

Sierra Worthy

Asian American Immigration

Description: This issue brief discusses trends in Asian immigration and the historical experience of Asian immigrants. It also describes the Asian American demographic profile. It concludes with an overview of Asian Americans perceptions of the US immigration system, policies and areas in need of improvement.

Key Words: Chinese Exclusion Act, internment, model minority, ethnic enclaves, family reunification

History

After gold was discovered in 1848 Chinese miners working in California were targeted by a discriminatory tax.¹ Shortly after, in the 1870s, Chinese railroad workers became targets of discrimination by native railroad workers who blamed Chinese immigrants for fierce job competition and low wages (Fong and Markham 1991). The 1882 Chinese Exclusion Act barred almost all immigration by and naturalization of Chinese people. The association of China with communism has also fomented prejudice against Chinese Americans. The Japanese also faced discrimination after arriving in the United States in the 1890s. The Gentleman's Agreement of 1907 denied passports to Japanese workers. Executive Order 9066, a response to the attack on Pearl Harbor, interned 120,000 Japanese Americans.² Later, Koreans, Filipinos and other Asian groups immigrated to the US.

Demographics

Asian Americans make up 5.8% of the total US Population. Of this small segment, 74% of Asian American adults are foreign born (Pew Research Center 2013).

¹ See, Cuong Nguyen Le "The History of Asian Immigration and Assimilation" in *Asian American Assimilation: Ethnicity, Immigration, and Socioeconomic Attainment*, 2007 for detail of inconsistent enforcement and collection of tax between White and Asian miners.

² Roosevelt, Franklin D. "Executive Order 9066." *February 19* (1942).

Geographically, Asian Americans are highly concentrated in the west (47%). 21% live in the South, 20% in the Northeast, and 11% in the Midwest. In comparison to other minorities, Asian Americans are highly educated. Half of Asian Americans over the age of 25 possess a bachelor’s degree or higher. High levels of education are characteristic of the recent wave of Asian immigrants. Due to educational achievement and high socioeconomic status, Asians have been labeled the “model minority”. This stereotypical representation fuels animosity from groups who see Asians as a source of economic competition. As a means of seeking support and familiarity, groups of Asians have formed ethnic enclaves such as Korea towns, Chinatowns and Japan towns.

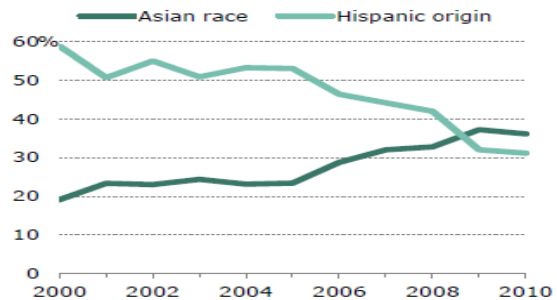
Immigration

Recently, Asians surpassed Hispanics as the largest group of immigrants to the United States. Asians are three times as likely to receive green cards or permanent resident status from an

employer. Family sponsorship is still the dominant route to permanent residency, and 55% are granted entry via sponsorship (Kieu 2013). Nevertheless, many Asian immigrants come to the United States illegally. Out of the 11 million undocumented immigrants in the US 1.3 million are from Asia. People from Asian countries make up 41.8% of individuals waiting on green cards to allow them entry to the US and the opportunity to reunite with their families (AAJC 2013). Upon arrival, Asian-American immigrants must grapple with language barriers, the stereotype of the

Meet the New Immigrants: Asians Overtake Hispanics

% of immigrants, by year of arrival, 2000-2010



Note: Based on total foreign-born population, including adults and children. Asians include mixed-race Asian population, regardless of Hispanic origin. Hispanics are of any race. The 2010 ACS includes only partial-year arrivals for 2010; arrivals for 2010 adjusted to full-year totals based on analysis of 2005-2009 ACS data on partial-year arrivals.

Source: Pew Research Center analysis of 2010 American Community Survey, Integrated Public Use Microdata Sample (IPUMS) files

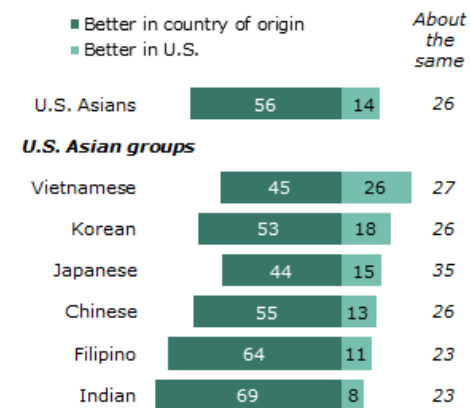
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“model minority” and discrimination on the basis of physical characteristics such as skin color and eye shape.

Although 58% of Asian Americans favor a clear path to citizenship for undocumented immigrants (Kieu 2013), Asian Americans are split in opinion regarding the efficacy of the current immigration system. A Pew Study finds that, 45% of Asians say the system “works pretty well” while 47% believe it needs a complete overhaul. For Asians, the immigration system’s major weakness is family reunification. Only 21% of Asians think the system does a very good job of uniting family members (Lopez, Funk and Gonzalez 2013).

Strength of Family Ties

% saying ...



Among U.S. Asians who are ...



2012 Asian-American Survey, Q54c. Responses of “Don’t know/Refused” not shown.

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