Dr. Grace S. Kim is a clinical associate professor in the Counseling Psychology & Applied Human Development Department at Boston University Wheelock College of Education & Human Development. Dr. Kim, a trained clinical psychologist, centers her research on social justice education and Asian American psychology. She explores how students understand the meanings of diversity; how to teach diversity and social justice effectively; and how to train future professionals to be more culturally humble and responsive. She also focuses on resilience and the mental health of Asian Americans, highlighting their struggles for liberation, social agency, and solidarity with other marginalized groups. Below are her reflections on AAPI Heritage Month.

What does AAPI Heritage Month mean to you?
AAPI Heritage Month honors the extensive contributions, diverse cultures, and lived experiences of Asian American and Pacific Islander (AAPI) populations. For me, learning the history of how AAPI Heritage Month was established has been interesting. The first efforts to acknowledge AAPI experiences officially started in the late 1970s and the commemoration was originally designated as a week. It took a decade to make this effort a reality and to expand it to a month. This historical fact alone reflects how recognizing AAPI experiences and contributions has always been a struggle, and how AAPI experiences remain invisible in U.S. history. AAPI Heritage Month is an important step toward bringing diverse AAPI experiences to the spotlight — because they still remain largely unknown in broader American society.

How has AAPI history influenced your professional life?
AAPI history in the U.S. is long, complex, and dates back to the 1700s. At the same time, it is not very well known, and AAPI experiences are often relegated to the foreigner, enemy, and model minority stereotypes. Because AAPI populations are seen as not fully belonging in the U.S., our presence is routinely excluded from important dialogues. For instance, many racial discourses center on White and Black experiences but lack the inclusion of AAPI voices and perspectives. Debunking these stereotypes, teaching and reflecting on AAPI history, along with other histories, is an important aspect of my research and teaching. In recent years, anti-Asian racism has pained many of us in the AAPI community. I have educated students and professionals about how this type of racism is not a new phenomenon but continued othering that has existed throughout the AAPI community’s history.

What are some ways women have contributed to AAPI History?
AAPI women have been actively involved in the arts, sciences, politics, and leadership throughout U.S. history. They pulled communities together, contributed to establishing important legislation (e.g., Title IX), and stood in solidarity in Civil Rights movements. I am especially indebted to AAPI feminist psychologists who have made considerable efforts in feminist therapy to meet the needs of diverse populations.

How can higher education institutions empower the AAPI community?
Higher education institutions could empower AAPI individuals by fully recognizing the diversity of this incredibly large, heterogeneous community. To do that, disaggregating data for different ethnic groups is crucial. In addition, it is critical to create opportunities to listen and learn about the diverse histories, experiences, and complexities that AAPI individuals face. Too often, AAPI individuals are still seen in stereotyped imaginations, which is problematic.