

ASIAN PACIFIC AMERICAN HERITAGE MONTH/MAY



YURI KOCHIYAMA

Yuri Kochiyama (1921-2014) was a Japanese American activist whose early political awakenings came while incarcerated in the concentration camps of World War II. She dedicated her life to social justice and liberation movements. Kochiyama became an activist and an organizer in her 40s as a mother of six children. She got involved in supporting better quality schools for the children of Harlem, then later in a labor struggle at a medical site.

Kochiyama followed and was inspired by the Civil Rights Movement and operated by the ethos that many people's liberation is intricately connected to that of others. She fought for black separatism, the anti-war movement, rights for Japanese American internees and those she considered political. She is also captured in a famous photo at the assassination of Malcolm X, in which she held up Malcolm's head, appearing to give him comfort in his dying moments.

ASIAN/PACIFIC AMERICAN HERITAGE MONTH

May is a celebration of Asians and Pacific Islanders in the United States. A rather broad term, Asian/Pacific encompasses all of the Asian continent and the Pacific islands of Melanesia, Micronesia and Polynesia.

Like most commemorative months, Asian/Pacific American Heritage Month originated with Congress. In 1977, Representative Frank Horton of New York introduced a resolution to proclaim the first ten days in May as Pacific/Asian American Heritage Week. The same year, Senator Daniel Inouye introduced a similar resolution, but neither passed. Eventually with some

changes, a joint resolution passed in October 1978, at which point President Jimmy Carter proclaimed a week to celebrate. The week was later expanded to a full month in 1992.

The month of May was chosen to commemorate the immigration of the first Japanese to the United States on May 7, 1843, and to mark the anniversary of the completion of the transcontinental railroad on May 10, 1869. The majority of the workers who laid the tracks were Chinese immigrants.

(Excerpt from asianpacificheritage.gov. Biographical information from <https://www.npr.org/2021/03/29/982274384/our-own-people>.)



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