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Asian Americans Nearly As Segregated As African Americans — But Richer

By Matthew Mientka



Asian Americans Nearly As Segregated Socially As Black Americans

The fastest-growing racial minority in America, Asians are nearly as segregated from white Americans as African Americans and other groups.

Although the experience of African Americans leads many to equate segregation with a lack of socioeconomic success, Asians in America have largely achieved social and financial success while living separately from whites, often in residential neighborhoods deemed "separate but equal" — if not better.

With the exception of Vietnamese immigrants, largely on the West Coast, most Asian Americans live in areas with a higher mean income and proportion of college graduates, including Chinese, Indians, Filipinos, Japanese, and Koreans. When separating Asians into six main groups, every ethnicity but Japanese is more segregated from whites than Asians as an entirety, while the two largest sub-groups, Chinese and Indians, are as segregated as Hispanics, with Vietnamese as separate from whites as African Americans.

"The key insight is that it is misleading to combine so many different groups - Chinese, Indians, Filipinos, and more - into the category of Asians," John R. Logan, a professor at Brown University, who co-authored the peer-reviewed report "[US2010](#)," told reporters. "These nationalities include people who speak different languages, have different identities, and occupy very different positions in American society. They are actually nearly as segregated from one another as they are from whites."

Once concentrated in Chinatowns of major U.S. cities, more than 18 million Asian American residents live throughout the country, although with larger concentrations in urban areas such as New York City and along the West Coast. The Asian

population has more than doubled during the past generation, with the Indian population growing the fastest of the fastest, nearly four times its size in 1990. With the exception of Japanese Americans, most American Asians were born in foreign countries, with more than three of every four Koreans in 2010 born overseas — compared to only 4.5 percent of the white population.

Throughout the recent history of Asian immigration to the U.S., most of the newcomers have achieved a higher than average level of education, including Indians whose average level of education, 15.5 years, is nearly equivalent to a college degree. With the exception of Vietnamese immigrants, many of whom were resettled as refugees following the war, Asian Americans tend to use public assistance at much lower rates than other American groups, including whites, and generally earn higher household incomes. In 2010, Indians earned a median household income of \$89,600 while Chinese earned \$65,000, in comparison to non-Hispanic whites, who earned \$54,000 per year.

"We are so aware of the disadvantaged situation of blacks and Hispanics that we tend to assume that segregation results in unequal neighborhoods for minorities," said Logan. "This isn't the case for any major Asian nationality. And that means there is very little incentive for Asians to assimilate into white neighborhoods. The alternative of the affluent ethnic community is a real option for these new Americans."

To measure segregation in American society, Logan and his colleagues skipped over the "heartland" to examine neighborhoods within metropolitan regions such as greater New York City, the San Francisco Bay Area, Los Angeles, and the Santa Ana, Anaheim and Irvine metropolitan areas of California, among others. Using the "Index of Dissimilarity," a common measure of segregation among social scientists, the researchers reported an overall Asian segregation from whites as .407 in 2010, compared to the highest level of racial segregation in America — the separation of blacks from whites — at .673. Within the Asian racial group, Indian Americans were .492 and Chinese were .487, slightly lower than the separation between Hispanics and non-Hispanic white Americans in 2010.

The researchers repeatedly emphasized the need for demographers to begin viewing Asians as more distinct ethnic groups, when trying to glean meaning from large-scale national data. "We believe that researchers have been misled by the use of an artificial category of Asians that does not correspond well to the reality of very diverse Asian-origin ethnic groups in the United States," they wrote. If a "pan-Asian" category was realistic, they wrote, Asian ethnic groups would tend to be more integrated with one another, whereas demographic data shows Asians to be more separate from one another neighborhood by neighborhood, more so than different ethnicities of Hispanics, blacks, and whites. In fact, Asian groups maintain a level of segregation between .40 and .60 from one another, similar to their separation from whites.

However, researchers acknowledged that one smaller factor for a greater degree of separation of Asians from whites — the "mainstream" as 63.7 percent of the population — is a declining relative population of whites, particularly in areas in which Asians live.

Source: Logan JR, Zhang W. Separate but Equal: Asian Nationalities in the U.S. US2010. 2013.