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Asians in Thriving Enclaves Keep Distance From Whites

By Frank Bass - Jun 26, 2013

Asians, the fastest-growing, highest-earning and best-educated race in the U.S., are almost as segregated from the nation's white majority as they were two decades ago, according to [a study released today](#).

Specific Asian ancestries -- including two of the largest, Chinese and Indians -- are as isolated from the white population as Hispanics, according to the study by two Brown University sociologists. At the same time, Asians generally live in neighborhoods that are comparable -- and in some ways "markedly better" -- than those of whites, the study said.

"The Asian pattern is separate but equal (or even more than equal), raising questions about the prospect or value of their residential assimilation in the future," wrote John Logan, who co-authored the report.

The number of Asians in the U.S. surged 43.3 percent during the last decade, about four times faster than white [population growth](#), to more than 17 million. Their ranks have more than doubled since 1990. Median [household income](#) has risen 2.3 percent to \$70,815 for Asians since 2000 while white Americans have suffered a 1.1 percent drop.

When viewed as a single race, Asians are less segregated than Hispanics or blacks. When Asians are divided into major ancestries, "they're more segregated than we thought they were," Logan wrote.

Cultural values and the fact that a majority of Asians are immigrants are the likeliest reasons for their segregation, he said. While most immigrant groups assimilate over time, Logan said Japanese are the only Asian ancestral group that isn't as segregated as the broader racial category.

Independent Enclaves

"There may be no motivation for spatial assimilation of these immigrant groups, that the current residential enclaves fully meet their needs in a way that could become self-reinforcing," the authors wrote.

The bulk of the nation's Asian population consists of six ancestries with 1 million or more people each: Chinese, Indian, Korean, Japanese, Filipino and Vietnamese. All except Japanese are made up of a majority of immigrants.

While Asians are the nation's third-largest minority group, they're concentrated heavily in three states. California accounts for 5.6 million of them, almost one-third of the nation's Asian population. [New York](#) has 1.6 million, and [Texas](#) claims 1.1 million.

Among U.S. metropolitan areas, New York and [Los Angeles](#) have the greatest numbers of Asians. New York's Asian population consists primarily of Chinese and Indians; Los Angeles has a larger percentage of Filipinos, Japanese and Koreans. Texas leads the nation in its share of Vietnamese.

Segregated New York

Segregation for Asians in Los Angeles and New York was higher than the national average. Logan described the segregation of Vietnamese and whites in Los Angeles as "startlingly high" and said the population in New York was even more segregated. Among Asians in the nation's largest city, Chinese were most likely to live in segregated neighborhoods.

In suburban neighborhoods where the number of Asians has swelled during the last two decades, only Vietnamese incomes failed to keep pace with white household earnings, falling about \$300 short of the \$65,460 median. Meanwhile, Indian households earned a median of \$77,032.

All Asian ancestries except Vietnamese and Filipinos reported college education levels higher than the 32.9 percent rate for whites. Forty-four percent of Indians and 43.9 percent of Koreans had college degrees, the study found.

More 'Ethnoburbs'

The creation of Asian enclaves has been more pronounced in suburbs than inner cities. Slightly more than half of all Asians lived in suburbs in 2010, an increase from the 42.2 percent two decades earlier among similar groups that prompted [Arizona](#) State University geographer [Wei Li](#) to coin the phrase "ethnoburb."

Indians were most likely to live in suburbs, with 56.5 percent opting for life outside a central city, while 44.5 percent of Chinese lived in suburbs.

Susan Brown, a University of California-Irvine sociologist, said that eventually Asians will probably become better assimilated with other ethnic groups.

"There's every reason to think that over time and generations, the Chinese, Indians and other Asian groups will start to move out of enclaves," Brown said in an e-mail. "It just won't happen quickly."

To contact the reporter on this story: [Frank Bass](#) in New York at fbass1@bloomberg.

To contact the editors responsible for this story: Flynn McRoberts in [Chicago](#) at fmcroberts1@bloomberg.net; [Mark McQuillan](#) in [Washington](#) at 202- mmcquillan@bloomberg.net.

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