

# MAY IS ASIAN PACIFIC AMERICAN HERITAGE MONTH

The following information is meant to assist with defining Asia and the Pacific Islands geographically.

The term "Asian-American" is a catch-all term that did not gain currency until the late 1960s and early 1970s. It was not until 1980 that the Census Bureau created the "Asian and Pacific Islander" category. Although seemingly a geographic description, "Asian and Pacific Islander" contains racial overtones, given that natives of Australia and New Zealand are not included, nor are whites born in the Asian region of the former Soviet Union. According to Census 2000, the Asian-American population was 10.2 million, making up 3.6 percent of the country's population.

## ASIANS



Following are the regions of Asia. Again, Russia is not included in the "Asian" group even though the country is on the continent of Asia.

**Eastern Asia** includes China, Hong Kong, Japan, Korea, South Korea, North Korea, Macau, Mongolia, Paracel Islands, and Taiwan.

**South Central Asia** includes Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Iran, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan, Sri Lanka, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan.

**Southeastern Asia** includes Brunei, Myanmar (Burma), Cambodia, Indonesia, Laos, Malaysia,

Philippines, Singapore, Thailand, and Vietnam.

**Western Asia** includes Armenia, Azerbaijan, Georgia, Bahrain, Cyprus, Iraq, Israel, Jordan, Kuwait, Lebanon, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Syria, Turkey, the United Arab Emirates, and Yemen.

*Note:* Regions are defined by the U.S. Census Bureau.

## PACIFIC ISLANDERS



The **Pacific Ocean** contains an estimated 20,000 to 30,000 islands (the exact number has yet to be precisely determined). Those islands lying south of the tropic of Cancer but excluding Australia are traditionally grouped into three divisions: Melanesia, Micronesia, and Polynesia.

Melanesia means *black islands*. These include New Guinea (the largest Pacific island, which is divided into the sovereign nation of Papua New Guinea and the Indonesian provinces of Maluku, Papua and West Papua), New Caledonia, Vanuatu, Fiji, and the Solomon Islands.

Micronesia means *small islands*. These include the Marianas, Guam, Wake Island, Palau, the Marshall Islands, Kiribati, Nauru, and the Federated States of Micronesia. Most of these lie north of the equator.

Polynesia means *many islands*. These include New Zealand, the Hawaiian Islands, Rotuma, the Midway Islands, Samoa, American Samoa, Tonga, Tuvalu, the Cook Islands, French Polynesia, and Easter Island. It is the largest of the three zones.

The region's islands are classified into two groups, high islands and low islands. Volcanoes form high islands, which generally can support more people and have a more fertile soil. Low islands are reefs or atolls, and are relatively small and infertile. Melanesia, the most populated of the three regions, contains mainly high islands, while most of Micronesia and Polynesia are low islands.

There are also many other islands located within the boundaries of the Pacific Ocean, but these are not considered part of Oceania. These islands include the Galápagos Islands of Ecuador; the Aleutian Islands in Alaska; the Russian islands of Sakhalin and Kuril Islands; Taiwan; the Philippines; the South China Sea Islands; most of the islands of Indonesia; and the island nation of Japan, which includes the Ryukyu Islands. The inhabitants of these islands are not considered to be Pacific Islanders and are usually identified with their nearest continent.