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Inaugural Japan Day and AAPI Parades Hope to Bring Unity, Healing to NYC

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The inaugural Japan Parade proceeds down Central Park West, Saturday, May 14, 2022 in New York. (Jason DeCrow/AP Images for Japan Day, Inc.)

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In a city that has become renowned for its exuberant and lavish parades celebrating the diverse cultures found in New York, it may be a surprise that this month, the first-ever Japan Day and Asian-American Pacific Islander Cultural and Heritage parades were held just a day apart. For Kenju Murakami, the deputy consul general of Japan and director of the Japan Information Center, the celebration in New York was long overdue.

"After two years of postponement due to COVID, we are really glad that we can make it possible to organize the first-ever Japan Parade in New York," he said.

Murakami noted that organizers had three goals in mind for the event ahead of the parade, including celebrating Japan's "long-standing friendship" with the U.S., showcasing the Japanese community's gratitude for New York, and displaying a wide range of culture, art, and tradition.

"With 19 units and 2,400 people marching and over 20,000 people gathering, the first Japan parade was a resounding success because the parade was able to meet all those three purposes," he told Cheddar.



The inaugural Japan Parade proceeds down Central Park West, Saturday, May 14, 2022 in New York. (Jason DeCrow/AP Images for Japan Day, Inc.)

While the theme of the Japan Day Parade was initially to display a clear picture of the bond between Japan and the Big Apple, it evolved to also highlight the city's recovery from COVID-19 as well. Small businesses, in particular, many of which are owned by people of Asian descent, were severely impacted by the pandemic and forced to shut their doors permanently.

The inaugural Japan Day and Asian-American Pacific Islander parades could not have come at a more urgent time as attacks on the Asian community skyrocketed during the pandemic. New York City Mayor Eric Adams noted the importance of rallying around the community during such a difficult period.

"As we work to combat a spike in hate crimes, it is important to support and uplift our AAPI brothers and sisters," he said in a [statement](#). "Now, more than ever, it is important to support New Yorkers in the AAPI community and reflect on the rich Asian American and Pacific Islander history."



Participants ride on a float during the first-ever annual Asian American and Pacific Islander AAPI Cultural and Heritage Parade in New York, the United States, on May 15, 2022. New York City held its first-ever annual Asian American and Pacific Islander AAPI Cultural and Heritage Parade on Sunday with the participation of immigrants from China, South Korea, India, Malaysia, Thailand, and others. (Photo by Michael Nagle/Xinhua via Getty Images)

In 2020, the NYPD [created a task force](#) to handle anti-Asian hate crimes, and between January 2021 and January 2022, there were more than 130 anti-Asian attacks in New York City alone according to police [hate crime stats](#). Murakami said that the [attacks](#) on the Asian community are concerning and there has to be a plan implemented to strengthen the relationship of all New Yorkers.

"The Japanese community, and of course the consulate, are deeply worried about the recent instances of hate crimes targeting Asians, and the protection of the Japanese community is the priority of the consulate," he added. "And therefore the consulate is against all forms of violence and discrimination."

Despite the rise in such attacks across the city and the broader U.S., Murakami believes that a place that has been accommodating to immigrants can find a way to be more unified.

"The Asian and Japanese community will continue to hope for that kind of occasion for New Yorkers to enjoy and have the hands-on experience of Japanese or Asian culture. We want more people to come and enjoy. It's the first step of mutual understanding, and that will eventually, hopefully, dissipate the kind of negative feelings or hate," he told Cheddar.

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