress of Japanese incarceration camps and President Reagan’s Civil Liberties Act, which paid incarceration survivors as an apology. Of note are works by Greg Robinson and Ronald Takaki. A majority of these works, however, characterize the attitude in the United States as one comprehensive response, with little attention to how the context of the South may have played a part.


Chinese American History

Chinese immigrants who arrived to join the California Gold Rush were the first Asians to come to America in significant numbers in the 1850s. In the 1860s, they were instrumental in constructing the transcontinental railroad, yet the contributions of Chinese immigrants and laborers receive only a brief mention by many historians. A few books on Asian American history mention their efforts (such as Ronald Takaki's *Strangers from a Different Shore*, Erika Lee's *The Making of Asian America: A History*, and Gary Okihiro's *American History Unbound: Asians and Pacific Islanders*), but some of the books listed below address these contributions more directly. Many of these works additionally provide valuable perspectives on the racial violence and anti-Chinese sentiment toward the Chinese in the United States during the late-19th century and beyond.


**Filipino American History**


**Vietnamese American History**


**Korean American History**


